Preparing to Leap:

Learning from the experiences of Maltese female adolescents in their preparation for transition to Further Education and/or work

Katya De Giovanni

Department of Family Studies, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta.

katya.degiovanni@um.edu.mt

Introduction

A main element in the socialisation process of a society is education, and the more advanced the society, the more complex is its educational system (Cassar, 2009: 51). Maltese society has been planning, adjourning and restructuring its system of education so as to keep abreast of and promote the more contemporary social, economic and general needs of its members. Malta, according to Cassar (2009), has experienced educational development manifested through a consistent

increase in school buildings, development of curricula and evermore-intensive teacher training. The aim of upgrading standards serves to promote national interests within a forcefully active and dynamic globalised society.

The participants of the research have attended a government primary school and then sat their 11+ exam, in which they were successful. They were then placed in Sir Adrian Dingli Junior Lyceum for Girls. The interviewed girls managed to pass their 11+ exam but the trajectory in their secondary school might not have taken the same course. Chetcuti (2001) also points out to the impact that the differentiated paper system at the end of secondary school, created by the MATSEC board, has caused on students. She states that the differentiated system forces students to place themselves in a category and the development of their sense of identity is strongly linked to the outcome. Within such a context, this examination system becomes a powerful measure of self-worth resulting in the empowerment of some but in elimination of possibilities for others. Reay (2001:334) in fact points out that:

'It is not surprising that education for the working classes has traditionally been about

failure; about 'being found out'. And this is not just an English phenomenon.'

Methodological approach

This research was carried out between 2007 and 2010 among nine female adolescents aged 15 to 16 who were in their final year of compulsory schooling. Twenty-five in-depth interviews were carried out, three to each of the participants from the period before they sat for their Ordinary Level Examinations until three years in which they followed a course at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). Transcripts were analysed using Thematic Analysis where initial analyses of the first interviews served to modify interview questions which were asked later on in the study. Interviews were fully transcribed and coded and located within an interpretivist tradition because of the acknowledgement of 'multiple realities' (Zinkel, 1979). The students taking part in this study have a mind of their own and they interpret and talk about their own reality each of which is considered to be important and valid. The author's experiences and tacit knowledge of systems and phenomena will work together to round up the arguments for the study.

Fieldwork sites

There were two fieldwork sites. Sir Adrian Dingli Junior Lyceum for Girls and Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology. Both venues are run by the state.

Discussion and conclusion

The ways in which students are prepared, give an implicit message where MCAST and work seem to be portrayed as choices considered less favourable to other tertiary schools in preparation for University. The fact that the school chooses not to organize or ignores the possibility of organizing visits to MCAST reflects a 'null curriculum'. The 'null curriculum' is about what schools do not teach and as Eisner (1985) states; the participants show that not teaching can be as important as teaching.

References

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