MELITA THEOLOGICA
Journal of the Faculty of Theology
University of Malta
67/1 (2017): 77-99

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Mercy in the Maltese Educational System: Education Practices to Foster Respect for Diversity Towards the Migrant Population

Introduction

The growing diversity of learners in Maltese schools presents new challenges to policy-makers and practitioners. Schools and teachers often find themselves at odds when trying to respond to the increasingly diverse needs of the student population within schools. Over the past decade Malta made the shift from a country of emigration to a country of immigration. This trend is represented in Maltese schools, as the student population becomes increasingly heterogeneous. While this new reality is more pronounced in certain areas, all colleges[2] have a representation of non-Maltese students, with Maria Regina College having the highest representation with a total of 1,134 students (819 at primary level, 95 in middle school and 220 in secondary school) and Saint Nicholas College having the lowest number, with a total population of eighty one migrant students (fifty-nine in the primary, eleven in middle school and eleven in the secondary school).[3] Research from different European countries

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[2] Maltese schools are organized into a college network that is formed of ten colleges. Each college is composed of a number of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools.

[3] These statistics were confirmed with the respective college principals in March 2017.

and other countries around the world hosting migrant populations show that on average, students from migrant backgrounds are significantly underperforming in relation to their peers.[4] Malta is no exception.

This reality brings forth the urgent need for schools to develop strategies that help migrant learners integrate successfully within the school community, while assisting the rest of the student and teaching community to develop values and attitudes that underline the value openness and learning from diversity.[5] Schools can be the places where citizens and migrants learn how to live together without feeling excluded because of their ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and the colour of their skin.

Schools are places where the fear of the stranger and the anxiety that results from it can be deflated. The school can be a place where the "other" can be deciphered and understood; it is a place where, living, sharing, collaborative productivity and realisation of potential can also be learnt. This would allow school communities to go beyond tolerance (to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour) and to accept and recognize the richness of the "strange" and the "different," and establish a genuine understanding of the "other" through the use of reason. Such environments nurture empathy[6] - by nurturing compassion and feeling for the sufferings of others. The "other" comes to be seen as an object of love and mercy, of care and hospitality.

Within this argument mercy is seen as a key component of dealing with the need of seeing the "stranger" as an opportunity of reaching out to fellow human beings. This "reaching out" gives one the possibility of giving the "other" the entitlement to live within a community. Notwithstanding the differences, we share a common humanity, and therefore we can live together and enrich one another. Within this scenario, difference turns out to be a tool for educability.

This article presents ethical and philosophical traditions that may underpin the virtue of mercy in the context of immigration with particular emphasis

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[4] Vicki Donlevy, Anja Meierkord and Aaron Rajania, *Study on the Diversity within the Teaching Profession with Particular Focus on Migrant and/or Minority Background: Final Report* (Brussels: European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture and ECORYS, 2016), 15.

[5] Barry van Driel, Merike Darmody and Jennifer Kerzil, *Education Policies and Practices to Foster Tolerance, Respect for Diversity and Civic Responsibility in Children and Young People in the EU* (Luxembourg: European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture and the Public Policy and Management Institute, 2016), 71.

[6] Lou Agosta, "The Development of Sympathy in Hume's Thinking: From a 'Delicacy of Sympathy' [i.e., Empathy] to a Taste," accessed March 21, 2017, https://empathyinthecontextofphilosophy.com/2009/11/16/the-development-of-sympathyin-in-humes-thinking-from-a-delicacy-of-sympathy-i-e-empathy-to-a-taste/

on the education of migrant learners. This will be followed by a description of the local educational scenario in relation to the migrant student population in Maltese schools. Finally, the article will present proposals for education policy and schools to effectively grow into inclusive environments that have as their main objective the support of all learners in order to succeed. These suggestions would embody and reflect in concrete contexts and situations the theological virtue of mercy as it is understood and characterized in the initial sections of this paper.

Citizenship and the Migrant "Other"

The discussion so far has been based on the distinction between the citizen and the migrant, and this in itself requires critical reflection. Any discussion of migrants and rights and obligations relating to them must necessarily interrogate notions like citizenship, the nation state, and democracy. The sovereign nation state delineates its border with other states; it also establishes borders between citizens and non-citizens: those who belong, and those who do not. As such, the presence of the migrant embodies the "other," reinforcing the social construction of the nation state. Whilst citizenship does not ensure equality (gendered, racialized and class divides are always present), the legal aspect of citizenship, that which ensures the "right to rights," is intrinsically exlusionary, regulating who belongs to this bounded political community and who does not. As such, as Hannah Arendt[7] has argued, the nation state cannot deliver the principles on which it was premised, namely equality, solidarity and liberty, while "laws that are not equal for all revert to rights and privileges, something contradictory to the very nature of nation-states."

Citizenship then has always been a contested notion. Yet, major complexities have come to the fore in view of the intensification of migration within a globalized world. The images we have all been exposed to over the past months, within (the so called) Fortress Europe, with the reinforcement (both metaphorical and physical) of borders in view of the "refugee crisis," highlight this point. Access to rights and justice, if nothing else, the basic right to dignity, is quite literally at the mercy of the democratically elected leaders of the nation states. Such a reality also raises important questions as to how citizenship is taught within the school curriculum. If, as Claudia Ruitenberg[8] has argued, citizenship education must

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[7] Hannah, Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* new ed. (Orlanda FL: Harcourt Inc., 1968), 290.

[8] Claudia W. Ruitenberg, "The Practice of Equality: A Critical Understanding of Democratic Citizenship Education," *Democracy & Education* 23, no.1 (2015): 5.

stress equality, then citizenship education must shift away from the preparation of citizenship as the acquisition of identity (with the onus on the personal and the social), towards citizenship education as "fostering commitment to equality." This would require placing the political role of the citizen at the core, and citizenship as the political, democratic role of holding the state accountable. In this regard, the classroom can become the space where all students can engage in democratic and political processes, and use their voice to engage in action geared towards demanding equality and social justice.

Certainly, the school is no utopia. It tends to be defined by and to reproduce inequalities. Yet, the possibilities for transformation towards social justice cannot be ignored. If we acknowledge that all education is political, then the possibilities exist to disrupt the hegemony of citizenship and the nation state, as they exist today - to "democratize democracy."[9] Such an approach may be aligned with the words of Pope Francis, if true mercy is to demand justice, citizenship education can create the political space to demand transformation. Humanitarian aid, and services or benefits accorded to migrants should remain, even if not legally justified. The virtue of mercy is important in this regard.

Understanding Mercy

In the history of Western thought, Mercy has been characterized in two ways. A tradition, going back to Seneca and stretching to modern writers like Martha Nussbaum relates mercy to crime, punishment and retribution. In this tradition, Mercy is "the inclination of the mind towards leniency in exacting punishment."[10]

Mercy has also been considered as a species of love, and along this line, it is not considered necessarily in relation to retributive justice. Indeed, mercy related to punishment might be considered as just one species of mercy. According to Aquinas,[11] mercy is a response to the suffering of others, and is manifested in the attempt to alleviate that suffering. Mercy involves a "passive aspect," wherein one is affectively influenced by the needs or suffering of others, and an "active aspect" where, if possible, one actively seeks to remove the source of misery.[12] It is a virtue in the Greek sense of the term; an *arete* ' (skill) one needs to rationally develop

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[9] Etienne, Balibar, "Historical Dilemmas of Democracy and their Contemporary Relevance for Citizenship," *Rethinking Marxism* 20, no.4 (2008): 522.

[10] Benjamin, S. Yost, "Responsibility and Revision: A Levinasian Argument for the Abolition of Capital Punishment," *Continental Philosophy Review* 44, no.1 (2011): 54.

[11] *STh* II-II 30.

[12] Luigi, Sartori, "Misericordia," in *Enciclopedia Filosofica*, 2nd ed. (Venezia: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1975), 618.

and nurture. In concrete situations it may entail various features: adopting a particular attitude, performing acts of benevolence and/or forgiveness or showing kindness, depending on the case in question. It is in this second sense that Pope Francis understands mercy. In what follows we shall make a critique of the concept of this characterization of mercy; i.e. we will analyse the limits and consider the possibilities of the concept. We shall consider mercy in relation to a group of individuals – migrants - who come to Europe in general and Malta in particular.

Should one focus on Malta, the group of people who are classified as "migrants": "persons who come to our country and end up on a relatively long-term residence," is varied and needs to be specifically defined. Migrants arrive in Malta in various ways, from different continents, for different purposes, have different legal statuses, come from different socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds, have different abilities and levels of education, and have different needs. These differences need always to be taken into consideration and the temptation to consider migrants as a homogenous whole is to be resisted.

The Limits

Mercy is a virtue that may be manifested at different levels. It may be manifested at an individual level, when someone adopts a merciful attitude and/or carries out acts of mercy in relation to another or to a group of individuals who stand in some need. It may also be manifested at a collective level, when a group of individuals shows mercy towards another group or towards a particular individual.

Mercy may involve certain negative features, especially in relation to the educational and political spheres that are our main concern. It may seem inimical to the existence and coming into being of political, cultural and economic structures based on justice and rights. For instance, if a group which, as often happens in these cases, is vaguely characterized as "European" or "Maltese," provides some educational service/s to another group (for example "migrants") out of mercy, the latter would apparently not have a claim to the service provided. At any time, the service in question may be withdrawn, without the latter party being in a position to appeal, except to the former group's good will. Mercy may also abet a culture of dependence and inequality. If we consider once again the scenario of migrants receiving some service, this scenario of mercy renders these migrants as dependent on the other group providing the service in question. Moreover, if Maltese or Europeans enjoy the services in question as a matter of right, whereas non-European migrants receive the service in question as a form of concession (which can be withdrawn at any time), an inequality between the two groups would be sustained.

Another example of such limits may involve the legal domain. Speaking of mercy in relation to a particular set of migrants, such as, those who did not enter Malta in a regular manner may contribute to the (incorrect) assumption that these migrants are fundamentally legal trespassers and hence, as a matter of law, ought not to enjoy the rights and freedoms that an ordinary law abiding person ought to enjoy. If some benefit is accorded to them, it is accorded despite their dubious legal status. Acts of mercy with migrants may therefore actually reinforce the popular myth that some (racialised) migrants are illegal[13] or irregular, rather than rights-holders and primarily victims (economic, political or both) of the wrong doings of others.

Possibilities

Mercy however may play a positive role in a number of respects. If we were to suppose that structures concerning rights and justice regarding individuals or groups do not exist, or that they exist but not in an acceptable or humane manner, the virtue of mercy may move people to attempt to change and amend the structures in question. This is indeed in line with how Pope Francis understands the role of mercy. In his address to the Jesuit Refugee Services the Pontiff states that "true mercy, the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice; it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer ... It asks us, the Church, us, the City of Rome, it asks the institutions - to ensure that no one ever again stands in need of a soup kitchen, of makeshift lodgings, of a service of legal assistance in order to have his legitimate right to live and to work, to be fully a person, recognized."[14] In this sense being merciful is motivated by the aim that those in need do not persist in depending on others. This kind of mercy then, seeks to empower those who are in need rather than to confirm them to dependency.

Moreover, any characterization of rights or setting up of a just political, economic or educational arrangement will, by definition, involve borders and lines. Situations will obviously develop that fall outside these lines and borders;

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[13] The belief that asylum seekers are residing in Malta illegally is a myth. The term "illegal immigrant" is widely used in political and popular discourse; however, every human being has the right to seek asylum in another country, as per the 1951 Geneva Convention. An asylum seeker is a person who has entered a legal process of refugee status determination. In Malta, for example, the vast majority of asylum seekers are granted some form of international protection, and as such they are residing legally.

[14] "Address of the Holy Father Francis during his Visit to the 'Astalli Centre' Jesuit Refugee Service in Rome, 2013," accessed May 15, 2017, w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130910_centro-astalli.html.

situations that are not covered by the provision of rights or services that these entail. This is especially so in relation to vulnerable groups. While equality is an ideal, one should not naively ignore that different people come from different backgrounds, some of which are privileged/disadvantaged in relation to others. This is especially so in education and in relation to migrants, particularly those who hail from backgrounds characterized by suffering, war or denial. These circumstances should not be denied in the name of some fictitious concept of equality; fallaciously assuming or pretending that students come from similar backgrounds, or that their education will automatically involve a level playing field. Not merely will such students have particular needs that require specific provisions, but the cases where their needs will fall outside established parameters are likely to be more numerous in relation to students who hail from backgrounds that are more mainstream.

In this regard we would also like to develop an insight from the Jewish-Lithuanian-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas characterizes mercy in the first sense mentioned above, i.e. in relation to retributive justice.[15] Yet, there are insights in his work that may be adopted even in relation to how mercy is being understood here. Levinas maintains that comprising all our obligations and provision of needs entirely within legal and political structures is not merely impossible, but also undesirable. In his words, "politics left to itself bears tyranny within itself; it deforms the 'I' and the 'other' who have given rise to it for it judges them according to universal rules and thus in absentia."[16] Universal provisions and stipulations cannot capture the specific requirements of the "other," which demands an encounter and an annunciation. One owes an obligation to the "other," irrespective of boundaries and margins; a being responsible for the "other," even for aspects we normally do not think ourselves responsible for. Developing the virtue of mercy as is being understood here may help in this regard.

Mercy and Education

The role of mercy may also seem controversial in that it apparently conflicts with political ideals that conceive education as something provided as a matter of entitlement, in terms of a basic human right, or as a matter of social justice. In Malta, education has been traditionally envisaged as an entitlement. This entitlement is grounded in the notions of justice, of availability of educational

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[15] Yost, "Responsibility and Revision," 43.

[16] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An essay on Exteriority* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), 300.

opportunities, of inclusivity, and of taking into account the different and varying needs of students to ensure that their educational experiences are fruitful and successful. Should then education be about granting children that to which they are entitled? Or does entitlement need to be supplemented by acts of mercy? If education is a right, how can one speak of mercy in relation to education? If mercy is part of the equation, this becomes particularly problematic, if not outrightly dangerous, with regards to migrant children, as their education is being literally left at the mercy of responsible authorities.

Despite these justified worries, one may again argue that, just as justice and stipulated rights may not tell the whole story in society in general, so also with regards to education, the provision of the latter cannot be simply construed as a matter of statutory entitlement. Even with regards to education, just as much as mercy demands justice, justice cannot be brought about without mercy, without a compassionate understanding of the needs, problems and suffering of others.

Mercy is essential to our reflection on how educational justice can be actualized and how the entitlement of educational provision for migrants is guaranteed. Educational provision on its own cannot rely solely on an expression of justice at institutional and administrative levels. To be just, educators need to be conscious of the rights of children, understand different notions of social justice, and gain knowledge on how to bring these concretely into being in schools. Being just in education goes beyond the simple following of established laws, and adherence to rules and practices that ensure entitlement. Once again, this would involve borders, entitlement and non-entitlement. Education is rather an encounter of people, which derives its meaning from the relations that are established among them. Educational practices where the people remain detached from each other are neither usually fruitful nor effective in spite of being informed by principles of justice. Sensitivity to people's different needs and conditions is essential. Mercy kindles the spirit within which educational entitlement is given. It is the merciful giving of educators that guarantees quality of the educational entitlement that students have.

Consider for example a school whose mission is to ensure just education. It lays down rules and practices that insist on the distribution of resources and time, establishes a code of practice that highlights respect for all differences as well as ensures freedom of expression and participation of vulnerable and marginalized children and their families. Without the merciful actions of educators who recognize their responsibility in encountering their students as unique individuals, this school would become merely a vehicle of delivery of goods and services that arise out of a detached obligation to others.

Mercy therefore necessitates of schools to take into account the students' life histories and the particular conditions and contexts in which migrant students live. Being merciful is an important aspect in education in that it does not reduce the latter to an impersonal delivery to what people are entitled to. Education depends very much on the educators' relation with others, their response to them, and the way they act to bring about what is publicly considered to be just.

Migrant Students' Cultural Capital

An evaluation of a migrant student's educational experience necessitates an evaluation of the educational structures that provide learning opportunities for these students. Apart from the resources related to economic and financial capital which adversely affect minority students in the educational process, one should also consider the systematic deficiencies of the school system with regards to minority students.[17] Research on migrant students in schools suggests that schools do not accommodate the specific needs of migrant students and that cultural barriers lead migrant students to be stereotyped.[18] This arises through a lack of understanding, knowledge of and respect for migrant students, their culture and their transitory lifestyle. Even in cases where one does not witness outright discrimination or racist remarks, migrant students may still be negatively labelled or stereotyped. While some teachers may act compassionately towards migrant students, others do not.

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[17] Richard L. Sparks and Leonore G. Ganschow, "Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Foreign Language Academic Skills and Affective Characteristics," *The Journal of Educational Research* 89, no.3 (1996): 183; Janin Brandenburg, et al., "Over-Identification of Learning Disorders among Language-Minority Students: Implications for the Standardization of School Achievement Tests," *Journal for Educational Research Online* 6 (2016): 60; Elena Makarova and Dina Birman, "Minority Students' Psychological Adjustment in the School Context: An Integrative Review of Qualitative Research on Acculturation," *Intercultural Education* 27, no.1 (2016): 3.

[18] Juan Cardenas, "An Educational Plan for the Denver Public Schools," accessed May 15, 2017, http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED096046.pdf; Blandina Cardenas, "The Theory of Incompatabilities: A Conceptual Framework for Responding to the Educational Needs of Mexican American Children," accessed May 15, 2017, http://eric.ed.gov/?q=theory+of+incompatabilities+cardenas&id=ED174383; Lindsey, Tricia, "First Refugee and Migrant Simulation Aims to Dismantle Stigma, Stereotypes," accessed May 15, 2017,http://search.proquest.com.ejournals.um.edu.mt/docreview/1782317059?accountid=27934; Anne K. Reitz, Jens B. Asendorpf and Frosso Motti-Stefanidi, "When do Immigrant Adolescents Feel Personally Discriminated Against? Longitudinal Effects of Peer Preference," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 39, no.3 (2015): 198.

The characteristics of migrant students may be incompatible with the education system they find themselves in, and lead to cultural and educational barriers:

- the barriers related to migrant students' and parents' cultural capital, especially involving language and communication
- the barriers referring to migrant families' parenting approach with regards to education, especially students' and parents' level of knowledge of the school system, their attitude towards teachers and education, and their level and kind of involvement with the school system.[19]

Pierre Bourdieu's theory is helpful in this regard. He differentiates between three different types of capital, which may affect social mobility, and life chances:

- economic or financial capital, such as parental income, wealth, and assets. Economic capital would allow a family to buy the time and resources needed to bolster its cultural and social capital, so that in this way, the three forms of capital are profoundly interrelated;
- cultural capital, including language proficiency and the ability to assimilate cultural objects, such as music and art; and
- social capital, the networks and social ties that may prove useful (or harmful) in furthering students' academic and social success.[20]

The focus on these different types of capital frames our argument about the way migrant students may be disadvantaged. A case in point is the way parents of different students approach and interact with schools and teachers. While the parents of a good number of Maltese students (especially those who do not have cultural and social deficit) may feel a sense of entitlement when dealing with teachers, those of some migrant students - when migration intersects with poverty, "race" and insecure legal status - are more likely to be deferential and outwardly accepting. While parents of Maltese students may act in an assertive manner, question teachers and intervene on behalf of themselves and their children[21] the parents of migrant students may not directly intervene with teachers in the education process on their children's behalf. Furthermore, because of language difficulties they may experience, migrant students do not voice their concerns

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[19] Janese L. Free, Katrin Kriz and Jenny Konecnik, "Harvesting Hardships: Educators' Views on the Challenges of Migrant Students and their Consequences on Education," *Children and Youth Services Review* 47, no.3 (2014): 191.

[20] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John H. Richardson (West Port, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 241-258; Elliot B. Weininger, "Pierre Bourdieu on Social Class and Symbolic Violence," in *Approaches to Class Analysis*, ed. E.O. Wright (Cambridge: Cambrdige University Press, 2005), 116-165.

[21] Annette Lareau, "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Child-Rearing in Black Families and White Families," *American Sociological Review* 67, no.5 (2005): 759.

and do not ask questions - they may not know how, or may not feel empowered enough to do so.

Legal Provisions

Like most countries, Malta extends the right to compulsory education to all children, irrespective of their country of origin as long as they have a legal status (regulation 3 of Subsidiary Legislation (*SL*) 217.05) or fall under the stipulations of the *Migrant Workers (Child Education) Regulations: Legal Notice 259/2002 SL 327.220,* or the *Refugee Act Chap. 420*. Children coming from other EU member states and children of Third Country Nationals (TCNs) that fall under the above mentioned regulations are entitled to free State education. The Refugee Act also extends the right for "access to State education and training" to applicants for international protection. The Migrant Worker (Child Education) subsidiary legislation extends the duty of the State to take appropriate measures to ensure that "free tuition is given to children of migrant workers ... in particular the teaching, as adapted to the specific needs of such children, of any of the official languages of Malta"; and "within reasonable limits" to promote "the teaching of both mother tongue and the culture of the country of origin of such children in cooperation with such country of origin."

Maltese authorities are legally obliged to provide access to all students regardless of status, as long as these can provide a permanent address in order to be registered.[22] In the Maltese context, difficulties for non-EU nationals start once they reach non-compulsory age. On moving from secondary to post-secondary education, the law is not clear, and as the law stands at present, non-EU nationals are asked to pay for continuing their education from this level of education onwards. This situation is undoubtedly causing a lot of anxiety to students - and their parents - who would like to continue their education but have no financial means to do so. This situation is also creating a gap that would have a long-term effect on the employment prospects of migrants.

This ambiguity needs to be rectified if we are truly seeking to ensure that future migrant adults are well equipped to contribute to society and be provided with the skills required for them to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. It is in such situations, where the legal framework is still not in place, that the role of merciful action needs to intervene. Civil society has to ensure that obstacles for the "poor" and the underprivileged are resolved both for the immediate - for those that are caught in this legal limbo - and for a more sustainable future.

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[22] Families wanting to register their children in a school need to have a permanent address. This measure is restraining some 200 school-age immigrant children from attending school.

Teachers' Judgements

The provisions of *SL* 327.220 also stipulates that all necessary measures should be taken "for the adequate training of teachers providing tuition to the children of migrant workers." Such professional preparation is crucial since teachers' influence and judgements can have a determining effect on learners. Teachers' judgements of students' achievement can influence students' educational experience.[23] Misjudgement of students has its roots in the theoretical developments of the self-fulfilling prophecy:[24]

- teachers show differential expectations regarding students' academic achievements
- teachers treat students in different ways
- differential treatment influences students' motivation and emotions
- these changes reinforce teachers' expectations
- a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when these changes are reflected in students' achievement.

Teachers' misjudgement and students' motivation are mutually related. The particular characteristics of different sets of students may influence the teacher's judgements about these students, which judgements may determine how teachers relate to these students.[25] This may often be the case with migrant students who are a minority in a classroom, and whose language barrier may deter them, at least temporarily, from performing well and achieving at par with their peers. Language is an educational barrier for migrant students, especially if their families/parents have trouble communicating with educators, and educators have trouble communicating with them. Skills in a classroom's working language/s are related to course grades and students may underperform if they have consistent difficulties in communicating or understanding the language of instruction within the classroom. Migrant students may also find difficulties in completing their homework because of their and their parents' language barrier. They may get held back as a result of their level of language proficiency, which may lead them to feel demotivated and discouraged. As a result, migrant students may even distance themselves from learning and school entirely.

Because of the language difficulties that they encounter in the classroom, migrant students are likely to be judged as poor spellers, or as reluctant towards reading; or are sent to complementary and remedial classes. It is hence important

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[23] Zhu Mingjing and Detlef Urhahne, "Teachers' Judgements of Students' Foreign-Language Achievement," *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 30, no.1 (2015): 24.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

that schools, and teachers, identify migrant students' situational, motivational and emotional characteristics that can be conducive to future achievement deficits. Once teachers recognize that their judgements may affect their perceptions of students' motivational characteristics and their perceptions of students' abilities, they are likely to respond more supportively and positively than teachers who believe that such students lack motivation, have a poor attitude, or simply cannot perform well and register progress. Similarly, once teachers are aware of the students' difficulties with language and respond to them adequately, they would be in a better position to understand why these students are encountering problems in their classroom. Under such circumstances, teachers may need to make curricular adaptations which would involve designing classroom instruction to meet the needs of a population with different language skills. When this is not possible or feasible, teachers may need to refer these students to classes where they can receive support for their language learning difficulties.

Measures for the Integration of Migrant Children

It is here pertinent to present possible measures that can be taken in order to ensure an equitable educational provision to migrant children in harmony with the basic principles of inclusion. All measures discussed in this paper have been to a greater or lesser extent, implemented in different European countries. Various European reports have discussed the measures taken by different member states in their efforts to integrate migrant children in schools. What will be discussed here are practices and measures that support the educational community to meet the educational needs of the migrant population. The discussion will also include different approaches that can be taken to position the intercultural approach within our national curriculum, and the support and training to teachers that this would require in order to enable them to deal with issues raised within such a reality.

These measures should not be understood along the provider-beneficiary model; something that would suggest the banking concept of education, which is ultimately debilitating to the beneficiaries and not consistent with the understanding of mercy as outlined in the first part of this article. Unfortunately, this is a drawback of many provisions and measures that are provided to migrants and other groups. The aim of the measures is not merely to provide an entitlement, but to empower migrant children, parents, schools and communities at large to become critical and reflective agents of change. These social, political and empowerment ideals are fundamental benchmarks in relation to which the success of the measures being suggested ought to be assessed. The benefits of these measures are also far-reaching, and should not be evaluated exclusively in relation to schools and or on a short-term basis.

Orientation Measures for Migrant Parents

Supporting migrant parents, especially those who lack proficiency in the language of the host country is needed to help boost their involvement in the education of their children.[26] This would also empower them as stakeholders within the context of school; giving them greater access to school life and possibly to decision-making. Parental involvement is also known to be a key factor in the academic success of children.[27] The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory[28] in their report *A New Wave of Evidence* go even further and conclude that, "when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more." They also concluded that children whose parents involve themselves in the life of the school, regardless of their income or background, were more likely to do better academically, have regular attendance, have better social skills and tend to move on to post-secondary education. The report insists that a way for addressing the achievement gap could very well be for schools to continue to support and encourage the involvement of parents at school. Such parental involvement is known to benefit also the "school to improve and innovate, also in their intercultural policies."[29] Different colleges and schools can implement different measures in order to include parents of migrant students in school.

A first step towards effective parental involvement is for schools to ensure that important documentation is made accessible to all parents. A number of schools around Europe have made such documentation available in various languages. It would therefore be a good measure for schools to have basic documentation about the Maltese educational system and other school policies translated in various languages. Such translations can be made through the involvement of the parents themselves who are conversant with target languages and other community resources such as migrant organizations and embassies. Such services could also be centralized either at a college level or as one of the services

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[26] Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI), *Study on Educational Support for Newly Arrived Migrant Children: Final Report* (Luxembourg: European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2013): 113.

[27] *Education and Migration: Strategies for Integrating Migrant Children in European Schools and Societies: A Synthesis of Research Findings for Policy-Makers* (Brussels: European Commission and the Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training [NESSE], 2008): 53.

[28] Ann T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Lab., 2002), 7.

[29] PPMI, *Study on Educational Support for Newly Arrived Migrant Children,* 102.

offered by the newly established Unit for Migrant Learners at the Ministry for Education and Employment.

Parents of migrant children wanting to register their children, or already having children in Maltese schools could also be invited to meetings in which they are given useful information on procedures, transition choices, support services that they can avail themselves of, and other topics of particular interest to migrant parents. Such meetings may also require the services of interpreters and can either be organized specifically for migrant parents or together with other parents who in some cases can offer interpreting services themselves.

In order to continue supporting migrant parents and to help cater for the ongoing mediation and communication with these parents, a number of European countries reported that they were offering additional resource persons to schools, such as cultural mediators and home-school liaison officers. Understanding and catering for cultural differences can help schools involve migrant parents in their children's school life. Such services would also benefit teachers to adapt communication methods to reach out to parents to help support migrant children.

Outreach should be made to migrant parents and their communities and to NGOs working with migrants, so that these bring additional resources to the schools. Different European countries have employed such an approach to mentor and support students in mother tongue instruction through after-school programmes. This has increased the performance and self-confidence at school of disadvantaged migrant students. Such collaboration with migrant communities and NGOs working with migrant communities has boosted networking and a sharing of experiences.[30]

Ensuring Inclusive Settings - Reversal of Selection Policies

Most research suggests that student selection is inadvisable. Many international studies have shown that the earlier the tracking starts, the greater would be the chances of inequalities.[31] Studies also show that where early selection is adopted,

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[30] Ibid., 107.

[31] Gary N. Marks, "Cross-National Differences and Accounting for Social Class Inequalities in Education," International Sociology 20, no.4 (2005): 485; Giorgio Brunello and Daniele Checchi, "Does School Tracking Affect Inequality of Ppportunity? New International Evidence," Economic Policy 22, no.52 (2007): 784-785; Daniel Horn, "Age of Selection Counts: A Cross-Country Analysis of Educational Institutions," Educational Research and Evaluation 15, no.4 (2009): 344; Van Driel, Darmody and Kerzil, Education Policies and Practices to Foster Tolernce, Respect for Diversity and Civic Responsibility in Children, 15; Herman G. Van de Werfhorst and Jonathan J.B. Mijs, "Achievement Inequality and the Institutional Structure of

migrant students may more often be assigned to lower bands with the result that schools have lower academic expectations of such students. Such low expectations have a major influence on student achievement.[32]

The 2008 report of the Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training (NESSE), compiled for the European Commission Directorate-General for Education & Culture, quotes a number of studies that show that late selection of students to different tracks (ability grouping) offer better educational opportunities for disadvantaged children. The report makes reference, among others, to a comprehensive study by Schofield (2006)[33] which concludes that "considerable evidence exists [to show] that tracking and related kinds of ability grouping with curricular differentiation, ... often contribute to the achievement gap between initially lower- and initially higher-achieving students, by undermining the academic achievement of the former group." Schofield explains, "Because a disproportionate number of students from migrant backgrounds are in the former group for various reasons, such forms of ability grouping are likely to increase the achievement gap between migrants and others." The NESSE report goes on to emphasize that "selective systems contribute to increasing the problems of minority children and do little to support them"; disabling rather than empowering these children, and producing negative effects that do not concern simply academic achievement but extend beyond the school.[34]

These studies and others evidently show that selection is not the way we should be tackling the challenges faced by the increase of diversity within Maltese classrooms. The banding system recently introduced in primary schools and the fine-setting system in secondary schools need to be reversed and replaced with inclusive pedagogies that support all students as learners. Farley[35] in his comprehensive review of studies on the influence of peers on academic achievement concludes that, when exposed to classmates with higher educational

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Educational Systems: A Comparative Perspective," Annual Review of Sociology 36 (2010): 408.

[32] John Hattie, "The Applicability of Visible Learning to Higher Education," *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology* 1, no.1 (2015): 87; Ross Miller, "Greater Expectations to Improve Student Learning: National Panel," accessed March 16, 2017, http://oldcourtmiddle.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/68214430/Greater%20Expectations%20to%20Improve%20Student%20Learning.pdf.

[33] Janet W. Schofield, *Migration Background, Minority-Group Membership and Academic Achievement: Research Evidence from Social, Educational and Developmental Psychology* (Berlin: Arbeitsstelle Interkulturelle Konflikte und Gesellschaftliche Integration, 2006), 95.

[34] Heckmann, *Education and Migration: Strategies for Integrating Migrant Children in European Schools*, 21.

[35] As cited in ibid., 27.

aspirations, minority children increase their own, have higher expectations, improve academic achievement and at the end of their compulsory schooling they are more likely to attend college and get better jobs after graduation. Farley[36] concludes that, "the great majority of studies show that the achievement of majority group and/or middle class students does not decrease" in integrated schools. Obviously this is only true as long as the right conditions are in place.

Quality Schools with Quality Teaching

Individual schools and classrooms can make a marked difference in supporting learners to succeed. John Hattie[37] in his meta-analysis of hundreds of studies showed that teachers could make a significant difference (30% variance) in the learning process of students. He shows that teachers who work with others to seek evidence of their impact on students, who inform students early what success looks like, who provide appropriate levels of challenge and feedback, and who have aligned their claims about success, assessment and teaching, would be powerful contributors of learning.

Previous studies[38] list a number of characteristics that make up a good school and benefit all students. Among these characteristics one finds a shared pedagogical concept and good cooperation among teaching staff; high quality school management and leadership; high expectations of teachers towards students coupled with readiness to give support; good quality teaching; ensuring effective learning time (fewer hours of teaching lost); and involvement of parents in school life. The combination of these characteristics and others ensure good quality education for the underprivileged and migrant children within an inclusive environment. This combination of characteristics however, is also beneficial to students, teachers and members of the community who are neither underprivileged nor migrants, and helps to broaden their perspectives and provide a realistic scenario of the diversity one finds in society at large.

Language Support Policies

Lorenzo Milani used to emphasize mastery of the "word"; of language and of languages, as a key feature of his pedagogic and liberatory project. Learning a

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[36] Ibid., 527.

[37] John Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analysis Relating to Achievement* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 31-35; Hattie, "The Applicability of Visible Learning to Higher Education," 87.

[38] As cited in Heckmann, *Education and Migration: Strategies for Integrating Migrant Children in European Schools,* 22-23.

language empowers the learner and helps create spaces where critical and human encounters can take place.

In relation to schooling a key competency crucial to academic success is proficiency in the language of instruction (in the case of Malta, both English and Maltese). Glory Gatwiri,[39] insists that "language proficiency may have a profound effect on an individual's ability to learn and develop, due to its key role in the transmission of information and regulation of cognitive processes."

This type of support in European countries falls under one of the following categories or models, the integrated model, viz. (support given within an inclusive classroom), or a separate model (support given to migrant children grouped together following a special language programme different from that given to native students). Both models are delivered within a mainstream setting.

Once an adequate initial assessment of language skills has been conducted, schools that apply the integrated model allocate migrant children to mainstream classes to follow the regular age-appropriate curriculum with the rest of the class. In such arrangement children are given linguistic support on an individual basis during normal school hours within an inclusive setting. Some European countries organize "extra-curricular" language tuition in which pupils are given lessons outside regular school hours, to further support and accelerate language acquisition.

Those countries adopting the second model often do so alongside the integrated model, and migrant students are offered support (mainly linguistic support) outside the regular classroom but within the same school premises. This practice is either done for a transitional period for some hours during the week (joining the regular class for the rest of the time), or for longer periods of time where they spend one or several years in a special class. This second model is the one preferred by Maltese schools. Up to 2016 migrant students used to be taken to separate premises and only "upon completion of an induction process, [would] the learner be registered in the mainstream, in the school of the locality of residence."[40] As from this scholastic year (2016-2017) the policy has changed slightly; children arriving at different times of the year are given a language support programme for a whole scholastic year, in most cases within a mainstream premises thus giving these children the possibility of sharing the same break time with their Maltese peers.

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[39] Glory Gatwiri, "The Influence of Language Difficulties on the Wellbeing of International Students: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis," *Inquiries Journal* 7, no.5 (2015): 38, http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1042 .

[40] Malta. Ministry for Education and Employment, *Country Report (Malta) - Education* (Floriana: MEDE, 2015), 52.

Notwithstanding the general policies and practice, schools in Malta are free to take initiatives and make their own arrangements. A case in point is the experience of a particular secondary school in Malta that has designed its own distinctive language programme within mainstream curriculum. Here one finds the two models implemented in parallel. This is how one of the teachers explained what is happening:

> Up to last year students arriving during the year, who had neither English nor Maltese proficiency, used to be sent for the induction course offered at a centre close to the school locality but not within the school premises. Here they used to be given basic English language lessons, and some Maltese lessons, to enable them to survive in mainstream once they return. Notwithstanding the valuable work carried out by the teachers at these centres, after six weeks these students used to return with some basic English proficiency, but in terms of their integration they used to have a very hard time.
>
> In our school we have long since taught Maltese as an additional or foreign language - here we provide every year-group different options, including one for students learning Maltese as a foreign or additional language. These lessons are given while the rest of the students are following their Maltese lessons. For the rest of the day they follow the regular timetable. These students would have the same number of lessons as their Maltese counterparts with the difference that they would follow a programme tailored on the Common European Framework (level A1) with the aim that after a few of years they can join the mainstream programme and eventually can sit for the SEC (Secondary Education Certification). The learning of Maltese will also help them in other academic subjects taught in Maltese. Unfortunately due to lack of teachers it is not always possible to make this programme available to all year-groups.
>
> During this scholastic year we have three types of programmes. Migrant students who arrive at different times of the year without basic proficiency in the English language join one of two induction courses (one targeting the first two years of secondary or middle school, and another targeting the final three years of compulsory education [3rd, 4th and 5th forms]). Both programmes run over a scholastic year and the focus is on English, Maltese, Mathematics and some other basic subjects. These migrant students are grouped together but remain in the same school. This allows us to move them to mainstream classes once we see that they have gained enough proficiency that allows them to follow the regular programme.
>
> Then there are those who follow a regular timetable since their English is of a good level, and they are just grouped to learn Maltese which is taught to them

> as an additional language. These students would follow the same timetable as the others who are following regular Maltese. They are assessed with an adapted paper that fits their particular programme.

The above case study is a good example of implementation of the two models (run in parallel) within the same school. Though one might have reservations on aspects of implementation, what is praiseworthy here is the school's commitment to respond to the varied needs of the migrant student community within the school timetable and premises.

Within the above two broad models one can find a wide range of measures that can be grouped under three categories or elements:

- Measures which are intended to compensate for language needs of migrant pupils whose mother tongue is not the language of instruction. Such programmes are usually based on "linguistic" immersion in which pupils are exposed to the target language and receive intensive tuition - individually or in small groups - during normal school hours.
- Measures that aim at supporting migrant students in other areas of the curriculum. Here the teacher is expected to collaborate with other resource staff to modify the mainstream curriculum and assessment to the competency level of the migrant child who remains in the classroom.
- Pupil-teacher ratio is reduced allowing more time for the class teacher to assist individual students in their natural environment.[41]

It is worth noting that notwithstanding the diversity of measures taken by different countries, all measures seek to be offered within a mainstream setting, and the language support given is based on a teaching approach to language as a "second or additional language."

The 2013 study on Educational support for newly arrived migrant children prepared by the Public Policy and Management Institute insists that such training should not be confined to language teachers but should be open to all teachers "so that teaching of academic subjects and language happen in a coordinated way, which can also help avoiding the delay of academic learning due to the low language proficiency."[42] This preparation should be introduced in both pre-service and in-service training.

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[41] Eurydice, *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe: Survey* (Brussels: Eurydice, 2004), 16.

[42] PPMI, *Study on Educational Support for Newly Arrived Migrant Children,* 95.

Mother Tongue Instruction

When children are offered opportunities to learn in their mother tongue they are more likely to succeed academically[43] and help develop self-confidence and self-esteem. A positive approach to multilingualism, and the appreciation of native languages of migrant students is crucial to help them excel in their education, and develop a positive and appreciative approach to diversity and identity among the larger community. These opportunities can take the form of: offering such native languages as modern foreign languages within the curriculum, using bilingual classroom assistants to support learners during subjects, provide team teaching with a mother tongue teacher and training teachers how to support their students in using their language competencies as a learning tool (Public Policy and Management Institute (PPMI).[44] The report also emphasizes the need to have a national language policy that takes a positive approach to migrant students and focus on their linguistic resources and potentials. Therefore together with the learning of the host country's language/s, migrant students should be provided, whenever possible, with the possibility to learn their parents' native language/s and in the early years of their education the possibility to promote learning through the native/home spoken language. It is to be noted that, "research increasingly shows that children's ability to learn a second or additional languages (e.g. a *lingua franca* and an international language) does not suffer when their mother tongue is the primary language of instruction throughout primary school"[45] and fluency and literacy in the mother tongue lay a cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning additional languages.

Other Support Policies

There are many policies that can be adopted that would help all learners, and not only migrant students. What follows are some of such policies that have been listed in a previous publication[46] and that would help support all students, in particular migrant students:

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[43] Kimmo Kosonen, "Education in Local Languages: Policy and Practice in Southeast Asia," in *First Languages First: Community-Based Literacy Programmes for Minority Language Contexts in Asia* (Bangkok: UNESCO Asia & Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, 2005), 5.

[44] PPMI, *Study on Educational Support for Newly Arrived Migrant Children,* 95.

[45] *Enhancing Learning of Children from Diverse Language Background: Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual or Multilingual Education in the Early Years,* ed. Jessica Ball (Paris: UNESCO, 2011), 6.

[46] Colin Calleja, Bernard Cauchi and Michael Grech, *Education and Ethnic Minorities in Malta* (Malta, Ministry of Education & Culture. Lifelong Learning Programme, 2010), 39-41.

- Ensuring continuous monitoring and evaluation of students' progress. Such a policy would ensure that students who are identified as underachieving are given the necessary assistance in time.
- Ensuring the provision of in-class prevention support programmes for under-achieving students and migrant students who might be facing difficulties. Such provision would help prevent performance gaps.
- Opening up second chance education programmes to migrant students, such as those mentioned in the National Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta (2014).
- Ensuring that the investment which government is making in Early Childhood Education is also made available to migrant students. Such childcare facilities and early childhood education should be given by well-trained and highly qualified educators prepared to deal with children coming from different cultural backgrounds.
- Textbooks that are provided for use in Maltese classrooms should reflect different ethnicities, cultures and beliefs. Such exposure would help all children appreciate the richness and opportunities that diversity brings with it.
- School calendars should also include important commemorations of major festivities pertaining to the different minorities.
- Set up after-school programmes that involve members of migrant communities, especially with regards to tasks that require cultural interpretation. The provision and access of these programmes in terms of time and logistics should be taken into consideration.
- Promote policies that would encourage and facilitate the process for young people of ethnic and cultural minority background to follow teaching careers. The experience of other countries shows that having teachers with a migrant or minority backgrounds has a positive influence on the achievement of migrant learners. Unfortunately, regulations that insist that all teachers who teach in Maltese schools should have an Ordinary Level in Maltese to be able to apply to join the teaching profession is a stumbling block for those migrants who have arrived here with a teaching qualification from their country of origin or who would like to pursue this profession locally.
- Develop opportunities that promote successful individuals within migrant communities as role models for everyone.
- Since secondary schools provide canteen services, these should provide for the dietary requirements of migrant children and of those who due to their religion or ethnicity would require special food requirements.

Such policies encourage respect and reflect acceptance within the school community.

Conclusion

Different countries have found different ways of integrating migrant students into the school system. Notwithstanding the variety of measures taken, most countries have ensured that the assistance provided is not exclusionary but given within the mainstream system.[47] Apart from the need to create a well-developed reception system through which migrant students and their families are introduced to the country's educational system, an initial assessment of these students' educational background is crucial. In a country like Malta, where resources are limited and all schools follow a National Curriculum Framework, a central reception centre should suffice to coordinate such services. Once the initial assessment has been completed students should be placed in mainstream schools so that children could interact with their Maltese peers. Such interaction favours the transition of these children and their integration within the school community.

The Report on the Educational Support for Newly Arrived Migrant Children commissioned by the European Commission[48] suggests the introduction of targeted dispersal policies. Such a policy would allow authorities to distribute children between schools by college or even better between colleges thus ensuring the proper distribution of migrant children across different geographic areas of the country. Such a measure (which of course offers its own challenges) would ensure the right mix of foreign and native language speakers, offering a greater opportunity to develop language skills through social interaction.

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[47] Eurydice, *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe,* 16.
[48] PPMI, *Study on Educational Support for Newly Arrived Migrant Children,* 95.

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