

Sustaining parental engagement: a challenge to maltese education leaders

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Abstract: In 2006, the Act to amend the Education Act, Cap. 327¹ made provisions to reinforce and enhance the current school-parent partnership and collaboration. The study examined the current partnership and collaboration between schools and parents in four Maltese colleges and the challenges that Maltese educational leaders face so as to reinforce, enrich, and sustain joint-working. Data was collected from a substantial number of interviews with the selected policy-makers, college principals, heads of school, and teachers; reviewing official documents and observing council of heads meetings. The convenience and purposive sampling methods were employed to select the required sample of interviewees. The results of the study indicated that the school-parent collaboration showed proof of a fractured history, an area fraught with uncertainty given a turbulent period in the 1970s and 1980s.² The research findings will illuminate the position that educators currently hold towards parental involvement in the education of their children, together with the issues and challenges that educational school leaders can face in sustaining a partnership with parents. The study seeks to contribute towards an understanding of these issues and challenges.

Keywords: education, collaboration, school-parent partnership, challenges, school leaders

The modern ‘forces of change’ in the new socio-economic order have driven innovation and growth in education in their wake. Education is not an isolated sector. It is central to a country’s future economic success and its long-term sustainability.

1 Laws of Malta, *An Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap. 327* (Malta, 2006).

2 D.V. Scerri, *The Saga of the Church Schools in Malta (1970–1986) a historical portrayal of events* (Malta, 2000).

A learning society's economic success depends on its ability to share ideas across disciplinary and organizational boundaries and the strength of its educational system. Appreciating that educational reform and change presents complex challenges to both the individual stakeholder and society, we can then begin to understand both the small and big picture and, in turn, realize the larger significance of educational change.³

The Context: Past and Present

The Maltese education system (from kindergarten to university) together with its examination system followed the British model (probably because of Malta's colonial past) very closely.⁴ Studies⁵ give evidence of a highly centralized and bureaucratic state education. The government sought to address the situation by adopting a more decentralized approach to policy- and decision-making, a shift that saw its inception in the mid-1990s.

The past two-and-a-half decades saw an unprecedented move to bring about radical changes to the way education was conceptualized and reformed. Embarking on a review of the education system by transforming it into a new framework that will make it more relevant and effective for the needs of the Maltese children and Malta, various ministers of education strove to empower school authorities and cultivate a culture of participation at school level. In 2005, the minister of education, youth, and employment stated that the future of Malta's education system lies in '... widespread discussion and dialogue with all stakeholders, particularly the general public.'⁶

3 M. Fullan, *The new meaning of educational change*, Fourth Edition (New York, 2007).

4 R.G. Sultana, T. Cachia, D. Chircop, D. Cilia & S. Borg., S. Galea, T. Gatt & D. Mula, C. Grima, J. Mallia & M. Mallia, R. Mansueto, I. Mifsud, N. Mifsud, J. Rotin, D. Zammit-Marmarà, *Inside/Outside Schools: Towards a critical sociology of education in Malta* (Malta, 1997); J. Zammit Ciantar (ed.) *Education in Malta (A handbook)* (Malta, 1993); J. Zammit Mangion, *Education in Malta* (Malta, 1992).

5 C.J. Farrugia, 'Authority and control in the Maltese Educational System', *International Review of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1992), 155–71; K. Wain, *The National Minimum Curriculum: A Critical Evaluation* (Malta, 1991); Zammit Mangion.

6 L. Galea, 'Foreword – Quality Education for All', *For All Children to Succeed: A New Network Organization for Quality Education in Malta* (Malta, 2005), xi–xiii.

Joint-working and collaboration between schools showed evidence of success, even though decentralization and autonomy had only been partially achieved. On the other hand, the school-parents collaboration showed proof of a slightly fractured history. While teachers have always been entrusted with the education of children, parents were hardly ever regarded as jointly responsible for the education of their children. Parents were expected to support and never question the authority of the teachers and the school. After 1984 with the introduction of state school councils, parents started getting involved in school activities. The legal notice of 1993⁷ encapsulates various School Councils Regulations, primarily that:

- School Councils have a chairperson (appointed by the minister of education), a secretary (the head of school), and members (teachers and parents elected by their peers);
- School Councils had no executive powers, but were responsible for the organization of educational, cultural, and social activities for parents. ‘The Council may not interfere in matters of teaching, discipline, or school administration, these being the areas which are explicitly reserved in the Education Act.’⁸

The Report *Tomorrow’s Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures*⁹ and *The National Minimum Curriculum* (NMC)¹⁰ called for the increase of parental involvement for the benefit of the educational needs of the students. The NMC defines as competent and effective teachers those individuals who ‘seek to collaborate with parents and other participants in the educational process.’¹¹

The year 2005–06 became a watershed for Maltese education. Significant in this regard was the seminal document *For All Children to Succeed – A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta (FACTS)*,¹² which introduced the education reform proposals, and *An*

7 Laws of Malta, *The Legal Notice 135 of 1993/Legal Notice*.

8 *Ibid.*, 6.

9 K. Wain, P. Attard, C. Bezzina, M. Darmanin, C. Farrugia, A. Psaila, J. Sammut, R. Sultana, & L. Zammit, *Tomorrow’s Schools: Developing Effective Learning Cultures* (Malta, 1995).

10 Ministry of Education (MEE), *Creating the Future Together – National Minimum Curriculum* (Malta, 1999).

11 *Ibid.*, 41.

12 Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, *For All Children to Succeed: A New Network Organisation for Quality Education in Malta* (Malta, 2005).

*Act to Amend the Education Act, Cap. 327.*¹³ Both documents underpin numerous educational reforms, including parent participation. *Part V – Colleges of State Schools of the Act*¹⁴ states that every state college is to:

Promote the implementation of the national partnership policy of parents in school development and in the educational experience of their children and create an effective home-school partnership.¹⁵

Parent involvement in the education of the child was meant to bring about a paradigm shift in school-parent joint-working, and the cultural mind-set of how schools perceive and understand such a collaborative endeavour. The documents establish a conceptual framework that inculcates the professional complement of colleges to look at parents as partners in this new experience for Maltese education and provide opportunities for both parents to engage in their child's education and also to enhance their own life-long learning process. This form of collaborative partnership is acknowledged and underlined by the Malta Union of Teachers in its reform agreement with the government:

A School Council and a Student Council are elected and representative structures through which students; teachers and parents can become involved in and committed to the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management and staff for the benefit of the students and the school they attend.¹⁶

Collaboration between schools and parents continues to be recognized as central to the Maltese Education System by the Maltese government. Such centrality is evidenced in the *National Curriculum Framework for All* (NCF),¹⁷ one of whose central tenets¹⁸ reads: 'Parental interaction with schooling is one of the most important factors for learners' successful educational development.'

13 Laws of Malta (Malta, 2002).

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 658

16 MEYE, *Agreement between the Government and the Malta Union of Teachers* (Malta, 2007), Part IV, Section 24, 19.

17 MEE, *A National Curriculum Framework for All* (Malta, 2012).

18 Ibid., 43.

Although various efforts have been made by the education authorities to sustain the practice and culture of school-parent collaboration, the reality is that Maltese parents do not seem to actively involve themselves in school councils. Most of these councils, which have been in place for 20 years, only existed in schools where parents and teachers were ready to participate in the council's formation. The *Times of Malta* reported that, out of 107 state schools, only 17 held school council elections in January 2013 and that two did not even have a council as no nominations were received.¹⁹

The Literature Review

Today we are living in an era of partnerships, networking, and collaboration as a result of the globalized culture that modern and post-modern society has embraced. However, in any reform process, regardless of the field for which change is envisaged and planned, the interested parties will need to believe in the paradigm of change and be empowered and committed enough to own it. The significance of commitment is eloquently asserted in the observation that 'A group of people truly committed to a common vision is an awesome force'.²⁰ When individuals in a group are committed to the cause they bring energy that may generate improvement. However, commitment alone is not enough even though it is an asset to the cause. Cooperation between schools and the external communities, particularly parents, needs to be built on trust, proper communication, and voluntary commitment.²¹ This should pave the way for the essential paradigm shift in culture and mindset. A cultural and attitude change requires conviction, understanding, and support.

Establishing a partnership between schools and the outside community, particularly parents has been considered by many as a

- 19 Kim Dalli, 'Parents to be promoted to school policymakers', *Times of Malta*, 6 August 2013.
- 20 M.P. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organisation*, Second Edition (London, 2006), 205.
- 21 T.J. Sergiovanni, *The Principalsip – A Reflective Practice Perspective*, Fifth Edition (Boston, 2006).

valuable relationship in the educational journey of the child. Literature²² has shown that educational communities and all their stakeholders appear to have benefited from collaborative practice and partnerships with the outside school community. This form of synergy sustains major improvements in the education sector, development in the quality of learning, and more so in the students' progress.²³ In addition, Dolan argues that, 'To educate children without a deep partnership of teacher and parent is hopeless'.²⁴ Parents are considered by many as the first teachers and that the informal education which they give to their children is the foundation and precursor of formal and the succeeding years of compulsory education. Wallace pointed out that:

It seems trite to remind ourselves that parents are the first teachers of their children. The topic cannot be glossed over, however, when one reflects on the powerful influence of the formative years on subsequent schooling.²⁵

Tapping the powers of parents should underline any formal or informal existing partnership and should help parents 'become knowledgeable partners in their children's education'.²⁶ Schools who strove to involve parents with curriculum content, not only did they reinforce the partnership between schools and parents, but they took it to a higher level. When parents become involved in their children's learning they tend to perceive the teachers of their children differently. Rosenholtz underlines that the teachers who strove to include the

- 22 Christopher Bezzina, 'From Centralisation to Decentralisation: The real challenges facing educational reforms in Malta', *Journal of Maltese Education Research*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2006), 80–95; A. Datnow, L. Hubbard, & H. Melan, *Extending Educational Reform – From one school to many* (London, 2002); R. DuFour, 'What is a professional learning community?' *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 61, No. 8 (2004), 6–11; L. Stoll & D. Fink, *Changing our Schools*, Thirteenth Edition (Maidenhead, 2003).
- 23 M. Fullan, 'Causes & Processes of Implementation and Continuation' (New York, 2007), cited in M. Fullan, *The Meaning of Educational Change* (London, 1991), 84–106.
- 24 W.P. Dolan, *Restructuring our schools: A primer on systemic change* (Kansas City, 1994), 159, cited in R. DuFour and R. Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work – Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (USA, 1998), 235.
- 25 R.C. Wallace, Jr., *From Vision to Practice – The art of educational leadership* (London, 1996).
- 26 J.L. Epstein, and S.L. Dauber, *Teacher attitude and practices of parent involvement in the inner-city elementary and middle schools*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, (San Francisco, 1988), 12, cited in Fullan, 'Causes & Processes', 197.

parents in planning the curricular programme managed to bridge ‘the learning chasm between home and school.’²⁷

Current literature²⁸ claims that when school practitioners work in isolation, they become detached from the current realities. They need to fall in line with their global counterparts who are living this educational change and reform of building partnerships with the external communities, particularly parents. Taking on board the contributing factor of the parents is both crucial and beneficial to the educational development of the children because, as Fullan asserts:

Parents ... have assets and expertise that are essential to the partnership. They have knowledge of their children that is not available to anyone else. They have vested and committed interest in their children’s success, and they also have valuable knowledge and skills to contribute.²⁹

Literature³⁰ argues that schools need to form partnerships with the outside community because schools need to have people looking in, mean well, and are not directly involved in the planning and execution of the school programme. They can act as ‘critical friends’³¹ and accordingly ‘help schools raise their expectations because critical friends are concerned about schools and want the best for them’.³² Having the right tangible mix between the school, the family institutions, and other community members pays dividends because it motivates the students, a fact underlined by literature and Fullan.³³ Fullan claims that literature demonstrates clearly that an established parent-school partnership has a positive impact on children because parents will grow to value more

27 S. Rosenholtz, *Teachers Workplace, the Social Organization of Schools* (New York, 1989), 152, cited in Fullan, ‘Causes & Processes’.

28 J. Kahne, J. O’Brien, A. Brown, & T. Quinn, ‘Leveraging Social Capital and School Improvement: The Case of a School Network and a Comprehensive Community Initiative in Chicago’, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4, (2001), 429–61; T.J. Sergiovanni, ‘The Principalship’; Stoll & Fink, ‘Changing’.

29 Fullan, ‘Causes & Processes’, 190.

30 A.L. Costa & B. Kallick, ‘Through the lens of a critical friend’, *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (1993), 49–51.

31 Stoll & Fink, ‘Changing’, 134.

32 Ibid.

33 M. Fullan, ‘Broadening the concept of teacher leadership’, S. Caldwell (ed.), *Professional development in learning-centered schools* (Oxford, 1997), 34–48, in DuFour and Eaker and in Fullan, ‘Causes & Processes’.

the importance of schooling.³⁴ This form of collaborative partnership should not be regarded as working with the enemy, or even showing weakness, but simply working with each other for one common goal – the educational achievements of the students.

Conversely, building a culture of partnership between schools, parents, and the outside community will not be as straightforward as one may hope. Generating a working relationship between teachers and parents, who have historically lived on opposite sides of the fence considering each other with distrust and antagonism,³⁵ has been deemed by Fullan, to be a rather challenging journey.³⁶ Stoll and Fink advocate that parents and teachers need to be ‘reading from the same page’³⁷ to maintain a rewarding parent-school partnership. We also have to acknowledge that it is far from easy to read from the same page because at times it can be impossible. And, if we take the analogy further and we may be reading from the same page, we can still understand things differently! Encountering difficulties in sustaining a school-parent partnership describes the realities that characterize the parent-school relationships in a number of countries.³⁸ Stoll and Fink³⁹ maintain that:

Parents have often become the scapegoats for unsatisfactory school performance. ...Conversely parents have often seen schools as places to be feared, especially by those who were unsuccessful in their own school experiences.

Literature⁴⁰ concedes that collaborating with the community is not only perceived as slightly problematic but also a leadership challenge, particularly since both camps live in two different worlds and have a history of considering each other with distrust and antagonism.

34 Fullan, ‘Broadening the concept’.

35 W. Waller, *The Sociology of Teaching*, (New York, 1932), in A. Hargreaves, ‘Professionals and parents: Personal adversaries or public allies?’, *Prospects*, Vol. VXXX, No. 2 (2000), 201–13.

36 Fullan, ‘Causes & Processes’.

37 Stoll and Fink, 135.

38 D. Middlewood, ‘Managing Relationships between Schools and Parents’, J. Lumby and N. Foskett (eds.) *Managing External Relations in Schools and Colleges* (London, 1999).

39 Stoll and Fink, ‘Changing’, 135.

40 A. Bryk & B. Schneider, *Trust in Schools* (New York, 2002); M. Hadfield & C. Chapman, *Leading School-based Networks* (London, 2009); Waller; Hargreaves.

Bringing the community into play, and sustaining a joint working mentality with the parents, calls for a paradigm shift in value systems, in the beliefs, norms, attitudes, and skills of all stakeholders. In this regard Hadfield and Chapman recognize the building of partnership between the school and the external context as a challenge for school leaders.⁴¹ One barrier to communication that can have a negative impact on establishing cooperation with parents may be the result of the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity between the two groups. Overcoming the tensions that such an issue can generate is addressed by Graham-Clay when she maintains that: ‘The time and effort invested by teachers to research and better understand the cultures reflected in their school community can only serve to enhance partnership opportunities.’⁴²

Every school leader who aims to narrow this divide needs to appreciate that achieving success will be fraught with tension. Middlewood argues that school leaders and managers need to understand this complex relationship, tinted with tension and problems, which cannot ‘evolve unaided’.⁴³ Mutual consent between schools and parents to bridge their divide⁴⁴ can have a positive impact on the child’s development and educational achievement.⁴⁵

The Research Methodology

The general purpose of this research was to examine the relevance of the context in which school leaders work to sustaining parental engagement and how favourable or otherwise is the context of local schools towards sustaining parental engagement. The study also aims to highlight and examine the challenge/s that school leaders encounter when striving to foster a partnership between the schools and the parents and how school leaders are addressing the challenge/s.

41 Hadfield & Chapman.

42 S. Graham-Clay, ‘Communicating with Parents: Strategies for Teachers’, *The School Community Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 117-29. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ794819.pdf>, (2005), 124–5.

43 Middlewood, 114.

44 R.C. Wallace, Jr., *From Vision to Practice – The art of educational leadership* (London, 1996)

45 Fullan, ‘Causes & Processes’.

In my research, I chose the qualitative approach because I wanted to acquire an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of the educators in the field and create direct and personal contact with the respondents in their own environment. Accordingly, in interpreting the collected data, which ‘will be glossed with the meanings ... of those people who are their source’,⁴⁶ I followed the interpretative paradigm because ‘people’s words provided greater access to their subjective meaning.’⁴⁷

The data was obtained by means of an empirical research involving case studies of four colleges, selected using the convenience and purposive sampling methods. Using the non-probability sampling technique implied that from the overall population of potential participants involved in the study only some existing respondents were more likely to be selected than others,⁴⁸ suggesting that the researcher could not generalize about the population.⁴⁹ However, it could be argued that purposive sampling allowed themes in the full breadth of the experience of respondents in various sites to be pursued, explored, and characterized, which in a way gave a sense of generalizability. However, information collected from a non-probability sample could not be used to make inferences to the population from which the sample was selected.⁵⁰ Additionally, the methodological triangulation process was employed since data was collected using face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews, observing council of heads’ meetings and analysing documents.

The research methodology process also addressed the research questions of the study:

- a) What is the nature of school-parent partnership that will sustain parental engagement in Maltese state schools?
- b) What are the implications for the school leaders in sustaining parental engagement?

46 L. Cohen, M. Manion, & K. Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, Fifth Edition (London, 2003), 23.

47 D. Lazar, ‘Selected issues in the philosophy of social science’, in *Researching Society and Culture* (London, 1998), 7–22, cited in C. Seale (ed.) *Researching Society and Culture* (London, 2000), 17.

48 Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford, 2004).

49 Cohen, Manion, & Morrison.

50 Bryman.

Ethical Considerations

I grew aware that ethical responsibility and practice entailed more than just adhering to established guidelines and statutory provisions, particularly when the research was aimed at exploring the interviewees' perceptions, which meant that the study engaged people in a direct way. Mindful that gaining access and acceptance generated ethical implications about openness, mutual trust and commitment, I sought to build a meaningful strong rapport with the participants. I maintained that trust throughout the research and beyond by disguising the identities of the interviewees, the schools, and colleges participating in the study. Primarily, I ensured that the participants knew their rights, particularly that they had the right to withdraw from the research without offering a reason. Furthermore, at the beginning of the interview, all interviewees were asked whether they objected to the recording of their interview. I informed the participants that I would give them a copy of the interview transcript for confirmation to ensure that I had transcribed a faithful rendering of their narratives. All the members of the councils of heads that I observed were informed that I would hand over to the principal a typed copy of the observation field notes for verification, clarification, if needed, and approval.

Data Analysis

When analysing the selected data, I adopted the style that Thomas referred to as 'Network Analysis'.⁵¹ After transcribing all interviews, I adopted the selective reading approach of the transcripts. The careful reading of the transcripts, complemented by reflection, helped me select relevant interview discourse and narratives and cluster them together under the emerging themes. Hence, items that had similar subject matter were fused together under thematic categories.

Once again, I adopted the selective reading approach of the typed and verified observation field notes to obtain a general sense of the information, to reflect on its overall meaning and to facilitate the selection of thematic statements. The analysis of the relevant parts of

51 G. Thomas, *How to do your research project* (London, 2011), 198.

relevant official documents, in conjunction with the interview, and the observation data give the attitude and voiced opinion of the respective participants towards a school-parent partnership significant meaning. Consequently, categories and themes emerged.

Findings and Discussion

Interviewees were asked to speak about the current school-parent partnership and what on-going reinforcement was in place. Although overall there seemed to be a consensus among interviewees that fostering and sustaining parental engagement is essential; there were also mixed reactions how far parents could be involved. The challenges were not insignificant, when many teachers and even heads of school were not ready to involve parents in discussing educational matters which was regarded as the domain of professional educators. As one teacher strongly stressed:

Parents can be an asset for the school as long as their participation is limited to fundraising for the school. Parents cannot offer anything to the curricular sector of the school. They lack experience and knowledge. (Teacher 4)

Hence, it emerged that establishing cooperation between schools and parents was not easy. Many school leaders acknowledged that there were many factors at play, particularly the aftermath of the educators' strike of 1984, which thwarted the fostering of a stronger and more constructive teamwork culture between schools and parents. As one head of school stated:

We are all too familiar with what happened when the parents took over the classrooms in the 1984 educators' strike. Involving parents in the management of the taught content in the school or classroom is rather risky, particularly when the standard of education of many parents is very limited. (Head of School 6)

However, the data casts a ray of hope on this endeavour. Some interviewees pointed out that sustaining parental-engagement was not unattainable. These interviewees underlined the importance of

consolidating the relationship between the school and the parents. They believed that a number of parents are adequately qualified to contribute to curriculum provisions in the school. They claimed that they had students attending the school whose parents are professional teachers, lawyers, and doctors. This cohort of interviewees believed that educators need to understand that parents need specific detailed guidance on the on-going educational programmes and on their expected contribution. Consequently, working with parents required skill and the right attitude. Interviewed college principals believed that Maltese educators need training in engaging with parents and that having the corpus of educators acknowledge this was going to be an issue. As one college principal stated:

We need to train our heads of school and teachers as to how to engage effectively with parents through continuing professional development sessions. Our school leaders and teachers need training and coaching, particularly when working with parents whose backgrounds are very different to their own. However getting certain heads of school and teachers to acknowledge that they lack the appropriate skills and approach in communicating and working with parents was challenging. (College Principal 2)

It was suggested that heads of school organize informative CPD sessions for their schools which will help their members of staff understand that parental engagement can be sustained when

- parents are equipped with the skills and subject knowledge to help their children with their homework;
- there is a two-way communication, as a result of which information is shared with parents through proactive dialogue;
- educators understand that there are parents whose expertise can help in the classrooms and invite parents to accompany their children on field trips.

This alone is not enough. Heads of school have to encourage more parents to participate in school activities. They have to help parents understand that a positive relationship with the school will have beneficial effects on school improvement. This can be achieved if heads of school in collaboration with their senior management team and teachers work more on communication strategies, such as

- demonstrating welcome signs when the parent enters the school building for the first time; e.g. greeting the parent with a smile, exhibiting student artwork on the walls, and ensuring cleanliness of school grounds;
- taking account of parental work schedules and commitments when organizing learning programmes for parents.

The Education (Amendment) Act, 2006⁵² and the seminal policy document *For All Children to Succeed*,⁵³ which underpin parent participation, were meant to bring about a paradigm shift in the mind-set of how schools perceive and understand school-parent engagement. The documents establish a conceptual framework that encourages school leaders and teachers to look at parents as partners and provide opportunities for both parents to engage in their child's education and also to enhance their own life-long learning process. This form of collaborative partnership is acknowledged by the Malta Union of Teachers in its reform agreement with the government:

A School Council is the representative structures through which teachers and parents can become involved in and committed to the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management and staff for the benefit of the students and the school they attend.⁵⁴

Both the reviewed documents and the discourse of some of the interviewees underline the importance of parental engagement. However, as claimed by Waller, it was appreciated by interviewees that enculturing the mind-set of professional educators was challenging, will take time, called for hard work and perseverance.⁵⁵ The complex and diverse nature of educational challenges have increased the demand for new systems and structures which are led by leaders who have the skills to facilitate change and take schools forward. Hence, heads of school had a significant role to play in fostering and sustaining such a culture change towards parental engagement. The findings indicated the reality that heads of school have to understand the importance of

52 Laws of Malta (Malta, 2006).

53 MEYE (Malta, 2005).

54 MEYE (Malta, 2007).

55 Waller.

effective leadership. Effective leadership, as argued by Sergiovanni, could be achieved when school leaders update their leadership and management styles in their endeavour to keep the school focused on the overall goal.⁵⁶

Hence, school leaders, in collaboration with their members of staff can plan effective programmes and strategies that would target parents, which could make parental engagement in their schools a success story. This way forward would require heads of school to be sensitive to the realities of the school environment since, as Stoll and Fink argue, schools are not isolated institutions and cannot disregard the fact that they exist within a social context.⁵⁷ Furthermore, all educators, including heads of school, need to understand, as Louise Porter wrote, that a school-home relationship is founded on commitment, which means that schools respect and appreciate the diverse family context and strive to establish a strong sense of trust.⁵⁸

Conclusion

All Maltese educators, regardless of the status and position one holds, need to understand that forming partnerships with parents is important because schools need to have people looking in.⁵⁹ Additionally, Stoll and Fink refer to parents as ‘critical friends’⁶⁰ who can ‘help schools raise their expectations because critical friends are concerned about schools and want the best for them’.⁶¹

56 Sergiovanni.

57 Stoll & Fink.

58 Louise Porter, *Teacher-Parent Collaboration: Early childhood to adolescence* (Australia, 2008).

59 Costa & Kallick, 49–51.

60 Stoll & Fink, 134.

61 Ibid.