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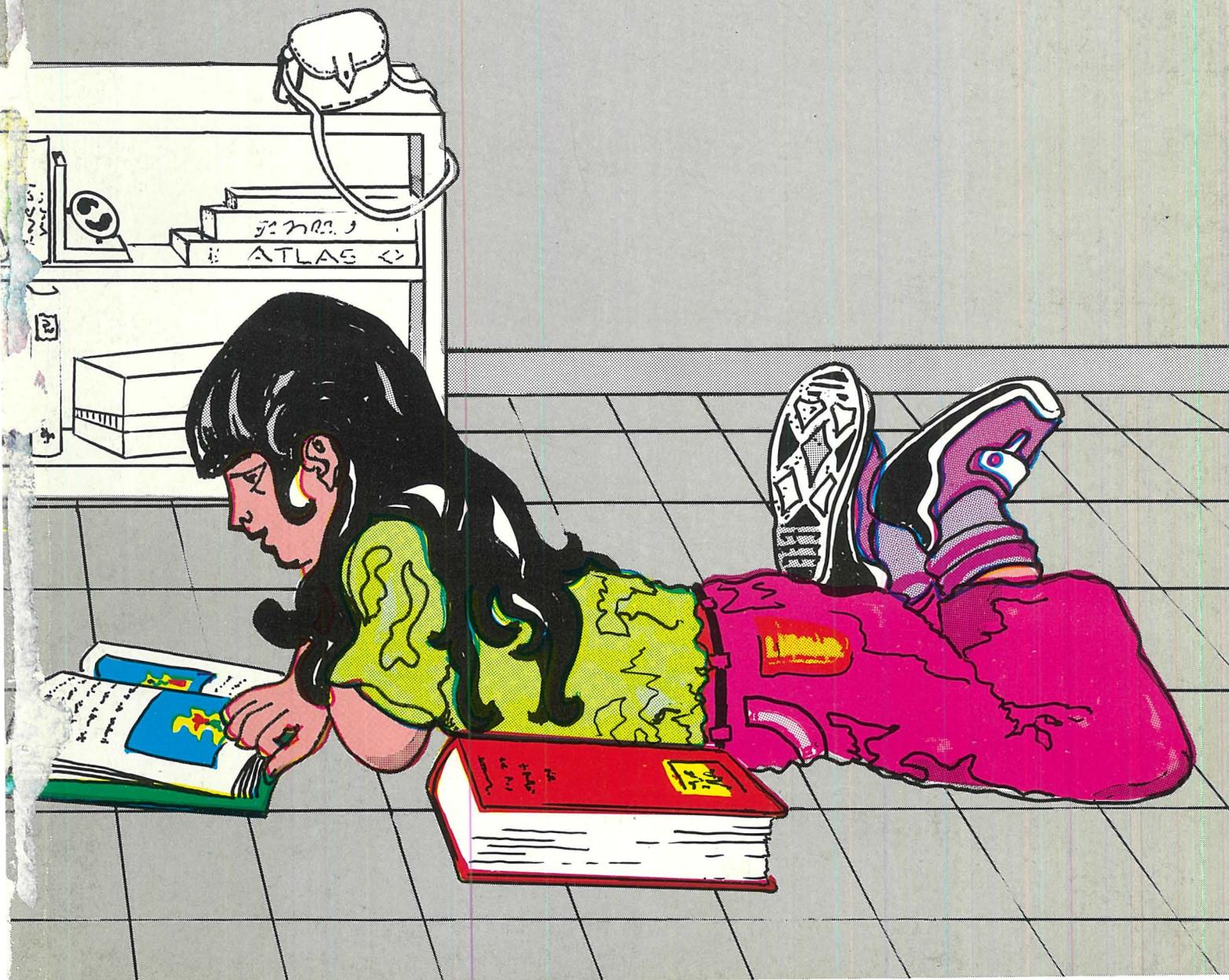
Volume  
3



# EDUCATION

The Journal of the Faculty of Education

The University of Malta



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## INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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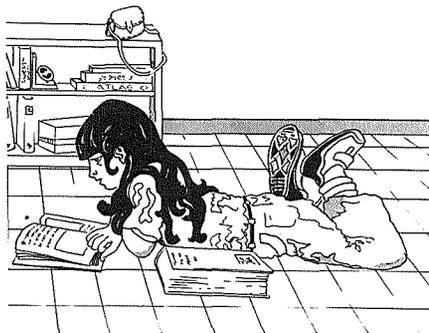
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## Editorial

**A**n issue in education which generates much heat but little light is the controversy which surrounds the streaming of pupils within the school; a related question is that concerning the selective as against the comprehensive system, especially at the secondary stage. Unfortunately, though much research has been carried out abroad, the answers have on the whole been inconclusive — mainly because researchers have been using different criteria when assessing the effects of streaming and selectivity. In Malta, where primary school pupils are streamed from the fourth year onwards, and where selectivity is the order of the day at the secondary level, the issue has mainly been discussed at the level of the correspondence columns in local newspapers. The present edition of this journal represents an attempt to consider the issue at a more objective level: the first three papers in this issue take a good look at streaming and selectivity from three different perspectives. The first paper considers some of the philosophical aspects of selectivity; the second discusses the sociological implications while the third outlines some of the criticisms aimed at the practice of streaming and attempts to assess the validity of these criticisms basing the arguments on an empirical study carried out within the local educational system. In line with the established practice of including in this journal articles by students whose dissertations contain original research, the final paper in this education reports the results of an ethnographic study carried out by two undergraduate students in a local primary school focussing on the knowledge of, and attitudes towards, streaming on the part of Maltese parents, teachers and pupils. Hopefully, these four papers will shed some light on local practices and assist in resolving the knotty problem of streaming and selectivity in our country.

# Ethical Considerations in Selection and Streaming in Education\*

Paul H. Hirst

*Professor of Education in the University of Cambridge*

\*This is an edited text of a public lecture given by Professor Hirst in the Faculty of Education, University of Malta, May 1988.

**U**nder this rather forbidding title I want to dig below the immediately practical questions to do with selection and streaming in schools and look at certain of the fundamental moral and social value questions that pervade debates on these topics. In doing this I am not seeking to evade the directly practical issues that arise. It is rather that, in an area where much of the empirical evidence on what happens under different practical arrangements is inconclusive and raises such sharp controversy, there is a danger that we lose sight of what is really at stake. The analytical exercise of the kind I shall undertake therefore seeks to bring to the fore just those basic issues of principle on which any organisation of schooling inevitably takes some stand. After all what we really want is a system that as far as possible embodies the principles we really espouse rather than one locked into principles we have inadequately examined. The basic question I am therefore addressing is: what are the principles of selection and streaming we think the educational system should reflect and what can we say about the practical organisation of the system simply on these grounds.

As a first move in this analytical task let me make it plain how I understand the terms "selection" and "streaming" within the context that concerns us. The *process* of selection I shall take to be the grouping of pupils according to certain particular rules as part of the means to achieving certain educational ends or purposes. Selection within an educational system is thus a deliberate, intentional procedure which is built into the system and it is primarily justified as the means to certain ends. If that is the case, we shall avoid a good deal of confusion in our debates if we keep a firm hold on what the educational purposes are that we wish schools to serve and see the rules of any selection processes in relation to these. If the purposes are clear we can at least seek to assess what selection processes, if any, are consistent with those ends

even if it is difficult to discover empirically the detail of what happens when we put certain processes into practice. Of course this is not to deny that any system of selection will have consequences that were not envisaged. And that being so we must always be prepared to change the system in the light of what actually happens. But it is with the educational purposes of schools that we must surely start if we are to examine issues of selection coherently.

But within any sizeable educational system the process of selection can be carried out at two different levels. First, at the level of the organisation of schools as a whole, there is the selection of pupils for admission to different schools. Here the central question is whether there are to be schools of different types, schools that serve different purposes. Are we in fact to have a selective system at all? If so, what distinct purposes are different schools to serve and what are to be the rules by which pupils are selected for them? It is these issues about schools within the system that are usually referred to as the problem of "*selection*". But the process of selection also arises within any one school no matter what its basis for admitting pupils is. The issue now is how pupils are to be grouped into classes or other units for actually achieving what the school is after. Are there to be different kinds of classes, e.g. different streams, sets, or mixed ability groups and if so what are to be the rules for putting pupils into them? At this level it is customary to refer to these interlocked questions as the issue of "*streaming*" though that is a shorthand when streaming is only one system of grouping. In these terms then there are two levels of questions I must address: those to do with "selection" and those to do with "streaming".

But where is one to start on such large scale issues? What I have said already gives us the key I think. It is with the purposes we want schools to serve that we must begin. What is it we want achieved that leads us to advocate grammar or



comprehensive schools, academic sets or mixed ability groups? At first the answer might seem very simple, we just want the best education for every child and all we need to know is how we should organise schools so that they get it. But as soon as we push matters a little further we discover that people are often radically divided as to what in practice that best education should be for any one pupil let alone what it should be for different pupils who vary widely in their abilities and interests. But if any argument for or against "selection" or "streaming" makes sense only in relation to the purposes of schools then we shall not get very far until we begin to sort out what those purposes are to be. What I therefore wish to do is to distinguish the four major purposes that figure in most educational systems and lie behind debates on these issues, then going on to pursue the implications each of these has for "selection" and "streaming". What I shall argue is that in so far as we are committed to education in all these terms we have to recognise that we support moral and social principles that pull us in different directions. There is nothing unique in that dilemma, but it does mean that in seeking to reconcile our educational purposes we are compelled to consider what we judge most important for young people in our society. "Selection" and indeed "streaming" in schools are in the end both "political" issues though at very different levels. What then matters is that those "political" decisions are properly and responsibly taken. What I personally consider should be the outcome for schools in the U.K. context I will I trust make plain. What you, in your context should conclude I am not really in a position to argue. What I hope I shall have done is set out the central ethical considerations that you must face.

The first of the four purposes schools serve is, I suggest, the mastery of those areas of knowledge, understanding and skill that every person needs for basic competence and viability as an individual in their society. What I mean here is an education to which everyone in a society has a right simply as a human being in that society irrespective of race, religion, sex, social background or ability. It is the kind of education we recognise most readily at the primary stage where we consider everyone needs to read and write, to use numbers, to understand the world and the society about them. The idea that because some pupils find certain of these kinds of learning difficult or not interesting they should be selected to go to a school which attends to them selectively or to other things instead, would seem to most of us bizarre. These matters are so important and so fundamental in everyone's life if it is to be a truly human life, that difficulty with these areas of learning demands that we provide special "remedial" help, extra teaching and attention. We do all we can so that no one misses out, if at all

possible, in reaching that minimum level we consider everyone really must have. Here is a form of basic personal education that is for all, equally, where what we are after is set by the demands made on everyone by life in the society, not by the differences of any kind there might be between people or their roles. Not that all pupils will in fact attain even the minimum standards we think necessary for all and manifestly some pupils will rampage with great speed through all those things we would consider basic. But what matters in this form of education is that we do all we can to make sure everyone attains certain common ends. Education of this kind most of us would consider crucial for all as basic to development as a person as well as being necessary for purely practical reasons. In a democracy it must surely also be valued as a fundamental form of the educational opportunity to which all should equally have access as a basic right. What is to be noted however is that what exactly such a basic personal education should contain is not easily decided. In terms of elementary skills it is arguable that we are moving into a period when certain computer skills will be as necessary as writing skills. It seems to me too that a basic understanding of the workings of one's society in terms of its financial, legal and political practices and its health and social services, is no longer an optional matter. Indeed, I would suggest that in western societies a great deal of education at the secondary stage ought now to be devoted to basic personal education that is necessary for all. Just what we consider to be the content and standards of the basic personal education we want attained by all is a very telling judgment for it marks out just what kind of life we think all, without exception, should have access to.

But there is more to basic education than this. In addition to much necessary knowledge and skill, life in any society demands that we learn to establish certain kinds of relationships with other people for without these much of what life is about is closed to us. Most of the things that we value in life of their very nature go on within complex personal and social relationships that are part of a vast network. It is in the family, in friendships, in associations for music making or playing games, in churches, businesses and hospitals that human life is lived. Learning to cooperate with others in enterprises of great variety and to establish certain kinds of relationship is thus a basic part of education to which all have a right simply as human beings in that society. In a liberal democratic society this includes learning to live together as equals, to treat people fairly, to respect the interests and freedom of others, to work together for the good of others, to accept responsibilities and share in benefits irrespective of sex, colour, creed, ability or social class. It includes too,

learning to take part in the political life of the society as a citizen with both a right to the benefits there are for all and responsibility to contribute to the good of the community.

It seems to me therefore important that alongside the first form of education I outlined, that of basic personal education, we should distinguish a second form whose purpose is basic social education. Like the first we can recognise this kind of education for all at the primary school stage when learning to cooperate with other children no matter who, to share facilities and opportunities fairly with them and to consider their interests as well as one's own is built into the programme of activities. But it is now strongly argued, and I think rightly, that wide ranging personal and social education of many kinds is a necessity for all at the secondary stage for the good of pupils individually and for the good of society as a whole. No longer can we consider moral and political concerns as matters outside the educational sphere of responsible schooling if only because we demand significant choice in these areas by all members of our society irrespective to their background.

The third educational purpose I want to distinguish is of a sharply different character. Beyond pupils' basic development personally and socially, we see schools as providing opportunities for the fullest possible fulfilment of each individual's own distinctive abilities and talents. We recognise that, whatever the reason, people differ in their potentialities, some being better at languages, mathematics, music or games than others. People are unique, they do not start alike and we do not wish to make them alike. Rather we consider it important that they be able to pursue the development of their gifts and abilities and thereby find personal achievement and satisfaction. But the development of personal abilities is important not only for the good of the individual concerned. It is also of great importance for the community as a whole. The calibre of life we can all have depends very much on the use the society makes of the abilities and talents people have to contribute for the good of all. We need those who can contribute to technological and industrial development, to commercial enterprise and to medical and social services. Any society must therefore have a vested interest in developing pupils' abilities of great variety, for we need for the greater good of the community gardeners and plumbers, teachers and secretaries, scientists and surgeons. The development of pupils' particular abilities is therefore for both individual and social good. Not that all particular uses of abilities are good or desirable, some can be individually or socially destructive. But we manifestly want schools to provide a wide range of opportunities for abilities to be developed in those ways that in themselves enhance the quality of life of the individual and

contribute to the wider good of the community. It is of the nature of this form of education that, being geared to individual abilities, it will lead to differences of achievement in any one area and will concentrate on different abilities for different pupils. Indeed, its stress is on human difference and diversity, unlike the forms of basic education I outlined which are concerned with human similarities and likenesses. But for all their differences in a democratic society all pupils will have an equal right to opportunities for the development of their abilities within a framework designed to provide for both individual fulfilment and social good. Freedom to be different is the equal right of all and schools must do justice to both freedom and equality if they are to be truly democratic.

In different societies and at different times, however, the value placed on particular abilities will vary and the opportunities provided overall for developing them will therefore be different. Though many people may be capable of being dentists, and indeed may wish to train in dentistry, the need for dentists may in fact at any one time be strictly limited so that only a small number of people could find personal satisfaction in that particular contribution to society's good. No real good will, then, can be served by offering an excess of places for training in dentistry. Open opportunity and competition in terms of ability for the appropriate number of places is clearly the most rational approach. The provision of opportunities for training in different areas clearly serves to channel human abilities so that they can find fulfilment in valued ways.

But societies have other ways of steering the development of abilities, in particular by giving rewards of money, status or power to those with skills and qualities that are prized. This being so, in educating for the development of personal abilities, schools come to serve other, very different, purposes. The development of high ability, as say a mathematician or lawyer, can come to be valued not for the personal fulfilment that ability can bring in itself nor for the good it can bring to the community, but because it is the means to the individual achieving valued extrinsic rewards in terms of money for cars, houses and travel or influence in political or social circles. Schools then serve a fourth purpose, access to rewards. Of course schools may well serve the development of abilities for their intrinsic value to pupils and society and at the same time incidentally serve this fourth purpose by putting many of their pupils into the way of high rewards. But if what matters is the development of abilities for personal and social good, many abilities that have low extrinsic rewards may well be seen as being of high importance. If on the other hand the rewards are

what matters, then education in this fourth sense can seek to develop abilities that may bring little or no significant fulfilment to the pupil and indeed might belong to a category that does little or no social good. Developing abilities can thus take on two different purposes which may in fact conflict for any individual. What is in a pupils' personal interests may produce little by way of rewards or rewards may come from pursuits that give little personal satisfaction. That particular kinds of abilities are tied to high rewards means that whether we like it or not certain educational decisions are tightly linked to external social consequences of very considerable significance for pupils. Their future standard of living is likely to be determined to a large degree by the abilities they do or do not develop at school. That being so, if we subscribe to liberal democratic principles we shall want an educational system which takes seriously equality of opportunity for pupils to seek those rewards.

I have distinguished four purposes which education serves because in pursuing each of these the issues of "selection" and "streaming" take on a different significance and only if we keep all four purposes in mind can we begin to adequately determine what we should do. The first of the purposes, that of basic personal education, is concerned with a common set of achievements for all. It is not about differences between pupils except in so far as some have difficulty in mastering the basic knowledge and skills that all require as common goods to which all have equal right. Schools therefore must attend to pupils' disadvantages and seek to overcome these whatever their cause. But if the concern is with all attaining common basic levels in the same areas of education, there can be no different purpose for different schools or even for different classes other than those arising from learning difficulties. A selective system of schools, except for extreme handicap, would seem to lack any rationale in terms of this first purpose. And selective classes within a school could have nothing to do with pursuing different goals or different standards. The best means for reaching common goals could be the only basis for selection.

The second purpose, that of basic social education, introduces another consideration. For if such education is concerned precisely with learning to live and cooperate with others, respecting them equally irrespective of their ability, race, religion, sex or social class, then any principle of selection is likely to strike at the very roots of that purpose. A school system which is selective on any grounds is thereby deficient in its provision of schools that are a fully adequate context for basic social education. The sharp institutionalisation of differences involved necessarily raises problems

for education in the fundamental principles of a democratic society, something schools in a democracy must surely seek hard to preserve. Selection into classes on any particular basis similarly gives prominence to the distinction being made and it is once more hard to see how that can be justified unless it is necessary for overcoming learning difficulties. Basic social education like basic personal education is concerned with differences only as a hard practical necessity when empirical evidence justifies this. The evidence that it is necessary for education of these kinds is far from easy to find.

But if there is little place, if any, for selection in either form of basic education, education for the fulfilment of personal abilities has very different implications. In pursuing this third purpose schools are seeking to provide for each pupil opportunity to develop their own distinctive abilities at an appropriate level. The development of individual differences is of the essence of the business. What is wanted is the opportunity for pupils to go in different directions be they academic, technical, artistic or athletic and at their own pace. For this purpose it would seem that schools providing different opportunities are what we need and within them groupings of pupils based on ability in different areas that will allow the gifted to forge ahead at their own rate. This sounds like a "selective" and "streamed" arrangement. But though something of that sort is certainly indicated we must be careful about the details. To begin with, though we may want a differentiated system, that is not to say it must be a selective system. Choice of school by pupils rather than their allocation to schools might be more appropriate. Who does the selecting, the pupil or the school, makes a lot of difference. However, if there are to be only limited opportunities for developing certain abilities there might well need to be selection for access to particular areas of education. Even if that is so, however, do we really want separate institutions serving say academic and technical abilities? Is it not the case that any one pupil may wish to develop a combination of academic and technical abilities and that we might wish to encourage such combinations? Indeed, if personal fulfilment is a major purpose, to prevent combinations of abilities across the whole range is a serious disadvantage in any system. What is more, if the distinctive abilities of each pupil are to be valued as equally important for them personally and as a contribution to society's good, the isolation of pupils into, say, academic and trades schools will do little to forward any real appreciation of the value of different abilities for society as a whole. It is also the case that in the early stages of education even for this third purpose the differences between individuals are not likely to be so great that

separate institutions are needed for meeting pupils' needs. Within any one school of reasonable size it is going to be possible to cope with very wide ranging abilities for pupils from say 11 to 16 by using setting and streaming. Clearly what can be done in any institution depends on its overall size and the age range for which it caters. The third purpose of education thus demands that schooling be progressively differentiated in ability terms, but that does not necessarily point to a selective system. It certainly points to ability grouping wherever that is necessary for high achievement, though setting for specific areas rather than streaming would be the ideal.

The fourth purpose of education, that for personal rewards, is clearly like the third purpose, linked to differentiation within the educational system. If a high premium is put on developing the rewarded abilities, if only because the rewards of those who get to the top are so manifest, there will inevitably become great competitive pressure for the training of those abilities. In so far as such training is limited, that competition will be accentuated. It is the significance of extrinsic rewards and the competitive nature of access to them that produces popular demand for selective schools and patterns of setting and streaming. In most modern societies the rewards attached to specific 'jobs means that at school level the development of academic abilities is the key and it is therefore not surprising that a selective system dominated by academic pursuits has emerged. Clearly in these contexts that serves well the pursuit of rewards and, provided the competition is run on the grounds of ability only so as not to infringe our commitments to equality of opportunity, where can be the objection? In so far as schools serve this fourth purpose only, there is, I suggest, no answer to that question.

But in so far as schools serve all the four purposes I have outlined, conflicts emerge that we must take seriously. Even where the pursuit of personal abilities is concerned there is a genuine tension between the third and fourth purposes I have distinguished. As I indicated earlier, concern for rewards and the competition that that involves can deflect education away from the importance of developing pupils' abilities for their personal significance in themselves and their value in society irrespective of the rewards. Being a first rate plumber can for some be personally more fulfilling than being a lawyer even if the rewards are much lower. What is more both jobs are vital in our society. If my third educational purpose is to be reconciled with the fourth, the institutionalisation of competitive academic selection will need to be moderated by explicit concern for other values. If not we will build into the very structure of our

institutions a distorted concern for abilities which fails to develop them as providing personal fulfilment and as important contributions to society. That would be a great disservice to our pupils individually and be a negative force in our society.

There is, however, a yet greater tension between the demands of the two forms of basic education outlined and the two forms of education directed to each individual's personal abilities. Basic personal and social education are in aim essentially non-differentiating, whereas concern for the individual's personal abilities must be differentiating. If therefore we wish to do justice to both of these major concerns we must somehow organise our educational system to combine elements of differentiation, including selection, with elements of non-differentiation. As in all moral and social problems where there are conflicting aims we must seek a way ahead that provides an acceptable compromise within our context. How are we to find that?

In the United Kingdom we had for many years a supposedly tripartite system of secondary education which at 11+ selected pupils into secondary grammar, secondary technical and secondary modern schools in a roughly descending order of intellectual ability as assessed by combining I.Q. tests with tests in mathematics and English. Primary schools, for pupils from 5 to 11+, were local comprehensive schools taking pupils of all abilities, though their later years were streamed, or more rarely were setted separately for mathematics and English. This system, though officially presented as concerned with the third of my four educational purposes, was in practice seen by many people as dominated by the fourth purpose, the provision for a selected minority of an education that could bring greater extrinsic rewards. It was in fact objected to by many because the selection procedures were inaccurate, though it was the best that could be devised. It was considered too rigid, too decisive in its consequences, too self-fulfilling in depressing the development of the less able and so on. But in terms of my earlier analysis it had more fundamental weaknesses if schools ought to take seriously all four educational purposes I have outlined. First it took a minimalist view of the basic personal education needed by all pupils. It saw this as the concern of the very early years of primary education only, after that the promotion of individual personal abilities for fulfilment and reward became the point. But in fact the modern world has long demanded basic knowledge, understanding and skills of a considerable range and sophistication. The basic general education about the world we live in that all people need

nowadays is simply not provided by schooling dominated by academic pursuits from an early stage. My own view is that we can no longer really justify any pupils abandoning basic education even for part of the curriculum before, say, 14. It takes until then for most pupils to begin to master the kind of knowledge of our contemporary physical and social context required for living in it intelligently and competently. At present most of us, dependent on our own initiatives and the media, never even attain that by middle age. But our traditional "selective" and "streamed" system equally took a minimalist view of the basic social education that all pupils need. In particular it prepared pupils hardly at all for the choices and responsibilities they faced. In any complex liberal democracy these choices and responsibilities are now very considerable. Increases in personal freedom have in most societies come with the disappearance of many of the forces that previously held society together. Increasingly democratic societies now depend on the direct voluntary adherence of all their members of certain crucial fundamental principles. The significance of schools as institutions where these principles of equality, freedom and respect for others are both truly expressed and adequately taught is now overwhelming. It seems to me that basic social education until 14 is required. In the light of these comments on both forms of basic education and what they entail, I can see no real justification for any form of selective schools in U.K. until about 14. Inside schools, for pupils up to about 14 the separation of pupils into special groups for certain remedial purposes can clearly be justified but otherwise all groupings, I suggest, should be expressly comprehensive or, where appropriate, simply on the basis of pupil choice.

But if the traditional U.K. selective system minimalised basic personal and social education, it also served to narrow education for personal fulfilment quite unacceptably. By institutional groupings into three kinds of schools it prevented the development of combinations of abilities that we now regard as not only natural but personally desirable and socially important. Early selection and streaming prevented many from the later pursuit of abilities by restricting far too soon and far too narrowly the choices open to pupils. The status of the academic education provided in grammar schools, because of its leading to external rewards, only served to accentuate the pursuit of a narrow range of abilities particularly by the academically able. But it led too to a valuing of abilities primarily for the extrinsic rewards they bring rather than for their personal and social significance. A selective system within a capitalist economy cannot but accentuate extrinsic rather than intrinsic educational values with the personal and social

consequences so narrow a view entails. The more we let selection rip the greater is the pressure on individuals to pursue what is rewarded rather than what will bring personal satisfaction or social good. The greater too is the tendency to undervalue the contribution of non-academic abilities in society with the undemocratic sentiments that that entails.

In keeping with these comments on the significance of the former selective system in U.K. for the development of personal abilities, I would defend most firmly the U.K.'s almost universal move to a comprehensive school system for pupils from 5 up to at least 16. Within that, the fulfilment of personal abilities requires as flexible arrangements as possible for personal choice amongst groups appropriate to one's individual capacities. Exercising this function in most areas at any advanced stage will require setting by ability. But the institutional framework for those groups should be as wide ranging as makes practical sense and in the U.K. I consider secondary schools should therefore be comprehensive. Ideally I think the U.K. should push ahead with comprehensive institutions for all up to 18. After that some differentiation into academic, technical and other institutions geared to different kinds of specialist abilities seems to me inevitable. Within our primary and secondary comprehensive schools I would want a system of class groupings that is as mixed as possible in ability and all other respects up to about 14, as the sole emphasis of education to that age I take to be basic education. Remedial education would be available as also might be special interest groups which pupils would choose. From 14, however, though some basic education should I think continue until 16 in mixed ability groups, education for personal abilities could be phased in during the period 14 to 16. For this purpose part of the time-table, say half, might be directly devoted to developing individual abilities in core areas such as languages, mathematics and science. Here pupils could be grouped according to ability as is appropriate. Streaming I see as an adequate but not very desirable crude approximation to setting. Even in these setted groups, however, I would want to work up to 16 to concentrate on general educational purposes rather than those of narrow academic specialisation. Only from 16 at the earliest would I wish education to be given over entirely to a concern for personal abilities with pupils setted on appropriate academic or other ability grounds.

Such a system may or may not be what is required in the Maltese context. That is for others to judge. But forcing the issues to a practical level for the U.K. context will have served I hope to highlight the major decisions of principle which any contemporary educational system including your

own must face. Using the framework of the four educational purposes I have outlined, I suggest the following questions need to be addressed:

(a) How extensive do we consider basic personal and social education should be for all, for during the years we wish to pursue that as the dominant purpose I suggest we must be committed to a fundamentally non-selective and non-streamed school system?

(b) How important do we consider the development of abilities for the sake of personal fulfilment and social good, for that requires classes differentiated according to different abilities and standards for those? In particular from what age should classes devoted to this purpose be introduced into schools?

(c) How important are freedom of choice and equality of status in the development of abilities, for these suggest a non-differentiated school system with differentiated rather than selective classes within each school?

(d) What restrictions are to be placed on the development of certain valued abilities because of the costs involved and the social significance of those abilities, for to the extent we introduce restrictions equally of opportunity means that selection becomes necessary? In general, restrictions must surely be undesirable as being contrary to human freedom but they are necessary in all societies for the greater social good and longer term interests of individuals. Selection into classes within a comprehensive school system can probably provide an adequate degree of selection in most economically advanced societies. Only if a very high level of selection is judged necessary or desirable would a selective school system seem justifiable.

(e) How important do we consider it that schools educate pupils to compete for the restricted pool of extrinsic rewards, for to the extent we value this we will directly advocate an appropriate and efficient selective school system and sets or streaming

within those schools? If rewards are not freely available, freedom and equality in pursuit of these become restricted to the opportunity to compete against others on what are considered equal terms.

Over all, it seems to me that in a democratic society committed to freedom and equality of educational opportunity the extent and nature of selection in a school system reflects two major concerns. First, the society's restrictions for whatever reasons, good or bad, on the development of certain abilities and, secondly, how far education for extrinsic rewards is allowed to dominate other educational purposes. It is to me unremarkable that the USA has the most non-selective educational system in the world. First, the society, as the most open democracy there is, strongly committed to freedom and equality, sets a high premium on basic personal and social education for all. Secondly, as a rich society it has little or no need to restrict opportunities for the development of personal abilities. Thirdly, rewards in American society are more widely distributed than in many others and are less directly related to a restricted form of education. In the U.K. we have until recently been moving more in the American direction. Unfortunately, to my mind, a spell of economic difficulty and a shift in public values has resurrected an unnecessary concern for individual extrinsic rewards and competition within the educational system. But I do not wish to give the impression that a school system can successfully operate without coherent alignment with the economy of the society it serves. If that society is a liberal democracy, however, it must wish its schools to balance those concerns with its commitment to the fundamental values of democracy. Every such society must therefore I suggest consciously form its own resolution of the demands made by the four educational purposes I have outlined. And it must do that in a thoroughly democratic fashion.

## Notes

1. In this paper I have indicated that I consider that a school system ought not to be selective on religious or social (including financial) grounds. I take that position as basic to the role of the school in an open democracy. This is not to say that in my view schools have no role in relation to religious education or that they may not charge fees (e.g. say, in some way related to parental income). If religious or financial selection is advocated this must rest on other educational or social purposes which may well conflict with the four purposes that I have outlined, particularly that of basic social education for all. This is not the place for arguing against such other purposes in an open democracy. In the last analysis, however, whether any such principles are to be accepted and what weight they are to be given are again matters for proper democratic decision in a society. But it that is accepted it

must be recognised that the concerns of democracy rather than those of any particular group within it, be that the church or the affluent, are being given the ultimate right to decide on matters for society as a whole. In fact that is precisely how I think such matters should be settled.

## 2. Further reading:

Cohen, B.: *Education and the Individual* (Allen and Unwin) 1981. Ch. 2.

Guttmann, A.: *Democratic Education* (Princeton Univ. Press) 1986.

Norman, R.: *Free and Equal* (Oxford Univ. Press) 1987. Ch. 5.

Walzer, M.: *Spheres of Justice* (Martin Robertson, Oxford) 1983. Ch. 8.

# Streaming: A Sociological Perspective

Ronald G. Sultana

## Introduction

An ideal view of streaming would have us justify the process of sorting and selecting students into different classes (stream A, B, C etc.) and schools (junior lyceum, secondary, trade schools, craft centres etc.) in terms of a number of educational goals. In attempting to organise class and school membership on the grounds of similarity of academic abilities and occupational aspirations, streaming is said to facilitate the achievement of the following positive ends:

- \* Teaching is more effectively carried out because students proceed at roughly the same rates through the learning tasks;
- \* Appropriate pedagogies, curricula, texts and teachers can be delivered to different kinds of students according to the latter's particular needs, abilities and inclinations.

In this ideal view, both students and teachers stand to gain from streaming. Students are spared the constant embarrassment of competing with more able classmates, or the injustice of being slowed down by those who are less capable. Teachers, on the other hand, feel reassured because there is less of a risk of addressing their teaching at only one group of students in their class. Few would moreover deny that the teaching of mixed ability classes requires more — and different kinds of — skills, and that teachers training courses in Malta have generally failed to foster such skills<sup>1</sup>.

Underpinning the argument in favour of streaming is an unexpressed belief in what is often referred to as "meritocracy", or the conviction that Intelligence plus Effort equals Success (at school and in terms of future life-chances<sup>2</sup>). In academic circles, meritocracy has been shown to be more an exception than a rule, but it still holds sway on the minds of many parents, teachers, educational policy-makers, as well as students. One and all tend to liken education to a race in which "*all compete on equal terms for a limited number of prizes, and in which premature judgements about the results of the race are avoided*" (Watts, 1985). In this contest, there is mobility for those who are capable and those who try. In other words, those who find themselves in low streams and in low-status schools (and eventually in the "lower" ranks of the

labour market) have only themselves (and their genetic endowment) to blame. Within this logic, streaming is a fair and impartial allocation of places according to intrinsic ability and effort to achieve.

My intention in this article is to first of all place the ideal view of streaming elaborated above within a set of sociological arguments, thus problematising views which have assumed a common-sense quality about them. In so doing, I will be challenging the prevalently held notion of meritocracy to suggest — and offer explanations for the fact — that students coming from "higher" social class groups are more likely to be in top streams and in high status schools, and that the inverse is true for those coming from "lower" social class groups. In other words, I will be arguing that when we stream we are involved in a process of *social*, not ability selection, and that streaming is therefore inadmissible since it goes against the most basic principles of democracy.

In the mounting of this argument, I will make reference to reproduction theories of education. These have been classified by Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) in terms of economic reproduction theories — as represented by the writing of Bowles and Gintis (1976); cultural reproduction theories — whose main exponent is Bourdieu (1973); and ideological reproduction theories as formulated by Gramsci (1971) among others. Reproduction theories have in common the belief that schooling is not a neutral process, but rather is serving the interests of the economy — and of those who have a privileged position within the economic structure — through a variety of ways. It is actively engaged in the selection and sorting of students along class lines so that the children of the dominating class inherit — through "education" — the privileges of the parents. The obvious corollary of this is, of course, that the children of the dominated classes remain disadvantaged, and thus the social structure, injustices and all, is reproduced from one generation to the next.

Economic reproduction theories suggest that students from different social class are differentially processed in schools and this in turn predisposes them to fit positions in the occupational structure accordingly. Cultural reproduction theories argue that this differentiation and streaming is further strengthened by the fact that the

culture of the school is generally that of the dominant class, and that this gives an advantage to the privileged. Ideological reproduction theories examine the way schools transmit messages in hidden and explicit ways in order to promote the *status quo*, even when this, as is being suggested, is unjust. These are very serious accusations levelled at an institution which for decades has been considered to be a democratic and democratising influence in the West<sup>3</sup>. I will therefore give a brief but thorough account of economic and cultural reproduction theories, making only a cursory reference to ideological reproduction theories since these have a peripheral relationship to streaming when compared to the former two theories.

### Economic Reproduction Theories

**W**hile the three master minds of classical sociological thought, namely Durkheim, Marx and Weber, have all considered the role of schooling within a wider social context, it has been Bowles and Gintis' (1976) work which has been most influential in formulating the contemporary debate on education in its macro dimensions. Bowles and Gintis build on the insights provided by Marx to suggest that all institutions in the superstructure of society — including the family, the legal system, the church, the media, and schooling — are to a large extent determined by the economic base of that society. In other words, it is the way the economy is organised which "determines"<sup>4</sup> the form and character of, in our case, schooling.

In capitalist societies, argue Bowles and Gintis, we have a segmented labour market which needs different kinds of workers (entrepreneurs, professionals, technicians, manual workers, etc) arranged in an hierarchical relationship with regards to each other, with regards to financial and status rewards, and with regards to those who own capital and the means of production. It is vital for the survival and reproduction of capitalist societies to somehow ensure that the population does not all end up in the most rewarding occupational stratas. Society needs a variety of socialisation mechanisms to direct different groups towards particular locations in the labour market. While families and the media are powerful socialisation forces, Bowles and Gintis identify schools as having the foremost influence in the selection and sorting of generation upon generation of children. By providing different kinds of educational experiences in different streams and schools, society ensures that students end up with different — or no — qualifications, and that they are then channelled to corresponding jobs.

Bowles and Gintis make two points here: first that the structures, organisation and relationships prevalent in schools generally mirror the needs of the economy. Capitalist work places have a number of characteristics, among these being an emphasis on hierarchical rather than participative relationships, the fragmentation of tasks which alienates the worker from his/her product and from colleagues, the carrying out of tasks for the sake of an extrinsic reward (a wage). It is easy to see the correspondence between these characteristics and what takes place in schools. The Department of Education assumes the role of the expert, with students (and in a Maltese context, some would say the Head and the teachers<sup>5</sup>) having little or no say about the choice of curricula, as well as the pace and direction of learning. Students are alienated from a holistic understanding of the world they live in through a fragmented rather than integrated subject approach. They are alienated from each other physically (note the seating arrangements in most of our schools) and morally (competition rather than co-operation is the norm). Like workers, students are encouraged to give more importance to extrinsic rewards: it is grades ("wages") rather than the intrinsic satisfaction of learning which most often counts. More close to the focus of this article is the fact that as in workplaces, students are streamed in different locations which have a differential access to rewards in terms of both life-chances and status.

Bowles and Gintis make a second point. Within this general framework of correspondence, different schools prepare specific groups of students for specific types of work. Elite schools catering for the children of executives and professionals are a very different kind of animal to working class schools. Both encourage pedagogies; patterns of school work and styles of control which promote traits and skills required by on the one hand executive and professional-type work, and manual-type work on the other. Anyon's (1980) research is of particular importance in this regard because her observations in schools catering for different socio-economic groups (the elite executive, the affluent professional, the middle class, and the working class) provide qualitative and substantive evidence for Bowles and Gintis' arguments which were in the main based on statistics and formal theorising.

Anyon's research suggests that the children of the American elite receive a schooling which involves them in a process of creative discovery of concepts and principles underlying knowledge. Teachers in these elite schools were observed explaining the procedures and purpose of every activity they organised, giving their students the opportunity to discuss the direction the lesson/unit

would take. In these schools, students are encouraged to experiment, investigate, observe, draw conclusions, organise results and report them. They are given frequent and immediate feedback, have ample opportunity for group and self-expression, and are exposed to a wide variety of teaching styles and contexts which include discussion, field trips and research projects. Control is generally exercised through negotiation with students, with reasons being given for every decision taken, encouraging students to develop their own class rules and to monitor their own behaviour.

It is quite easy to note the correspondence between such a socialisation and the traits of self-determination, authority, total conception of task, planning abilities and so on which are required by the executive, managerial and professional jobs in society.

In direct contrast are the patterns of school work, pedagogies and forms of control in schools catering for working class students. Anyon notes that here the emphasis is on mechanical and rote learning, the blind following of pre-set tasks over which students have little control or choice. There is little done by teachers in these schools to encourage a holistic understanding of the nature of the tasks at hand, and the relationship of this to wider systems of knowledge and meaning. There is an overall emphasis placed on copying as opposed to the creative production of knowledge: students copy from the blackboard or stencilled notes during a variety of lessons. Assessment depends not on whether the ideas expressed by the students are correct, but on whether they approximate to the teachers' notes. Control is characterised not by negotiation, but by imposition on the part of the teacher, and resistance on the part of the students. This resistance to the curricula and pedagogy can be so aggressive that at times teachers capitulate, promising not to give any work as long as students remain quiet.

Here too, the correspondence between working class schooling and the character of most working class jobs is obvious. These students' present school work is preparing them for occupations characterised by routine and mechanical labour, where there is little control over the tasks to be done, and where obedience rather than questioning, understanding, and participation is desirable. The conflictual rather than co-operative style of relationship with authority developed at school will last throughout their working career, where various types of resistance including *soldiering*, *slowdowns* and *sabotage* (cf. Carlson, 1982) learned at school will be used again and again in reaction to exploitative and dehumanising working conditions.

Bowles and Gintis' work as well as that of

Anyon afford a much more sophisticated and detailed exposition than the brief and selective overview I have given of their argument above. There have also been important developments on their work. Bowles and Gintis have, for instance, been criticised for being too functionalist (i.e. for over-emphasising the determination of schools by the economy leaving little agency to teachers, parents and other pressure groups to promote different versions of schooling), for focusing only on social class (i.e. ignoring the way schooling promotes inequality on the grounds of gender, race and ethnicity), and for presenting a conspiratorial view of social engineering (i.e. as if educational directors got together with capitalists and planned schools in such a way that students from different social classes received different and occupationally "appropriate" learning experiences). Despite such critiques, the basic insights developed by Bowles and Gintis have been applied to educational analyses in a variety of countries (cf. Da Silva's work in Brazil, and Connel *et al.*'s research in Australia, for instance), and form the basis for all major developments in contemporary sociological theory (cf. Cole, 1988).

There is, to my knowledge, no analysis of Maltese schooling as a source of economic reproduction within the theoretical framework elaborated above. However, initial data being collected in the ethnographic data bank of the Trade School Research Project — which the author is carrying out with the help of a number of research students — is already indicating that schools in Malta treat students from different social classes differentially. The work tasks assigned, the relationships encouraged, the control techniques used — one and all exhibit a correspondence to the future occupational paths deemed "realistic" for the students in question. Gatt and Vassallo-Agius' (1988) research in "Fra Mudest Primary School" also reports similar types of processes with lower streamed students, even though their analysis remains at the micro level of interacting. In this context, it is important to keep in mind that there are a variety of studies which show that there is a high correlation between social class and streaming, indicating that the chances of being in a low stream for a working class child are very high (Jackson, 1964; Coclough and Beck, 1986; Oakes, 1985 among others). A number of recent dissertations carried out in Malta suggest that the same correlations apply locally (Baldacchino, 1988; Gatt and Vassallo-Agius, 1988; Hili, 1988).

## Cultural Reproduction Theories

**T**he economic reproduction perspective attempts to describe how schools promote social inequality through their practices, and to explain the rather unexpected findings through-

out the seventies and into the eighties in a number of countries that despite the widespread increase of schooling for all, there was little evidence of social mobility. In other words, as Health and Ridge (1980) discovered in the United Kingdom, children of the working classes were highly unlikely to get jobs outside of their class, and thus social positions were inherited from generation to the next.

Such findings placed the notion of meritocracy in jeopardy. If, however, one moves away from the logic of meritocracy to mount a different set of arguments, then it becomes increasingly clear why there are social patterns in who ends up in the low streams and low-status schools. Cultural reproduction theories complement economic reproduction approaches in their analysis of education and power, focusing, however, on the way the dominant culture is imposed in schools. This new framework has been presented by — among others — Bernstein and Willis in the U.K., and Bourdieu in France. Bernstein can be credited with being the first sociologist to suggest that working class students experience failure at school not because they are intellectually less capable, but because their language code, embedded in a set of cultural experiences and meanings conditioned by the material circumstances of their class membership, does not give them access to the meanings and knowledge transmitted within middle-class institutions in middle class language codes. While at first the notion of a “restricted code” led to the viewing of working class children as being culturally deprived, Labov’s (1969) critiques helped Bernstein — and others who have followed his lead in critical and interpretative sociology of education — to clarify the initial position. It is Bourdieu (1973), who has developed Bernstein’s initial insights with most sophistication. Bourdieu’s explanation for working class failure at school suggests the following sequence:

(1) Each class of people — and Bourdieu has a Weberian rather than Marxist notion of class — has developed a particular set of meaning systems, values, perceptions, attitudes, inclinations which are related to its particular position in the overall social structure. This set of inter-related factors Bourdieu calls a *habitus*, a word which incorporates but goes beyond the notion of class culture.

(2) All social classes have their own habitus, but the educational system in France (and Bourdieu’s analyses have been accepted in countries as far flung as the U.S.A., Brazil, Britain, New Caledonia, Australia and New Zealand) recognises and promotes only one habitus, that of the ruling class. While the children of the ruling classes find continuity between their socialisation in the family and the meanings and symbols within the school, the children of the dominated classes find schooling an alien and alienating experience. The

school does not give their habitus (e.g. linguistic and behavioural styles) legitimacy, and imposes one cultural arbitrary — the habitus of the ruling classes — on all as if it were the only and best one in society.

(3) This imposition results in a process of what Bourdieu calls *symbolic violence*, whereby dominated class students unconsciously accept that the “referent” (in Bisseret’s terms, 1979) is the culture of the school, and they thereby judge themselves — and are labelled by significant others — as incapable and unintelligent. This process of “learned ignorance” damages — probably for ever — the self-image of the student who blames him/herself rather than the system for failing. These students do not succeed in fully “penetrating” (Willis, 1976) the way the system works in patterning their disadvantage, and thus they feel they only have themselves to blame for their position in lower streams in the primary schools, lower-status secondary schools, and eventually lower-status, lower-paid manual jobs. Such a blame-the-victim approach is important, because the blaming of the system would lead to social unrest. Through this form of ideological reproduction, hegemonic control is maintained (Gramsci, 1971). Willis (1977) also shows how some students *do* resist the cultural and ideological imposition of dominant class schooling, but in rejecting schooling they also reject intellectual labour and damn themselves to the class position the school wills on them.

(4) The children of the ruling classes, on the other hand, enter the educational race with a distinct advantage. They have already inherited from the home the “cultural capital” which the schooling system requires (a conceptual style which operates in the abstract, for instance). Therefore they do well at school — not necessarily because they are innately and generally more capable or “intelligent” — but simply because in comparison to other groups with other *habitus*es, they are at an advantage. Bourdieu suggests that cultural and linguistic capital is in this way transformed into educational capital (in the form of credentials), and this in turn leads to the better jobs in society and thus to economic capital. The children of the ruling class therefore rule once again, and power is inherited as surely as in pre-modern times. In other words Bourdieu — taking a very different line of argument from and drawing on different evidence than that used by Bowles and Gintis — comes to the same conclusion: schooling promotes rather than reduces the reproduction of inequalities.

### The Notion of Ability

**T**hese sociological arguments challenge the very foundation of our streaming procedures. They suggest that when we stream, we are involved in a process of *social*, not academic

selection<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the very notion of ability and innate intelligence which underlies attempts to justify streaming need to be re-evaluated in relation to reproduction theories. Those who accept a meritocratic view of education have an implicit belief in a specific notion of intelligence, one which has been influenced by Arthur Jensen's work and which believes that it is heredity which largely determines a child's intellectual potential, and that this potential is fixed, unchanging and subject to accurate measurement.

While this view was scarcely questioned in the 1920s and 1930s, *Jensenism* has today lost most of its credibility, and with it the belief that "*the blame of educational failure is located in the insular individual and his or her genetic endowment or personal environment, instead of in the very social process which organised education represents*" (Richardson, 1982, p. 182).

It is not possible to present a detailed critique of common-sense conceptions of psychology and heredity in this context, although this exercise would certainly be beneficial. Suffice it to point out the unfounded but strong beliefs in ability as natural talent, in intelligence as a unitary concept, and in the distribution of natural talent along a curve of normal distribution, just like height and weight are. Christensen *et al.* (1986) report, for instance, that those who had traditionally been labelled as "learning disabled" often came from low status groups in society, such as working class students or members of ethnic "minorities". The authors conclude that here the schools purport to select on grounds of ability, when in fact they are differentiating on social criteria.

This is where the work of psychologists like Luria, Vygotsky and Bruner<sup>7</sup> ties in with the cultural reproduction theories discussed earlier, and with the modern conception of ability to learn as residing not so much in the students' supposed limitations and failures (whether in their conceptual apparatus or in their environment), but rather in terms of the actual teaching quality itself (Nisbet and Entwistle, 1982).

### Streaming and Maltese Teachers

**D**armanin (1985) has suggested that while officials of the *Malta Union of Teachers* have consistently denounced streaming, many of the practitioners are themselves in favour of it. Gatt and Vassallo-Agius (1988) report that as many as 90% of the teachers in their school believed that streaming was beneficial to all pupils. While the result of a national survey launched in June 1988 by the Department of Education to find out the opinions of parents and children on streaming are not yet available, I would not be at all surprised that even these groups would be averse

to destreaming. I would suggest a number of reasons for the prevailing opposition to destreaming. I have already suggested that the teaching of mixed "ability" classes require skills — and resources — which Maltese teachers might consider themselves to lack. For control reasons too, teachers might prefer to have a class progressing at the same pace so that the orchestration of tasks commences and terminates roughly at the same time for all.

An important reason for resistance to the idea of destreaming is probably the fact that it — together with the ideologically parallel initiative of comprehensivisation — had already been tried in the early seventies, and was considered to have failed. However, while the education reforms of the Labour government of the time were democratic in intent and ideologically consistent, the suddenness of the exercise, the lack of consultation with teachers, the lack of training and offering of concrete alternatives (Darmanin, 1985, p. 176), one and all have led to an aversion of the possibility of the repetition of a similar experiment. Teachers and parents (who are often both at the same time) associated destreaming with the fall of academic standards, but in fact, the former — if correctly implemented — will not lead to the latter. Indeed, the intention is to *remove* the limitations inevitably imposed by streaming, and to develop a system whereby each child is encouraged and enabled to develop its full potential.

This poses a *pedagogic* challenge and the *raising* of educational achievement for all. The latter is not wishful thinking: there is now a long tradition of educational research which strongly suggests that most children gain academically (Daniels, 1961), socially (Willing, 1963), and in the motivation to learn and interact (Chetcuti, 1961) from non-streamed situations. Simon (1970) reports that on the basis of similar research results, the Swedish parliament passed a law making it illegal to stream pupils below the age of fifteen.

Finally, streaming will remain unless the whole educational system is given an overhaul and is brought into the twentieth century. The competitive striving for exams and grades blinkers parents and their children from the meaning of true education as personal growth in a community of caring people, identifying "success" with pure academia and the collection of inert knowledge and certificates. Within this system, destreaming cannot make sense because the concept begs a notion of education which is completely different to the way it is currently being defined. I would therefore argue a case for the professionalisation of teachers based on their commitment to a true democratisation of education where each individual is empowered to grow in all his/her human aspects. The removal of streaming is only one, but highly significant starting point.

## Notes

1. This problem is compounded by the shortage of trained teachers, and the large numbers of casual teachers and instructors in Maltese schools. Sources from the Department of Education have claimed that as many as 20% of primary school teachers are untrained (i.e. have "casual instructor" status).
2. The concept "life chances", as developed by Weber, refers to the probability of a person of a specified status achieving a specified goal or suffering a specific disadvantage. The concept therefore suggests that there are regular patterns to the biographies of individuals and groups, and "educational life chances" refers to the regular features found in educational biographies and group experiences (Meighan, 1986).
3. Although in Malta, of course, the Labour Movements' reforms in education — including destreaming at the primary level, comprehensivisation at the secondary level, and freer access at the tertiary level — did have an understanding of the part played by formal education institutions in the reproduction of an elite.
4. The nature and extent of this "determination" has been an issue of important debate for a number of social theorists. Althusser (1971) for instance argued that superstructural elements like the school had a "relative autonomy" from the economic base, although he also argued that the latter enjoyed determination "in the last instance".
5. Refer to Sultana (1989) for a discussion of the way teachers in Malta are "deskilled".
6. We even have Maltese research, reported by Borg and Falzon (1988) and discussed in their article in this issue of *Education*, which indicates that our selection procedures go wrong on other grounds as well: streaming in primary schools depends, to a great extent, on a person's gender and age.
7. The movement toward the so-called "new" or "critical" psychology is gaining ground, and useful discussions can be found in Youngman (1986), Leonard (1984), Wexler (1983) and in the works of social theorists of the Frankfurt School.

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# Streaming in Malta: Current Practices and Future Prospects

Mark G. Borg and Joseph M. Falzon

## Introduction

One of the most controversial issues in education is whether or not primary and secondary schoolchildren should be taught in streamed classes.

This paper proposes to consider some of the criticisms directed at the practice of streaming as an organisational policy in Maltese state schools; it will also provide an evaluation of the system of streaming at the primary level vis-a-vis some of its major criticisms. Finally, some of the major organizational alternatives to streaming will be considered.

## Streaming: a definition

For the sake of clarity, by *streaming* we here mean that type of school organizational policy whereby children are grouped into classes of homogeneous ability. Assignment to classes is based on scholastic attainment (usually in terms of performance in a number of examinable curriculum subjects), and/or mental ability (that is, on the basis of performance on intelligence tests). It stands to reason that this type of arrangement can be used only in relatively large schools since one needs to have at least two classes in each year group; otherwise, streaming cannot be implemented.

The number of streams in a year group will obviously depend on the number of children, but for the sake of simplicity in this paper we shall be referring to three ability streams: A-stream pupils whose scholastic attainment is above average in their year group; B-stream, average ability pupils; and C-stream pupils whose attainment is below averaged.

## Streaming in Maltese schools

A brief look at the history of education in Malta reveals that with the exception of a brief period in the 70's the official or unofficial policy has always been to stream schoolchildren; in the past more rigidly in fact than we do nowadays. The practice for many years had been to implement the traditional standard policy (cf. Barker Lunn, 1982) whereby children were allocated to classes according to age but with some promotion of the

more able pupils and the keeping back (in terms of repeating the year or being promoted to the next year but in a lower ability stream) of the less able ones.

It should be made clear at the outset that in addition to streaming within the school, selectivity is another form of streaming which takes place as between schools. For example, admission to Maltese private schools (primary and secondary) is regulated by entrance examinations or by other selective procedures; the same applies for admission to junior lyceums in the state secondary sector.

### *At the primary level*

At present, for the first three years of compulsory schooling, primary schoolchildren attending state schools are grouped with their peers into mixed ability classes. This means that pupils are assigned to classes, usually on the basis of their chronological age, without any reference whatsoever to attainment or ability. In the second three years of the primary school children are streamed on the basis of the global mark obtained in the national end-of-year examination in a number of curriculum subjects. The global mark which determines stream placement is in effect the sum total of the raw scores a pupil obtains in the five examinable subjects namely Maltese, English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Religion. The present system, moreover, does not allow particularly gifted children to be promoted two (or more) year groups at a time (e.g. from Year II to Year IV, or from Year IV to Year VI), because from the first year onwards pupils proceed alongside their peers. In other words, from Year IV onwards pupils are also streamed on the basis of their chronological age. In small schools (that is, with one class in each year group) children continue their primary schooling in mixed ability classes.

### *At the secondary level*

At the end of their primary education pupils proceed to one of three types of secondary school: state junior lyceums, private schools and state area secondary schools. Whereas admission to the first two types is restricted by selective procedures, admission to the third is not selective in any way.

During the first two years in state secondary schools (junior lyceums and area secondary schools), students are again streamed on the basis

of scholastic attainment. At the end of Form II students are offered subject options. Therefore, from Form III onwards students tend to be grouped according to their subject options. It could very well be the case, however, that large schools would have several classes having the same subject option such that even in this case students are grouped into classes on the basis of attainment in the annual examinations.

### Some Criticisms of Streaming

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the philosophical and sociological arguments in favour of, or against, streaming as an organizational policy. Indeed, we are more concerned with considering some of the shortcomings attributed to the practice of streaming, namely that:

- (a) streaming determines the child's educational future from a very early age since it is claimed that stream placement is in effect permanent;
- (b) within a given year group, streaming tends to favour the older children;
- (c) there is an element of sex bias in stream placement;
- (d) the validity and reliability of the criteria on which streaming is based are suspect;
- (e) teachers' attitudes and expectations are modified by the ability stream they are teaching.

Each of these criticisms will be considered in turn.

#### *Stream transfer*

Many educationalists would argue that the practice of streaming is undesirable because there is very little transfer of pupils from one ability stream to another; consequently, stream placement becomes practically permanent. The implication here is not only that pupils tend to remain in the same ability stream for the whole of their primary school career but also that this effect spills over at 11+ with the result that their future educational career would have been determined from an early age.

Studies carried out in Britain by Daniels (1961), Douglas (1964), Jackson (1964) and Barker Lunp (1970) seem to give support to the above argument insofar as the transfer rates reported are on the whole quite small. In fact, these rates are smaller than the expected 10 per cent estimated by Vernon (Plowden, 1967, par. 812).

Borg and Falzon (1989) report the findings of a number of studies investigating the effects of streaming in Maltese primary schools. The sample consisted of 4266 schoolchildren attending Years III, IV, and V in state schools with streamed classes (making up about 34 per cent of the total pupil

population in each year group). Irrespective of the number of classes in each school (which varied from three to eight classes in each year group), the pupils were grouped into three streams: streams A, B and C.

Table 1 shows the number of pupils who moved up or down the ability stream after being promoted from one year to the next. The figures show that the transfer rate is highest from Year III to Year IV (27.7 per cent) and lowest from Year V to Year VI (12.9 per cent). In the light of the figures quoted by the British studies above, one would conclude that the local transfer rates are quite substantial. Bearing in mind these relatively high transfer rates it appears unreasonable to criticize the system of streaming as practised in Maltese primary schools on the basis of permanent stream placement. These transfer rates imply that the present system incorporates a mechanism which effectively facilitates the transfer of pupils from one ability stream to the other. The mechanism, of course, is the national end-of-year examination in the five examinable curriculum subjects, even though one may disagree with the excessive importance given to it.

**Table 1. Stream Transfer By Year Group**

|                          |  |                     |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------|
| From Year III to Year IV |  | Total<br>(N = 1414) |
| Moved up+                |  | 182 (12.9%)         |
| Moved down+              |  | 210 (14.8%)         |
| Total                    |  | 392 (27.7%)         |
| From Year IV to Year V   |  | Total<br>(N = 1446) |
| Moved up                 |  | 121 (8.4%)          |
| Moved down               |  | 102 (7.0%)          |
| Total                    |  | 223 (15.4%)         |
| From Year V to Year VI   |  | Total<br>(N = 1346) |
| Moved up                 |  | 72 (5.4%)           |
| Moved down               |  | 101 (7.5%)          |
| Total                    |  | 173 (12.9%)         |
| Grand Total              |  | 788 (18.74%)        |

= Moved up/down one or two streams.

Percentages are based on the sample size in each sex year-group; sample figures do not include 60 pupils for whom data were missing.

#### *Age differences in stream placement*

The findings reported by Jackson (1964), Jinks (1964), Freyman (1965), Pidgeon (1965) and Sutton (1967) show that a relationship exists between pupil age and stream placement: the mean age in each ability stream decreases from the A to

the C-stream so that older children in a given year group tend to be over-represented in the A-stream.

The situation in Maltese schools, as reported in Borg and Falzon (1989), is in line with the trend indicated by the British studies. This is shown by the mean age of the pupils in each of the three streams in the three year groups as set out in Table 2: in each year group, A-stream pupils are as a group older than B-stream pupils; and B-stream pupils are older than C-stream pupils. In addition, Table 2 also shows the distribution of pupils in the three streams according to whether they are 'old' or 'young' pupils. In this context, 'old' pupils are the ones whose age is above the mean age for the respective year group, whereas 'young' refers to those whose age is below the mean age. Results show that in each year group there are more 'old' than 'young' pupils in the A-streams whereas in the C-streams there are more 'young' than 'old' pupils. These results were all found to be statistically highly significant (cf. Borg and Falzon, 1989). Proportions for the whole sample show that 41.08 per cent of the 'old' group compared with 33.01 per cent of the 'young' group are in the A-stream; conversely, in the C-stream there are only 22.8 per cent of the 'old' group compared with 29.93 per cent of the 'young' group. One would therefore conclude that the contention that streaming favours the older children is justified.

**Table 2. Stream Placement: Age Differences By Year Group And Total Sample**

| YEAR III             | Stream A     | B            | C            | Total       |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Old Pupils           | 321 (44.15%) | 245 (33.70%) | 161 (22.15%) | 727 (100%)  |
| Young Pupils         | 234 (32.91%) | 262 (36.85%) | 215 (30.24%) | 711 (100%)  |
| N                    | 555          | 507          | 376          |             |
| Mean Age (in months) | 97.20        | 96.48        | 95.88        |             |
| SD                   | 3.36         | 3.36         | 3.48         |             |
| YEAR IV              | Stream A     | B            | C            | Total       |
| Old Pupils           | 285 (39.31%) | 259 (35.72%) | 181 (24.97%) | 725 (100%)  |
| Young Pupils         | 248 (33.33%) | 261 (35.08%) | 235 (31.59%) | 744 (100%)  |
| N                    | 533          | 520          | 416          |             |
| Mean Age (in months) | 108.9        | 108.4        | 108.2        |             |
| SD                   | 3.44         | 3.44         | 3.28         |             |
| YEAR V               | Stream A     | B            | C            | Total       |
| Old Pupils           | 264 (39.64%) | 261 (39.19%) | 141 (21.17%) | 666 (100%)  |
| Young Pupils         | 227 (32.76%) | 273 (39.39%) | 193 (27.85%) | 693 (100%)  |
| N                    | 491          | 534          | 334          |             |
| Mean Age (in months) | 120.72       | 120.48       | 119.88       |             |
| SD                   | 3.36         | 3.36         | 3.48         |             |
| TOTAL                | Stream A     | B            | C            | Total       |
| Old Pupils           | 870 (41.08%) | 765 (36.12%) | 483 (22.80%) | 2118 (100%) |
| Young Pupils         | 709 (33.01%) | 796 (37.06%) | 643 (29.93%) | 2148 (100%) |

### Sex differences in stream placement

Barker Lunn (1967) asserts that the system of streaming favours the girls. She found that at age seven there is a larger proportion of girls in the upper stream than in the lower stream whereas the number of boys was approximately equally divided in the three ability streams. When she compared the same cohort of children at age ten-plus, Barker Lunn found that this sex difference in stream placement was nearly as pronounced as it has been at age seven.

Table 3, adapted from Borg and Falzon (1989), shows the proportions of boys and girls in each ability stream for each of the three year groups. In accordance with the finding reported by Barker Lunn (1967), local results show that in each year group there are proportionally more girls than boys in the A-stream and more boys than girls in the C-stream. This trend is reflected in the overall proportions: 41.66 per cent of the girls as opposed to 32.81 per cent of the boys are in the A-stream whereas 31.12 per cent of the boys as opposed to 21.17 per cent of the girls are in the C-stream. Again, the sex differences in stream distributions are statistically highly significant, so that the criticism that streaming shows a sex-bias appears to be justified.

**Table 3. Stream Placement: Sex Differences By Year Group And Total Sample**

| YEAR III | Stream A     | B            | C            | Total       |
|----------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Boys     | 264 (36.07%) | 257 (35.11%) | 211 (28.82%) | 732 (100%)  |
| Girls    | 291 (41.22%) | 250 (35.41%) | 165 (23.37%) | 706 (100%)  |
| YEAR IV  | Stream A     | B            | C            | Total       |
| Boys     | 246 (31.14%) | 285 (36.08%) | 259 (32.78%) | 790 (100%)  |
| Girls    | 287 (42.27%) | 235 (34.61%) | 157 (23.12%) | 679 (100%)  |
| YEAR V   | Stream A     | B            | C            | Total       |
| Boys     | 225 (31.34%) | 266 (37.05%) | 227 (31.61%) | 718 (100%)  |
| Girls    | 266 (41.50%) | 268 (41.81%) | 107 (16.69%) | 641 (100%)  |
| TOTAL    | Stream A     | B            | C            | Total       |
| Boys     | 735 (32.81%) | 808 (36.07%) | 697 (31.12%) | 2240 (100%) |
| Girls    | 844 (41.66%) | 753 (37.17%) | 429 (21.17%) | 2026 (100%) |

### Validity of the criteria

The issue of the selection of criteria on which the streaming exercise is based is a complex one. The criteria must have certain desirable characteristics like, for instance, that these should be valid and reliable. Nevertheless, as Barker Lunn (1970) points out:

"Whatever method is used, it cannot be perfectly reliable; some children will be wrongly allocated, no matter what the criterion of allocation may be." (page 84).

Studies by Emmett (1954) and Yates and Pidgeon (1957) have shown that the best available methods of allocation involve errors in prediction (and stream placement) with regard to at least ten per cent of the children.

As pointed out earlier, Maltese primary school children are streamed on the basis of a global mark which is the sum total of five raw scores obtained in the national end-of-year examination in Maltese, English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Religion. The current practice of adding together raw scores obtained on various subjects is, to say the least, psychometrically unsound. In fact we believe that this practice, together with the unavoidable measurement error, is responsible for rather unstable cut-off points between the ability streams such that pupils may end up in one ability stream when in fact they should be in another. Moreover, the fact that the measurement on which stream placement is determined is obtained on a single occasion (that is, end-of-year examinations) is bound to compound the measurement error and consequently a larger number of children will be wrongly allocated to the ability streams.

There is evidence that pupil performance is influenced by the teacher's expectations, the so called *Pygmalion effect* or *self-fulfilling prophecy* (cf. Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968): the pupil achieves or fails to achieve according to what the teacher expects of him. This effect would appear to be most detrimental to that pupil who on the basis of the current method is placed in a lower stream (e.g. a C-stream instead a B-stream class) than he should be on the strength of his *true* achievement. Since teachers of C-stream classes are likely to have relatively low expectations for their pupils the misplaced pupil in such a class would not be sufficiently stretched.

#### *Teachers' attitudes towards streaming*

When evaluating the practice of streaming one cannot ignore the attitudes that teachers have towards this organizational policy.

Studies carried out in Britain by Daniels (1961) and Jackson (1964) have shown that the majority of school teachers were in favour of streaming. In a survey of the views of 173 primary school teachers on methods of streaming, Daniels (1961) reports that the large majority of English teachers believed that streaming was educationally sound. Jackson (1964), in a survey of 217 headteachers and 438 teachers, found that 85 per cent of the sample were in favour of streaming while 9 per cent were against the practice.

In late 1987 the Ministry of Education in Malta set up a Committee "to study the situation and effect of streaming at the primary level" (Sunday Times, June 1988). The Committee launched a

survey to ascertain the views of those directly concerned (that is, teachers, parents and children) through appropriate self-administered questionnaires. However, to date (September 1989), none of the results have been made public.

A likely indication of Maltese teachers' attitudes towards streaming is given by the results of a small-scale survey carried out by the present authors. One hundred eighty-three ex-B.Ed. students who are now full-time practising teachers in state primary and secondary schools were asked to indicate their opinion on streaming. The distribution of opinions is set out in Table 4. Results show that the great majority of respondents (83.6 per cent) are in favour of streaming at one stage or another of the educational system. Only 16.4 per cent are totally against the practice of streaming in the primary and/or secondary school.

**Table 4. Are you in favour of streaming?**

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| Yes, from Year I primary onwards              | 5.5%   |
| Yes, from Year IV primary onwards             | 40.4%  |
| No, neither at primary nor at secondary level | 16.4%  |
| Yes, at secondary level only                  | 23.0%  |
| Other forms of streaming                      | 14.7%  |
| <hr/>   |        |
| Total (N = 183)                               | 100.0% |

### What of the future?

**T**he issue of whether or not to stream gives rise to a number of questions. Should we follow the example of other countries and go comprehensive? Should we stream only at the secondary level? Should we retain the system of streaming as currently practised?

The Malta Union of Teachers, which represents the majority of teachers in Malta, is quite explicit about its views on streaming. In its Memorandum to Political Parties (1986) it is stated that:

"... streaming in the primary schools is simply not desirable." (par. 4.2)

With regard to streaming at the secondary level the memorandum states:

"Classes, particularly in the first three years of secondary education, should be of mixed abilities, with setting according to different subjects resorted to instead of general streaming." (par. 6.4).

Therefore, it is quite clear that the teachers' Union is against streaming at both primary and secondary levels.

In their electoral manifestos, the two major political parties, commit themselves, in somewhat

vague terms, to reduce the current role of streaming. In its electoral manifesto, the Nationalist Party (1986), the party in Government, states that, as far as possible, all forms of discrimination among groups of schoolchildren should be eliminated (par. 5.1 (c)).

Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, the current Minister of Education, is quoted by the local Sunday Times (1987) as saying that:

"The PN is known to be against the present 'streaming' system in the passage from primary to secondary level." (p. 16).

In its electoral manifesto the Malta Labour Party (1987), now in opposition, states that it would seek to reduce anxiety generated by the competition that is so rampant in the Maltese educational system. The Labour Party also promised to try to ensure that selectivity is not practised at an early age.

It therefore seems that both political parties, one of which at the end of the day has to make the decision of whether or not streaming should be abolished, are committed to abolish or at least modify the present system of streaming.

However, if we decide to unstream, how ready are we for the change? Are teachers trained to teach mixed ability classes? Do we have the material resources which such an organizational policy would entail if it were to be successful? Can mixed ability teaching succeed when most practising teachers appear to be in favour of streaming? Would parents support the change to mixed ability classes?

If, on the other hand, we decide to retain the current system, at what age should we start streaming? Should we try to improve the reliability of the criteria on which streaming is based?

Indeed, perhaps the question about streaming should not be in the form of an either-or question. Some other alternatives which retain some of the characteristics of streaming but which avoid some of its shortcomings appear to be worth considering.

An alternative which readily comes to mind and which can be used at both the primary and secondary level is *setting*. *Horizontal setting* is the division of pupils of a particular year group into sets according to ability in particular subjects (Page and Thomas, 1977). Thus, during say mathematics, those children who are most able in the subject come together for mathematics lessons in the top set; similarly, the least able in the subject form the bottom set in mathematics. For lessons in other specific subjects each pupil would be assigned to a set according to his/her ability in that subject. For the remaining curriculum subjects children return to their normal mixed ability class. The advantage

of this organizational policy over streamed and mixed ability classes is that for basic subjects like Maltese, English and Mathematics, children are grouped in relatively homogeneous groups in each of the subjects. Thus, a pupil may be in the top set for English, in the middle set for Maltese, and the bottom set for mathematics, and in addition, returns to his/her home-class for the rest of the curriculum subjects. In addition, teachers would still be teaching a streamed class; one which in effect is more homogeneous in ability (in a particular subject) than a class streamed on the basis of overall performance in five subjects.

In *vertical setting*, instead of organizing the sets in one year group only, the sets cut across several year groups. Therefore, for instance, if a Form I pupil is exceptionally good at mathematics then during this subject he joins one of the Form II sets; similarly, if a Form III pupil is having difficulties in English he/she would join one of the Form II sets in the subject. For the rest of the subjects, of course, they join their peers in the respective sets and in the home-class.

Another alternative is *topping and tailing*. The underlying assumption of this organizational policy is that the great majority of children in any given year group are more or less homogeneous in ability. Only a small percentage at the two ends of the distribution are different enough to warrant a teaching approach which is substantially different from that used with the very broad middle band. At the *top* end one finds the most able, the gifted, whereas at the *tail* of the distribution one finds the least able, the slow learners. Therefore, whereas pupils in the middle section (the large group) are organized into mixed ability classes, the two 'extreme' groups (the *top* and the *tail*) are given special provisions like enrichment programmes for the gifted and remedial help for the slow learners.

Another variation of the *topping and tailing* structure is that whereby the whole year group is divided into mixed ability classes, with the *top* and the *tail* being withdrawn for one or more subjects — the *top* end for enrichment or accelerated programmes and the *tail* for remedial education in the basics

Similarly, the slower pupils, or those who need special help and attention, are withdrawn from normal classes to form a remedial group in specific subjects either for part of the day or week.

## Conclusions

**T**he authors hope that this paper has shown that there are no simple solutions or panacea to the streaming issue. Whatever decision is taken this must be made following a careful consideration of the issues involved and the views of the persons concerned.

The authors believe that *horizontal setting* is perhaps the most attractive of the alternative organizational policies outlined above. With the help of educationalists from the Department of Education and the Faculty of Education, it should be quite feasible to have such an experimental policy tried out in a school or in a small number of schools. There is undoubtedly a number of teachers, headteachers, education officers and academics who would be interested in participating

in such a project. Once a new organizational policy is tried out and evaluated, theoreticians and practitioners can get together to discuss the effectiveness of the method and the difficulties it gives rise to. Better still, we could decide to be less centralized in the decisions taken in this regard. It could also be the case, for instance, that each headteacher will be advised to implement that organizational policy which, after experimentation, seems to be most suited for his/her school.

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# Streaming: Knowledge and Attitudes

Suzanne Vassallo Agius and Christine Gatt

## Introduction

Recently, there have been a number of contributions to the local press as to whether Government primary schools should be streamed or not. These letters discussed various issues such as the role of the teacher, the relationship between pupils and teachers; and the relationship between teachers and pupils of different abilities. Unfortunately, these opinions were only expressed by University lecturers, politicians and researchers. The voices of the teachers, parents and children involved in streaming were not heard.

On 14 June 1988, the Department of Information, in a Press Release, stated that a committee set up by the Ministry of Education was attempting to investigate the opinions of parents and teachers on the system. However, no results have been published as yet. It was for this reason that in our study we concentrated on such an issue in order to open a new field where such attitudes are given primary importance.

It was not the purpose of our study to make a case for or against streaming. The study was designed to gather ethnographical material on the knowledge and attitudes that the pupils and their parents have towards streaming. It also attempted to trace out the part played by these attitudes in determining the success or failure of a pupil's academic performance.

### *Description of Study*

The study was carried out in a state school, here referred to as 'Fra Mudest Primary School'. This school was chosen for the study because of its good academic reputation, if this is to be measured by the high percentage of pupils who are successful in the Junior Lyceum entrance examination.

The first part of the study was carried out towards the end of the scholastic year 1987-88, so that by then pupils would have settled down in their respective classes. Before the sample was selected, one or two preliminary decisions had to be made. It was first of all decided to restrict the survey to one age-group and secondly to focus on the three ability streams — the top, the middle and the bottom stream (i.e. stream A, B and C respectively).

Therefore, three classes, one from each ability stream were chosen as the sample. The advantage of selecting one age group was that assessment of progress and attainment would be easier because of the uniformity of the curriculum. While a small sample presents problems with regards to the generalisability of our findings, ethnographic research techniques allow the researcher to get closer to the people concerned. What is lost in breadth is recovered in depth.

These three particular classes were visited on several occasions for two main reasons. Firstly, to get familiar with the teachers and the pupils concerned and secondly to assess the atmosphere in each of the classes in question. What is meant by "atmosphere" will become clear in the course of this paper.

The teachers supplied details which included the pupils' dates of birth and their addresses. In each of the 'A' and B stream class there were 30 pupils, while in the 'C' stream class there were only 26 pupils. It was decided to randomly select 20 pupils from each class and to interview them individually. The main aim of these interviews was to find out the pupils' attitude towards streaming and education in general.

The second part of the study was to obtain information on the home background of the pupils in the classes in question. There were three possible ways of doing this: one was to ask the pupils to provide it, the second was to send a questionnaire to the parents and the third was by means of a personal visit to the home.

In the first method (questions to the pupils), questions would have had to be severely restricted, information provided by them was likely to be unreliable and only a very superficial assessment of the home would have been possible.

The questionnaire method was likely to be just as unsatisfactory. Inevitably, there would have been questionnaires not returned, returned incomplete or inaccurately completed. Besides, as we discovered later, there were a number of parents who were incapable of reading the questions and of writing the answers.

In an interview, it is possible to acquire certain information which could not be obtained through a written questionnaire. In particular, assessment of the emotional atmosphere of the home requires a careful and tactful approach. During an interview, it is possible to lead gradually to questions on family relationships, parental harmony and the like, but a bold question in a questionnaire would either have aroused antagonism or have had to be omitted.

From every point of view, a visit to the home appeared to be the most desirable approach — this method was therefore selected. Short notes were sent to parents of all the pupils in the three classes. In this note, the parents were asked whether they were interested in being called upon in their own home to discuss certain issues concerning their child's education. The response was such that out of 30 notes that were sent to the parents of the 'A' stream pupils, 25 answered in the affirmative, 3 refused to be visited and 2 did not answer at all. Out of 30 requests that were sent to parents of 'B' stream pupils, 15 gave a positive answer and the other 15 notes were not answered. Finally, out of the 26 notes given to the parents of the 'C' stream pupils, only 9 answered in the affirmative, and the rest did not answer at all.

The homes were visited during the summer months. Once contact was made, it was found that the majority of the parents interviewed (mostly mothers) were extremely cooperative and ready to answer most of the questions asked. Information gathered throughout the interviews regarded details about the home environment, details about the parents, the latter's occupation, level of education, the knowledge they had of streaming, and their attitude towards streaming. Many interviews were over in 20 minutes, but a considerable number extended far beyond the 30 minute limit which had been established by the present researchers.

The *third* part of the study — the part concerning the school staff — was carried out at the beginning of the scholastic year 1988-89. The administrative and teaching staff were given a questionnaire enquiring about their opinions on streaming and how the staff and pupils would be affected if schools were unstreamed. Filling in a questionnaire has probably diluted and oversimplified their opinions. However, due to the time constraints of this study, interviews were out of the question.

#### *Summary of Findings*

The relationship between streaming and failure at school was an important consideration of

our study. We found that causes for such failure may begin at the very start of the child's life, yet be quiescent for years. They may start at any time and cease as suddenly; but it is easier for them to start than the effects to disappear. Some causes are intellectual, others fundamentally emotional but the chief cause of deterioration in academic performance was found to be in the attitude of the pupil, and not in his/her level of ability, though the cause of his/her attitudes are many and varied. We found that streaming represents a major influence on a pupil's attitude towards schooling.

#### *a. Attitudes of Pupils*

In order to be successful, a pupil must have at least an average academic aptitude and willingness to work. The pupil of an inadequate academic aptitude will be allocated to the lowest stream. At school, such a pupil confronts other disadvantages. We found that the school organisation, the content of the curriculum and the attitudes of the teaching staff towards such a child were aggravating his or her problems. The staff approved of the bright pupils, of the streaming system and of this same system as a means of adapting to individual difference. In our study, 90% of the teachers strongly believed that streaming was beneficial to all pupils, whatever their academic ability. Such an atmosphere at school was found to influence a pupil's own attitude to academic work.

The method of directly asking pupils about their attitudes towards streaming had to be abandoned, partly because of the school's attitude and partly because "the children couldn't think about streaming in isolation". (Jackson 1964: p. 64). A number of general questions were therefore asked, with the hope that the answers would reveal the world as seen through the children's eyes.

#### *i. Attitudes to own class*

So as to find out the children's attitude to their own class, all the children in question were asked: "Are you happy in this class?"

"I am very happy to be in my own class. I have a very good teacher and I have many friends."  
— 'A' stream child.

"Of course I'm happy. I cannot be in a better class."  
— 'A' stream child.

"I'm happy because I'm with the most intelligent children."  
— 'A' stream child.

"I'm happy but I wish I was in a better class."  
— 'B' stream child.

"It's alright, but it's better to be in the 'A' class." — 'B' stream child.

"So and so. I wish I was with quieter children." — 'C' stream child.

"I think I could be better in a 'B' stream class." — 'C' stream child.

"It's just the same. At least we don't have much homework." — 'C' stream child.

## ii. *Own Academic Image*

The second question put to the pupils was the following: "if you had to study with someone, whom would you choose?" This showed that children, on the whole, had a realistic picture of what pupils thought of each other academically.

"I would surely choose a girl from my own class." — 'A' stream child.

"We think on the same lines in this class." — 'A' stream child.

"We are all bright pupils." — 'A' stream child.

"I would choose someone from my class because we all cover the same work." — 'B' stream child.

"A boy from my class. I wouldn't choose an 'A' child because I am afraid I wouldn't catch up." — 'B' stream child.

"I don't like to study but if I had to I would study with someone from my own class." — 'C' stream child.

"I would only study with a boy from my class." — 'C' stream child.

"Perhaps I would study with someone from stream C or stream B." — 'B' stream child.

## iii. *Friendship Patterns*

The next question: "Which class is your best friend in?" was an attempt to catch a glimpse of how the streaming process controls friendships and tightens the groups further.

"My best friend is in my class." — 'A' stream child.

"My friends are all in my class." — 'A' stream child.

"My best friend is in my class but I have another friend in the stream 'C' as he was in my class last year." — 'B' stream child.

"My best friend is in my class ... he has always been in my class." — 'B' stream child.

"My friends are all in my class. We have always been together." — 'C' stream child.

"My best friend goes to a Secondary School." — 'C' stream child.

## iv. *Image of own class and of others*

By answering the question, "Would you like to be in another class?", the pupils had to state whether they were happy or not to be a member of a particular class. They were also asked to state the choice of stream.

"No, I wouldn't like to be in another class because they are not good enough academically." — 'A' stream child.

"If I had a good teacher, I wouldn't mind being in another class." — 'A' stream child.

"No, because in this class I am with the best children. I have a very good teacher and I'm happy." — 'A' stream child.

"Yes, I would like to be in an 'A' stream class because I could learn more." — 'B' stream child.

"I'm not sure, because this year I have a good teacher." — 'B' stream child.

"Yes, so that I could be with well-behaved children." — 'C' stream child.

"No, because I do not think I will understand anything. They learn difficult things in the 'A' stream." — 'C' stream child.

"I would not want to be in the top class because I'm afraid." — 'C' stream child.

"A' pupils learn more ... and they are intelligent ... they are better than us and they learn a lot." — 'C' stream child.

## v. *Culture and Streaming*

In the next question — "If you weren't yourself which famous person would you like to be?", the children were given a list of choices namely a 'school figure', a 'pop singer', a 'film/t.v. star', a 'sports figure', a 'figure of state', and 'any other'. Each one was read out and each pupil had to choose one of the above areas mentioned, or any other of their own choice. The aim of such an exercise was to pick up the pattern of responses and trace a remote trend which linked education to cultural differences and cultural poverty. (Jackson, 1964). See Figures 1a, 1b, 1c).

## vi. *Job Aspirations*

The final attempt to catch a glimpse of the correlation between pupils' attitudes and streaming, was to find out the job aspirations of the pupils

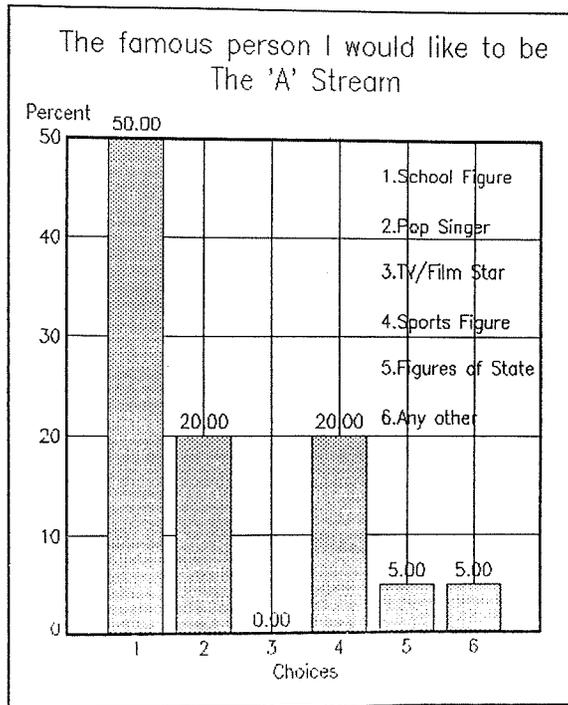


Figure 1a

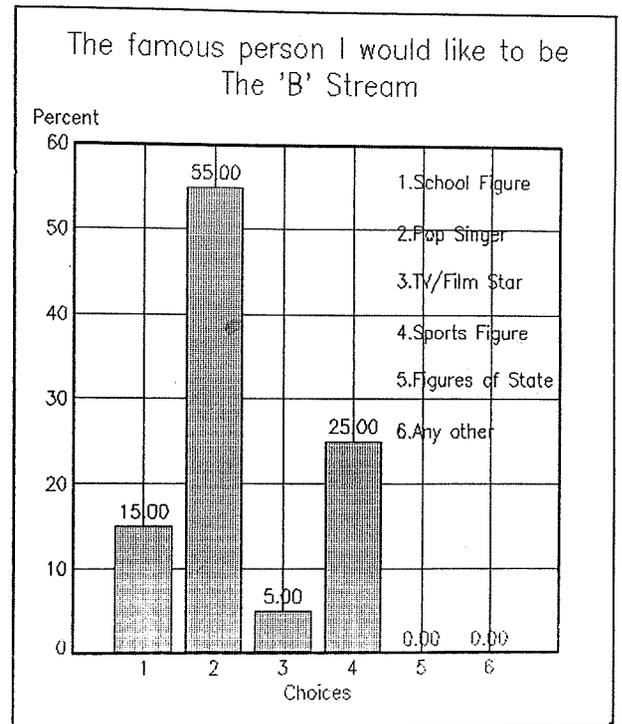


Figure 1b

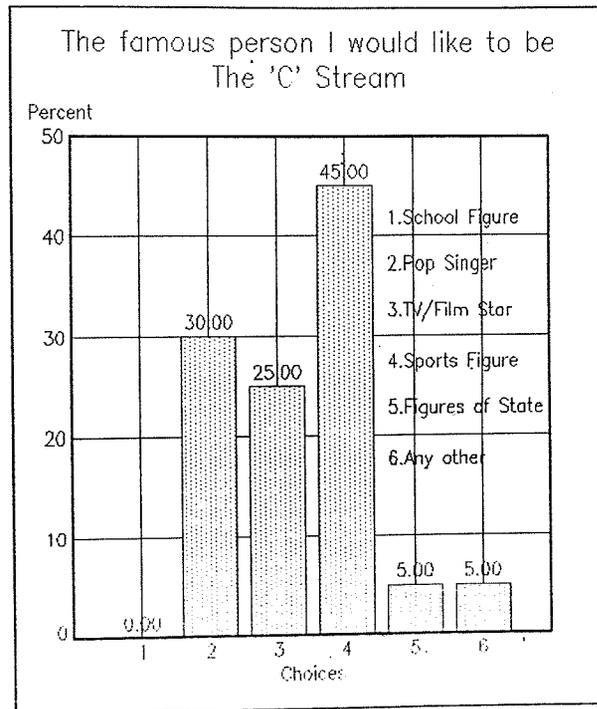


Figure 1c

in question (Hargreaves, 1967). The pupils were asked "What job would you like to have when you grow up"? What is of interest here is whether the pupils' own occupational aspirations are stream-related or not. Yet the more interesting finding emerged when the statistics were related to the fathers' occupation. (See Figures 2a, 2b, 2c).

b. *The Home Background*

The attitude of a pupil to his studies can be affected by a great variety of influences. Among these one can mention the influence of socialisation process in the home.

Poor parenting, emotional disharmony, lack of proper facilities to do homework, parental

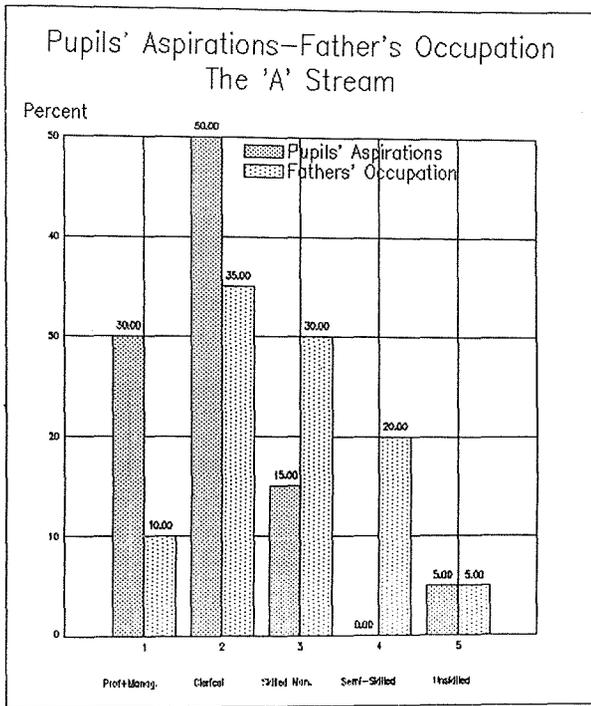


Figure 2a

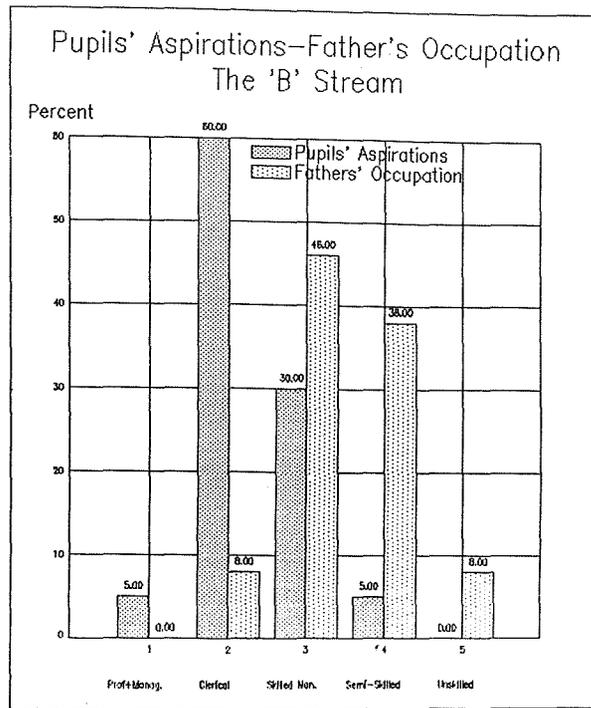


Figure 2b

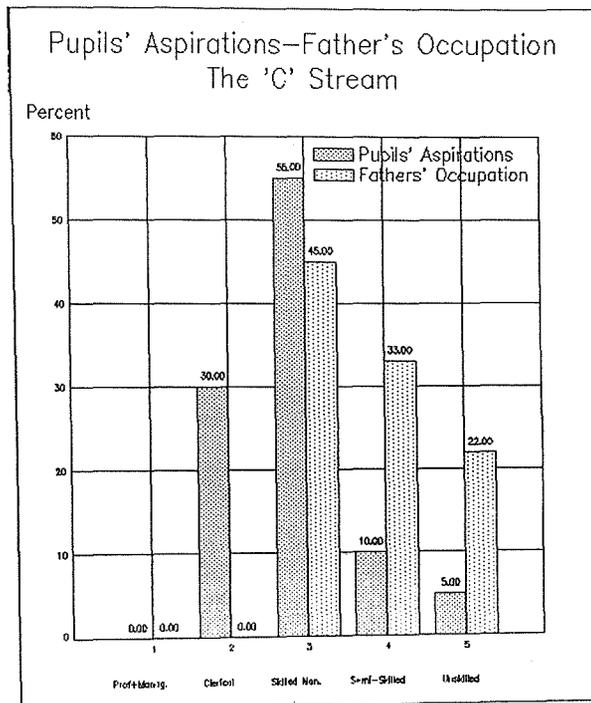


Figure 2c

separation — all these conditions and more can adversely affect the academic performance of pupils.

i. *Socio-Economic Background*

Our research has demonstrated a strong

relationship between academic deterioration and the socio-economic background of students, and between low academic achievement and the education of parents. Thus, all the lower stream pupils in our sample seemed to come from lower socio-economic groupings.

**Table 1. Parental Occupational Categories in Relation to Streaming**

| Parental Occupational Categories | 'A' STREAM | 'B' STREAM | 'C' STREAM |
|----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Professional and Managerial      | 10%        | 0%         | 0%         |
| Clerical                         | 35%        | 8%         | 0%         |
| Silled Manual                    | 30%        | 46%        | 45%        |
| Semi-skilled Manual              | 20%        | 38%        | 33%        |
| Unskilled Manual                 | 5%         | 8%         | 22%        |

Through a variety of interviews it was discovered that those families from lower socio-economic groups did not tend to have a strong supporting attitude to education and thus deterioration set in. On the other hand, many of the 'A' stream pupils seemed to come from higher socio-economic groups, and to be constantly supported by their parents.

#### ii. Parental Education

Related to the socio-economic groups of the parents is the type of education they themselves received. One of the most striking findings in this research is that amongst the parents of the 'C' stream pupils, there was not even one case where both parents were educated beyond the age of fourteen. On the other hand, there were half the parents of the 'A' stream pupils who were both educated beyond that age.

A pupil's academic attainment was found to be affected also by family size as compared to the size of the home. From our visits to the homes, it was found that the 'A' stream families, though on average larger in size, lived in spacious homes whilst the 'C' stream families, though on average smaller in size, lived in very small houses. The 'A' stream pupils were almost all provided with a suitable place where they could concentrate on their work, whilst the 'C' stream pupils had to struggle to find some space where to do their work.

#### iii. Culture

Another important aspect of the home which affected attainment was the type of culture that parents initiated their students in. All people have a culture, but society and schooling rewards one type of culture over another. The child from the higher socio-economic groups has a flying start over his lower socio-economic group rivals in richness of vocabulary and in general knowledge. The conversation of parents was found to be more informative and such a child had access to a wider variety of books and educational games. Such a pupil was found to receive much more tutoring whilst doing his homework and as a result was academically successful.

#### c. Parental Attitudes

Less obvious attitudes, although of equal importance, were those generated by the day-to-day commentary by the parent or the school, on homework and on books. Other pointers to the parental attitudes were found in the priority they gave to homework over other activities, the frequency of constructive interviews with the Head of the school and the extent to which the casual absences of the child from school were with their tacit consent or active connivance. Slowly, but surely, the parental comments (even in our presence during the interviews) and their scale of priorities have their affect on the attitude of the child. Even a parental attitude of neutrality or 'laissez-faire' is a big handicap to a child who is competing against other children who have fully supporting parents.

In our study, parental attitudes towards education, and streaming were assessed through the responses of the parents themselves during the home visits. Unfortunately, the parents who were interviewed were already affected by the progress or lack of progress of their child at school.

#### i. Importance of Education for Parents

Parents were asked how much they value their child's education. The following are the most common comments:

"It's indispensable ... it's so important that no one can manage without it."

— 'A' stream child.

"It's crucial because it's something that a person cannot live without."

— 'A' stream child.

"It is important." ... — 'B' stream parent.

"It is necessary nowadays."

— 'B' stream parent.

"I think it's quite important, don't you think so?"

— 'C' stream parent.

"I don't really know, because nowadays ... you see ... people who are not educated still can afford to buy villas, BMW's and whatever..."

— 'C' stream parent.

#### ii. Age at which child is expected to leave school

A further evidence of parental attitudes towards education emerged when the parents were asked at which age they expect their child to leave school.

"He can remain as much as he wants to. The longer he stays, the happier we'd be."

— 'A' stream parent.

"I always wished my daughter to become a secretary, or a typist." — 'B' stream parent.

"My son wishes to become a mechanic, like his dad, but after a while, I'm sure he'll get bored".  
— 'A' stream parent.

"If he stays till 16 ... isn't it enough?"  
— 'C' stream parent.

### iii. Views about Junior Lyceum Exam.

Parents were also asked to give their views about the Junior Lyceum entrance examination.

"I can't imagine what the education system would be like without the Junior Lyceum Exam."  
— 'A' stream parent

"I am in favour. Without the exam, the level of education will decline." — 'A' stream parent.

"It wouldn't be right if everyone enters the Junior Lyceum because not everyone is capable."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"There should be an exam to select the children. Those who are intelligent will pass and those who are not intelligent will fail."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"It's too much pressure on the children. Exams frighten children."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"There are too many subjects. Religion and social studies should not have been included. After all they are not that important."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"It's better to have an exam."  
— 'C' stream parent.

"Exams are not enough to assess a child's ability."  
— 'C' stream parent.

"The Junior Lyceum Exam is a game.... Like all other exams ... don't you agree?"  
— 'C' stream parent.

### iv. Parental knowledge of streaming.

Although "Fra Mudest Primary School" is a streamed school, yet when the parents in question were interviewed it was discovered that a good number among them did not have a clear idea of what streaming really entails.

"No, what does it mean."  
— 'C' stream parent.

"I think it's when they place them in different classes."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"Not exactly. But I think it depends on how intelligent the children are."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"Believe me. I don't understand anything about school. You see, I left school when I was young...".  
— 'C' stream parent.

"I'm not really sure ... but I think they choose the child according to marks he gets in his final exam."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"I don't know exactly how they do it, but I think they put the bright ones in one class and the stupid in another." — 'B' stream parent.

### v. Favourable/unfavourable attitudes

After the meaning of streaming was explained to the parents in question, they in turn were then asked to express their attitudes towards the streaming system.

"I surely do not agree with mixing. If possible I would suggest that streaming should start as early as possible — even from year 1."  
— 'A' stream parent.

"Firstly, the less intelligent will not cope with the bright ones and will get discouraged. Secondly the bright ones will become frustrated because they will move at a very slow pace — which is not natural to them."  
— 'A' stream parent.

"I would not like my child to be with children who are worse than him. I would prefer if he mixed with better children."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"No, I do not agree, because it is not fair on the children to be selected. The ones who are backward can perhaps do better if they are mixed with brighter ones."  
— 'A' stream parent.

"I don't really know what is good for the children. Everything in life has its good points and bad points."  
— 'B' stream parent.

"If he mixes with brighter children, he will learn something from them — at least how to behave."  
— 'A' stream parent.

"He's learnt so many rude words from the children in his class. I did not want to send him to school anymore. If he mixes with other children who are better than him, then yes ... it will be beneficial for my child."  
— 'C' stream parent.

### vi. Knowledge about Stream Mobility

Parents were also asked to give their views as to the possibility for a child who is in the lower stream to move into a higher stream, the following year.

"A lower stream pupil is too much at a disadvantage and I'm sorry to say that he will

never, ever catch up.” ‘A’ stream parent.

“It’s impossible for a stupid child to become suddenly intelligent.” ‘A’ stream parent.

“It is possible but it’s important that firstly, the child wants to learn and he finds a good teacher and good parents who dedicate their time for the benefit of the child.”

‘B’ stream parent.

“It’s impossible. He is just not cut out for school. He’s just like his dad. He’s not capable and moreover he doesn’t want to learn. He literally hates school, that’s all there is to it.”

‘C’ stream parent.

“Of course it is possible. If the child wants to learn — yes he will succeed. But my son won’t because he can’t stand anything that has to do with school.”

‘C’ stream parent.

“Of course, I’m sure he will make it, but he has to have a very good teacher who gives him individual attention all the time.”

‘C’ stream parent.

vii. *Reasons for their child being in that particular stream.*

Parents were asked why they thought their children were in the present streams.

“I know perfectly well why my child is in the ‘A’ stream. He is intelligent and those who are intelligent will obviously do well in their exams and so they should be all kept together. The bright ones are all placed in the ‘A’ stream so that they will move at the same pace.”

‘A’ stream parent.

“If one child is capable of carrying only a bottle, you can’t give him a whole crate of bottles to carry. My son is intelligent and so he deserves the ‘A’.”

‘A’ stream parent.

“I know why my child is in a ‘B’ stream. He is not willing to learn. He never studies or reads a book in his free time. He doesn’t deserve a better class ... it’s his fault.”

‘B’ stream parent.

“My child should be in a better stream, but throughout his school years he never had a good teacher. I’m not surprised that he is in the ‘B’ stream.”

‘B’ stream parent.

“It’s our fault, we never helped our child with his homework ... you see, we’ve had serious trouble in our family, and I think it upset our child very much.”

‘B’ stream parent.

“My son here is hopeless, he is so stupid and slow that he only deserves the worst.”

‘C’ stream parent.

“I don’t really know what stream my daughter is in.”

‘C’ stream parent.

c. *Staff’s Attitudes*

i. *Attitude towards streaming*

The teachers in question were asked to give their opinions about the streaming system — that is whether they were in favour or against the system. The following are their comments:

“Of the same standard — so better results.”  
— ‘A’ stream teacher.

“In my opinion this is the best procedure in the set up of the educational system as it is in Malta.”  
— ‘B’ stream teacher.

“Because lessons could be given accordingly to the ability of the children.”  
— ‘C’ stream teacher.

“Children of very low intelligence should be provided with remedial teaching, but there’s no need for streaming children of normal intelligence.”  
— ‘C’ stream teacher.

“Teaching is easier, more rewarding. Children benefit from streaming, because the child will be working with other children with the same ability.”  
— ‘B’ stream teacher.

“The teacher is more able to plan and offer the children in her care the right learning opportunities, which they may benefit most from.”  
— ‘C’ stream teacher.

“Less bright children won’t be able to keep up with the brighter ones, and the latter will slow down because of them.”  
— ‘C’ stream teacher.

ii. *Prime purpose of Streaming*

The teachers were then invited to select prime purposes of streaming from a list of five commonly mentioned ones. The top three purposes are:

“Streaming meets the needs of all children. It helps both the gifted and the less-gifted child.”

“Streaming simplifies the school organisation.”

“Streaming makes teaching easier”.

iii. *Destreaming*

Teachers were then asked to comment about how they thought pupils and staff would be affected if the school were unstreamed. The teachers were asked to choose between “better” or “worse” They were also asked to comment about their choice if they wished.

The following comments refer to the effect on the gifted-child:

“In many cases, the pupils’ academic standards would worsen.”  
— ‘C’ stream teacher.

"The gifted child would lose interest and strive less."  
— 'A' stream teacher.

"The 'A' child would certainly be at a disadvantage because he will not be able to develop his capacities to the full."  
— 'A' stream teacher.

"A mixed academical environment automatically forces the teacher to teach at a low level which in turn is detrimental to an 'A' child."  
— 'C' stream teacher.

"An 'A' child would still be able to get the optimum opportunities of learning."  
— 'B' stream teacher.

The comments on the effect of destreaming on the less-gifted child are as follows:

"No chance of improvement."  
— 'A' stream teacher.

"He would never catch up with the others, and would be demoralised."  
— 'B' stream teacher.

"The abilities of children would be too far apart entailing group work." — 'B' stream teacher.

"A low stream child in an unstreamed school will probably be discouraged by the good performance of the high achievers in his class. He has more chance to feel that he is a failure. This will cripple more his chances to develop his limited potential and himself as a person."  
— 'C' stream teacher.

"The teacher has to find a compromise in the teaching level in a class of 30 children with mixed abilities. Normally an average level of teaching is already too high for a low stream child."  
— 'C' stream teacher.

"He would not be affected."  
— 'A' stream teacher.

"The child may or may not progress depending on the attention given by the teacher."  
— 'B' stream teacher.

"Some wouldn't care, but others might feel better, although it would be hard for them to keep up with the brighter ones."  
— 'C' stream teacher.

iv. *Comments as regards lower stream pupils.*

"These children are stupid.... They are not capable of doing anything."

"We never give them new books, they're savages!"

"They're like a bucket with a hole in it ... whatever goes in, falls out!"

*Comments as regards 'A' stream pupils.*

"These are my angels!"

"'A' stream children tend to feel superior and underestimate the low stream children."

"In an unstreamed school the pupil wouldn't feel as proud of her 'A' class."

v. *The morale of teachers in an unstreamed school*

"Certain individuals adapt themselves more to 'A' stream children." — 'C' stream teacher.

"The morale of the 'A' stream staff would be definitely worse." — Most teachers.

"Certain teachers feel more comfortable with lower stream children and are better oriented to provide the best opportunities for the full development of the lower stream child."

vi. *How would discipline be affected by affected by destreaming?*

"Discipline will deteriorate."

"The school organisation would worsen."  
"In certain cases it would improve."

vii. *Child's place in Society*

"I feel that certain activities should be provided by the school (regular and occasional) e.g. school mass, assembly, school quizzes, sport sessions, drama and cultural activities. The child from any stream may participate and feel that he has something to offer.

Besides, he will develop as a personality, as in such a way he will be motivated. As a result he will develop more his potential and facilitate more his learning process."

— 'C' stream teacher.

"It all depends on the character of the child."  
— 'A' stream teacher.

"Their place in society has many pros and cons."  
— 'C' stream teacher.

viii. *General Comments about Streaming/ Destreaming*

"Streaming is imperative."  
— 'A' stream teacher.

"Streaming is a necessary evil because not all children are gifted children."  
— 'B' stream teacher.

"In a streamed class there is better under-

standing, better communication among children and healthier competition.”

— ‘B’ stream teacher.

“When a class is unstreamed it would involve a lot of group work which entails more preparation on the teacher’s side besides requiring more patience when dealing with the low streamed group.” — ‘C’ stream teacher.

“Group work and individual help are imperative with unstreamed classes. How could you do this if you have to follow a rigid curriculum?” — ‘B’ stream teacher.

“A teacher teaching in an unstreamed class cannot cater for so many different IQ’s and potentialities with the maximum of effectiveness, for the best development and performance of each child.” — ‘C’ stream teacher.

“Unstreaming is idealistic, but what do we want, idealism or practicality; what does a developing country like ours need?”

— ‘C’ stream teacher.

#### ix. *Proposals*

Teachers generally suggested that destreaming could only come about:

- (a) After at least a 10 year campaign with parents.
- (b) The number of pupils in class were to be lowered by at least a third.
- (c) If there were to be a revolution in the present methods of teaching.
- (d) If schools were fully equipped with all the facilities for such a class.
- (e) If criteria for employment were to be lowered. There were still factories asking for G.C.E.’s

and making potential factory girls sitting for Maltese and English composition and Mathematics.

— ‘C’ stream teacher.

“I believe that the ‘half way’ streaming and individual care for the less gifted children is the answer. Bottom stream classes should be better equipped with adequate teaching apparatus. They should be grouped in small groups to enable the teacher to cater for individual attention. — ‘B’ stream teacher.

“It depends on the size of school and class. In a small class it makes little difference because the teacher will be able to cope with all the children. In a class of 30 children where very little individual attention is possible, the ‘A’ stream child will suffer and so would the very weak one.” — ‘A’ stream teacher.

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#### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their thanks to Mrs Mary Sant, their dissertation supervisor, for her guidance and encouragement as well as to the parents, teachers and children who participated in the survey.

# Events

Report on the Proceedings of the Two-Day Seminar organised by the Faculty of Education on:

An analysis of the work of the Faculty of Education and proposals on how the Faculty's Academic and Administrative commitments can be improved.

The overall Seminar Theme selected for this seminar was:

*What are we doing ..... How can we do it better.*

Three main areas were tackled on the first day of the seminar, these included the Educational theory component, General Pedagogy and the Methodology component in the Secondary school subject area. The major proposals which were put forward in these initial sessions concerned the role which the Faculty should be providing to education in Malta. The participants agreed that within the framework of Educational Theory, General Pedagogy and Teaching in the secondary schools, "an academic lead" must be established and that it was up to the Faculty to introduce innovative ideas in the general structure of the educational system in Malta through its teacher education programmes and research. The presenters of the sessions developed their ideas on an interdisciplinary approach, formulating suggestions as to how different departments within the Faculty can cooperate with each other and help organise a coordinated and integrated teacher education to ensure consistency in their integrated effort. Another major discussion revolved around the concept of a "teacher model" which the Faculty had in mind. Those present expressed an opinion that the "model" for the students to follow should be reflected in what the various departments teach and what Teaching Practice tutors expect the B.Ed. students' performance in class to be. A possible solution to some of the problems in the Pedagogy area was found in re-establishing the Regency Scheme and the utilisation of "master-teachers" as *living models* for students. The Seminar discussed in some detail the pros and cons of a content oriented approach vis-a-vis a process

oriented approach in structuring methodology courses. The first day of the Seminar concluded by recommending that Subject Methodology should not be sacrificed for the sake of peripheral content.

The second day of the Seminar was charged with considering in some detail the significant contributions that Administrative Support was providing and which could be enhanced in the near future. The Rector, who was present for this session, intervened on more than one occasion to elucidate the University's policy with regards to funding and equipment which was envisaged to be put into use by the staff and its support services.

A second session considered the validity of the present programme structure in the EMY area. A proposal was put forward to the participants to the effect that the EMY programme should be recognised as a professional studies course, with an underlying rationale, to be offered to intending Primary teachers. The Language component was discussed in some detail and agreement was reached over consolidating the "language across the curriculum" approach which is currently being presented in this teaching area. The last theme with which the proceedings were closed referred to the Dissertation Requirement. The debate was mainly directed towards the retention or suspension of the six-credits' research project as part-fulfilment of the B.Ed. (Hons.) course. Most of the participants agreed on the concept that the teacher is a researcher, and only a dissertation can provide the necessary feedback for a critical analysis of topics in Education. The points which were raised in this session dictated the urgency of more meetings at the Faculty to delve deeper into this controversy. Not all aspects of the Seminar could be discussed in this short report on the proceedings but much of the substance of the criteria governing teacher education at University were evaluated and reflected upon. It is desirable that the recommendations put forward in the Two-Day seminar are followed up and sustained to set clear aims on how academic and administrative commitments can be improved.

**Dott. Joseph Mifsud**

# Notes on Contributors

Mark G. Borg is lecturer in educational psychology and human development at the University of Malta. An Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, he has published several research papers in scholarly journals like the *British Journal of Education Psychology*, *Collected Original Resources in Education* and *Educational Review*. He is actively interested in occupational stress in teaching and is currently conducting his doctoral research on the subject.

Joseph M. Falzon is Associate Professor in educational psychology and human development in the Faculty of Education; he is a U.K. registered educational psychologist. His main research interests are in the field of streaming, teacher stress and educational measurement.

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Professor Paul H. Hirst recently retired from the post of Professor of Education at Cambridge University. One of the leading pioneers in the early years of the philosophy of education, his most famous book is "Knowledge and the Curriculum", which appeared in 1974. He collaborated with R.S. Peters in a number of joint publications, and is author of numerous articles.

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# The Multi-functional Administrator

Charles J Farrugia and Paul A Attard

In 1987 the Commonwealth Secretariat published *The Challenge of Scale* edited by Kazim Bacchus and Colin Brock. This was an introductory volume in a series of publications to focus on the impact of scale on national education systems in the small states of the Commonwealth. This handbook concentrates on the demands which are placed on senior administrators who have to undertake a variety of tasks by virtue of a limited range of specialist skills and departments in small state systems. It recognizes the very special demands placed on senior managers who live and work in societies distinguished by closely knit, highly personalized networks. It also highlights the vital importance of overseas linkages and their implication for the work of the educational administrator.

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The Multi-functional Administrator



## Educational Development in the Small States of the Commonwealth

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