EXPLORING LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL- A MALTESE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT
The study seeks to explore leadership praxis in response to the increasing multicultural influxes in Maltese schools. It looks into the complexity of multicultural leadership praxis exemplified by a self-professed multicultural school leader in her quest to transform vision into reality by combining the expectations and aspirations of the various stakeholders who actively involve themselves in the school. Aiming to provide scholarship into what constitutes effective multicultural leadership practices, the author opted for a qualitative research design as the major methodological approach. The main research instrument employed in the study was a semi-structured interview targeting the school leader and parents. However, a quality assurance report together with a questionnaire for educators and a series of observations, triangulated findings obtained from the semi-structured interviews.
Data was analysed by categorising into relevant themes as mirrored by literature review. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory served as a conceptual framework to analyse the evidence and examine the research aims. The findings highlight the complexity of Multicultural Education Leadership praxis and the influence that each stakeholder exerts on transforming vision into practice. Moreover, the research highlights effective multicultural school leadership practices and provides readers with avenues towards furthering the critical debate surrounding multicultural education.
Keywords: Multicultural Education, Leadership Styles, Bronfenbrenner, Justice

Culturally responsive leadership involves the nurturing of practices that stress high expectations for student achievement making use of values and cultural norms pertaining to the students' communities, and initiate those processes which develop critical consciousness among educational stakeholders, thus challenging disequilibrium inherent in the wider society. It purports to stimulate inclusive processes that place organisational structures in a critical lens that empowers parents and students from diverse racial communities to partake in all aspects and stages within the educational journey. This enterprise is by no means seamless when one considers that culture is closely intertwined with other concepts such as 'race', 'multiculturalism', and 'educational provision' that often lead to conceptual confusion often hindering progress in this area (Hajisoteriou, 2013; Zembylas, 2010; Fine-Davis & Faas, 2014; Szelei et al., 2019). On the other hand, failure to place issues of race, class, culture, and language at the center of the educational debate pushes a culturally blind perspective and projects a narrative of neutrality and complacency.

Review of Literature

These notions, though strongly affirmed in the Maltese educational system (MEDE, 2012) provided unprecedented challenges to educators. Being a colonized island for many years is one of the reasons for Malta attracting a large number of citizens from European countries. Another reason is Malta's change in socio-economic stratagems and direction, attracting families from non-EU countries notably Russia, Libya, Serbia and Syria (Arar et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Bezzina and author, 2019). Coupled with this, the onset of irregular immigration from war-torn countries such a Libya and Syria, provided a further push factor for shelter-seeking families to settle themselves in Malta. Given the increasing diversity of learners in our schools and classes, it was immediately noticeable that a particular pedagogical approach agreed by school staff during a particular time may not be appropriate during other times. These ensuing changes, occurring within the school's internal structures, would mirror what Gay (1994, p.57) terms 'social reconstruction', where students are empowered with a social action approach, learning to look critically at social imbalances and acting as catalysts for change. Hence, Multicultural Education (henceforward ME) dethrones the 'establishment', challenges the invisible echelons, advocates for constant renegotiation of one's identity, both on an individual and on a group level, which are sometimes hard to take (Yampolsky, Amiot & de la Sablonnière, 2013).

Multicultural Education in Malta

Malta, a small island at the center of the Mediterranean continues to experience cultural and demographic changes arising from increased migratory influxes which brought about an intermix of different cultures, languages, races and religions. Statistics show that in 2019, immigration to Malta contributed to 21% of the total population i.e. 98, 918 persons of non-Maltese citizenship. The largely disputed irregular immigration heading towards Malta's sandy beaches has had an undesired effect on the perception of the Maltese towards ME with many associating

Multiculturalism with irregular immigration, in an aura of mistrust, deep concerns and anxiety. Research conducted by author (2012) has concluded that large-scale irregular immigration in the Mediterranean has caused unprecedented alarm among the Maltese population who suddenly found themselves in situations where they had to interact with other people whose cultural heritage is to a small or large extent different from ours.

The increase in student diversity has prompted the need for school leaders to develop leadership practices intended to kindle a learning environment which possesses supportive and responsive structures, aimed at spurring educators to include all children in their daily curricular planning. Various initiatives, such as the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework (MEDE, 2012), have been crucial towards promoting activities which enthuse educators, parents and students to construct and reconstruct ensuing realities based on reciprocal respect and open-mindedness.

Culturally responsive educational leadership encompasses concepts such as antiracist leadership (Miller, 2021), democratic leadership (McCormick, 2017), transformative leadership (Montouri & Donnelly, 2018), distributive leadership (Shava & Tlou, 2018), instructional leadership (Knapp, Mkhwanazi & Portin, 2012) and social justice leadership (Bogotch, 2002; Turhan, 2010). It moves away from emancipatory practices and requires that school leaders learn about the communities they serve and create an ambience that stimulates equal participation from all cultures and actively promote the principles of equity and social justice.

This suggests that multicultural leadership does not adhere to one style of leadership practice but is a curious combination of different styles that an eclectic leader has at his/her disposal, depending on emerging situations. Hence in view of the complexity and variety of leadership styles the following research questions pave the way for a systematic investigation as to 1) What style of leadership is the school leader using to embrace the multicultural realities surrounding the school? 2) What strategies are currently being adopted to implement the values of Multicultural Education, and 3) How are educational stakeholders (educators and parents) responding to the leadership styles of the school leader?

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model
Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model is ideal for describing the complex systems within a school context. It explains the influence that surrounding experiences have on a person's life, starting from the self and progressing on to a small circle of people, and then onto a larger circle until it encompasses the whole world. These influences shape a person's personality, values and beliefs, and are mediated by the increased and varied interaction of different people with the individual further influencing their thoughts and actions (Velez Agosto et al., 2017).

The ecological model is a set of four nested systems (usually presented as concentric circles) called micro-system, meso-system, exosystem and macro-system. According to Nieto (2008), this nested arrangement of structures is permeated by influence of culture, entrenched in contexts, and embodied in practices, values, behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and norms. Hence, culture infuses in contexts and directs the ways that individuals ascribe meaning to, interact with, and adapt to their environments.

The micro-system consists of the immediate environment of the individual, the actions and the interpersonal relations occurring. It is the closest layer to the person and contains the structures with which the individual has direct contact. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the meso-system as a set of interrelations between two or more settings (within the micro-system) in which the developing person becomes an active participant. In our example of a school's ecological model, the school's culture and the school's leadership practice could be considered this arena of interactions and relationships that form the meso-system. It suggests that development is explained in terms of relationships between people and their environments (Boyd & Bee 2006). Each system contains roles, norms, and rules that can strongly shape development. Nevertheless, the school's development is not influenced only by the micro-system and its interrelations, but also by the larger environment in which the organization exists. Thus, the next level of analysis, the exo-system, refers to the system where, even though there is not active involvement by the school, events occurring there affect or are affected by the mesosystem, for example the external community where the school is situated, boards of trustees, the Maltese Education Act, could be a school's exo-system. On the outside of the model there is the macro-system, which is the most remote system to the individual. It is composed of the social beliefs, attitudes, culture, laws and policies. In our study, the macro-system could be the local educational officials or the state's educational policy. As analysed in the literature review, the implementation of Multicultural Education is considered a process for school development that involves many stakeholders. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model is useful explore the way multicultural education is practiced in the chosen school and how the complexity of leadership and the individuals in the school's ecology influence and is influenced by this process.

Method of Enquiry

To answer the research questions a qualitative paradigm was deemed as most appropriate since it allowed multiple responses from the lenses of participants (Cohen et al. 2007). Case study research was considered most appropriate since it is concerned with 'individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used' and that 'the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system' (Stake, 2008, p. 443, 445).

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During all stages of the research, the researcher adhered himself to the highest standards of ethical responsibilities. He handed participants required consent forms outlining information about the research and a statement reminding them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process and also complete anonymity.

Instrumentation

The semi-structured interview was the main instrument of data collection. It was used to gain in-depth evidence of behaviour and attitudes. The interviews were administered to the school leader (Head of School), educators and parents. These were performed over a period of two months, depending on the availability of the participants. They lasted for about half-an-hour and were later transcribed.

A month after the interviews were conducted and evaluated, a semi-structured questionnaire was conducted tapping on the findings of the interviews. The first part consisted of a 5-point likert scale targeting awareness, attitude, knowledge and skills of teachers towards multicultural education while the second one consisted of a set of open-ended questions which emanate from earlier responses to interviews.

A week after collecting and analysing the questionnaire, five systematic observations were conducted by the researcher. These were conducted consecutively over a period of two months. Every observation lasted for a whole school day. These provided direct examination of behavior/activity in real time and also information about aspects of the research questions that participants may not have been willing to speak about or unable to recall. School documents were also used for systematic evaluation as part of the study. They included agendas, circulars, social media communication, minutes of meetings, prize day programs, survey data, reports from the Maltese Quality Assurance Department and policy documents published by the Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment.

Framework for analysis

The micro-system is composed of the immediate school environment and is therefore made up of the school leader, the educators and students working closely together forging everyday experiences in a network of interpersonal relations. The interview and observation method were deemed most appropriate to understand the effects emanating from such interaction. In our study, the microsystem is represented by the school leader, the educators, and students.

The meso-system is an interrelation between different micro-systems where the agents of change (school leader and educators) become active participants stimulating transformations within the school. In our study the interaction between the school leader and the school culture assumes particular significance since it provides fertile ground for the sharing of school vision, aims and strategies. This also explains the use of interviews and

documentary analysis as research instruments, as these permit the researcher to critically understand the processes that occur during shared practices between the leader and educators.

However, school systems are not only influenced by what happens between school walls but are also influenced by the larger context within which they exist. Bronfenbrenner (1979) takes account of external influences through the exo-system which in our research is embodied by the school's parent association and the external community. In order to elicit responses from the parent association the research opted for both the interviewing method and the observation method.

The macro-system is the outside of the model suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979). This is the part where the head of school, educators and parents have limited influence on.   In our study, the macro-system is composed of the local educational officials and the state's educational policy.

Table 1 below depicts a framework of the ecological systems understudy, the sources of data, the issues under investigation and the research instruments used to carry out research.

Table 1

Ecological System	Source	Issues under study	Research Instrument
Microsystem	School Leader	Leadership Styles, skills and practices.	1) Interview 2) Observation
	Educators	Multicultural Competence (Attitude Awareness, Knowledge and Skills)	Questionnaire
	Students	Multicultural sensitivity (seamless interactions, care, respect)	Group Observation
Meso System	School Leader	School Culture (Sharing of vision, aims and strategies)	1) Interview 2) School documentation
	Educators	School Culture (Sharing of vision, aims and strategies)	Interview
Exo-system	Parents and community members	Extent of parental involvement in multicultural activities	1) Interview 2) Group Observation
Macro- System	Policy documents	Response to current legislation (policies) on Multicultural Education	Documentary analysis

School context and participants
The school, situated in the northern part of the island of Malta, hosts around 500 students, 25% of which was foreign in origin, mostly migrants. The participants were:
a) Maria, a school leader in her early 50s and who has been working in primary schools for almost 30 years. She spent 4 years as assistant head of school and later appointed to a head of school, a position she has been occupying for the past five years.
b) A sample of 26 educators (chosen from a total number 82 teachers), with the criterion being that they needed to have more than 5 years of teaching experience. The interview plan consisted of five major areas namely multicultural education (perceptions, meanings and competence), leadership practice and strategy, school culture and climate, parental perceptions, government support (policies).
c) A sample of 26 parents on evidence found in documentary analysis and
d) five student groups, observed during school break activities and observation notes taken.

Table 1 gives a picture of the distribution of participants in relation to the instruments of research.

Data from interviews were recorded and transcribed, whilst data from questionnaires was analysed using basic statistical computations. Observations were analysed, coded and aggregated into usable, quantifiable data. This was complemented with data gathered from documentary evidence. Altogether, these four methods of data

collection provided triangulation of evidence and equipped the researcher with the tools to aggregate results and perform an in-depth analysis.

Results

The thematic analysis method was used to analyse data. The meanings forming specific pattern were categorized into themes which captured vital information about the data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Taylor & Ussher (2001) argue that 'themes do not just lay about waiting to be discovered, they do not simply emerge, but must be actively sought out' (p. 310). For this purpose, the researcher sought the assistance of MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. A total of eight themes were identified and organized to identify culturally responsive leadership practices which were then analysed in the light of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology systems model.

The Micro-system

Theme 1: School Leader's Professional Development and Beliefs about ME

The school leader critisised the current system of professional development sessions stating that courses rarely hint to ME and that her educators had to 'work their way up when it comes to Multicultural Education' and teachers owe their existing repertoire of multicultural skills to their own efforts and research. From the interview it was evident that her knowledge about cultural diversity and Multicultural praxis was from what she gained during her experience in schools, rather than formal training. She stressed the need to know the baggage that each different individual and groups bring because "their attitudes and behaviours towards schooling are also heavily dependent on their ethnic and cultural dispositions and aspirations".

Maria highlighted the importance of ME in schools by referring to the values of respect, equality and mutual understanding between cultures. In her own words, "There must be mutual understanding, respect and trust in each other's culture and acknowledgment of the diversity which enriches us … this does not in any way diminish the respect for our culture and traditions [Maltese]". Maria also believed in different socializing experiences outside school premises and beyond school hours. This was corroborated by data from questionnaires, observation schedules and documentary evidence. In fact, all educators (100%) and almost all parents (96%) believed that the school leader possessed the necessary charisma to attract people around her and instill in them a deep sense of motivation to work.

Theme 2: Open to Initiatives

Educators commented that the school leader is well informed on the different issues surrounding teaching and learning in the classrooms or the problems the teachers face in the school. They noticed that she praises and supports her staff, also empowering them to take initiatives and act as leaders in various EU projects. This was corroborated by the various observations conducted at different periods of the study.

Theme 3: Teachers' Multicultural Competence

The multitude of ways that teachers connected Multicultural education with equality principles is to be highlighted. They equated multicultural education with some quoting biblical scripts such as '*Don't forget to be kind to strangers*' and '*You are all my children and you are all created equal*'. Throughout their responses, educators advocated for an education where all students are treated as equal. They viewed school as the ideal place where equal educational opportunities should be provided to all students irrespective of their ethnical and cultural heritage. An educator, however, expressed concern as to *how* can this quest be reached:

> I do feel that there is something missing…I'm aware of the need to reaching out … but it seems that I'm always lacking the right skills to do so… as we already said, change is so quick that you barely have time to adjust to immediate needs.

The inclusion of all students into the school was highlighted by all teachers. Most (81% of teachers interviewed) spoke about the importance of multicultural competence as an essential tool towards long-term integration in Maltese society, but they provided few suggestions of how this can be achieved. Through observation it was noted that classrooms had little evidence that reflected the cultural composition of the children at school cultural display or multicultural related evidence. Instead, the school environment looked very monocultural, featuring only European artefacts which included story telling books coming only from Western European cultures. 23% of educators stated that respect meant that they try to modify their work to mirror the diversity present in their classrooms. Only 2 out of 26 educators believed that their work has a positive impact on the newly-formed diverse structures of modern society. 44% of educators interviewed believed that the challenge of ME is about "building a collective character made up of individuals from various nationalities, cultural identities, religious affiliations, ways of behaviour and patterns of communication."

Theme 4: Students' Multicultural Competence

From observations it could be deduced that students seemed to accept diversity and respect each another. Cultural differences did not seem to have an effect on students' behaviour in class as they interacted with each other in friendly manners. Students attributed diversity to physical characteristics such as colour of hair, facial characteristics and language prosodics. Educators revealed that student's behaviour at school was very positive and believed that minor misdemeanors were due to family and social problems and not as a result of racial discrimination occouring at school. However, some educators also pointed out at instances of racist behaviour amongst children invoking racial scoffs targeting ethnic differences. Educators admitted that they were at a loss at how to deal with situations such as these.

During interviews some parents (23%) revealed that their children were facing psychological problems due to different upbringing, cultural characteristics, socio-economic status and religious views. A parent stated that the teacher "imagined" her child's behaviour to be challenging. In his own words "what the teacher sees as problematic is in fact normal in our culture …and my child is now carrying the stigma that surrounds this behaviour". This illustrates the need for teachers to be more aware of the different cultural underpinnings that dictate what is acceptable or not acceptable in particular cultures.

The Meso-system:

Theme 5: School Culture and Climate

When referring to the school climate the school leader smilingly iterated that it is "neither too warm nor too cold, it is just right!". She stated that her insistence of working as a team has resulted in a positive atmosphere in school. She also believed that providing opportunities for educators had a catalysing effect as could be seen (documentary evidence) from educators' enrolment in professional development courses. Moreover, it was observed that during staff meetings, most educators (88%) felt comfortable to participate in discussions, express their opinions and engage in productive dialogue leading to collective decision making. The school leader was, however, quite reluctant to speak about parents' participation in the school. She said that most parents attended parents' evenings to discuss their children's progress but there was no opportunity for parents and educators to meet outside school hours. She also sadly noted that whenever a multicultural evening was organized, attendance was poor and very discouraging for her, for educators and for other parents who would have spent the whole morning organising the event.

Theme 6: Vision, Mission and Educational Goals

Maria* mentioned the words "vision" and "mission" very often when we discussing the school's policy on ME. She said that vision is most important and has actively engaged with teachers to explore ways into achieving a vision based on the principles of ME. She argued that:

> the face of education in an era of globalization is becoming increasingly complex and educational leaders who can inspire, stimulate and partake in the interests of the staff, led by a shared vision, mission and educational goals is essential for the survival of a school.

This statement was corroborated by responses given by teachers during interviews who stressed the importance of character education and that all children, irrespective of cultural origin graduate from school mastering reading, writing and the ability to form meaningful relationships. As one educator clearly remarked "Her vision is the overall development of the children, both cognitively and emotionally, within a positive school climate serving students, teachers and parents alike". This statement shows that the school leader managed to inculcate this vision to the educators.

Theme 7: Leadership characteristics and strategies

Apart from the characteristics described above school leadership appears to be flexible and contributing to finding practical solutions to arising difficulties. This flexibility however was not manifested in all circumstances affecting the practice of ME such as delegation of duties to teachers, formation of teacher clusters, parental involvement in the implementation process and providing for professional training needs of staff. Her leadership style could be described as democratic to a large extent but authoritative in difficult circumstances. She engaged in dialogue when there is an issue to decide, involved educators in decision making processes and tried to take a balanced approach whenever a conflict arose.

Several leadership strategies have emerged which sustain ME at school. Interviews and observations have shown support, guidance, collaboration, maintenance of a positive school climate, leading by example, promoting training opportunities, collaboration with stakeholders, involvement and communication with parents and distributive leadership capabilities.

The Exo-system:
Theme 8: Parents and Community

Parents from migrant backgrounds, especially those from African countries face major socio-economic problems. Their differing socio-cultural standards, cultural norms, difficulty with English and Maltese Language have an effect on their involvement and contribution to the school.

The lack of communication with parents regarding the students' academic progress was prevalent in some responses with educators complaining that even though they have a scheduled period per week in their timetable devoted for parents' visits the majority never make contact. A parent remarked "I am more than enthusiastic to provide and support for my daughter education but I feel [experience] limited confidence and knowledge to help her achieve academically". This further illustrates the need for increased parental involvement at all school levels and the formation of networks that help glue the various cultural groups.

On one particular occasion the school together with the parents' committee organised small multicultural festival, where all parents were invited to bring a traditional dish for all to share. Although attendance is poor, teachers still believe that this is the best way to meet parents and that 'such events should be organised more often' (educator). Some educators (8%) suggested that the school organises parental skills courses so that they are provided with the opportunity to keep abreast with latest developments in school policies and pedagogical practices. A school report from the Quality and Assurance Department shows that parents are generally satisfied with the work performed by the school.

Some parents (31%) believed that there have been racist attitudes in the past and that they found it difficult to mingle with other parents from migrant backgrounds. A parent commented that when he reported racism at school,
>...it was not even acknowledged or addressed by the school authority who have the ability to do something about it... it seems that those who do not themselves experience racism either do not recognise it, or else dismiss it as trivial. The danger is that when racist attitudes go unchecked in a school, a bad climate develops, and this gives way for further racism to become entrenched, as part of the whole system.

Analyses of Findings and Discussion
The study emphasized a two-pronged process towards the implementation of ME in the school. The first one is the emphases on the achievement of all students' academic success irrespective of their multicultural background by providing equal educational opportunities and the second is the nurturing of students' emotional, ethical and social values, echoing Nieto & Bode's (2007) assertion that '...[multicultural education] is a powerful source of inspiration, ideas, and solidarity for all of us who see social justice and equity as important core values within our educational systems'.

Infusing multicultural philosophies
The study reveals that staff within the school responded positively to the values of trust, collaboration, respect and friendship so ably transmitted by the school leader. The moral leadership practice exercised within the school's meso-system was crucial for the school improvement plan, but proved insufficient for sustainability of change.

Data reveal a discontinuity between the ecological systems. Within the microlevel there exist continuous efforts by school leaders and staff to meet multiethnic influxes in the school, but these are falling short from bearing fruition in the form of increased involvement of parents and the outside community. What seems missing in the practice of leadership for ME within the wider community context (exo-system) and at department and government levels (macro level) so that leadership with moral purpose and social justice would be inspired and supported by the societal and government policies to provide continuous school improvement for all students.

From vision to action
Inculcating a vision should be the result of action and involvement of all stakeholders especially in complex situations where people or events interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Hence effective leadership in a multicultural school context is the effect of clear vision, effectively communicated with all stakeholders through collaborative decision making. The school leader effectively communicates his vision to his immediate colleagues, i.e. educators (the microsystem), but is failing to reach the exo and macro systems of her school. Respect and collaboration were the elements which embodied democratic leadership actions and heavily influenced the implementation of multicultural values in the school context. Teachers felt empowered by democratic leadership practice which promoted innovation in teaching and learning, the uptake of responsibilities and active participation in leadership distribution.

Cultural plurality as embodied in traditional festivals, enabled the school leader to identity shifts needed for changing the school culture and climate. Moreover, through 'knowledge construction' and reconstruction about cultural identities and contributions of the 'others', the whole school has contributed to 'prejudice reduction' and 'empowering a school culture' that is inclusive of diversity (Banks, 1995). However, the need to 'make connections between what they [students] know and what is new' (Stabback, 2011) needs to be carefully and deliberately integrated around a theme involving various subject areas within the National Minimum Curriculum so that 'content integration' as suggested by Banks (1993) would be successful in reconstructing knowledge about cultural diversity and in reducing prejudice and discrimination.

Improved collaboration between stakeholders

There seems to be a gap between the extensive work done within a micro-system level and its extent of permeation and influence at the macro-system level with the consequence being that the practice of multicultural education is not contributing to challenging existing assimilatory beliefs and conceptualizations. Perhaps the answer to this can be found within the school leader's and educator's responses. They felt hesitant about whether equal educational opportunities are truly being created. They stress that many of their students have difficulty expressing themselves in English and/or Maltese and the use of translators (electronic or human) to overcome language communication difficulties is needed. Both the school leader and her staff were adamant in voicing their concern that the curriculum is not sensitive to the impending realities and stressed that it is within the remit of Quality Assurance personnel to assist the school in this.

Banks (2001) emphasises the need for a pedagogy which ensures that all students' academic and emotional needs are met. He places added emphasis on modifying teaching styles and approaches that facilitate academic achievement for all students from diverse racial, cultural, linguistic and social-economic groups. Evidence points out that although the leader effectively managed the microsystem, through her democratic and distributed leadership practices, this alone has not been effective, since the contribution of the exo-system and the macro-system was not visible. In an educator's own words "…we are left alone fighting the current, within a rapidly changing educational context, adapting to diverse student populations without the necessary trained and support". The study points at the need to establish *communities of practice* which are 'voluntary groups of people who, sharing a common concern or a passion, come together to explore these concerns and ideas and share and grow their practice' (Mercieca, 2017, p. 1).

The study identified discontinuities between the microsystem and the macrosystem in terms of
   a) Development of vision and policy for ME,
   b) Lack of staff training and capacity building in ME.
   c) Lack of resources and specific funding for ME.
   d) Lack of awareness on school realities by the outside community and,
   e) Need for the Maltese National Minimum Curriculum to embrace the multiple realities presented by ME.

Enhancing parental and community contributions

Community involvement and parental participation in school environments have always been linked with democratic practices (Matshe, 2013). Though the research evidence supports a democratic orientation, this seems to be bound macrosystem with the circle of the microsystem and does not permeate the macro and exosystem. Hence the assertion that the school professes a democratic leadership practice which emphasises equity and social justice seems incomplete since it lacks the involvement of parents and community on crucial decision-making situations surrounding the development of ME within the school.

Arguments for more community and parent participation are often linked to fundamental democratic principles in school leadership practice (Gordon & Louis, 2009, 7). There seems to be a set limit as to the extent of involvement of parents and community members are 'allowed' in the practice of ME. There seem to be boundaries, delineated by the school leader, communicated to educators and taken notice by parents and community. Hence, exo-system's involvement in the process of practicing ME is one of contributing to the school needs in terms of fundraising and cultural awareness but not at School Development Planning or policy making processes. There is an unfounded belief that parents would "interfere with the school's affairs" (parent's interview). This narrow view of parental involvement at school decision making level could be an explanation of parents' lack of presence at school meetings.

The need for more training

There is the lack of professional training for school staff on issues revolving around ME and the important role that each stakeholder has towards school improvement in his area. There is also lack of human resources and expertise to handle issues of cultural conflict and to support the work in multicultural school environments. Ozmen, et. al. (2016) suggest that teachers and parents may desire democratic community connections, but lack the

necessary language or support to sustain such relationships with the consequence being a more centralized school system which struggles to view parents as important contributors rather than outsiders. This is resulting in decreased parental support, lack of trust in school staff and an additional stumbling block towards building communities of practice.

Conclusion

The analysis of the systemic school environment gave the researcher a holistic picture of what goes on in the school under investigation and revealed the particular interrelations between the systems. The research has highlighted the strains between the systems and the current mechanisms which enable or disable leadership practice towards ME. The need for tailoring professional development programs for school leaders with special emphasis on ME has to be seriously taken on board. These programs need to include an understanding of the philosophy of ME and its practical implications on the practices, strategies and policies that provide guidance for educators to mitigate against inequities within the educational system.

The effects of inclusive physical environment need to be further promoted by educational authority and policy makers. Promoting a physical environment that is inclusive of all cultures would provide continuous stimulation improvement on a broad front, enabling students and parents to adapt to and prosper in their increasingly complex environment by learning from one another's diverse baggage.

Policy makers and leaders need to synergise efforts to develop those characteristics and practices that enable ME to flourish and to work towards eliminating or reducing obstacles that hinder the process. The findings also gave evidence of successful leadership characteristics within the school and revealed the importance of viewing leadership in the wider context of a school system taking into account the complexity of the interrelations between the school's micro, macro and exo-systems. include ways of exposing the participants' beliefs and conceptualizations and help them build educational values appropriate for the practice of ME. School leaders could use staff meetings as platforms for the continuous sharing of ideas thus urging staff within the school microsystem and to invite members from the macrosystem (parents and community) and of the exo-system (policymakers) to share their beliefs, observations and opinions. This would lay fertile ground towards the start of much needed communities of practice.

Critical reflection is an important tool to enact transformative processes in ME and social justice teacher education (Nieto, 2006; Liu & Milman, 2010). Through critical reflections educators examine their biases (Silverman & Shiller, 2020) and positionalities related to privilege (Acquah & Commins, 2015; Nieto 2000), develop deep and broad understandings of oppression (Benade 2015; Gorski & Dalton, 2020), and strengthen their overall commitments to educational justice (Grant & Sleeter, 2010; Gorski & Dalton, 2020). The importance of high moral and ethical standards in multicultural leadership practice in the school along with the importance of democratic education was also highlighted in the findings. Hence the author recommends leadership preparation programs that train school leaders to understand and enact leadership based on democratic attributes, principles and values (Jacobson, Johannson & Day, 2011).

In the study, the school leader's experience was perceived as important and looked upon positively by educators. This factor needs to be given more weight when it comes to transferring school leaders from one school to another. Policy detailing transferring school personnel needs to take into account the cultural composition of the school and the academic and experiential credentials of the school leaders and educators. About half of the interviewed teachers were newcomers at the school and felt the need for increased experience within the school context to able to tackle issues related to cultural diversity. Hence policy makers are urged to take advantage of the experience gained by school leaders and educators and use it as background data for the design of courses targeting ME. School leaders, policy makers, educators, parents and students should strive to promote collaborative decision making, productive sharing of responsibilities and engage in critical and reflective dialogue, keeping students' interest at the very center of school development.

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