

Primary Education: simply an academic experience?

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Abstract:

“Prospective teachers enter teacher training with a broad range of experiences affecting attitudes and beliefs about methods of teaching and the value of different subjects” (Morgan et al, 2002).

This paper studies how prospective student-teachers comprehend the term education in relation to their primary education experience, and how future primary school teachers give weight to different subjects on the curriculum, and why. The cohort of Primary B. Ed (Hons) students (intake October 2003) was questioned on its first day at University. As was expected, English, Maltese, and Mathematics were mentioned as the most important subjects during their primary education; however, the reasons behind this choice were varied. Their concept of education had been influenced by an academic-oriented curriculum. Although the NMC (1995) advocates a holistic-oriented approach, these respondents have had a diverse experience. It is presumed that during their pre-service training students are exposed to studies which would enlighten their perceptions; however, the question remains whether “the effects of teacher education on attitudes and beliefs are only temporary...” (Morgan et al, 2002), meaning that they will revert to their previous perceptions once they go in the field.

Introduction

“If educators have badly misunderstood the nature of persons, then they probably have been ‘miseducating’ individuals just as badly” (Kretchmar, 1994, p34).

The National Minimum Curriculum (the NMC, 1999) is an important landmark for Maltese Education (Ministry of Education, 2001). It delineates a policy of education which is defining specific principles, from quality of education for all to holistic education and a more formative assessment – all of which make the NMC, in Kress’

(2000) terms, “a design for the future” (p. 134). It also defines a number of objectives, including education for leisure and wise choices in the field of health. There was every expectation that these principles and objectives would have influenced the provision of Physical Education and Sport in the Primary Schools. However, the current situation in Malta seems to reflect the trend that

“educational innovations have rarely lived up to the expectations of their proponents... with classroom practitioners often not implementing reforms disseminated by centralised government agencies” (Carless, 1997, p 341).

A current research study in Malta (Gatt, 2004) is indicating that children in state Primary schools are not being presented with enough time for PE and other subjects which are not examined. These subjects are regarded as ‘non-academic’. These findings are also corroborated by Panzavecchia (2004) who stated that:

“We are learning about the importance of creativity, expressive arts, physical education and critical thinking, however, we would eventually be putting this into practice within a system where examinable subjects dominate the curriculum. In this situation, I fear that the former subjects [non-examinable] are unfortunately being forced to take second place within a jam packed syllabus ...” (p. 6)¹

Building on the above argument, this paper will mainly focus on what may be happening in the classroom and its influences on prospective teachers. One reason for this state of affairs could be that Primary School class-teachers leave out ‘non-academic’ subjects owing to a number of constraints which include: pressures due to exams, lack of time to follow the examined syllabus, and not feeling competent to teach such subjects (Curtner-Smith, 1999; Martens, 1996; Turnbull, 1992; Graham, 1991; Cundiff, 1990; Tinning & Hawkins, 1988). Another reason could be that the class-teachers attach more importance to academic achievement rather than the holistic development of the child; thus supporting Panzavecchia’s (2004) comment that Malta is “a country dominated by a culture of competitive achievement, stressed by an exam-oriented system” (p.6). This is substantiated by Zrinzo (2003) who stated

“We are pushing our children to learn much faster – unnecessarily – than other European countries and this at the expense of their mental and physical well-being” (p. 15).

Such conceptualisation of education, that is, highlighting the academic aspect of development, could have its roots in the life-history of class-teachers – a life history that stretches back to their initial-teacher-training course, maybe also going further back to their days as pupils at school (Morgan et al, 2002; Rolfe, 2001). Studying how prospective teachers comprehend the term education at their entry point into the B. Ed (Hons) course could open a window on the perceptions they hold. These insights could influence their discernment of educational issues, especially in relation to the problem of an academic vs. a holistic oriented education. Thus, the premise of this

¹ Panzavecchia M. is a third Year B. Ed (Primary Track) student. She presented a paper during the annual staff seminar of the Faculty of Education, outlining feedback on the teacher-training course after collecting informal feedback from her colleagues. Some of her comments reflect experiences of teaching-practice placement.

paper is that prospective students have their own particular concept of education, influenced by their own experience of schooling (Morgan et al, 2002). Consequently, this paper attempts to recognize these perceptions, and subsequently discuss them in relation to the NMC. The paper also intends to discuss the case of physical education and the importance attached to it by the respondents. Such discussions will also deal with notions of curriculum change.

Methodology

A one-page questionnaire was distributed to the cohort of a new intake for the B. Ed (Hons) Primary Track (2003-7) during their first day at University, prior to the welcome speech by the Dean of the Faculty of Education. The main questions related to what they thought of as the 'most important' and 'least important' subjects taught in Primary schools, and (more importantly) why. They were also asked which were their 'favourite subjects' whilst attending the primary school, and whether they currently practise any type of physical activity.

The cohort

The cohort totalled 63 students. There were two types of respondents: students whose entry requirements included A-levels according to University regulations and Faculty of Education Bye-Laws ($n = 54$, 86%) and 'mature' students over the age of 23 ($n = 9$, 14%) who did not need the standard university entrance requirements. 89% of the cohort were females ($n = 56$), producing a gender ratio of 8:1 when compared to males .

The majority of the respondents (67%) came from state schools, thus having experienced primary state schooling. As can be noted in *Table 1*, there was one respondent who did not attend school in Malta at the Primary, Secondary and Post Secondary level, and three who did not attend post-secondary school (all mature students).

Table 1: School attended by the respondents

	Primary				Secondary				Post Secondary			
	State	Church	Ind ² .	Total	State	Church	Ind.	Total	State	Church	Ind.	Total
<i>n</i>	42	17	3	62	42	19	1	62	53	4	2	59
<i>%</i>	67	27	5	99	67	30	2	99	84	6	3	93

Academic qualifications acquired by the cohort

English ($n=31$) and Maltese ($n=24$) top the list of subjects taken at A-level by the students. Maths ($n=4$), a subject which we shall see as being perceived as an important subject, was only taken by four students. Maltese ($n=32$) and English ($n=26$) are chosen at the IM-level³, by those students who did not choose them at A-level. Consequently, 56 students have Maltese either at A-level or IM-level, and 57 students have acquired English at A-level or IM-level (the discrepancy when

² "Ind." Denotes Independent Private schools which are not run by the Church.

³ The Maltese system requires students at Post-Secondary to sit for two A-level and three Intermediate-level subjects.

compared to the total number is due to the fact that there are some mature students who do not have A-levels or IM-levels). Maths ($n=11$) again scores low at this level. This was an expected result since these qualifications are the entry requirements for the B. Ed (Hons) Primary Track.

The most important subjects as perceived by the respondents

According to the respondents, English ($n = 60$) and Maths ($n = 60$) are perceived as being the ‘most important’ subjects taught at Primary. Maltese ($n = 57$) comes a close third. This homogeneity in the response by the students was expected; however, the underlying motives behind such a choice vary, and may be categorised under four different headings. A number of respondents argued that these subjects are the “basis of everything” related to education (ps02⁴, 03, 06, 26, 30, 46, 51 and 57), while others called them “main” or “core” subjects (ps33, 35, 36, 59, and 60). Some relate these subjects to academic achievement:

- “They are the three compulsory subjects throughout my education” – ps04
- “Knowing they are compulsory for post-secondary” – ps19.

A number of respondents stated *entry requirements* to a higher institution as a reason for this importance:

- “Always important for your entry requirements” – ps09
- “The three subjects are compulsory requirements for Junior College” – ps17
- “They are the three most requested subjects” – ps37
- “You need them to enter almost any course” – ps59

Other references to the SEC exam were made by ps07, 43, and 47. *Further studies* were also quoted as a reason by ps10, 12, 21, 30, 43, 47, 48, and 58.

It is interesting to note that a number of respondents stated that their perception of the importance of a subject could have been influenced by what others, namely their teachers, might have seen as priority:

- “Teachers emphasised their priorities” – ps20
- “Those subjects [Maths, English, and Maltese] were always given the most attention. Social studies and religion weren’t given much of that importance” – ps22
- “Because they were given the most importance” – ps25
- “The teacher emphasised a lot on these” – ps27
- “These were the basic subjects and were given the most importance from teachers and my parents” – ps28
- “They were the main three subjects and they used to emphasise them” – ps45

The influence of class teachers is clearly described by ps31 who stated: “teachers tend to give more importance to these subjects therefore they make us think that these are important”.

⁴ Respondents were coded as “PS + number”. PS stands for Primary Student Intake.

However, other students do not see academic achievement as the only reason behind their choice. Ps01, 05, 07, 17, 44, 49, 54, and 51 were also aware that languages (both Maltese and English, but especially the latter) are very important for communication in today's world.

The least important subjects as perceived by the respondents

Religion ($n = 27$), Social Studies ($n = 27$) and Physical Education ($n = 19$) are the three subjects which top the list of the *least* important subjects as perceived by the prospective primary school teachers. The respondents came up with a variety of reasons. The motives behind the choice of religion and social studies were mainly due to personal interest/liking, especially for the former subject, since some felt that religion is something which should not be part of the school curriculum:

- “Because I would like to choose my own religion” – ps03
- “Religion lessons used to dictate our whole way of life” – ps06
- “Religion is a bit awkward” – ps15
- “It is a matter of belief and faith depending on the individual” – ps37
- “Many have different views of religion” – ps49

Other respondents referred to the content and method used related to the particular subject, and found either one or both as *boring* or *not interesting*. Thus, it seems that the way teachers present a subject may, to some extent, influence how students perceive it:

- “Social studies was a bit boring” – ps01
- “What they taught us was endless theory which we had to learn by heart, and all of which hardly any use in life” – ps14
- “Both history and geography⁵ were not made interesting” – ps20
- “The teacher did not make the lesson interesting” – ps28
- “They were not always taught in a good way” – ps30
- “Religion was learnt by heart and not taught how it should be lived” – ps41
- “In the lesson we did nothing special” – ps46
- “Lessons were a bit boring, have to be more interesting and creative” – ps47

It should be noted that no such comments were attributed to Physical Education.

Some respondents thought that a subject was not important if it did not have a clear use for them:

- “Because they were not very important and useful for me” – ps08
- “Not much required” – ps09
- “I found no use for them in the future” – ps19
- “I found them unuseful” – ps55

The fact that these subjects are not perceived as *compulsory*⁶ influenced the decision of some of the respondents:

⁵ History and Geography are part of Social Studies.

- “Because they are not compulsory” – ps04
- “Art and PE are not obligatory” – ps07
- “Because they are not subjects that are compulsory in education” – ps13
- “Because we did not have any exams of these subjects” – ps35

Another reason expressed by the respondents was the fact that there were very few lessons dealing with such subjects, and that the teachers did not emphasise the importance of such subjects. Examples may be found in the following replies:

- “These weren’t given importance since they were taught one day a week” – ps11
- “There was no time for PE and science because the curriculum in the other basic subjects was too vast and demanding” – ps22
- “Art and PE mostly. They were allotted very little space and were mainly scheduled for the last hour” – ps29
- “Art wasn’t given any importance at school” – ps31
- “PE, art and drama were considered the least important as we only had a lesson once a month” – ps60

Certain respondents thought that the school should abdicate its responsibility for some subjects to outside agencies:

- “These can also be learnt through outside school” – ps10
- “Music can be enjoyed at home” – ps39

The students’ favourite subjects

English ($n = 35$), Maltese ($n = 30$) and Maths ($n = 25$) were chosen mostly when the respondents were asked to identify which was their most favourite subject at Primary school. The students’ favourite subjects also correlated with their perception of what subjects were most important, and were taken up as post-secondary studies. The most common response for the choice of a subject as one’s favourite is usually a personal preference of a subject expressed through “I like” or “I love”:

- “I like the English language” – ps01
- “I like sports and I like to read” – ps02
- “I like languages” – ps09
- “... Maths was always a subject I like” – ps13

Other respondents explained their choice through phrases like “my personal favourite” (ps14), “I love language” (ps19), “PE was very much one of my favourites” (ps31), “my favourite subjects are languages” (ps44). Others described their favourite subjects as “interesting” (ps01, 08, 28, 35, 46, 47, 52, 54, 60, 61), or “made interesting” by the teachers (ps10).

⁶ Physical Education is compulsory in the Primary, since it is considered as ‘core’ (NMC, 1999, p. 103), but it is not examined at that level. Ps04, ps07, and ps 13 seem not to be aware of this, or they may have a different interpretation of the word ‘core’.

The level of difficulty of the subjects, as perceived by the students, was another reason for choosing it as a favourite. Thus, ps13 stated “Maltese can be easy for us. Religion can be seen as an easy subject as well and therefore when you get good marks you start to like it”; “I always found it easy” (ps17), “I always found [religion] easy” (ps19); ps31 and ps52 gave a similar response. Ps41 stated “Maltese and English because they were not difficult to learn”, and ps42 wrote, “these subjects were not hard to learn”.

Being ‘good’ at a subject, maybe having an aptitude for it, also figures as a response:

- “Maths was always my favourite, maybe I was good at it” - ps05, 20
- “I did well in these subjects and I got high marks in them” - ps12
- “...therefore when you get good marks you start to like it” - ps13
- “I always got good marks in these subjects” - ps16
- “I am good at Maths” - ps20, 49
- “I was good since it was my language” - ps45
- “Languages are my *forte*” - ps50

Teachers’ praise may also have contributed to this ‘liking’ of a subject: “I also felt I was good at English and the teacher praised me” (ps26), and ps28 who “liked to read in class when the teacher asked me”. These comments have a lot to say on how the class-teachers influence young pupils through positive reinforcement.

Students who identified PE as their favourite school subject gave two main reasons for this. Firstly, the *health* aspect: “PE involves physical exercise” (ps41), “I enjoy outdoor and keep fit” (ps57), “PE is very healthy” (ps61); and secondly, *fun and enjoyment*: “PE was fun” (ps05), “PE gave me time to relax and to enjoy time off from studies” (ps06), “I always enjoyed doing sport” (ps62). However, *enjoyment* was not restricted to PE: “I enjoy doing things with my own hands and being creative” (ps33), referring to art, or what this mature student would have called ‘Art and Craft’ as it was known in her time, “I enjoyed group work [during drama]” (ps36), “I enjoy reading” (ps37), “I enjoyed mostly these lessons [English, Science, Maths] during Year 5 as my teacher used to teach them through games” (ps40), “I enjoyed the way they were taught to us” (ps50). These last two respondents making a direct reference to methodology.

Current participation in physical activity

38.1% of the respondents ($n = 24$) stated that they participated in some form of physical activity (organised/competitive sport, leisure sport, or fitness activities). There were eight students who declined from giving any reason for their inactivity. The others mainly stated that they do not have time for physical activity. Some tried to give a reason for this lack of time:

- “I don’t have a lot of free time and I’m not into sports that much” – ps05
- “I do not find spare time for these kinds of things and I prefer to do something else” – ps37
- “Maybe because I really don’t like sport, I’m out of training and I don’t have time” – ps55

Ps06 and ps58 argued that they are ‘lazy’, perhaps implying that not finding time to participate may be just an excuse not to do any physical activity. Others stopped participating due to exams or injury, but never recommenced their activity:

- “I used to play basketball but due to injury I had to stop and could not find time to start again now” – ps22
- “I used to but I stopped because of exams and didn’t continue afterwards” – ps28

Ps35 and ps40 gave a similar response. Two other respondents have a medical or physical condition which they perceived as an impediment for physical activity.

Discussion

Perceptions of the respondents

“When it is said that education is development, everything depends upon how development is conceived. Our net conclusion is that life is development and that developing, growing, is life” (Dewey, 1944, p.49).

The data from this study demonstrate that English, Maths, and Maltese top the tables, both as ‘important’ and ‘favourite’ subjects. There appear to be two main reasons for this.

Firstly, students associate these subjects with future academic study at post-secondary level and see them as a basis for entry. This may be evidenced in the respondents’ statements related to academic achievement linked to exams. Since our education system requires certification, some sort of assessment is necessary. This is currently based on summative exams: at Year 3 Primary for streaming purposes; the Junior Lyceum exams; the SEC and MATSEC exams. English, Maltese and Maths are basic entry requirements to the Junior Lyceums and consequently to post-secondary level of education. Thus, any student who wants to further his or her studies needs to acquire at least a “C” grade, or better, in these subjects. This situation seems to reflect a vote for an “academic rationalism orientation” of the curriculum, which tends to develop “students’ intellectual abilities in those subject areas most worthy of study” (Cheung & Wong, 2002, p.226), and is in contrast with the NMC (1999) which may be seen as advocating a holistic development of the person stating that,

“Holistic education acknowledges the interdependence of psychomotor, intellectual, affective, social and cultural learning. The educational community would be selling students short if it privileges one of these aspects of the learning process at the expense of others” (p. 26).

This philosophy is expanded in Principle 7 of the NMC (pp. 34-35) and Objective 1 (p.47), thus, encouraging a global development of the person rather than one aspect of personhood. Since the “curriculum includes the way content is organised, how it is taught and how it is assessed” (Cheung & Wong, 2002, p.242), the NMC also advocates a more formative assessment as this focuses on the individual student, and

helps him/her to develop abilities rather than “memorisation of facts” (p.37), through rote learning, for the ‘all-important’ exam.

Secondly, class teachers seem to be sending subtle messages with regards to the importance of these subjects. The emphasis put on by class teachers on these subjects is sending powerful messages, however implicit, to the pupils that they (that is, these subjects) are very crucial. This emphasis is also evident in a current study⁷ of Maltese Primary School class-teachers. Therefore, since Physical Education (like Art and Drama) is not perceived as an academic subject and is not examined at the Primary level (due to the ‘academic rationalism orientation’), its potential as an ‘important’ subject is decreased immensely; even though, PE can now be chosen as an option for SEC examination.

In spite of these influences, two of the respondents still believe that all subjects are important, even though, as stated by one of them, “teachers gave [put] more pressure on Maths, Maltese, and English”. Ps42 makes us aware of our responsibilities during primary education, where we need to show that the whole education process is important, not just academic achievement: “in those days I did not realise their importance”, or perhaps, nobody helped him realise.

There seems to be a never ending cycle – students being influenced by the system and by the teachers; they, in turn, will be influencing their future pupils’ perception of education, physical education, and schooling, since

“Many researchers have indicated that early school experiences in physical education provide prospective teachers with a large range of information about physical education, which may potentially affect attitudes, beliefs, and teaching practices (Belka, Lawson, & Cross-Lipnickey, 1991; Doolittle, Dodds, & Placek, 1993; Keating, Silverman, & Kulinna, 2002; Lawson, 1983a; Placek et al., 1995; Morgan, Bourke, & Thompson, 2001)” Morgan et al, 2002)

Whilst studying non-specialist student-teachers’ confidence in teaching dance, Rolfe (2001) referred to a number of authors (Nettle, 1998; Kagan, 1992; Calderhead & Robson, 1991) who corroborate the notion that the student teachers’ prior experience as pupils exerts a heavy influence on how they perceive education, and that “personal values and beliefs about teaching merely become elaborated during training and are resistant to any real change” (ibid, p. 158). Morgan et al (2002) strongly argue that

“the influence of teacher education is questioned, as school socialisation agencies are often much stronger than preservice teacher training ... A variety of studies have consistently testified that teachers’ prior experiences are so powerful that preservice training may have little effect on their beliefs, particularly if they contradict already established beliefs ...”.

Hopefully, this may change during the study units in PE offered to student teachers in the Primary sector since,

⁷ Current Doctoral research being carried out by the author.

“Content importance is at par with creativity, expressive arts and critical thinking. Physical Education, health, and nutrition are also given importance within our course, which I feel is imperative since teachers should indeed foster healthy lifestyles in children, especially when one considers the fact that we are living in a society that is crippled, by obesity, diabetes, and heart disease” (Panzavecchia, 2004, p. 2)

However, it would be unwise to assume that all teacher education programmes have little influence on all prospective teachers (Lawson, 1983) supported by Rolfe’s argument that

“... Experience of an institutional course can have a significant impact on shaping individual’s attitudes and developing practice. This supports the work by Bramald et al. (1995) and reinforces the importance of the characteristics and components of courses in relation to their effect on students’ thinking” (2001, p. 169).

A case for Physical Education

“The distance between persons and their bodies is related to the centrality of physical education in schools and the importance of other movement-related professions in society” (Kretchmar, 1994, p. 69).

The local situation, with regards to Physical Education, is similar to that of some other countries (Johns & Dimmock, 1999; Fernandez-Balboa, 1997; Kirk & Tinning, 1990). Johns & Dimmock (1999), discussing PE in Hong Kong (which is considered as a small country like Malta), remark that “as a marginalised subject, physical education is accorded low status and minimal curricular time, a situation which departs markedly from the aims of education as expressed in Government documents” (p. 363-4). This low status has been directly or indirectly referred to by the respondents of this study perhaps because they “often viewed the subject as non-cognitive ... and even antithetical to cognitive development” (ibid, p. 366). Thus, even if the NMC is putting forward its aims for the local education system, what is actually happening in the schools, and the message that is coming across, could be something else, signifying a “discrepancy or divide between policy aims and practice” (ibid.).

It is interesting to note that some students stated that certain subjects should be taught by other agencies (meaning that schools would be abdicating part of their responsibilities): “PE, Music, and Drama: although they are mentally relaxing I think they don’t have to do with primary education. One can attend these institutions after school if he/she wants to” (ps12). Such a response perhaps demonstrates two things: one is that, during the respondent’s primary school experience, these subjects were not thought as relevant; and two, she has not as yet come into contact with alternative perspectives (e.g. the NMC) which could help her develop a different outlook. It will be interesting to see how this student develops her ideas with regards to schooling and holistic education during her next four years of study.

When discussing Physical Education, the parameters mentioned by the respondents pertain mainly to the physical domain (e.g. health benefits etc.). No mention was made of the social or cognitive domains of the subject (Gensemer, 1995), thus, it may

be presumed that these latter characteristics were either not exposed during the few (rare) PE lessons delivered at school, or else they were not perceived as areas related to PE. Doolittle et al. (1993) argue that student- teachers' perceptions of physical education, developed during their personal primary and secondary school experiences in physical education, will persist as a reference point which is used against any different theories they come across during their teacher- training. Thus, it would be presumed that even though other domains are exposed, the students will still hold to their original perceptions.

Whilst analysing the responses related to *participation in physical activity*, a crucial point of discussion is the attitude of the non-participating respondents (62%) towards the 'physical'. It seems that they do not consider the benefits of an active life-style important enough to overcome their time constraints. This may be due to the fact that the concept and benefits of an active life-style were not appropriately exposed to them when they were young, or worse still, they were alienated from such thoughts, thus, experiencing a very academic-oriented education. It will be very interesting to observe whether, after the course of their studies, they would have reconstructed their perceptions of PE and holistic education as suggested by Rolfe (2001), since "when embodiment is seen to be central to human development – indeed to what it is to be human – then physical education and related professions will reside on a level playingfield with the other educational arts and sciences and with any number of other people-related professions" (Kretchmar, 1994, p.34).

The over-all situation in the Maltese state primary schools may be reflecting an environment influenced by the values of the particular society, the practices of the schools and the resources afforded to PE (and other 'non-academic' subjects) (Johns & Dimmock, 1999). Such environments may be influenced by any two or three of these domains. The same authors provide an argument for this marginalising of PE related the first two domains:

"In contrast [to academic activities], 'play-like' activities have been branded as manual and insignificant and have been denigrated, both by the society, which fosters such beliefs, and schools that reproduce them." (Johns & Dimmock, 1999, p. 367).

This statement seems to support Connell's argument that the amount of abstract knowledge that has been developed in the curriculum "promotes and magnifies differences between certain types of academic and practical knowledge" (1985, p. 87), thus marginalising the non-academic curricula.

However, the NMC (1999) has the following agenda in relation to holistic education and Physical Education:

"Holistic education acknowledges the interdependence of psychomotor, intellectual, affective, social and cultural learning. The educational community would be selling students short if it privileges one of these aspects of learning process at the expense of others" (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 26).

Thus, no particular aspect of this learning process should be omitted. This principle is reflected in the first objective of the NMC which states that “through the curricular experience, the students acquire knowledge/information in the different dimensions of the human person: the spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and moral dimensions” (ibid, p. 47). These notions are reinforced in objectives 9 (p. 60), 10 (p. 62), and 11 (p. 63). However, it seems that the messages that are being transmitted to pupils at school are showing otherwise. The current situation could be demonstrating what Kelly (1989) considered as “the distinction... between the planned curriculum and the received curriculum” (p. 12) mirroring what he had evidenced as “a mismatch between the intentions of those who framed that National Curriculum and the realities of the practices of teachers and the experiences of pupils” (ibid, p. 13).

During their course of studies at Faculty, prospective teachers are exposed to in-depth studies of issues which enlighten their perceptions and help them in developing an ethos which emphasises the “interdependence of psychomotor, intellectual, affective, social and cultural” (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 26) aspects of education. Panzavecchia’s (2004) feedback on the current teacher-training course confirms this:

“The majority of the credits all adopt a holistic approach towards education and focus on teaching us to recognise the individuality and capabilities of each and every child; together with equipping us with the skills to nurture the physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural, social and moral well being of each and every child in our care” (p. 1).

However,

“Teacher educators need to improve their understanding of the attitudinal disposition of both preservice and inservice teachers to ensure relevant and appropriate learning experiences are presented... educators may be advised to challenge or complement intentionally and explicitly the attitudes and beliefs of preservice teachers that exist as a consequence of their school experiences” (Morgan et al, 2002)

Conclusion

“Curriculum change needs to involve teachers not only in the development of the new curriculum but must also engage them with the rationale for change” (Higham, 2003, p.346-7)

The question now is whether new teachers will adopt the approach referred to by the NMC, or change to the conventional modes, once they find themselves in schools. It would be interesting to study whether their established colleagues (that is the practising teachers) would influence them, yet again, and turn 360 degrees to re-embrace the curriculum orientations which they had at their entry point, since the orientation learned during their teacher-training course would not be “compatible with existing classroom practices... irrespective of their objective merits” (Carless, 1997, p.352), especially if the implementers of the curriculum do not have ownership of these innovations (Kennedy, 1988). More than this,

“Some researchers have suggested that many of the effects of teacher education on attitudes and beliefs are only temporary ... beginning teachers leave behind innovative teaching strategies and improved attitudes developed during teacher training, as they are socialised into the teaching profession” (Morgan et al, 2002).

Class teachers are liable to resist any change if they perceive the innovation as incompatible with their existing attitudes (Brown & McIntyre, 1987; Nicholls, 1983) especially if they have not been involved in the curricular process (Kirk & Macdonald, 2001). How such a change will affect them personally in their work praxis also plays a part in this game, influenced by their levels of job satisfaction and motivation (Evans, 2000).

At this stage, one would also query whether the necessary steps have been taken over the last five years to affect the required reform. Two of these steps would have been the availability of resources and training. Fullan & Miles (1992) noted that “change demands additional resources for training (or re-training), for substitutes, for new materials, for new space, and above all for time” (p.750); without such resources (meaning also ‘funding’) there would be very little to work with. Carless (1997) observed that “*In-service training* is an essential preparation for a new curriculum” (p. 352). This needs to be both on-going and concurrent with professional development (Kirk & Macdonald, 2001; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992), since, if the class teachers are

“not equipped to deal with the implementation of the new approach, they are likely to revert to the security of their previous behaviour and the desired change may not take place” (Carless, 1997, p. 352).

Such training (or retraining) would also help class-teachers to develop their perceptions, especially in relation to the merits of the required change and holistic education. These thoughts had also been reflected in the Strategic Plan (Ministry of Education, 2001) of the NMC:

“The Strategic Plan will clearly fail to be implemented if there is not sufficient funding, if teachers are not committed to it or do not rise to the challenge, if teachers are left untrained, or if the administrative bodies designed for its implementation are not sufficiently systematic and responsive” (p. v).

Consequently, unless the National Curriculum Council ascertains that the above are in place, we shall remain getting the same answers from prospective student-teachers; we shall still be practising an academic oriented programme in our primary schools... and the reform instigated by the NMC five years ago will just remain a utopia.

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