

## Parental engagement during the '*Ċaqraq!*'2 campaign: A summative analytic report of a non-formal adult educational initiative

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**Abstract:** This paper synthesises parents' and guardians' engagement with a non-formal educational initiative sponsored by Fundación Mapfre that took place between October 2014 and February 2015. Parents, guardians and carers of students' recruited from a sample of state and Catholic Church primary schools in Malta engaged with graphical representations related to select health and fitness issues prioritised at the time by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2014) to trigger collaborative and interactive activities and discussions. These activities fed into a critical engagement with the codifications, i.e. decodification (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011; Freire, 2005). Participants presented main themes / issues emerging from the workshop activities. In this manner, workshops yielded to participants' grassroots, in-depth, critical and inquisitive ownership of and engagement with health and fitness concerns. The main findings of the study show that, during the workshop, participants manifested a successful thematic, self-critical and reflective engagement with the select health and fitness concerns; they also linked the workshop discussion to their family and community contexts, as well as to broader socio-economic, cultural and global dynamics – with special reference to water supply; availability of public and recreational spaces; work-life balance; globalisation and technology. Thus, the workshop pedagogy provided democratic, dialogical and reflexive engagement; enhanced social capital and a grassroots' approach to knowledge and education. Recommendations stemming from these research findings include the possibility of parent and child workshops; holding a series of workshops and forming a core-group of family members who have a more active role in future '*Ċaqraq!*' and other health and fitness campaigns.

**Keywords:** adult education; codification and decodification; Freirean pedagogy; non-formal education; parental involvement.

## Introduction

This paper synthesises parents', guardians' and carers'<sup>1</sup> engagement with a non-formal educational initiative sponsored by Fundación Mapfre. Between October 2014 and February 2015, parents, guardians and carers of students from a sample of state and Catholic Church primary school children in Malta were recruited through an open invitation to attend a workshop about health and fitness. Workshop participants engaged with an interactive pedagogy comprising codification and decodification (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011; Freire, 2005) to critically and actively engage with concepts and practices related to health and fitness. During the workshop, participants formed teams that were exposed to a number of pictorial, graphic and photographic representations of select health and fitness issues prioritised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2014) at the time<sup>2</sup> to trigger intra-team discussion, inter-team speed dating and role taking.

The '*Ċaqraq!*'<sup>2</sup> parents' workshop comprised a non-formal educational initiative because it occurred "in a planned but highly adaptable manner" (Eshach, 2006, p.173); it featured a curriculum and methodology that were adapted to the needs and interests of participants (Zaki Dib, 1988); and the educational process was engaged with in a community-based scenario that was "beyond the spheres of formal and informal education" (Eshach, 2006, p. 173).

Workshop participation fed into a critical engagement with the codifications, i.e. decodification (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011; Freire, 2005). Teams' representatives presented main themes / issues emerging from the workshop activities for collective feedback, further discussion and data collection<sup>3</sup> for the purposes of analytic synthesis and dissemination of '*Ċaqraq!*'<sup>2</sup> project findings. In this manner, workshops yielded to participants' grassroots, in-depth, critical and inquisitive ownership of and engagement with select health and fitness concerns advocated by WHO (2014).

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term "participants" refers to all workshop recruits, i.e. parents, guardians and, sometimes, other student carers, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles. The terms "students" and "children" are interchanged. The term "educators" refers to professionals in the field of education (teachers, heads of school etc.)

<sup>2</sup> Pedagogy and materials used for the workshops were also reviewed by Malta's Health Promotion Unit (HPU) and the whole project was endorsed by the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE).

<sup>3</sup> Data collection was carried out by the workshop facilitator, also author of this paper.

## Background

Various studies sought to answer the question whether schools are actually practising parental involvement (Spiteri, 2009; DeGabriele, 2004; Foot, Howe, Cheyne, Terras and Rattray, 2002; Tett, 2001) and whether this has an impact on students' achievement and general well being at school (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002; Edwards and Warin, 1999; Baker, Scher and Mackler, 1997). As a result, this project deployed an action research approach to actively involve parents themselves in a critical and non-formal educational engagement with health and fitness concerns. For Malta, this is relatively atypical since, despite latest policies and developments that give relevance to lifelong learning (ePlatform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE), 2015; Mayo, 2014)<sup>4</sup>, the use of school premises as a learning space for adult members of the community is limited (Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE), 2014; Brown, 2012). This is partly due to Malta's challenging rates of early school leaving (MEDE, 2014; European Commission, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) & Eurydice, 2013); a tradition within the education system that leaves little room for decentralisation of power (Brown, 2012) and the lack of a policy on community involvement in schools (Brown, 2012; Bugeja and Cassar, 2011; Spiteri, 2009; DeGabriele, 2004).

As an educational initiative, the pedagogy of the 'Ċaq!aq!'2 parents' workshop drew on principles of Freirean pedagogy, particularly apt for a grassroots' initiative involving persons that are actually or potentially challenged by some form of oppression. In the case of 'Ċaq!aq!'2 workshop participants and their social context, i.e. Maltese society at the time of the campaign, the principal challenge lied in engaging actively and critically with health and fitness for oneself and one's family, particularly in a context where the

prevalence of overweight and obesity among Maltese schoolchildren and adolescents has been increasing over recent years, as it has in other southern European countries. Evidence shows that environments with barriers of access to healthy foods and fewer occasions to engage in physical activity are associated with higher rates of obesity" (Fearne, 2015, p. 4).

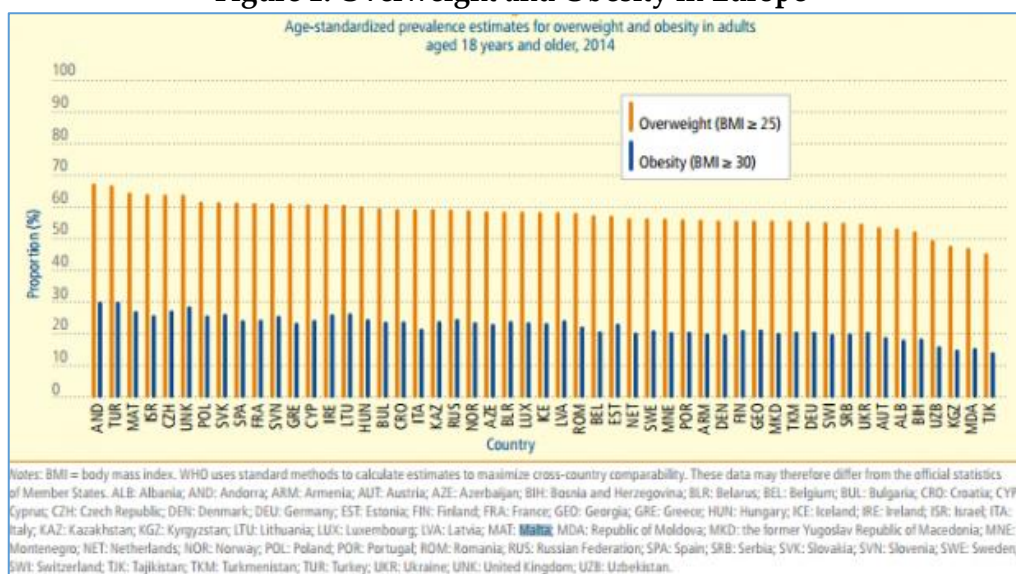
Indeed, although Malta ranks as one of the top six EU member-states when it comes to life expectancy (79.6 years) as well as the EU member-state with the highest number of healthy life years expected at birth (71.6%) (European Union, 2013); Malta tips the weighing scales in the EU by having the highest overweight and obesity rates; and ranks third in the whole of Europe, after Andorra and Turkey, when it comes to weight beyond the healthy level

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<sup>4</sup> Policy developments such as those entailed in the *Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* (MEDE, 2014) and the *National Curriculum Framework (NCF)* (MEDE, 2012).

(Figure 1) (WHO, 2015). In fact, 68.5% of Maltese men and 59.6% of Maltese women aged 18 years and over are overweight (WHO, 2015). Moreover, Maltese children are the second most overweight and obese in Europe, especially those aged between 10 and 11 (European Union, 2013). Malta is also the second country in Europe with highest female mortality from breast cancer and eight highest in the EU28 when it comes to all-cancers mortality rate (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2014).

**Figure 1: Overweight and Obesity in Europe**



(WHO, 2015, p. 3)

Therefore, it is not a surprise that Malta-based policy manifests ever-increasing concern about the decline in “the overall consumption of healthy foods...amidst the changing demand and accessibility of food, increasing convenience of ‘junk’ and ‘ready-made’ food, poor eating habits, and prevalence of a more sedentary lifestyle” (Bartolo, 2015, p. 3).

In this context the ‘*Caqlaq!*’2 parents’ workshop comprised a proactive attempt at involving the school as a “bridge to stimulate parental involvement in shaping children’s habits and attitudes about healthy lifestyle choices” (p.3). The value of parents’ and schools’ contributions to health and fitness are suggested in the *Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health* (WHO, 2004) as it states that “(b)ringing about changes in dietary habits and patterns of physical activity...require(s) the combined efforts of many stakeholders, public and private, over several decades”(pp.5-6 )<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The author is indebted to Dolores Gauci, Charmaine Gauci, Anna Maria Gilson and Elizabeth Pisani (Eds.) (2015) for linking her to this literature.

The ‘*Ĉaq!aq!*’2 parents’ workshop addressed these objectives through the intervention of a critical pedagogue deploying a dialogical pedagogy (Freire, 2005), which, however, did not imply a naïve or ‘laissez-faire’ approach that acquiesced the intolerable (Freire, 1998). On the contrary, the workshop’s pedagogy was based on critical problematization (Freire, 2005, 1993, 1985) of daily situations contextualised in broader social and global settings. Thus, a pedagogy that targeted praxis in terms of human production of a social reality that does not turn back against humanity - therefore, non-oppressive - because it involves action based problem-posing dialogue and reflection (Freire, 1993). This is also the process whereby voice is given “to unrealized possibilities” (Giroux and Simon, 1989, p.25)<sup>6</sup> in order to nourish “self-understanding” (Slattery, 1995)<sup>7</sup>.

‘*Ĉaq!aq!*’2 parents’ workshop targeted praxis and ‘conscientização’ (conscientization) (Freire, 2005, 1993) to foster people’s increased awareness of their potential for knowledge at various levels: subjective, communitarian and global (Freire, 1993, 1985)<sup>8</sup>. Through ‘conscientização’, the individual engages with ‘reading the world’ (Freire and Macedo, 1987). World literacy involves an understanding of the nature and dynamics of one’s immediate context as part of the broader context; as well as one’s possibility for emancipation of oneself in that context (Freire, 1993, 1987, 1985). It follows that workshops sought to foster dialogic relations that break “with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education...The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach” (Freire, 1993, p. 61)<sup>9</sup>.

The adult education component of the ‘*Ĉaq!aq!*’2 parents’ workshop drew on the branch of adult education that is concerned with social justice (Stein,

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<sup>6</sup> The author is indebted to Camel Borg and Peter Mayo (2006) for linking her to this literature.

<sup>7</sup> The author is indebted to Borg and Mayo (2006) for linking her to this literature.

<sup>8</sup> Freire (1985, 1973) identifies three stages of consciousness that feature in the journey towards ‘conscientização’, namely:

- The semi-intransitive consciousness, where there is no human agency, so social realities are experienced as irrevocably set in place;
- The naïve transitive consciousness, where cause and effect operate in fragmented ways, so human agency invests in changes in a short-sighted fragmented manner with no address to broader and fundamental issues;
- The critically transitive consciousness, where human agency recognizes connections between the immediate, micro experience of society and the broader socio-economic, political and historical dimension within which the micro experience is embedded (Freire, 1985, 1973).

<sup>9</sup> This dwells on the Freirean distinction between ‘problem-posing education’ and ‘banking education’ (Freire, 2005, 1993).

2006)<sup>10</sup>. In this sense, adult education “might serve as a critique of social, educational, and political policies...” (Stein, 2006, p.32). Such an approach widens the gap between with the discourse on learning, particularly lifelong learning and education, since, in this sense,

adult education is more than the preparation for a job. Adult education is... researching communities with a view to creating a school for all; transforming communities...Lifelong Learning's concepts and practices seem to obscure the fact that life is more than the labor market (Lucio-Villegas, 2009, p. xiv).

When adult education is deployed as a tool for citizenship education it calls for organised non-hierarchical discussion, reflection and engagement with issues that are common and/or draw on personal experience and/or somehow impinge on the experience of participants (Brown, 2014). In this sense, adult education supports people in taking control of their lives including their institutions (Hamilton, 2013). It fosters “action-oriented programmes” (Wright, 2007, p.412)<sup>11</sup>. Adult education programmes have the potential of fostering active world citizenship “by raising awareness and interest or actively recruiting people...” (Brown, 2014, p.11) and deploying a “curriculum intended to reflect the life experiences of participants” (Hamilton, 2013, p.14). This entails the formation of space for diversity of background (including race, culture, education) juxtaposed with finding common ground that transcends differences (Hamilton, 2013). In this manner, adult education may act as “a platform for groups traditionally associated with vulnerability” (Brown, 2014, p.10).

Adult education programmes are associated with challenging fundamental and/or mainstream values and hegemonized structures (Hamilton, 2013). In adult education interventions

all participants anticipate that their individual contributions will receive serious consideration from others. At the same time they remain open to changing or reconstructing their own stance on the problem under consideration in the light of what others have to say and on the weight of all relevantly identified information (Collins, 1991, p.12).

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<sup>10</sup> The literature also refers to another branch of research and work in the sphere of adult education whereby “adult education has been termed adult learning in the service of promoting teaching and learning in the workplace” (Stein, 2006, p. 32). However, adult learning was subject to severe critiques as it potentially omits the relational aspect inherent to the education component of adult education (Biesta, 2006, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> The author is indebted to Hamilton (2013) for linking her to this literature.



The ‘Ċaqraq!’2 parents’ workshop involved an educational intervention that drew on the immediate contexts of participants, namely, the school and its community; yet also targeting critical thematization of participants’ experiences within broader social contexts. It follows that the ‘Ċaqraq!’2 parents’ workshop is also relevant to research in the field of community development. The critical, problem-posing Freirean pedagogy adopted for the workshop sought to create an educational opportunity for participants to come into presence (Biesta, 2006) when experiencing interruptions and strangeness in the “‘other’ community” which lives within, yet juxtaposed with, rational communities<sup>12</sup> (Lingis, 1994<sup>13</sup>).

The literature reviewed in this section underpinned the pedagogy of the parents’ workshop during the ‘Ċaqraq!’2 campaign. The research questions that the discussion in this paper addresses are:

1. In what ways do parents and guardians of primary school children in Malta and Gozo engage with select health and fitness concerns prioritised by WHO (2014) at the time of the study, if at all?
2. How is such engagement linked to participants’ immediate family and community contexts (if at all)?
3. Is such engagement linked to forces and dynamics at play within broader socio-economic, cultural and global contexts? If yes, in what way/s?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the non-formal pedagogy deployed for ‘Ċaqraq!’2 parents’ workshop?

Data collected during the workshops were analysed using the methodology and research design discussed in the next section.

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<sup>12</sup> Gert J.J. Biesta (2006) uses the term ‘rational community’ by drawing on Lingis’ (1994) analysis of community as

constituted by a number of individuals having something in common—a common language, a common conceptual framework—and building something in common: a nation, a polis, an institution (Lingis, 1994, ix). A special instance of this kind of community is what Lingis calls the *rational community* (italics in the source)...not simply constituted by a common stock of observations, maxims for actions, and common beliefs, but produces and produced by a common discourse... (p. 55).

In this manner, individuals’ insights and ways of being and behaving are scripted on the basis of universal categories that are engaged with as rational. Therefore, in the rational community we are “*interchangeable*” (italics in the source) (p. 56). Biesta uses the term ‘other community’ (and not, as one might expect, ‘irrational community’) to refer to the situation when individuals engage with the call / need to go beyond - ‘out of the box’ of the rational community.

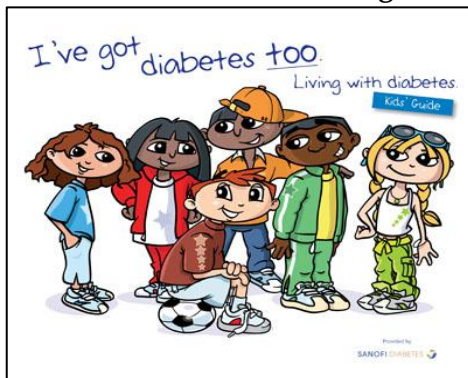
<sup>13</sup> The author is indebted to Biesta (2006) for linking her to this literature.

## Methodology

The 'Çaqlaq!'2 parents' workshop comprised action research "to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people...through adult education...and...sociopolitical [sic] action" (Reason, 2001, p.182). In turn, this targeted more power to participants as they actively processed and constructed knowledge through a problem-posing engagement with "context, issues of social identity, webs of power and such" (Hall, 2005, p.21).

A qualitative research design was deployed using focus groups and structured interviews as research tools. Focus groups were used to subdivide each workshop's participants into three or four teams<sup>14</sup> that discussed and decodified codifications (Freire, 2005, 1993; Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 2011) as they prepared a brief presentation for the rest of workshop participants. Teams would have different codifications although the same codifications were used throughout the campaign (Figure 2) in view of the priority assigned by WHO (2014) to the issues that the codifications represented at the time of the campaign.

Figure 2: Codifications



(Sanofi, 2014)



(Swabb, 2010)



(Adeevee, 2014)



(Bobby-Urban Heights Photographers)

<sup>14</sup> The number of teams depended on the overall number of recruited workshop participants so that, as much as possible, teams of 4-6 people would be working on the same codification. More details on recruitment processs further on in this section.



At the end of individual teams' focus group discussions, a representative from each team would present main ideas emerging from the team's collaborative decodification process and the rest of workshop participants would critically engage with such ideas. The researcher collected the data by audio-recording the presentations and discussions; as well as collecting notes made by each team that summarised main ideas resulting from individual focus groups' discussions. In this manner, the use of focus group methodology yielded to sharing, comparing and contrasting experiences; exploring issues of shared importance; developing and generating ideas (Breen, 2006) collaboratively and democratically (Brown, 2014). At the end of each workshop, qualitative data synthesised workshop participants' grassroots and critical engagement with select health issues and concerns prioritised by WHO (2014) at the time of this action research project.

Moreover, further qualitative data that evaluated participants' experience of the workshop were collected using a very brief structured interview (Figure 3) that asked participants to note down on a post-it what they felt/thought they would be taking home with them from the workshop experience; what they felt/thought they were going to leave behind them further to the workshop experience; a negative comment about the workshop and a positive comment about the workshop (Figure 3). Evaluation data (sampled in Figure 4) were used for the purposes of writing this paper as well as to give feedback to the sponsor about participants' experience of the parents' workshop<sup>15</sup>.

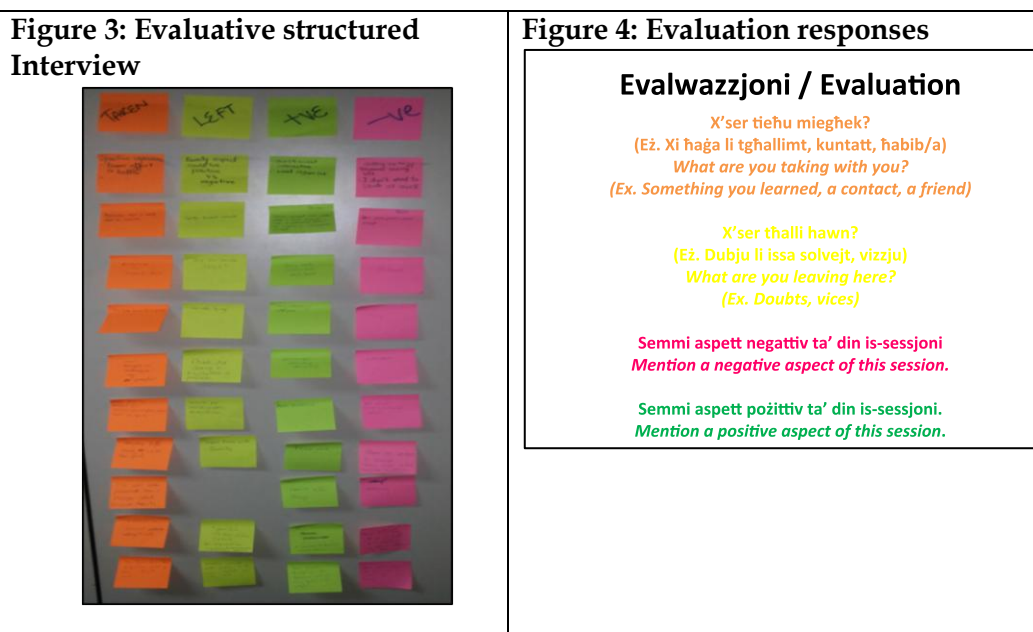
In view of budget and time limitations inherent to the sponsored campaign nature of '*Ċaqraq!*'<sup>2</sup>, convenience sampling was used to recruit schools on a first-come-first served basis through an open call sent to all state and Church schools in Malta and Gozo accessible via email. The funds allowed a maximum sample of 25 schools (20%) out of the total 124 state and Church primary schools in Malta and Gozo (Government of Malta, 2014)<sup>16</sup>. Reliability of research findings was therefore limited by sampling the maximum number of schools that the funds obtained made possible (i.e. 25 schools); yet maximised through the use of an open invitation to attend the workshop sent to all parents/guardians of students of the sampled schools by the schools' administration on behalf of the campaign coordinators. Further to piloting

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<sup>15</sup> Data gathering research tools and the information sheet and consent form were provided in Maltese and English languages.

<sup>16</sup> Whereas the sampling frame at the time of the project comprised a total of 124 primary schools of which 68 (54.8%) were state schools and 56 (45.2%) were Church schools (Government of Malta, 2014); the sample of 25 schools toured with the workshop comprised 18 state schools (72%) and 7 (28%) Catholic Church schools. Thus funding and time limitations inherent to the campaign limited the extent of which the sample of toured schools could be representative in terms of school type; albeit this was beyond the remit of the qualitative nature of the project.

initial workshop sessions<sup>17</sup>, efforts to maximise the number of workshop participants from each school were made by adding a face-to-face recruitment strategy whereby a ‘Ċaqraq!’<sup>2</sup> representative would seek to recruit more participants<sup>18</sup> the same week when the workshop was due<sup>19</sup>. At the end of the campaign, a grand total of 218 participants had attended the workshops.



A stratified sample of parents was not possible due to limitations of time and data protection. The validity and reliability of research findings are limited by this constraint, more so since recruited participants possibly and/or partially represent parents and guardians that may be less challenged by health issues and/or knowledge about these. Nonetheless, the open invitation sent to all students’ homes in writing through the school administration was an attempt

- <sup>17</sup> The first five workshops were used to pilot the data gathering research tools and revise them accordingly, including a pilot session with members of the government’s Health Promotion Unit (HPU). The piloting exercise yielded to identifying the need for an enhanced participant recruitment strategy that was sought through face-to-face contact as explained later in this paragraph); simplification of select slides used during the explanation phase of the workshop that contained too much academic/theoretical detail; and matching the text of the evaluative structured interview questions to respective post-it colours (Figure 3) so as to facilitate respondents’ association between the answer s/he would write and the post-it to be used for that particular answer (Figure 4).
- <sup>18</sup> Over and above those that would have positively responded to the open invitation sent by the school.
- <sup>19</sup> ‘Ċaqraq!’<sup>2</sup> representative would approach adults waiting outside the school to pick up students (convenience sampling) to explain about the workshop and register expressions of interest.

to maximise the size of the sample as it fostered open access to participation for all parents/guardians, irrespective of diverse socio-demographic profiles<sup>20</sup>.

A combination of analysis tools was used to analyse data in this action research project. Content analysis was used mainly to reduce data to essential content; as well as explain, clarify and annotate data (Mayring, 2000). Thematic analysis was used to subject data to a “*selective process*” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 55 (italics in the source)) and thereafter deconstruct data and organise them in thematic concepts or categories (LaRossa, 2005). Discourse analysis was used to understand how “individuals imbue reality with meaning” (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009, par.3).

Ethical considerations included probity (Bassey, 2002) and commitment to honesty (Sammons, 1989, as cited in, Busher, 2002); informed consent (Burton & Bartlett, 2009) through the use of a consent form that also included researcher’s contact details; and obtaining authorisation to carry out research from MEDE’s Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE).

Further to this section’s explanation of the deployed methodology, research findings are presented and analytically discussed in response to the study’s research questions.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Parental engagement with select health and fitness concerns prioritised by WHO (2014)*

Data collected during fieldwork testify to significant and on-going engagement by participants during workshops. Content and thematic analyses of data show that parents engaged mostly with the issues of types of foods featuring in the daily diet and exercise for the purpose of fitness. These findings are evident in data retrieved during teams’ presentations and group discussions, as well as data retrieved through the structured evaluative interview.

Content analysis of data shows that engagement with daily dietary patterns was mainly generic, rather than dietary-content-specific. This is testified by participants’ comments manifesting insights about general dietary patterns such as:

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<sup>20</sup> Collection of data concerning socio-demographic details of participants was not carried out as it was beyond the remit and funding of the campaign.

*“Kemmi hi importanti dieta bilanċjata” (Parteċipant – Evalwazzjoni (PE), skola tal-istat Żebbuġ (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*“The importance of a balanced diet” (Participant – Evaluation (PE), state school Żebbuġ (Gozo), January, 2015).*

*“Li hu importanti li ngħixu 'healthy lifestyle'” (PE, skola tal-istat Għarb (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*“It is important to live a healthy lifestyle” (PE, state school Għarb (Gozo), January 2015).*

*“Awareness on balance of the body, mind and spirit” (PE, state school Dingli, November 2014).*

*“Qatt mhu biżżejjed fejn tidhol is-saħħa” (PE, skola tal-istat” (PE, skola tal-istat Dingli, Novembru 2014).*

*“It's never enough when it comes to health” (PE, state school Dingli, November 2014).*

In some cases, data testify to a self-addressed critical and/or reformatory engagement with general dietary patterns, such as:

*“Li mhux ha nixtri 'unhealthy' food” (PE, skola tal-istat Għarb (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*“I am not going to buy unhealthy food” (PE, state school Għarb (Gozo), January 2015).*

*“Se nipprova ma nikolx 'junk food' speċjalment wara l-ikel” (PE, skola tal-Knisja Birkirkara, Jannar 2015).*

*“I am going to avoid eating junk food especially after meals” (PE, Church school Birkirkara, January 2015).*

*“Iva llum niddeċiedi li nieqaf mil-ikel ħazin li nieklu” (PE, skola tal-istat Għarb (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*“Yes today I will stop eating bad foods we eat” (PE, state school Għarb (Gozo), January 2015).*

There is less evidence of engagement with dietary issues that is content-specific, save for a few exceptions, such as:

*“Kilt il-'brown bread' l-ewwel darba” (PE, skola tal-istat Birżebbuġia, Jannar 2015).*

*“I ate brown bread for the first time” (PE, state school Birżebbuġia, January 2015).*

*“Alternatives to unhealthy food” (PE, skola tal-Knisja Balzan, Novembru 2014).*

Despite the limited incidence of such data, content analysis (e.g. a participant eating brown bread for the first time during the workshop) testifies to the workshop's pedagogy's success in engaging participants with experiences that are unfamiliar (Biesta, 2006), either due to lack of exposure or due to lack

of will prior to workshop attendance. Indeed, findings that point to generic and critical and/or reformative engagement are linked to the workshop's pedagogy since the workshop's rationale was partly based on the need to enhance adult sensitization to health and fitness issues; as opposed to delving into a nutrition or fitness programme for participants. Research findings related to the pedagogy of the workshop will be further discussed later on in this section.

With regard to exercise, participants engagement was also generic, rather than content-specific, such as:

*"EXERCISE IS IMPORTANT" (text capitalized by the respondent) (PE, Pilot of workshop with Health Promotion Unit (HPU Pilot), September, 2014).*

*"Kem hu mportanti l-isport" (PE, skola tal-istat Mqabba, Ottubru 2014).*

*"How important sport is" (PE, state school Mqabba, October 2014).*

*"Wiehed irid jghin ruhu billi jagħmel l-eżerċizzju" (Parteċipant waqt id-diskussjoni (PD), skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"One needs to help oneself by doing exercise" (Participant during discussion (PD), state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).*

Discourse analysis of research data sheds light on prevalence of data that testify to participants' self-addressed critical and reformative engagement, such as:

*"Realization that I really need to exercise" (PE, HPU Pilot, September, 2014).*

*"I'm even more passionate than I thought about physical activity" (PE, HPU Pilot, September, 2014).*

*"I always knew how important healthy eating and exercise is, however, today's seminar made me truly understand and feel that I need to do more" (underline added by respondent)" (PE, Church school Msida, February 2015).*

At the time of the study, child diabetes was also one of the main health concerns prioritized by WHO (2014). Participants' engagement with a codification about child diabetes (Figure 2) was interpersonal. Thus data bear little testimony of personal or family experience of child diabetes. This is unrepresentative of the registered increase in childhood type 1 diabetes mellitus (T1DM) over the last 16 years around the world, including in Malta, which has one of the highest incidence rates in the EU (Torpiano,



2014a)<sup>21</sup>. Nonetheless, the relevance of such engagement during the ‘*Ċaq!aq!*’2 parents workshop is testified by secondary sources showing that in Malta, “the number of children/adolescents with T1DM has been rising at a faster rate than expected, and a distinct shift to younger age at onset has been observed” (Formosa, Calleja and Torpiano, 2012, p.484).

**Figure 5: Childhood diabetes in Malta – Statistics 2006-2010**

Age group (years)	Mean incidence (per 100,000 per year)	Annual increase in incidence
0 – 4	21.7	+39% per year (p = 0.04)
5 – 9	30.4	+31% per year (p = 0.026)
10 – 14	16.1	-6.5% per year (p = 0.66)
Total (0 – 14)	21.86	21.8%

Circa 25 new patients (under 16 years) every year

**1 new young patient every 2 weeks  
on average**

(Formosa, Calleja and Torpiano, 2012, as cited in Torpiano, 2014b, p.5)

Indeed, there is evidence that, as a result of the workshop experience, participants became less detached and/or less estranged to the issue of diabetes in general and child diabetes in particular:

<sup>21</sup> As mentioned in the methodology section, lack of validity and/or reliability may be due to participants’ sample composition, possibly since adults committing to workshop participation might be less prone to health problems associated with improper eating and fitness routines.

*"Dwar id-dijabete tat-tfal kif tkompli magħhom" (PE, skola tal-istat Siggiewi, Jannar 2015).*

*"How to engage with diabetic children" (PE, state school Siggiewi, January 2015).*

*"Iz-zokkor huwa 'virus'" (PE, skola tal-istat Għarb (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"Sugar is a virus" (PE, state school Għarb (Gozo), January 2015).*

*"(In response to the picture about diabetes) Our group discussed the need of awareness within the family...what to feed our children and awareness at school...but in the end a diabetic child is still a child!" (PD, state school Mellieħa, February 2015).*

In turn, this would testify to workshop pedagogical outcome of enhanced world literacy (Freire, 2005, 1993; Freire and Macedo, 1987), as elaborated later on in this section.

Another health and fitness issue prioritized by WHO (2014) at the time of the project and that workshop participants engaged with - albeit to a lesser degree - was smoking and passive smoking. In this case the majority of data manifest critical and reformative self-engagement by participants who are also smokers themselves:

*"...tghallimt li ma tpejjipx quddiem haddieħor li ma jpejjipx" (PE, skola tal-istat Birżebbuġia, Jannar 2015).*

*"...I learnt not to smoke when with non-smokers" (PE, state school Birżebbuġia, January 2015).*

*"Try to smoke less" (PE, HPU Pilot, September, 2014).*

In sum workshop participants manifested engagement with the sampled health and fitness concerns prioritized by WHO (2014) at the time of the study. Nonetheless, this took place with varying degrees when comparing engagement with different concerns; as well as with varying attitudes, i.e. mainly generic but also content-specific; interpersonal with respect to some concerns, e.g. child diabetes, and as by drawing on personal experience with respect to other concerns, e.g. smoking and passive-smoking.

The discussion in the next subsection addresses the second research question by delving into if, how and why participants' engagement was linked to their immediate family and community contexts.

### ***The impact of participants' immediate family and community contexts***

Analysis of fieldwork data shows that participants significantly drew on their immediate and broader family, community and social contexts in the process of decodifying the workshop resources (Figure 2). Participants' immediate

family and home experiences feature in in two ways, namely: The actual past or present experience of participants' immediate family context and the potential impact of participants' immediate family context.

To explain better, discourse analysis of data points at some engagement that draws on participants' actual past or present experiences, such as:

*"Ftakart fi tfuliti u kemm hi sabiha l-ghaqda fil-familja" (PE, skola tal-istat Floriana, Dicembru 2014).*

*"I recalled my childhood and how beautiful the family unit is" (PE, state school Floriana, December 2014).*

Yet most participants spoke about potential experiences, immediate and long-term future possibilities within their immediate family and community contexts. When doing this, they addressed different types of health and fitness concerns that include – yet also go beyond - food and exercise, and extend to a more holistic engagement with wellbeing, particularly when it comes to one's family wellbeing:

*"... 'snack' ghat-tfal sakemm naslu mix-xogħol" (PE, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"Snack ideas for children till we get home from work" (PE, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).*

*"Biex nieħu aktar attenzjoni fuq l-ikel li jieklu uliedi" (PE, skola tal-istat Żebbuġ (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"To be more attentive of the food that my children eat" (PE, state school Żebbuġ (Gozo), January 2015).*

*"Titgħallem kif lit-tfal ma thallihomx jilagħbu hafna bil-'gadgets'" (PE, skola tal-istat Żebbuġ (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"I learnt that children should not be allowed to play with gadgets for long" (PE, state school Żebbuġ (Gozo), January 2015).*

*"Se nieħu miegħi esprjenja oħra li tgħin kif inrabbi 'l uliedi" (PE, skola tal-Knisja, Birkirkara, Jannar 2015).*

*"I am taking with me another experience that helps in raising my children" (PE, Church school Birkirkara, January 2015).*

*"tgħallimt li għandna nikkomunikaw aktar fil-familja u nieklu ikel 'healthy'" (PE, skola tal-Knisja Msida, Frar 2015).*

*"...I learnt that in the family we need to communicate more and eat healthy" (PE, Church school Msida, February 2015).*

*"Nghin lir-ragel jaqta' s-sigaretti għax jagħmlu ħsara anke lit-tfal barra*

*lilu nifsu" (PE, skola tal-istat Żebbuġ (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"I will help my husband quit smoking as it harms the children apart from*

*him" (PE, state school Żebbuġ (Gozo), January 2015).*

Holistic and forward-looking engagement with one's immediate context was also self-addressed and reflexive:

*"I was involved myself and not always think about kids, homework and stuff" (PE, Church school Valletta, October 2014).*

*"Noħrog dawra bir-rotta "" (PE, skola tal-istat Għarb (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"I will go for a bike ride" (PE, state school Għarb (Gozo), January 2015).*

*"Noqgħod aktar attenta fl-attitudni tiegħi" (PE, skola tal-Knisja Msida, Frar 2015).*

*"To be more careful in my attitude" (PE, Church school Msida, February 2015).*

Discourse analysis also shows that participants contextualised the select health and fitness concerns (Figure 2) in their community contexts in a critical manner. Indeed, participants deployed the workshop as a space to voice their analyses of strengths and weaknesses within their communities that affect the discussed health and fitness concerns:

*"(B'referenza għal wahda mill-kodifikazzjonijiet) It-tfal jaf m'għandhomx vuċi...it-tifel imdejjaq minħabba 'l missier...għax qed jibla d-duħħan (tas-sigaretti)..." (PD, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"(With reference to a codification) Children might not have a voice...the boy is sad because of the father...and for being a passive smoker..." (PD, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).*

*"It-tifel meta jilgħab 'videogames' jinfexx fl-ikel u jien nibda nisimghu jinħaraq u jindanna...Aħna konna noħorgu barra nilagħbu imma llum kulhadd kompjuter, kulhadd 'tablet'..." (PD, skola tal-istat Mosta, Frar 2015).*

*"My son binges on food while playing videogames and I can hear him getting angry...We used to play outdoors but nowadays computers and tablets are pervasive..." (PD, state school Mosta, February 2015).*

*"...tfal jinqatgħu mis-soċjetà...jieqfu jieklu...jibdew joqgoħdu d-dar biex jilagħbu l-logħba...tifel ma kienx qed jiekol, ma kienx qed jissocjalizza....tifel iddahhal go*

*'mental institution'...tant dahal gol-logħba dat-tifel li beda jgħix il-logħba..." (PD, skola tal-istat Mosta, Frar 2015).*

*"...children that exclude themselves from society...stop eating...start staying indoors to play the (digital) game...a boy was not eating, nor socialising...a boy was hospitalized in*

*"Tajjeb ngħid li mil-laqgħa li kellna hafna mill-ommijiet jahsbu li d-dijabete xi haga li ggibha int imma mhux il-każ fit-tfal" (PE, skola tal-istat Żebbuġ (Gozo), Jannar 2015).*

*"Importanti li jekk tifel għandu z-zokkor il-ġenituri jinfurmaw...shabu, jafu x'għandu? Halli jekk ikunu qed jilagħbu...jiġrilu xi haga ikunu jafu  
"It is important that parents inform concerned parties in case of child diabetes...do his/her friends know? So if they are playing...and something*

*"Nahseb l-aħjar li tgħidilhom (li wiehed għandu tfal bid-dijabete) halli anki jkollok bżonn titlaq mix-xogħol..." (PD, skola tal-istat Ghaxaq, Jannar 2015).*

*"(B'referenza għad-dijabete u kundizzjonijiet ta' saħħa oħra fit-tfal) L-atitudni mportanti. Jien għandi t-tifel 'coeliac', ġieli jispiċċa privileġġat...imma ġieli jaqbdu miegħu (tfal oħra)...is-sena l-oħra marli hafna lura..." (PD, skola tal-Knisja Valletta, Ottubru 2014).*

*"Naf omm hi tkun ġol-kċina ssajjar, it-tfal fil-kamra u biex jikkellmu bl-'sms'!...Din x'hajja hi?!" (PD, skola tal-istat Mosta, Frar 2015).*

*a mental institution...he immersed himself so much in the (digital) game that he could not longer distinguish between the game and reality" (PD, state school Mosta, February 2015).*

*"It is worth noting that from this meeting it resulted that most mums believe diabetes is self-provoked yet this is not the case of diabetic children" (PE, state school, Żebbuġ (Gozo), January 2015).*

*x'għandhom jagħmlu..." (PD, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*happens to hi/her they would know what to do..." (PD, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).*

*"I think it is better to inform (parties concerned about child diabetes) so that if one needs to leave work (in case of an emergency)..." (PD, state school Ghaxaq, January 2015).*

*"(With reference to diabetes and other conditions affecting children) Attitude is important. My son is coeliac, sometimes he was privileged because of this...but at other times (other children) picked on him...this negatively affected his studies last year..." (PD Church school Valletta, October 2014).*

*"I know a mother who, while cooking in the kitchen, communicates with her children via sms while they would be in their room!...What kind of life is this?! (PD, state school Mosta, February 2015).*

*"There is an organization where you can turn to for [sic] questions"*



(PE, Church school Gżira, December 2014).

*“That government should make vegetables and healthy food cheaper”* (PE, Church school Birkirkara, January 2015).

*“...f’suggett bħall-‘PSD’22 l-għalliema għandhom jindirizzaw dawn l-affarijiet”* (PD, skola tal-Knisja Valletta, Ottubru 2014).

*“...teachers should address these issues in PSD23”* (PD, Church school Valletta, October 2014).

*“Hawn Malta sfortunatament m’hawnx faċilità għall-eżercizzju...tara eżempju l-‘bike lane’ Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq tiegħi fin-nofs!...”* (PD, skola tal-istat Mosta, Frar 2015).

*“Unfortunately in Malta there is no exercise facilities...for instance the bike lane in Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq is truncated half-way through the road!...”* (PD, state school Mosta, February 2015).

*“The Head (of school) informed the warden who charged (fined) the street cleaner for smoking near the school premises...”* (PD, state school Mellieħa, February 2015).

It is evident from these data that participants identified strengths and weaknesses that result from individual agency, such as values and actions of fellow parents and community members; as well as from structural variables, such institutions and their policies.

The next subsection delves into this last point with a broader range of discussion since it addresses the third research question of this study, namely: If and how participants’ engagement with health issues prioritised by WHO (2014) at the time of the study was linked to forces and dynamics at play within broader socio-economic, cultural and global contexts.

### ***Forces and dynamics at play within broader socio-economic, cultural and global contexts***

Discourse and thematic analyses of fieldwork data show that participants linked their workshop engagement to socio-economic, cultural and global contexts that go beyond their immediate family and community contexts. Workshop discussions testify to enhanced world literacy (Freire and Macedo, 2007) as participants critically engaged with themes such as the quality of water supply and availability of public and recreational spaces, particularly

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Personal Social (and Career) Development.

<sup>23</sup> See footnote 21.

in Malta; strengths and weaknesses of male-female shared responsibilities on the work-life balance; globalisation, technology and their implications:

*"The extent of water pollution" (PE, Church school Birkirkara, January 2015).*

*"I learnt about water contamination in Malta" (PE, Church school Birkirkara, January 2015).*

*"Points raised like outdoor space and that exercise is a personal choice are important awareness raised" (PE, HPU Pilot, September 2014).*

*"People are resistant to change. They want to find excuses to resist change" (PE, HPU Pilot, September 2014).*

*"The reality of the how big the challenge for parents is with respect to technology in today's world" (PE, state school Mqabba, October 2014).*

*"Jiena fi żmieni...siegħa kien ikun hemm 'cartoons' fuq it-'television'...illum stazzjonjiet...juru ('cartoons') il-hin kollu" (PD, skola tal-istat Għaxaq, Jannar 2015).*

*"In my days...only one hour of cartoons used to be broadcasted on television...today there are stations...that broadcast crtoons all day long (PD, state school Għaxaq, January 2015).*

*"Jien it-tifel tiegħi jikkritikani li m'għandniex iċ-'channels' kollha" (Riċerkatriċi waqt id-diskussjoni (RD), skola tal-istat Għaxaq, Jannar 2015).*

*"My son criticizes me for not having all the (TV) channels" (Reasearcher during discussion (RD), state school Għaxaq, January 2015).*

*"Ġejna f'sitwazzjoni illum fejn b'paga waħda ma tistax tghaddi. Gie li lanqas bi tnejn – aħseb u ara b'waħda!" (PD, skola tal-istat Għaxaq, Jannar 2015).*

*"In today's society one wage is not enough to live. Sometimes not even two wages are enough – let alone one wage!" (PD, state school Għaxaq, January 2015).*

*"Aħna qed inkunu xogħol, it-tfal tagħna qed jispiċċaw bil-guħ u jieklu dak li jsibu" (PD, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).*

*"We would be at work, our children end up hungry and eat the first thing they find" (PD, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).*

*"Hemm element soċjali, kulturali, per eżempju kejk tal-preċett, it-tfal ikunu qed jistennewh..." (RD, skola tal-Knisja Valletta, Ottubru 2014).*

*"There is a social and cultural dimension, for example, children would be expecting a Holy Communion cake..." (RD, Church school Valletta, October 2014).*

When comparing this analysis to the one of the previous subsection, content analysis shows engagement that is less reflexive, since the approach is not particularly self-addressed. However, critical engagement with broader socio-economic and cultural forces is plainly evident; albeit this took place with less frequency and thematic variety when compared to participants' engagement with their immediate family and community contexts (discussed in the last subsection). This may be due to participants' lack of familiarity and previous opportunities in adult non-formal education, particularly with this workshop's pedagogy that calls for participants to link an immediate experience (in this case, workshop activities, resources and fellow participants) with global issues:

*"Kors interessanti u titghallem affarijiet li normalment ma tkunx tagħti kas" (PE, skola tal-istat Hamrun, Ottubru 2014).*

*"Interesting course where one learns things that normally go by unnoticed" (PE, state school Hamrun, October 2014).*

*"Skomdu meta ġejt biex nistaqsi mistoqsija lil haddieħor" (PE, skola tal-Knisja Gudja, Jannar 2015).*

*"I felt uncomfortable asking a question to another participant" (PE, Church school Gudja, January 2015).*

*"Ma fhimtx għal liema skop saret hlief 'awareness' ta' affarijiet li diġà naf" (PE, skola tal-Knisja Valletta, Ottubru 2014).*

*"I do not understand the purpose behind the session apart from awareness about things we already know" (PE, Church school Valletta, October 2014).*

In fact, similar results were obtained by pedagogues and researchers who also invested in this kind of pedagogy, such as Gerri Kirkwood's and Colin Kirkwood's (2011) experience with the Scottish Adult Learning Programme:

The unfamiliarity of the method made some people initially suspicious. Being asked questions reminded them of their schooldays, where there was always a right or wrong answer. It took people time to realize that the co-ordinator was trying to ask open questions which didn't have a correct answer implied in them. Sometimes, too, the open questions were seen as too simple, like Mickey-Mouse questions (p.63).

Data discussed in this subsection may also be the outcome of this research project's limitation of holding a one-time, one-hour workshop with each school's recruited participants. Hence, this is a limitation that partly reduces 'Ċaq!aq!'2 workshops' contribution to tokenism (Brown, 2012). Indeed, the literature shows that engagement with forces and dynamics at play within broader socio-economic, cultural and global contexts has more potential

when a similar adult non-formal pedagogy is deployed for a longitudinal study that involves the same participants:

Eventually, familiarity with the pedagogy enhanced the profile of the discussion in terms of depth and intensity. As sessions rolled on, the circle became tighter with participants becoming more familiar with one another (Brown, 2014, p.215).

Although this limitation does not discredit the participation in and exposure to Freirean-based non-formal adult education that 'Ċaqalaq!'2 participants experienced, it gives an introductory insight on how the fourth (and last) research question of this study may be addressed in the next subsection.

### ***Strengths and limitations of 'Ċaqalaq!'2 parents' workshop's pedagogy***

Discourse analysis of fieldwork data shows participants deployed and reviewed the non-formal pedagogy of the workshop as a space whereby democratic, dialogical and reflexive engagement was possible (Brown, 2014; Freire, 2005, 1993):

*"Kem hu sabiħ li jkollok iċ-ċans li tagħti l-opinjoni tiegħek" (PE, skola tal-istat Mosta, Frar 2015).*

*"How beautiful it is to be able to voice one's opinion" (PE, state school Mosta, February 2015).*

*"Beautiful experience, we calmed down a little, we discussed issues that surround us, perhaps of which consequences we would not be aware" (PE, skola tal-istat Mosta, Frar 2015).*

*"Esperjenza sabiħa, ikkalmajna ftit, iddiskutejna affarijiet li jiġru madwarna u forsi ma nkunux daqshekk konxji tal-konsegwenza tagħhom" (PE, state school Mosta, February 2015).*

*"Diskussjoni bejnietna u l-punti li ħargu l-oħrajn" (PE, skola tal-istat Birżebbuġia, Jannar 2015).*

*"Discussion between us and the points proposed by other participants" (PE, state school Birżebbuġia, January 2015).*

Figure 6: Photograph from *The Sunday Times* article on



*'Caqlaq!'2 parents' workshops*  
(timesofmalta.com, 2014)

A related outcome is the enhanced social capital that participants gained as a result of workshop participation, particularly social capital that translates into increased trust, networks and reciprocity:

*"Got to know new people and their ideas"* (PE, state school Floriana, December 2014).

*"Habiba ġdida u esperjenza ġdida"*  
(PE, skola tal-istat Bormla, Jannar 2015).

*"A new friend and a new experience"*  
(PE, state school Bormla, January 2015).

*"New contacts"* (PE, state school Dingli, November 2014).

*"Iltqajt ma' 'parents' godda u rnexxieli nitkellem quddiem kulhadd"*  
(PE, skola tal-Knisja Birkirkara, Novembru 2014).

*"I met new parents and I managed to speak in public"* (PE, Church school Birkirkara, November 2014).

*"Getting to know a mother of my son's friend"* (PE, Church school Balzan, November 2014).

Further data analysis also testifies to participants' 'conscientização' (Freire, 1993) with respect to the inherent social nature of education. Indeed, the



design and deployment of the workshop's pedagogy draws on Gert Biesta's (2006) distinction between 'education' and 'learning' since the latter potentially "allows for an understanding of education as an economic exchange between a provider and consumer" (Biesta, 2005, p. 55); whereas the former better testifies to the dialogic reciprocal relationship and exchange (Biesta, 2009, 2006, 2005) between workshop participants; as well as between workshop participants and workshop facilitator. There is fieldwork data showing that participants experienced the reciprocity that Biesta identifies as being a feature of education, such as:

*"Smiles. Recognizing each others' (mutual) points" (PE, state school Dingli, November 2014).*

*Interessanti li tkellimt ma' haddiehor u tawni parir" (PE, skola tal-Knisja Msida, Frar 2015).*

*"I enjoyed talking to others who gave me advice" (PE, Church school Msida, February 2015).*

*Li qsamt hsibijiet tieghi mal-grupp u nahseb li kienu tajbin għall-kumplament tan-nies li konna" (PE, skola tal-istat Ghaxaq, Jannar 2015).*

*"I shared my thoughts with the groups and I think they were good for the remaining participants" (PE, state school Ghaxaq, Jannar 2015).*

*"Kontribuzzjoni waqt ir-'role play'" (PE, skola tal-Knisja Msida, Frar 2015).*

*"My contribution during the role play" (PE, Church school Msida, Frar 2015).*

*"Hassejt li hallejt opinjoni tajba fuq fejn tidhol il-familja - 'quality time' mal-familja" (PE, skola tal-Knisja Birkirkara, Novembru 2014).*

*"I feel like I gave a good opinion with regards to the family - quality time with family" (PE, Church school Birkirkara, November 2014).*

*"Sharing; relaxing and joyous atmosphere; effective communication; powerful resources" (PE, state school Dingli, November 2014).*

*"Speaker included own life experiences" (PE, Church school Gżira, December 2014).*

In relation to this, participants also manifested 'conscientização' (Freire, 1993) that to participate in dialogic education (Freire, 1993) that features an element of reciprocity (Biesta, 2009, 2006, 2005), one has to overcome some form of limitation. Moreover, it is also interesting to note that limitations of various types had to be overcome by participants of different status and/or professional backgrounds:

*"Il-misthija li nitkellem fil-pubbliku"* (PE, skola tal-istat Għarb (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).

*"Being shy of speaking in public"* (PE, state school Għarb (Gozo), January 2015).

*"Hsibt le ser nisthi u ma sthajt nitkellem u ngħid li kont inpejjep u waqaft"* (PE, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).

*"I thought I would be shy but I was not shy to speak and say I used to smoke and quit"* (PE, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).

*"Bħala għalliema 'kisirt is-silg' hin ta' rilassament ma' xi ġenituri"* (PE, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).

*"As a teacher I broke the ice through some relaxing time with some parents"* (PE, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).

Therefore, to some extent "we are all, or can all be, vulnerable" (Brown, 2014, p.406). Freire (2007) sees educational potential in human limitation since their implied unfinishedness since it "is not possible to be unfinished beings, such as we are, conscious of that inconclusiveness, and not seek. Education is precisely that seeking movement, that permanent search" (Freire, 2007, p.87) for alternatives. As alternatives "begin to be seen as needed, the previously inevitable can become intolerable" (Livingstone and Raykov, 2012, p. 5):

*"Glad this study is being carried out perhaps a few things will change"* (PE, Church school Birkirkara, January 2015).

*"(I am leaving behind) Doubts that change in mentalities is possible"* (PE, HPU Pilot, September 2014).

These findings strengthen Freire's (1993) position when arguing for the importance of "participants (obtaining) a sense of totality. Individuals who were submerged in reality, merely feeling their needs, emerge from reality and perceive the causes of their needs" (p. 98). In turn, this testifies to the pedagogy's potential in raising 'conscientização' as participants generate their ontological (Brown, 2014) critique of official knowledge (Apple, 2000):

*"(Aspetti pozittivi tas-sessjoni huma) ...l-informazzjoni bżonnjuża u d-diskussjoni dwar saħħa ma' barranin"* (PE, skola tal-istat Kirkop, Novembru 2014).

*"(Positive aspects of the workshop are) ... (u)seful information and the fact of discussing the importance of health with outsiders"* (PE, state school Kirkop, November 2014).

*"Laqgħa vera nteressanti u edukattiva hafna li tgħaqqad il-kbar jitkellmu fuq il-ħajja ta' kuljum"* (PE, skola tal-istat Għaxaq, Jannar 2015).

*"A very interesting meeting that brings together adults to discuss everyday problems. Keep it up, it's good to have more of such meetings"*

(PE, state school Ghaxaq, January 2015).

*"Ikunu iktar ta' spiss, ghax it-tfal jiddependu mit-tagħlim tal-ġenituri tagħhom! 'Thank you'"* (PE, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Gozo), Jannar 2015).

*"This should be done more often because children's learning depends on their parents' teaching! Thank you"* (PE, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).

*"Li nipprova nkun ta' eżempju għal haddiehor"* (PE, skola tal-istat Siggiewi, Jannar 2015).

*"I will try to be a role-model to others"* (PE, state school Siggiewi, January 2015).

*"Varying exercises kept participants interested and contributed during the session"* (PE, Church school Balzan, November 2014).

*"(Qed inhalli warajja) Dubju kif nistgħu nsemmgħu dawn l-opinjoni"* (PE, skola tal-Knisja Gżira, Diċembru 2014).

*"(I am leaving behind) Doubt as to how we are going to publicly voice these opinions"* (PE, Church school Gżira, December 2014).

### Limitations

Content analysis of data, particularly data gathered from the evaluative structured interview, made possible the identification of limitations of the workshop and its pedagogy, such as the low turn-out (in some schools more than others); the one-hour one-time occurrence that limited discussion quantitatively (number of topics and amount of time dedicated to each) and qualitatively (depth with which each discussion topic was addressed):

*"Id-diskussjoni tkun aktar fil-miftuħ"* (PE, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).

*"The discussion should be broader"* (PE, state school Xewkija (Gozo), Jannar 2015).

*"Tant għogbitni li nixtieq li kienet iktar spiss u itwal"* (PE, skola tal-istat Mosta, Frar 2015).

*"I liked it so much I wish we had this more often and that it was longer"* (PE, state school Mosta, February 2015).

*"Il-ħin naħseb mhux biżżejjed"* (PE, skola tal-istat Bormla, Jannar 2015).

*"I think there was not enough time"* (PE, state school Bormla, January 2015).

*"Too little time as subject is interesting"* (PE, state school Mellieħa, February 2015).

*"...iridu jsiru aktar affarijiet hekk"* (PE, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).

*"... similar activities should be more frequent"* (PE, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).

*"Tagħmlu laqgħat aktar"* (PE, skola tal-istat Żebbuġ (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).

*"More meetings should be held"* (PE, state school Żebbuġ (Gozo), January 2015).

*"Ma kellniex ċans nagħtu l-opinjoni tagħna aktar fit-tul"* (PE, skola tal-istat Xewkija (Għawdex), Jannar 2015).

*"We did not have time to state our opinions at length"* (PE, state school Xewkija (Gozo), January 2015).

*"Nispera li jkollna aktar laqgħat bħal ta' llum"* (PE, skola tal-Knisja Valletta, Ottubru 2014).

*"I hope we'll have more meetings like today's"* (PE, Church school Valletta, October 2014).

*"There are other health issues that were not addressed. Not enough time to go in-depth of the subject and being able to address the issues"* (PE, HPU Pilot, September 2014).

*"Maybe the session could have been promoted better for more participation"* (PE, Church school Valletta, October 2014).

*"Konkorrenza. Ahjar promo 'maybe'"* (PE, skola tal-Knisja Balzan, Novembru 2014).

*"Attendance. Better promotion maybe"* (PE, Church school Balzan, November 2014).

*"Inizjattiva nteressanti hafna pero' ma kinitx reklamata biżżejjed. Proset"* (Jannar 2015).

*"A very interesting initiative although not publicized enough. Well done"* (PE, Church school Birkirkara, January 2015).

This analytic discussion clearly shows that the strengths of using a Freirean-based non-formal educational pedagogy outweigh the experienced limitations. Moreover, within the framework of the adopted pedagogy it is possible to effectively draw on the evidence that points at limitations to feed into future possibilities. This will be thrust of the next section, which also concludes this paper.

## Conclusion

This study involved qualitative action research with a sample of twenty-five schools in Malta and Gozo that comprised a non-formal adult educational initiative fostering parental engagement with health and fitness concerns prioritised by WHO (2014) at the time of the study. The select health and fitness concerns (Figure 2) were namely child diabetes; smoking and passive smoking; the impact of technology on health and fitness; and outdoor recreation and exercise within the community (WHO, 2014). Qualitative data was collected to address the study's research questions<sup>[1]</sup> using focus group discussions and presentations and an evaluative structured interview.

With special reference to the research questions of this study (RQ1, 2, 3 & 4), fieldwork data confirm that during the workshop, participants successfully established an engagement with the select health and fitness concerns (RQ1). Engagement was thematic and generic, such as the relevance of maintaining a balanced diet within the family or to exercise on a regular basis, rather than specific on dietary-content or exercise-type. During such engagement, most participants were self-critical and reflective, meaning that the workshop provided space for self-analysis. It follows that the '*Ċaqraq!*'<sup>2</sup> parents' workshop provided an opportunity to foster and experience "an increasingly rare public space for the expression of various forms of common position and collective identity or, indeed dissent" (Shaw, 2011, p. 308). This was also manifest in the way participants linked their workshop experience to their family and community contexts (RQ2). In this regard, most participants engaged with plans of taking up a reformed diet and fitness routine for enhanced holistic well-being. Thus, the workshop's pedagogy proactively responded to Maltese policy recommendations about the potential of schools in providing "an especially critical environment for encouraging healthy behaviours...(and) reinforc(ing) important health messages" (Bartolo, 2015, p. 3). Participants also linked the workshop experience to socio-economic, cultural and global contexts (RQ3). By researching links between participants' engagement with health and fitness and their immediate and broader contexts, this study's research questions addressed Malta-based policy concerns about how "dietary and physical activity behaviours...are influenced by many sectors of society, including families, communities, schools, child care settings, health-care providers, governmental entities, the media, and the food, beverage and entertainment industry" (Fearne, 2015, p. 5). Indeed, workshop discussions testify to enhanced world literacy (Freire & Macedo, 2007) as participants critically engaged with themes such as the quality of water supply; availability of public and recreational spaces; work-life balance; globalisation and technology. Despite some limitations of the study and the adopted pedagogy, such as the workshop's one-time, one-hour occurrence; valid strengths were also identified, such as democratic,



dialogical and reflexive engagement; enhanced social capital and a grassroots' approach to knowledge and education (RQ4).

Some research-based recommendations that stem for this action research study include designing a workshop in which children may also participate with adults so as to reduce low turnout, as well as enhancing the family experience of participation. The risk of tokenism (Brown, 2012) could be minimised by holding more than one workshop with the same participants; possibly through the formation of a core-group of participants who would take a more active role in community outreach (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 2011).

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## Endnotes

- [1] As explained earlier in this paper, the research questions underlying the research design were the following:
1. In what ways do parents and guardians of primary school children in Malta and Gozo engage with select health and fitness concerns prioritised by WHO (2014) at the time of the study, if at all?
  2. How is such engagement linked to participants' immediate family and community contexts (if at all)?
  3. Is such engagement linked to forces and dynamics at play within broader socio-economic, cultural and global contexts? If yes, in what way/s?
  4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the non-formal pedagogy deployed for 'Ċaq!aq!'2 parents' workshop?