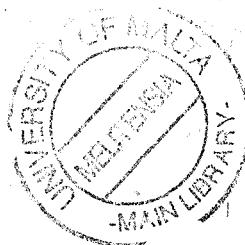


INSIDE/OUTSIDE SCHOOLS

**Towards a Critical Sociology
of
Education in Malta**

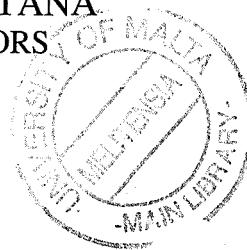


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INSIDE/OUTSIDE SCHOOLS

Towards a Critical Sociology
of
Education in Malta

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& CONTRIBUTORS



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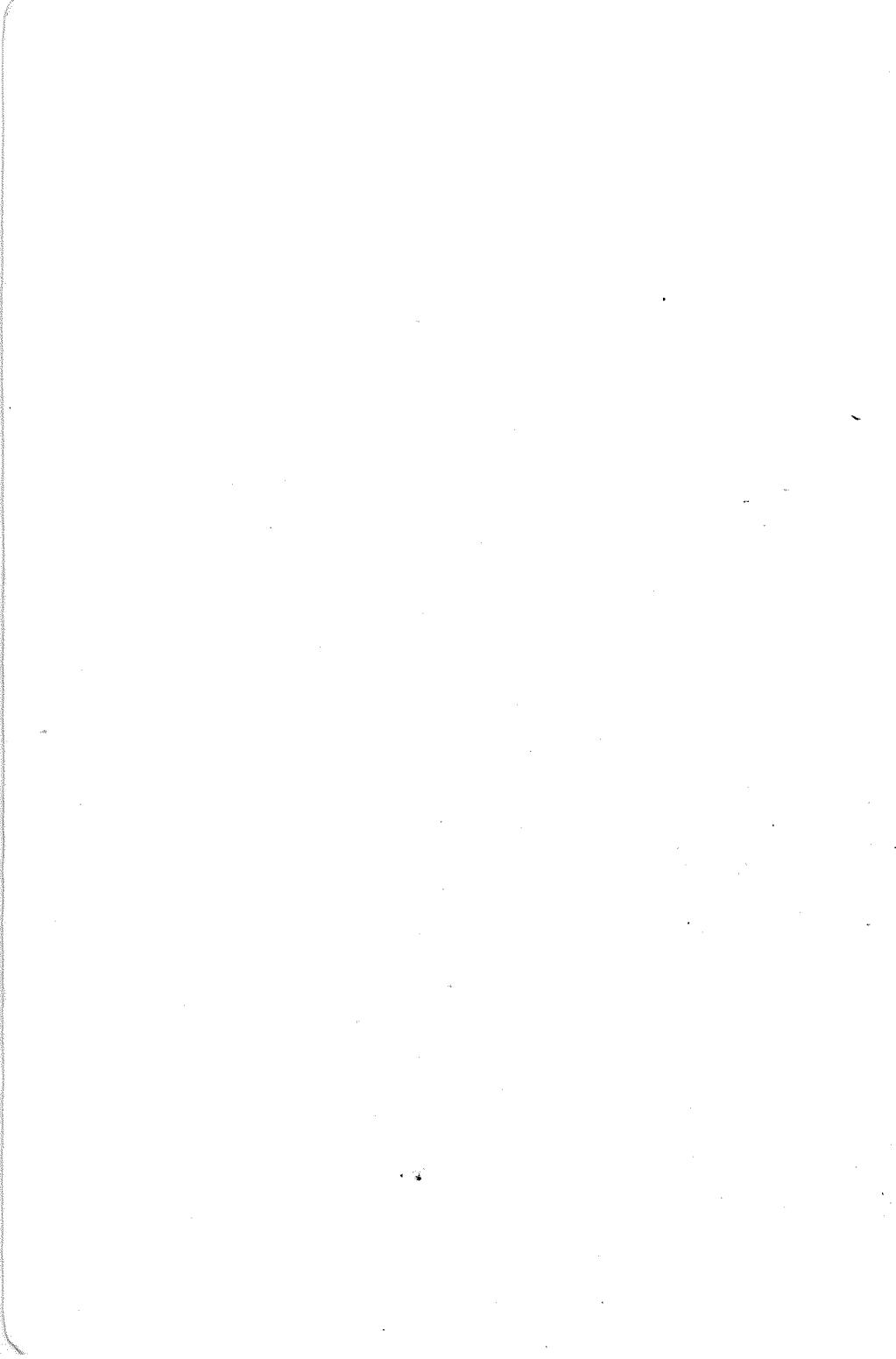
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*For Manwel Dimech (1860–1921) and
Dun Gorġ Preca (1880–1962),
who, in their own, different ways,
saw in education a source of Enlightenment
for themselves ... and others.*



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Introduction

This book began as a response to a felt need among students following teacher training courses for a set of readings in the sociology of education that reflected the Maltese context and the realities of the island's schools. Some of the most fundamental sociological insights developed with reference to education systems in industrially advanced countries such as England, France, Germany and the U.S.A. do, of course, contribute to an understanding of schooling in Malta, and to its relationship with wider society. The island, however, has its own specific character, one marked by scale, late industrial – and educational – development, and its own particular history of dependency, an interplay and struggle between foreign and local power structures and hierarchies. This book sets out to address that specificity, drawing on several theoretical frameworks in critical sociology of education in order to analyse, interpret and problematise current educational practice in Malta.

The volume is divided into three main sections. **Part One** provides a detailed account of the kinds of relationships that exist between schooling and society. Key concepts that are used throughout the book and which are central to educational sociology are presented, as are some of the main authors whose insights have made a major difference in the way we consider schooling. The recurring theme is that education is a highly political affair, one marked by struggle and contestation on the part of different power groups who set out to protect or advance their vested interests in an unequal setting. Some of the main struggles in the early stages of the development of Malta's educational system in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century are documented, in order to show the extent to which contemporary educational practice has been marked by those conflicts. The present situation is then analysed in some detail, first by considering the key landmarks in educational development in the post-colonial period, and then by attempting to disentangle the party political agendas that have a bearing on policy-making at a time when the ideological divide between 'left' and 'right' appears to be neither clear nor straightforward.

Part Two retains a close connection with the themes, concepts and frameworks

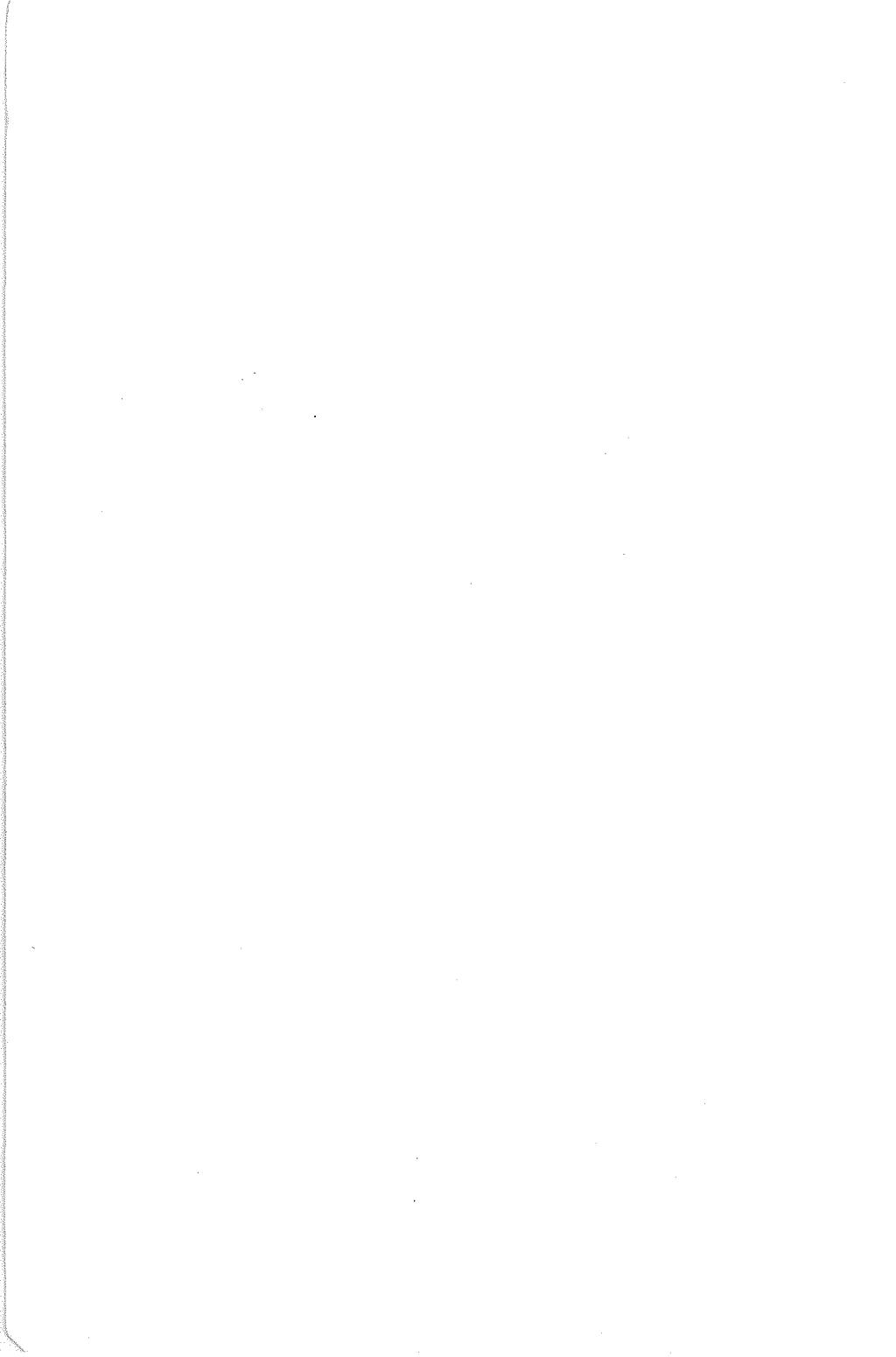
announced in the first section of the book, and explores these through empirical and qualitative inquiry. The authors, all utilising grounded theory methodology, look carefully at different aspects of Maltese schooling to consider issues that are of sociological interest. These include the experience of students in classroom and school settings that are differentiated on the basis of ability, culture, and/or social class; parental perceptions of the difference between schools in the state and non-state sector; the socialisation into different gender, class and work roles that students receive at home and at school; the problematisation of the myth of 'choice'; the structural and cultural features of family and school settings that either lead to student resistance and disenchantment with formal learning, or to serious and effective investment, irrespective of social class background. These are just a few examples of the kinds of issues that are of interest to a sociological investigation of schools. The aim of this book is not comprehensive coverage; rather, it sets out to provide readers with a method of analysis, with a way of looking at education that is critical, reflexive, informed, a stance that is marked by a sensitivity to the dangers of accepting common-sense and unexamined views of schooling.

Critical sociology is not only empirical and interpretive, it is also normative. In other words, this collection of readings is based on a concept of social science that is not satisfied with 'merely' gathering data and understanding it. That is a very important achievement, of course, and a contribution to the search for meaning in a very complex world. But understanding should lead to action, so that there is an engagement with the situation as it is, in order to bring about an educational practice as it could and should be. By this I do not mean that there are blue-print answers, or that policy-decisions can be read off unproblematically from the perspectives, data, and discussion contained in this volume. But I do mean that like any process that contributes to learning, the readings should lead to connections, interactions, responses, commitment, shared experiences and empathy, not clinical detachment. **Part Three** therefore focuses on the role of educators in addressing the damaging and undemocratic features of school life uncovered by research. It presents practical tools and inspirational models so that educators are enabled to respond to the invitation of considering schooling as a site where democratic practices characterised by equitable, fair and just relationships are promoted. Teachers cannot remain neutral in front of this challenge: they are necessarily political as they work with learners in schools and classrooms, and as they interact with their colleagues and fellow citizens in professional bodies and the wider community. As important knowledge-brokers in a world where knowledge is power, teachers have a serious responsibility to be transformative intellectuals who help others

decode a complex, often confusing existence, in the light of values that promote human dignity. Two educators who made this kind of contribution to Malta's public sphere – namely Manwel Dimech and Dun Gorġ Preca – are presented as exemplars of the kind of commitment that this book recommends, a commitment that makes a positive difference not only to learners, but to social arrangements more generally.

The book is a result of a collective effort that involved graduate and undergraduate students. Over almost a decade, data were collected, theoretical perspectives debated, complex issues confronted, and alternative educational visions considered. In the process, we not only learnt more about Malta's educational system and its particular strengths and weaknesses, but we also consolidated our belief that intellectual labour, when coupled with a passionate determination to challenge and reconstruct social practices in schools, leads not only to personal growth but to progressive institutional change as well. If this volume engages readers in the same process of reflection and debate, and if it generates the same kind of enthusiasm and determination, then it will have served its purpose.

*Ronald G. Sultana
September 1997.*

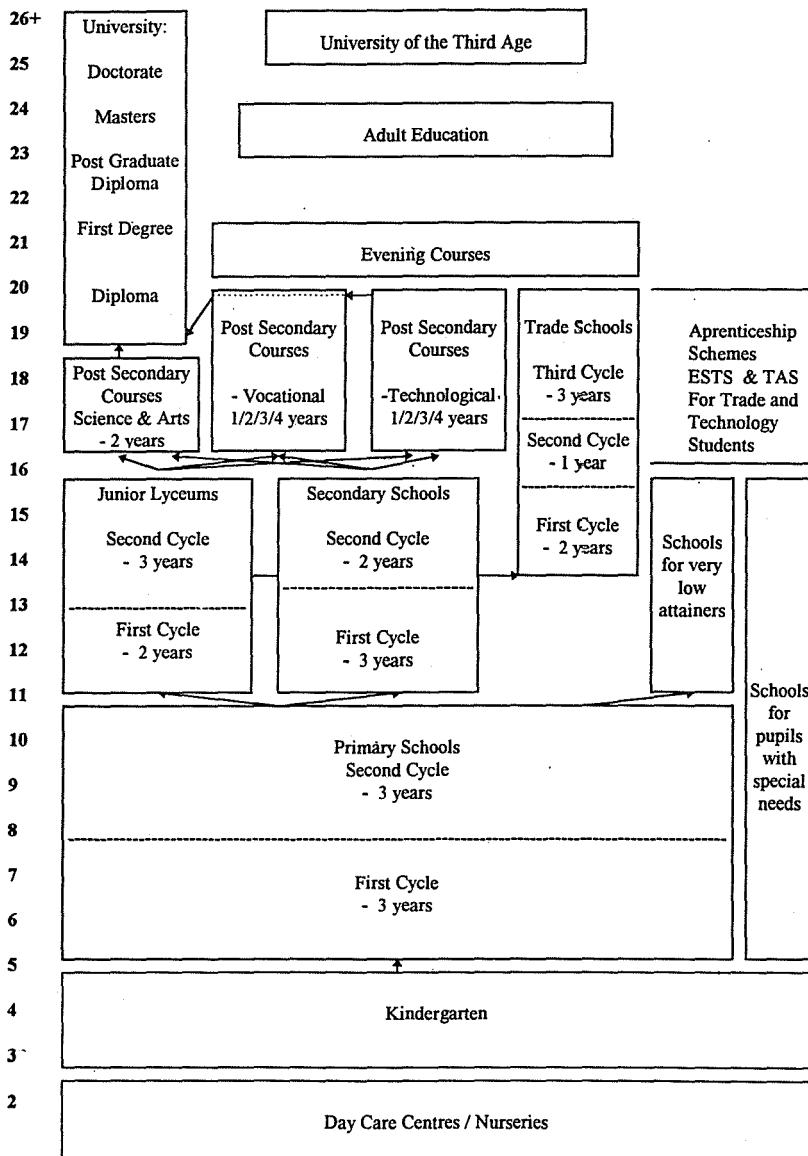


Malta's Educational System: A Brief Note for the Foreign Reader

Due to its colonial past, Malta's state school sector draws its main inspiration from the British educational system. Kindergartens are available free of charge for all students from the age of three upwards. Primary schooling extends from the age of five, which marks the beginning of compulsory attendance, to the age of eleven. Streaming is practiced during the last two years of primary education. Students sit national examinations at the end of Year 6 and proceed to Junior Lyceums, Area Secondary schools, or 'Opportunity schools', depending on their performance at this eleven plus hurdle. While an increasing number of students with special learning needs are being placed in mainstream schools, some still receive their education in special primary and secondary schools. After three years of secondary schooling, students can opt to transfer to trade schools, a system which leads either to employment or to further technical education and training through apprenticeship schemes. Secondary school students can choose to proceed through sixth form to university, or to one of several specialised vocational schools. The school-leaving age was raised to 16 in 1974. At the end of their fifth year of secondary schooling, students sit for a local version of the G.C.S.E., called Secondary Education Certificate (SEC). After two years at the sixth form Junior College, students sit for another set of 'Matriculation' examinations at intermediate and advanced levels. This enables successful students to move on to tertiary education, and particularly to University. Students in trade schools sit for local craft-level examinations, and some attempt to get UK-based City and Guilds certificates. Following the reform of the trade school sector, trade school students are also encouraged to sit for the SEC examination. A number of private schools provide parallel kindergarten, primary, secondary and sixth-form services. Most of these schools belong to the Catholic church but since 1987 there has been a tendency to set up independent schools as parents' foundations, or as commercial ventures. Following a Church-State agreement, Catholic schools are free of charge. The

Church transferred much of its land to the State, which in turn finances salaries of school employees. Parents of students attending church schools may be solicited for donations to make up for any shortfall between state financing and funding required to develop structural facilities and pedagogical services. About 30% of all students attend the non-state school sector. The organigram presented below (reproduced with the permission of Paul Attard, from his *National Report on the Development of Education in Malta: 1995-96*, presented at the 45th International Conference on Education, Geneva), provides a useful overview of the state system of education in Malta. The size of the boxes does not represent the number of students in the sector/at the level.

The State System of Education in Malta



Age Note: The size of the boxes does not represent the number of students in the sector/at the level

