

A Bridge Too Far?

Reflections on Theory in Educational Practice

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Abstract

Praxis is a notion underlying several educational theories and it has led to the development of different models of teacher education. Locally, this has also been one of the concepts discussed during the 'masterisation' of the teaching profession, by virtue of which pedagogical content knowledge builds on prior-achieved content knowledge. As teacher education in Malta was reformed, a number of unprecedented socio-economic developments created a scenario which, at policy-making level, brought about further educational reforms. These include an outcomes-based model for learning and assessment and a drive towards vocational education. In this presentation, I refer to data regarding teacher-student ratios, as one aspect of the contextualization of education locally, and I proceed to reflect upon two educational documents, using Critical Discourse Analysis. I argue that the cyclical nature of praxis, which requires reflection and action, is somewhat side-lined within the current educational context, possibly because immediate instrumental gains are being prioritized.

Keywords: *Educational theory; Critical Discourse Analysis; Educational policy; Praxis in Education.*

Introduction

This contribution needs to be contextualised in my own narrative as an academic and as a teacher educator as this determines, to a greater or lesser extent, my interpretation of the data and of the documents that I will refer to. My main field of expertise is Italian and matters that revolve around Italian language education as a branch of Sociolinguistics and of General and Applied Linguistics. Although most of my research has been dedicated to linguistic matters, my academic home has always been the Faculty of Education, not least because I read for Bachelor of Education (Honours) and Master in Education degrees which I was awarded, respectively, in 1991 and 1996. My involvement in teacher education was always flanked by my interest in Linguistics, and these two areas found complementary grounds throughout my PhD, completed in 2001, in which theoretical linguistic notions

were applied to the acquisition and learning of Italian. Throughout my academic career, I became increasingly aware of the importance of educational theory and its contribution both to the methodology of language teaching and to the professional formation of teachers. This was especially the case when in 2013 I was appointed Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Education and subsequently served as Dean between 2015 and 2019.

While, as a methodologist, I focus mainly on the practical, day-to-day needs of teachers and student-teachers, I gained further insights into education as a political and social activity, without forgetting its personal and intimate dimensions. This materialised especially through my readings on educational theory as well as by means of engagement with local and foreign colleagues who are specialised in this area. Theory and practice come together through praxis, in a cyclical process, and while the former is sometimes implicit and not immediately evident, its effects on choices made by teachers in our classrooms, the textbooks we adopt, modes of assessment, policies that are issued, educational legislation, and so on, are extremely far-reaching.

The data and reflections I include in this paper regard reforms being brought about in our educational system, in the light of on-going changes and challenges. In the first part of my contribution, I address some of the issues that are topical today in Malta's education. I then refer to two local educational documents: *The framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-24* (FESM), launched in February 2014 and *My journey: achieving through different paths* (MJ), presented officially in November 2016. My main tool for the analysis of these documents is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as through this I delve into them from a linguistic point of view by investigating the discourse used. The main objective of this exercise, including the presentation of data and analyses of the two reforms, is to reflect on whether space is being given both to theory and practice, and on whether one is being prioritised over the other.

History and Data

Our educational system reflects the history of our country. A few milestones, thoroughly documented in Sultana (2017), include the Austin & Cornwall-Lewis 1838 report, which represented the first serious attempt to address schooling in a systematic matter and tackle the mass illiteracy of the time, Paolo Pullicino's pioneering contribution to education in the mid-1800s and the Keenan 1880 report. The language question (Hull, 1993), whereby Italian as a medium of instruction gave way to English, as well as the gradual increase of importance given to Maltese in schooling also represent important stages and they are reflected in the events that occurred in local history. The same can be said about the founding of the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT), established in 1919 as consequence of the Sette Giugno

riots, in order to strive for better working conditions for teachers since the category had been largely ignored by the government of the time, despite the political strife which led to improved conditions for a number of work sectors.

In the post-war years, teacher education gained ground as a discipline in its own right, both through the development of the field internationally and through the establishment of teacher-training colleges locally. This was largely in the hands of institutions which were administered by the Church until, in 1978, the Faculty of Education was established as a result of Amendments to Education enacted by the 'new' University. The universitisation of teacher education was characterised by the introduction and development of a number of courses on educational theory, among other ambitious goals at the time, such as the professionalisation of teaching. Theories in education were mainly within the remit of courses in Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology of Education, fields which all education graduates are highly familiar with. However, they also carried implications for the whole teacher education programme, including courses in Pedagogy, Methodology and the Practicum sessions. More recently, following agreements with all stakeholders reached in 2014, and draft legislation in this respect proposed in 2016, teacher education has been raised to Master's level.

Teacher education, and the profession in general, has a history in which matching demand and supply represents a challenge. Up to a few years ago, for example, graduates from the Faculty of Education who specialised in some subject areas found it hard to be employed in local schools. A number of them abandoned teaching without ever being engaged. The demographic rate locally was not increasing as steeply as it had been in the past and the School Networks (known as Colleges) reform in 2006 effectively led to the closure of some public schools, with students being integrated into larger institutions. This process was also the result of the introduction of comprehensive schooling by virtue of which the Junior Lyceums and Area Secondary school system was removed. This dichotomous school system, in which students were placed in different schools according to their academic achievement, determined by an 11+ examination, has now been phased out, with the last examination of this kind being held in 2010. This was replaced by a benchmarking assessment system which, reportedly, will be removed in the coming years. In addition to this reform, in 2014 co-education was introduced to state secondary schools, so today all the public schooling sector is co-ed, as is the private sector. Secondary education in church schools is still single-sex.

These changes have also had implications on teacher recruitment, for which I present figures regarding class teachers during scholastic year 2018-19. The figures I report do not include instructors, peripatetic and support teachers as well as those who carry out duties in resource centres. However, it must be noted that in 2018-19 there were 626 peripatetic/support teacher who were employed in state schools, in contrast with a total of 50 covering both other sectors. The figures reported in Tables 1-4 were provided by the Ministry for Education & Employment, in June 2019.

Table 1: Teacher data 2018-19 in State schools

State schools			
Grade	Primary	Secondary	TOTAL
Supply teacher	81	93	174
Teacher	920	2,023	2,943
Total	1,001	2,116	3,117

Table 2: Teacher data 2018-19 in Independent schools

Independent schools			
Grade	Primary	Secondary	TOTAL
Supply teacher	130	92	222
Teacher	102	198	300
Total	232	290	522

Table 3: Teacher data 2018-19 in Church schools

Church schools			
Grade	Primary	Secondary	TOTAL
Supply teacher	42	94	136
Teacher	354	841	1,195
Total	396	935	1,331

Table 4: Student data 2018-19 (obligatory schooling 5-16 years of age)

School	Primary	Secondary	TOTAL
State schools	15,492	11,279	26,771
Independent schools	3,701	2,394	6,095
Church schools	7,794	7,118	14,912
Total	26,987	20,791	47,778

When teacher-student ratios are worked out on the basis of these figures the following results are obtained (Table 5):

Table 5: Teacher-student ratio 2018-19

	Not including supply teachers	Including supply teachers
State schools (primary)	16.8	15.5
State schools (secondary)	5.6	5.3
Independent schools (primary)	36.3	16
Independent schools (secondary)	12.1	8.2
Church schools (primary)	22	19.7
Church schools (secondary)	8.5	7.6

These figures indicate that there are substantial differences between the three educational sectors, and that the best teacher-student ratios are in the public sector. In general, these figures compare favourably to those of several EU states, as referred in Eurostat data (available up to 2017). The EU average is 14.7 for the Primary sector and 12.2 for Secondary.

These ratios, however, only provide a partial picture of the situation, and they conceal the complexities of the profession. In fact, despite generally favourable teacher-student ratios, there are indications that the country is facing shortages in a number of subject areas and there is the possibility that this problem could become more acute in the future. In fact, practically all teacher education graduates of the Faculty of Education have found definite or indefinite teaching posts in the past two years, unless they decided not to join the profession out of their own choice. What has led to this change, when compared to the aforementioned situation of faculty graduates not finding employment in schools?

One of the reasons is that our schools seem to be requiring more teachers than they did in the past, although the reasons for this are not explicit. The local journalist Arena (2019), in an article published in the Times of Malta, quotes the Ministry for Education and Employment to refer that a total of 10,372 teachers are employed in our schools, 66.6% of whom are in state schools, and 33.4% in the Church and private sector. These, presumably, include also figures of peripatetic, support and guidance teachers, not included in Tables 1-4 above (in which I report figures pertaining to scholastic year 2018-19), as well as kindergarten assistants. They cater for a total of 60,940 students (including those in kindergarten settings) which effectively means that there is one teacher for slightly less than every 6 learners in class, as the teacher-student ratio stands at 1:5.85. The same article refers that there has been an overall increase in the employment of teachers with an additional 200 being engaged in 2019. Reference is also made to an increase in the amount of kindergarten assistants and learning support educators, as well as to figures regarding the number of students in public schools who have opted for a vocational subject, reportedly amounting to 60%.

On the basis of this data, we cannot ignore the possibility that several educational reforms as well as changes in school demographics may be spreading teachers out too thinly, with the consequence that some are given heavy loads, in time-tabling terms, while other have to focus their attention on smaller classes, sometimes including learners who require specific attention.

Having provided data regarding our educational system today, and having described some matters regarding the present situation in schools, I now turn to the two aforementioned educational documents: *Framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-24* (FESM), published by the Ministry for Education & Employment (MEDE, 2014a) and *My journey: achieving through different paths* (MJ), published by the same Ministry (MEDE, 2016). These have been chosen because of the importance given to both in the discourse on education locally. The

FESM preceded the introduction of the Learning Outcomes Framework on which the recently-introduced outcomes-based model of education has been shaped, as stated in the document itself: “Other objectives include the provision of a relevant curriculum built on a learning outcomes approach, a variety of learning experiences and qualifications anchored to the Malta Qualifications Framework” (MEDE, 2014a, p.5). This model is referred to, albeit briefly, in the MJ document which led to the introduction of new vocational subjects in our state schools which are proving attractive to a substantial number of students, as reported earlier. MJ has recently been described by the Permanent Secretary (Fabri, 2019) as “our collective moral purpose”.

Although it is acknowledged that priority in both these educational documents is given to practical matters, the very notion of praxis suggests that practice devoid of theory is a misnomer in itself:

Praxis, as conceived by Aristotle and reconceptualized by Marx, requires one to practice what one theorizes while ... theorizing what one practices: reflective action and active reflection make for good praxis.

(Weltman, cited in Torres & Mercado 2004, p.61)

So, even though policies issued by educational authorities may have a strong instrumental orientation it is interesting to uncover whether there are any explicit theoretical underpinnings through their discourse and to explore what is being prioritised or sidelined. My aim is to analyse some aspects related to the discourse in both documents from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) ‘includes not only a description and interpretation of discourse in context, but also offers an explanation of why and how discourses work’ (Rogers 2004, p.2). The same author adds that “researchers working within this perspective are concerned with a critical theory of the social world, the relationship of language and discourse in the construction and representation of the social world, and a methodology that allows them to describe, interpret and explain such relationships” (Rogers 2011, p.3).

CDA therefore explores some of the hidden social, cultural and political concepts that underlie texts. It focuses on the framing of the text, including on how it is presented and the author’s point of view, on its foregrounding and on the background knowledge it presupposes. Other features are found at a conversational or dialogical level, wherein syntactic and textual constructions may be analysed in terms of the way they are structured and of how they establish relations by means of discourse. Space restrictions do not allow me to focus on all aspects of CDA which emerge from

the two documents under study and I will herein refer to the background knowledge of them both, and then carry out analyses based on word frequency, readability and lexical density.

Two official documents

The *Framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-24* (FESM) and *My journey: achieving through different paths* (MJ) are easily accessible, both in electronic and hard formats, and they are both often cited when reference is made to recent educational reforms which will be formalised through a new Education Act, for which consultations were initially carried out in October 2016. Among the issues which represent the background to the FESM, launched in February 2014, one finds the results achieved locally in TIMSS and PIRLS studies as they “painted a worrying picture” of the educational situation. The increasing demands of the employment sector required “a skilled workforce on a local level” and a “link between education and national development in relation to skills matching” (MEDE, 2014b). The effort being made to address diversity through inclusion and by offering equal opportunities to learners is also included in the background to this document.

On the 23rd November 2016, the MJ document was presented, as part of ongoing secondary education reforms. The launch of the programme was held, symbolically, at the Lufthansa Technik premises. The declared background included reference to UNESCO’s Sustainable Development Goal number 4 with emphasis on a reform that will replace the current “one-size-fits-all system to a more inclusive and comprehensive learning system” (Maltese Eurydice Unit, 2017). The introduction of a number of vocational subjects and different modes of assessment was also given prominence, pitched at Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) Level 3 (at par with the same European Qualifications Framework level). Parity of esteem between all different subject options “will be guaranteed” (Maltese Eurydice Unit, 2017). These different assessment modes and the equivalency to the MQF Level 3, are a direct reference to the Learning Outcomes Framework, although this was not mentioned explicitly in the presentation of MJ. Another issue that was referred to regards equitable support for all “children’s individual talents and needs through quality academic, vocational and applied learning programmes” (Maltese Eurydice Unit, 2017).

Analyses of the FESM and MJ

In order to analyse the content of both documents I processed them through two text analysers: a simple Online-Utility version, using open use software available at: <https://www.online-utility.org/text/analyzer.jsp> and the Using English advanced text analyser, for which registration is required at: <https://www.usingenglish.com>.

This software carries out text analysis at various levels of linguistic complexity although for my work I limit my considerations to lexical density, readability and word frequency. The general results pertaining to the FESM and MJ documents are presented below:

Table 6: Framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-24 (FESM)

Parameter analysed	Value	Notes
Number of words	1,376	
Total number of unique words	543	
Number of syllables	2,500	
Syllables per word	1.8	
Lexical density	39.46%	Different words/words x 100
Lexical density (without stop words)	55.31%	Lexical words / words x 100
Readability: Gunning Fog Index	34.06	Postgraduate (29 years)
Readability: Flesch Reading Ease	-10.36	Difficult: High School or Some College

Table 7: My journey: achieving through different paths (MJ)

Parameter analysed	Value	Notes
Number of words	3,447	
Total number of unique words	872	
Number of syllables	6,713	
Syllables per word	1.9	
Lexical density	25.3%	Different words/words x 100
Lexical density (without stop words)	61.27%	Lexical words / words x 100
Readability: Gunning Fog Index	37.86	Postgraduate (32 years)
Readability: Flesch Reading Ease	-27.9	Difficult: High School or Some College

The most interesting aspect of the numerical data is that in both cases lexical density is low, 39.5% in the FESM and 25.3% in MJ. By way of comparison, Johansson (2008, p.65) reports that “the large majority of the spoken texts have a lexical density of under 40%, while a large majority of the written texts have a lexical density of 40% or higher”. Lexical density, by definition distinguishes ‘content’ words (verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs) from grammatical ones, sometimes also referred to as ‘stop words’, as in the tables above (prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, articles). This indicates that both the FESM and MJ documents provide somewhat succinct information, and that they are not intended to go into depth insofar as the issues mentioned are concerned: this is also confirmed by the fact that, in either case, there is no explicit reference to educational theories or to philosophical underpinnings. The Gunning Fog readability index is 34.06 for the FESM and 37.86 for MJ. Both scores

indicate that the documents are not directed to the general public, as the reading level required is at least of graduate standard, both in relation to the terminology used (despite the low lexical density) and the syntactic structures employed. This is, by and large, confirmed by the Flesch Reading Ease index, also reported in Tables 6 and 7.

The reference in the background of both documents to employability, to the achievement of skills (including vocational skills) and to inclusion and equity, emerges also when examining content-word frequency:

Table 8: Content-word frequency in the Framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-24 (FESM)

	Occurrences	Percentage
1. Education	20	1.43
2. Learning	15	1.07
3. Skills	13	0.93
4. Ministry; Work; Strategy; People	8	0.57
5. Employment	7	0.5
6. Process; Society; Jobs; Current	6	0.43

Table 9: Content-word frequency in My journey: achieving through different paths (MJ)

	Occurrences	Percentage
1. Learning	101	2.42
2. Education	72	1.72
3. Secondary	48	1.42
4. Programmes	45	1.08
5. Vocational; Students	37	0.88
6. System	34	0.81
7. Quality	33	0.79
8. Academic	32	0.76
9. Skills	31	0.74
10. Applied	28	0.67
11. Equitable	25	0.6
12. Schooling	24	0.57
13. Training; Level; MQF; Malta	21	0.5
14. Compulsory; Current	19	0.45

Since the MJ document is substantially longer than the FESM, n-grams – that is the phrases that are used more frequently – also shed some light on the discourse used. The frequency of these 4-word phrases is presented in Table 10.

Table 10: 4-word n-gram frequency in My journey: achieving through different paths (MJ)

	Occurrences
1. equitable quality education for	13
2. academic vocational and applied	13
3. quality education for all	13
4. vocational and applied learning	12
5. to MQF level 3	6
6. and applied learning programmes	5
7. one size fits all	5
8. framework for the education	5
9. for the education strategy	5
10. up to MQF level	5

The word frequency and n-gram patterns for MJ reveal that the words 'education' and 'learning' feature frequently in both documents, with others that refer to 'equity' and 'quality'. The word 'skills' and terms related to employability are also used regularly, especially in the FESM. The MJ document, clearly designed to introduce a vocational path, puts emphasis on this and on the equipollency of this route to MQF Level 3. In fact, the term 'vocational' is often used to make a distinction between this path and the 'academic' one which, by and large, refers to the subjects currently taught in most schools and for which a Secondary Education Certification examination has been available for a number of years. This system is also referred to by means of 'one-size-fits-all' – this catchphrase, often used on the media when referring to these documents, is repeated on five occasions. The distinction between 'academic' and 'vocational' is presented somewhat unquestioningly in MJ, although in contemporary education one may debate as to whether the two should, really and truly, be kept so distinct (Bailey & Belfield, 2019).

Albeit succinct, and by no means comprehensive, the CDA exercise carried out by referring to the background of the documents, lexical density, readability and word frequency, indicates that the two educational documents under examination are contextualized through issues regarding the educational (e.g. achievement), the social (e.g. inclusion and diversity) and the employment (e.g. skills) sectors. The analyses indicates that they can be mainly understood by readers specialised in the field, although in terms of lexical density the proportion between content and grammatical terms indicates that the former are not used frequently, especially in MJ. In both documents explicit reference to theoretical frameworks is largely absent and there is only occasional mention of an outcomes-based model of education which, by and large, has now been adopted in most local schools.

There are some indications of evidence-based considerations (e.g. international test measures, general low achievement in academic subjects, skills' gap) but these

are not corroborated by data included in the FESM or in MJ. Both documents have a very strong practical slant, with emphasis on the link between education, the acquisition of skills - vocational skills in the case of MJ - and employability. Quality education, equity and inclusion are also central features in both policies. In both cases there is no clear indication as to how the policies will affect teacher recruitment, and whether it will be necessary to have Continuing Development Programmes or re-training of teachers already in employment.

Changes and reforms: what about reflection and action?

The documents that I have analysed, albeit briefly and without the pretence that these are representative of the range of documentation issued by the educational authorities in Malta over the past years, are characterised by a discursive style which gives prominence to practical skills, through which the link between education and employability is underlined:

Our children need to be prepared for present and future jobs, and obtain more transferable skills to avoid skill obsolescence (FESM, p.6). Ensuring that our young people acquire the necessary skills and strong work ethic to enable them to take up the jobs created is also a formidable task (FESM, p.6).

In the FESM job-related skills are contextualised within a framework involving lifelong education, achievement and literacy skills:

It is unacceptable that half of our fifth formers are leaving secondary school without the skills and qualifications expected of them after at least 12 years of schooling. We need to link much better the two worlds of education and employment to ensure the relevance of MCAST and the University of Malta to sustain the current employment rate of our graduates (20-34 years), and also improve the skill base of our 25 to 64 year olds (FESM, p.6).

The MJ document hinges on the FESM “values of inclusion, social justice, equity and diversity” (MJ p.1) and refers to a comprehensive system pitched at MQF Level 3 in which learners will be ‘equipped’ with employability skills, in light of ‘current and foreseeable skills shortages’:

*We need to ensure that all children develop into young people and adults equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to be active citizens, equipped with the necessary employability skills and to give valuable contributions in society (MJ, p.2)
Learning programmes could be broadly defined to fall under either a transitional and/or a qualification stream. The former stream prepares*

students to further their studies after secondary schooling both in academic or vocational institutions, while the latter prepares students with employability skills which can be used actively in employment. Both streams are complementary and essential for the Maltese labour market due to current and foreseeable skills shortages. (MJ, p.8)

This has implications for our educational system, including teacher recruitment (data on which was provided in Section 2) also insofar as the introduction of new vocational subjects is concerned. There is, however, little background in terms of how these subjects will flank the so-called 'academic' ones, although this dichotomy exists in the MJ document and should be questioned, as I stated earlier with reference to Bailey & Belfield (2019). Furthermore, whether implicitly or explicitly, the drive towards addressing skills' gap and bringing schools closer to industry leaves little space for reflection and action in this document. Rather, a direction is given, as may be seen in the quote below, without explaining whether such action would then require reflection in order to be effective in the long term, even in terms of improving literacy and achievement (as specified in the FESM), in a cyclical process which is typical of praxis:

As has been evidenced through local and international practice, it is advisable that every secondary school partners with post-compulsory general academic and vocational institutions and the industry to facilitate a seamless lifelong journey and progression for all their students. (MJ, p.9)

This, I argue, is leading to a situation where even in some teacher education programmes, which today are not offered exclusively by the Faculty of Education, educational theory - and the very notion of praxis - play second fiddle to instrumental goals. This situation, furthermore, is not only a local matter as similar trends are being witnessed in teacher education in other countries too. Educational theory may be suffering the brunt of this, and as a consequence the cycle of reflection and action has little room, or no room at all, to thrive. Prof Kenneth Wain, in his keynote to the Teacher Education Policy and Practice (TEPE) conference, organised by the Faculty of Education in 2016 summarises this poignantly when he raises alarms with respect to the fate of educational theory locally and internationally, and his arguments summarise neatly the point I wish to highlight:

It needs clarification here that I am not here arguing against teaching teaching skills or competences in teacher education. Indeed, I have been emphasising the point that teaching as a practice is a matter of knowing how, and therefore, inevitably, a matter of having skills and competences of certain kinds (like asking questions, instructing, assessing, presenting, demonstrating, and so on) that are measurable on a performative scale. (...) What I am arguing against is what

Hyland in another article describes as the “one-dimensional, technician approach reflected in the obsession with skills and competences (Hyland and Merrill 2003)” that proceeded from the “‘new vocationalist’ thrust of the late 1980s and 1990s,” for the same reason as his, that it is “‘morally impoverished.” (p.64) For that is precisely what it is; morally and, I would say, politically impoverished also. It is impoverished also by its exceedingly poor understanding of practical knowledge (which various critics have commented does poor justice to vocational education itself), especially when it is compared with the Aristotelian understanding as praxis, and therefore as rooted in the world not in a craft, which I have just described (...)

(Wain, 2018, p.58)

Conclusion

The local Maltese educational system is facing many challenges. Certain issues are the result of unpredictable trends, such as the significant increase of migrant learners in our schools (Caruana, Scaglione & Vassallo Gauci, 2019), some of whom reach our shores without any knowledge at all of either of the two languages of instruction, English and Maltese. Others, on the other hand, such as teacher recruitment, can be addressed if plans are made accordingly, both insofar as the short-term and the long-term are concerned and if educational documents also provide evidence of these plans in the light of the reforms they are proposing.

Figures concerning teacher-student ratios indicate that the teaching complement in Malta is spread out thinly and unevenly. The reasons for this are multiple and it is acknowledged that there are cases where small-group learning, and specific individual attention, reap benefits. On the other hand, it is undeniable that there are high numbers of qualified teachers who do not carry out duties with a full class, otherwise the recent shortage alarm would not be as insistent as it has been over the past months in the media.

The discourse of the two documents examined, while rightly focusing on quality and on inclusion, has a slant towards education for employability purposes. The consequent increase of subject options might complicate issues related to teacher deployment, especially if one is intent on safeguarding quality within the profession. Teachers qualified to teach ‘academic’ subjects might have to re-train to be routed to ‘vocational’ areas, although this does not necessarily mean that they will feel accomplished in the process, especially if there is a distinct separation between the two fields.

The discourse in both documents presents sporadic reference to theoretical grounding, and the notion of praxis, as described in Prof Kenneth Wain’s words quoted above, does not come across clearly. This may reinforce the erroneous, but

widespread, public perception that teaching is largely skills based and that it may not require an array of critical faculties in order to cognise that it is, ultimately, a social and political endeavour. While it is inevitable, and understandable, that aspects of a technocratic approach weave their way into official documentation, there is much at stake if schools start singing to the tune of industry, unquestioningly and unassumingly.

The masterisation of the teaching profession, brought about through the introduction of the Master in Teaching & Learning (MTL) as agreed by all stakeholders in 2014, is based on a model wherein the cyclical nature of praxis is central. During discussions leading to this, evidenced in the documentation produced (reference to which is included in Sultana, Gellel & Caruana, 2019) the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta invested a great deal of energy to reform its teacher education course and to bring it in line with some of the most successful programmes internationally, taking into account, for instance, the characteristics identified by Darling-Hammond (2013).

My main critique, in this paper, is not towards the education documents per sé but towards the fact that the current context, and the discourse linked to it, is sidelining theories in educational practice which are running the risk of becoming the proverbial 'bridge too far', thereby undermining quality in the teaching profession.

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Bio-note

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