

Special Issue

Emerging Researchers' Enquiries into Educational Trajectories in Malta

Editorial

Antoinette Camilleri Grima

University of Malta

antoinette.camilleri-grima@um.edu.mt

This Special Issue of the *Malta Review of Educational Research* is specifically dedicated to researchers in education who are at the beginning of their academic career. This idea was born during the weekend of 23-24 June 2017, when the doctoral committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta organised a young researchers' meeting in order to promote doctoral students' projects. This meeting was hosted in Malta and planned in collaboration with three other universities: Goethe Universtität in Frankfurt am Main in Germany; Université de Strasbourg in France; and Université du Luxembourg. Participants hailed from these and a number of other cities and states, such as, Southampton in Britain, Seville in Spain, and from as far away as Tahiti and La Réunion.

This Issue presents six articles by emerging Maltese researchers who tackle a particular aspect of their research project. There are a number of reasons for dedicating a Special Issue to their work, namely, (i) to encourage them by providing the opportunity and experience of writing and publishing an article for an international and peer reviewed journal; (ii) to support their endeavours by stimulating interest in their research questions; (iii) to divulge some of their research findings that have important implications for education, locally and globally; and (iv) to showcase the important work in

education being carried out by emerging researchers in Malta with a view to improving the national education provision.

The topics presented in this volume are varied, and range from science and language education to early childhood education.

Doreen Mizzi and Karen Buttigieg focus on science education. Doreen Mizzi tackles the problem of Science teachers who face challenges when teaching outside their Science specialism. She meticulously analyses their difficulties, gives them a voice, and discusses solutions. Karen Buttigieg makes a case for the improvement in Biology education at post-secondary level. She eloquently argues for a paradigm shift, from the current situation where the successful student needs to absorb and memorise information at the same pace that it is being dished out, to a culture of *Bildung*, where the intended outcomes are personal, and a societal transformation. In the current scenario, where the race for grades dominates, the skills for continuous self-formation and growth, both as an individual and as a member of society, are rarely acquired. Discourses surrounding improvement of local education systems thus need to take into consideration a diversity of ideas, especially ones that have been largely ignored to date.

Jacqueline Zammit and Gabriella Mifsud treat two different aspects of language education. Jacqueline Zammit explores the process of learning Maltese as a Foreign Language. Her exciting study is guided by Chaos/Complexity theory (C/CT), which focuses on the non-linear learning curve, the initial conditions of the butterfly effect and fractal patterns in language learning, and considers learning to be unpredictable, chaotic and complex. Her doctoral project is based on the epistemological approach of pragmatism, and includes both cognitive and sociocultural perspectives of second language acquisition (SLA). A longitudinal research design and a mixed method approach focusing on methodological triangulation were adopted, and in this article she reports on some of the significant findings.

Gabriella Mifsud courageously tackles the controversial question of international comparability of tests. In this article she adopts a readability formula that is appropriate for both Maltese and English texts, and applies it to four comprehension tests used in the PIRLS 2016 assessment. She compares the level of readability of the texts in Maltese with those in English given to the same cohort of students, and argues for a fairer choice that

would, first of all, be a more valid instrument, and secondly would allow for a proper comparison of proficiency in the two languages.

Charmaine Bonello and Anna Baldacchino tackle issues in Early Childhood Education. The purpose of Bonello's enquiry was not to solve the widely discussed phenomenon of boys' underachievement, but rather to create new understandings related to the concepts of boys' underachievement, early literacy learning and school readiness, in a Maltese context through a mixed methods phenomenological research investigation. Young boys' voices, several stakeholders' perspectives and the lived experience of three groups of five- to six-year-old boys during schooled reading and writing practices were investigated through an online questionnaire, classroom observations, individual interviews, and focus groups. This article lucidly presents the core findings which suggest that the three main concepts explored were inclined to biased and constricted worldviews that resulted in the majority of the young boys experiencing undesirable reading and writing practices.

Anna Baldacchino's research study is inspired by postcolonial theory, island studies, and small state studies. It diligently extends into an analysis of practice and pedagogy of early childhood education (2 - 5 years) in such countries. The study on which this article is based explores the origins and character of colonial lingering in the pedagogy and practice of early childhood education in small island states, with special reference to Malta and Grenada.

I wish the authors of the articles in this volume every success in their career in education.