

A hundred years of history teaching and learning in Malta

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In the Maltese educational system, history teaching can be traced back to at least the 19th century when popular education was established in Malta. It was in the year 1800 that Malta became part of the British Empire and this political development imposed on Maltese students the learning of the history of the mother country. On the other hand Malta had, since the Middle Ages, a strong predisposition towards the Italian/Sicilian culture and this led to a strong Italianisation of both the language of teaching and the subjects taught. This was the background to the evolution of the history lesson in Maltese schools at least up to the beginning of the 20th century. At this time Anglicisation became evermore prominent in local education and linguistic and cultural pressure determined a reform in the history syllabus which became much more 'English' in form and tendency. All this changed once again with Malta's political independence from Great Britain in 1964 when national issues and interests became embedded in the new history syllabus. From the 1960s onwards, therefore, Maltese schools taught more the history of Malta, with British history being substituted for European and World History.

History school books and methodologies in twentieth century Malta

The nineteenth century was a period that saw the development and early implementation of notions of history which thus started to evolve with the introduction of an embryonic setup of formal schooling in Malta. History in fact reflected much of the atmosphere of the 1800s where the political and social forces had been in a continuous tug of war to achieve a sense of proportion between the pro-Italianate and Anglophile factions of Maltese society. Thus while school books began to appear on the scene these reflected the frenzied attempts to keep an Italian touch to education and culture but having to recount per force the English coloniser's presence in the island. The titles would generally be in Italian as would be the language of the text but no author could dismiss the reality of Malta being a British colony. By the turn of the century the English language had by and large taken over in the schools and the teaching of history was no exception; textbooks now were more often than not in the language of the coloniser and the text would increasingly reflect the doings and achievement of the British and their Empire.

In 1903 there appeared on the school scene a publication intended especially

for use in elementary schools authored by Judge Paolo De Bono. Though originally penned down in Italian it had then been translated into English by Prof. Daniel Fallon. Under the title of *A Brief Compendium of the History of Malta*¹ this book had some innovative inclusions. In fact the author made a mild attempt at evaluating particular aspects of Maltese history. Moreover it incorporated direct references to other sources, a feature included in footnotes. The format of the book may have been conventional; however, the insertion of these novel elements in a schoolbook presented Maltese students of the time with an unusual feature in their school routine. Here thus one starts to understand that education may have begun to change from the rigid, factual and habitual, to something a little more investigative. Of course far off were the days of making the student a young historian but the fact that some exploratory elements were in the book would have given the teacher who was teaching history a hint at making the content less mandatory and somewhat more reflective.

With the accession of Dr Albert V. Laferla to the directorship of the schools, history education was given a further boost. Laferla, wielding the authority of Director, and having easier access to historical documents, found himself in a more comfortable and advantageous position to write a comprehensive History of Malta and press it into the schools of the colony. His original book entitled *The Story of Man in Malta* was structured in such a way so as to present an outline of Malta's variegated history.² And here once more a development took place. As not all students and other readers could understand English well, if at all, the authorities thought it fit and proper to translate the text into the native tongue so that the local students could have better access to, and a stronger grasp of, their history. The translation into the vernacular was left to Ġużè Ebejer and Saviour Gatt (who were two primary school headmasters at the time) and in 1936 it was published under the title of *Ġrajjet Malta u n-Nies Tagħha*.³ A feature of these books was the presence of illustrations to enliven the text. The picture element gave the book a boost as, reflecting the saying that a picture says a thousand words, the author here did not convey his thoughts and deliberations only in the written format but helped the imagination of the children reading the book by proposing illustrations to catch their attention and enhance their sense of understanding. One needs to point out that Laferla's *British Malta* was of course his major work and this was issued in two volumes, the first appearing in 1938.⁴ As this publication was meant for an adult audience one may assume that it was not felt necessary to include pictures in this book, possibly revealing the mentality of educationists of the time regarding the inclusion of illustrations – these being considered as more adapt to convey the message to younger users.

Notwithstanding the pro-British bias in early 20th century Maltese education, Italian was still of course taught and one particular publication entitled *Fior del Mondo*⁵ was used by secondary school students. This reading book penned by the Lyceum teacher of Italian Arnaldo Fabriani under the pseudonym of Aldo Farini,⁶ was in fact used for the Italian language, but it included among its stories and features a taste from the history of Malta written in our neighbours' tongue. The Italian language had been

literally assaulted by the colonial authorities and continuous and aggressive attempts had been made to eradicate this language from Maltese education and society in general by all means possible along the later part of the nineteenth century and more so during the first decades of the twentieth. Suffice it to say that Lord Strickland – both when he was Chief Secretary to Government and as Prime Minister of Malta – and his Anglophile colleagues had tried to introduce Maltese as a viable alternative to the Italian language thus creating a substitute which they saw as more akin to the needs of the populace. Of course with the presence of politicians such as Enrico Mizzi and his Italophile Nationalist Party on the Maltese political scene this attempt proved difficult to finalise and it had to be the war with Italy and the bombing by Mussolini's air force after the declaration of war on Malta as a British colony which paradoxically put on hold (at least for the time being) the public use of the language in the schools, and in everyday official communication.

Thus in the 1930s books in the native language became mainstays in Maltese schools and one series which was introduced consisted of a set of reading books authored by the prolific teacher and researcher Emmanuel Benjamin Vella. This series, entitled *Ġabra ta' Ward*,⁷ was introduced in the government primary schools, and among the various stories and poems one found some which dealt with themes from history. These were concentrated in books III and IV with stories featuring historical topics both from Malta and beyond. Here once again the education authorities and the policy makers utilised the general reading books in the schools to introduce the younger generation to their first experience of history – both that from their own land but no less also from other parts of the globe. One notices that the general idea was more or less the traditional story telling that recounted facts, but E.B. Vella and others, reflecting the pedagogical traditions of the time, made sure also to emphasise lessons that came out of history. Though, more or less, these were somewhat of the moralistic kind, yet one also notices that history did not remain a simple set of chronicles but was given a meaning. History was thus now a past with a future. What had happened was not just recounted but was also made an object of study. To some extent this helped to give a sense to history. The teacher could point out similarities to present-day life; the student could identify his or her realities in the actions of past heroes and common people. Therefore history could begin to be viewed as a past which mirrored a present, that human beings repeated actions even if not in the same exact form, but similar enough to learn from them, to read through them and to act upon them, for a present which could repeat the positive aspects but could also put aside those which were negative. It was a time of moralising, and E.B. Vella, like Aesop of Greek tradition, thought of presenting the stories with a moral coming out of them. That was one form of history as learnt in the 1930s but which necessarily continued in the post-war era as the *Ġabra ta' Ward* series was only phased out in the early 1970s.

An interesting replacement was another series of Maltese language readers called *Id-Denfil*,⁸ which followed the pattern adopted by their immediate predecessors. Thus from 1974 till about 2005 students in the primary schools came face to face

with elements of history through this similar alternative. Here one notices a sense of repetition and a somewhat stagnated methodology. The message which was being sent through these books for primary school children was that history (the little which was included in them) was story telling – maybe with a lesson to be learnt. But that was all; nothing else was attempted and thus the message sent to the teacher and the student continued to reflect the pre-war pedagogies.

In the primary school little effort was done to include larger doses of historical flavour in the school curriculum. Social Studies as a subject was, also, not realistically geared to introduce a history of substance to the younger pupil. In fact the history component in the primary schools continued to be rather weak and the new series of readers introduced about 2005 did not do much to improve this status quo. The series, entitled *Senduq Buffuri*⁹ and *Senduq Kuluri*,¹⁰ was gradually introduced till it reached the four upper classes of the Maltese primary school by 2007. In it one could of course notice more contemporary writings by emerging Maltese authors but this did not alter the more traditional historical literature. Though it may be argued that these books were not really meant to teach history and that the authors were not trained historians or history pedagogists, yet the conspicuous absence of a set text/s for the teaching and learning of history only left scanty sources from which teachers could take a cue as to what and how to teach history. One needs to remember that while primary school teachers may have had some exposure to history while they attended their teachers' course, this did not expose them to enough methodology in the subject, if any at all, which could then be utilised in their classes.

One also needs to understand that history never really made the grade as a first order subject at the primary school level and thus remained substantially on the periphery, being taught when and if time permitted – and I dare say according to the whims of the teacher in charge. Parents too arguably did not bother too much about the subject and would hardly complain if their children never brought home any work concerning history. After all it was not an examinable subject and did not form part of the entrance examination suite – that is, the 11+ examinations for the secondary schools / Junior Lyceums – so many did not really bother about its absence. In fact when Junior Lyceum exams were introduced in Malta in 1981 only Maltese, English and Mathematics were examinable subjects, and it was only in 1988 that Religion and Social Studies were added.¹¹ On the other hand, the history component in the Social Studies syllabus tended to be very factual and focused on detail more than on any form of investigative deliberation, thus suggesting to the student that history was simply the learning by heart of a list of dates, names, terms and facts – an impression which downgraded the subject even further due to the rote and drab methodology. This naturally led to the straight forward cramming of that which was strictly necessary to pass the exam. The situation in the primary schools tends to remain rather bleak even today as history as a subject has never really managed to break down the traditional barriers which had been set up and reinforced in the past through the uneventful teaching methods and the repetitive structures utilised.

One must however also realise that up to the early 1970s the language readers constituted a main source through which elements of history could be conveyed to pupils who, in their majority, did not continue with their schooling beyond the primary stage. It was in 1970 that Malta adopted a secondary education for all policy. While realities were what they were, officially the education authorities did promote history and its teaching even in the primary school level. Evidence of this support may be gleaned from the *Handbook for Teachers in the Primary Schools*¹² in which it was officially stated that, though the main aim was to convey the past to the children and make them aware of their heritage, history could also serve other purposes. Such purposes included that of providing training in reasoning; the fostering of the powers of selection and comparison; an exercise in memory to broaden the mind; and the inculcation of patriotism.¹³ History was thus defined and promoted as a subject that could impart basic citizenship skills among the younger learners who, it was hoped, would apply them in adulthood. The idea of using history to provide training in reasoning and to promote the powers of selection and comparison shows that early elements of *New History* were also being introduced by the authorities. How much such new elements were picked up by the teachers in the classroom is another matter.

During the 1960s a history schoolbook which circulated in the higher classes of the primary school (Standards IV, V, and VI) and lower classes of the secondary school (Forms I and II) was *The Gateway to Our Nation's History*¹⁴ Introduced in 1962 and revised some years later, this book showed a mild attempt at getting the students – aged between 10 and 14 years – to interact with the facts of the history lesson presented when in the section ‘Activity’ the students were prompted to draw, look around them, make plans or models, and tackle other such activities. The exercises were of the factual type with the questions deriving their answers from the text or where students were required to fill in the blanks. This showed the type of methodology current in the 1960s. Besides the narrative this book included some illustrations which contributed towards better comprehension. One needs to appreciate that the book was a first attempt at getting the student not just to read through the text but also to think about it (all be it rather superficially) and interpret the words by converting them into a picture or a model. Though limited in scope this book made an effort to convey a history of the Maltese nation – as stated in the introduction – in “the simplest possible way”. It was essentially the only specialised history book in the hands of teachers at the time and though the lower primary classes had nothing to go upon, at least those students who lingered on after Standard IV (and many would never make it to a secondary school) became aware of their past even if this was only in an abridged and factual way.

In the secondary schools, then, a book which many past generations of students still remember was the *Outlines of Maltese History* by Mgr Salvino Laspina. The first edition was published in 1943 and by 1971 the book had reached its 12th revised edition.¹⁵ This publication also had its Maltese version entitled *Ġrajjet il-Gżejjer Maltin*.¹⁶ In his introduction to the first English language edition, J. Brennan, Acting Director of Education, had commented that, “To write history is easy – the easiest

form of writing. Father S. Laspina has succeeded in telling Maltese children the story of their native land. Children love stories and in this book they will find an exciting, romantic, thrilling story.”¹⁷ In a nutshell Brennan may have been underlining an official view of the function of history – that of evoking a romantic feeling in school children. These were limited objectives for the learning of history, but the A/Director also added that this history book would also evoke a sense of patriotism in the students, something which Brennan considered quite important. He concluded his introduction to the book thus: “You will learn how great men did great deeds in these Islands in times long ago and in times not so long ago. You will be proud of these great men and women who made Malta famous and you will so act in school and after in life, that you also will uphold the great name of Malta.”¹⁸ One may interpret these words as having a specific objective, considering the period in which the first edition appeared on the island. It was a time of war and for Malta the 1941-43 years had been hell on earth with bombs being dropped every day, lives being lost in their hundreds, and the colony on the verge of falling to the enemy. Thus Brennan’s words were also a message of encouragement to the men and women of the future. The A/Director saw in the history of Malta a story of courage and great feats, an motivation to uphold the name of the nation and to defend it to the last drop – no doubt inspired by the heroic Great Siege to which the book dedicated many pages and through which the Maltese were depicted as gallant, fearless warriors, doing everything for their land. This book enshrines the history of the hero vs the villain, the upright vs the wicked, and the good vs the bad. Of course the Maltese were always on the right side of history – an honour to their land and to their forebears.

Whatever their limitations, these textbooks were mainstays of the Maltese education system. They were instrumental in giving history that factual twist many adults still hold to this day. That is why many still consider history to be a collection of facts and dates. These textbooks reflected the time in which they were written, a time when *New History* methodology had not yet been introduced to Maltese educators and teacher trainers.

With the setting in of the 1970s there appeared a new book in Maltese. It was written in a way which could fit into the structure of local schools. This was Charles Casha’s *Matul is-Snin*,¹⁹ a book which presented its contents in the form of a number of lessons. Sub-divided into three sections – consecutively dealing with the historical, folkloristic, and cultural and artistic heritage of Malta – it had a few black and white illustrations and no exercises. The contents were factual and abridged, with little to entice learners to follow the narrative and engulf themselves in the presentation. The pedagogic element therefore was traditional, stunted and of little use to promote the new face of history.

With history being a compulsory subject from Form I right up to Form V there was, however, a new set of textbooks which did become an inseparable part of everyday school life with every student practically being constrained to use them. The series of three textbooks was called *Ġrajjet Malta*²⁰ and its presence stretched throughout the last

decades of the twentieth century and also made it into the new millennium. Issued by the Department of Education, this series was possibly intended to provide an innovative twist to history teaching and learning. The many illustrations reproduced in the three books, using colour, were theoretically supposed to enliven the text and support the narrative, but to the contrary, the hues used generally produced a more confusing than comprehensible pictorial message. This is because the colours were in monochrome and the greens, yellows and blues used, in real fact made the recognition of what the pictures and drawings were supposed to be showing rather difficult to decipher. This series of textbooks failed from its origins to meet the requirements of the modern approach to history teaching and learning. Indeed many flaws were evident from the first years of their introduction in the secondary schools.²¹ Recent developments, such as women's history, made the series even more inadequate, added to which there was a complete lack of elements that could help the learner to develop historical skills and concepts. Far away were these books from the realities of what student-teachers of history were learning from the 1970s when Michael Sant introduced *New History* concepts and skills in his teacher-training courses.

One objective of the *Ġrajjet Malta* series appears to have been to emphasise the various vicissitudes experienced by the Maltese people and how bad and nasty the 'foreigner' was. This trait reflected the time in which the series was conceptualised, a period when the Maltese political authorities emphasised that the 'foreigner' who had ruled over Malta was bad and evil – an indirect reference to the British whose control over Malta stretched along 164 years and with whom during the early 1970s there developed a substantial element of political friction. Thus history helped to support the political views of the administrator and drive home the Government's agenda – the common people and their legitimate claims against the powerful rulers and their authoritarian attitudes – with the younger generation. History lessons somewhat 'demonised' the foreign, despotic rulers, of Malta and that the people were justified in fighting for their rightful claims. This indirectly hinted at how well the Maltese were under their Maltese government and that no foreigner should ever be allowed to interfere in Maltese affairs.

As such there was nothing new in this as governments generally tend to act in the same way everywhere. As always official history books only feature one fraction of the history of the land – that part which is desirable to manifest, those facts and personalities that best represent the image which the government in power wishes everyone and anyone to believe and accept.²²

Into the twenty-first century

History has continued to be present at both primary and secondary school levels and has managed to hold on to its status as a compulsory subject – even though from time to time grey, if not black, clouds appear to be looming over its existence. In the

primary school curriculum the subject is still embedded within Social Studies, which as an umbrella subject covers the historical,²³ geographical²⁴ and human or social²⁵ environments. As already pointed out, up till 2009 this syllabus was used to prepare students for the 11+ examination in Social Studies.²⁶ In actual fact those sitting for the 11+ examination, generally known as the Junior Lyceum Examination (for entry into state secondary schools) and the Common Entrance Examination (for entry into Church schools) tackled five subjects – Maltese, English, Mathematics, Religion and Social Studies – and those who managed to pass from all five proceeded to a Junior Lyceum or a Church school, while those who fail even one subject normally went to a state Area Secondary. This system has now been phased out and only Maltese, English, and Mathematics are formally examined. With the introduction of the College System²⁷ the Junior Lyceum / Area Secondary distinction has ended, and each student now proceeds to secondary level education in schools catering for mixed ability students.

In the secondary school the *Ġrajjet Malta* series was also gradually phased out during the first decade of the twenty-first century. One here needs to point out that as this series covered the history of Malta from prehistory to the short-lived domination of Malta by the French Republican forces of 1798-1800, teachers had found it necessary to cover the 19th century from other sources as this had not been provided by a staple textbook in the schools. A stop gap was found in the *Storja ta' Malta: Żmien I-Ingliżi - Is-Seklu Dsatax*.²⁸ This book, penned by Henry Frendo, was styled in the narrative form and did not, therefore, include any student friendly features – elements which are essential in a school environment and which are in line with the *New History* principles and structures. As this publication was typically an academic source, teachers needed to find ways how to translate its contents into what would be pedagogically suited for a student audience.

All of these factors hindered a modern and effective approach to the teaching and learning of history. One could not but admire those teachers who took a personal or group initiative and devised teaching resources which presented history content in such a way that students could understand and enjoy. This effort was evident from a number of school-based publications created for the students attending that particular school. One example among a number suffices to illustrate how this was being done. Thus, in the absence of a solid and reliable textbook, *Żmien il-Medjuevu: Ktieb ta' Tagħrif u Attivitajiet fl-Istorja*,²⁹ authored by Raymond Spiteri and published by the Liċeo Mikiel Anton Vassalli, had the objective of servicing the history students and their teachers in that school.

The History Section within the Department of Curriculum Studies also did what it could to soften as much as possible the problem through in-house publications which aimed at giving teachers some support in their daily work. One can mention *Kunċetti u Hiliet fit-Tagħlim ta' l-Istorja*,³⁰ a joint effort of the Subject Coordinators and the Education Officer of the subject. This publication aimed at giving the history teachers practical cues on a most important *New History* tenet – that of going beyond pure and

bare facts and extracting from the realities of history elements which could be applied to similar or other life situations. This effectively translates itself into bringing out concepts and skills by means of a focussed methodology and well-structured exercises. Another publication aimed at injecting into the system a number of resources and activities in order to prop up the teaching and learning of the subject was Raymond Spiteri's *Malta fis-Seklu XIX u XX: Ktieb ta' Riżorsi u Attivitajiet fl-Istorja*.³¹ In the same vein of the other Division of Education publication, this book continued to guide the teachers and the students towards the desired methodologies and practises which both those in the Faculty of Education who prepared the history student-teachers and those at the Curriculum Department who gave support to the history teachers had unstintingly striven to accomplish.

Other support was periodically given by the History Teachers' Association which from the 1990s issued a series of publications to help and direct teachers towards a more vivid and incisive pedagogy that could enliven the learners' life in class and help them to equip themselves with those concepts, skills and attitudes that would serve them in other walks of life. History was being shown as a subject that went beyond itself; that the past was not a dead deed but a mirror of a present and a future. History was there to teach about who one was and how one could understand and make sense of the various environments – those pertaining to the human, historical and heritage domains. The publications, produced by the HTA were divided into two categories: one known as S.A.P. or Students' Aid Programme, and the other as T.A.P. or Teachers' Aid Programme. Publications under S.A.P. included: *Is-Seklu Dsatax bil-Cartoons* by Leonard Grech, *Various Skills in the Teaching and Learning of History* authored by Leonard Grech and Sandro Sciberras, *Għaxar Fuljetti Simulati għall-użu fit-tagħlim ta' l-Istorja* by George Cassar, and *Work Book għall-Form 5* by Katya Vella Degabriele.³² T.A.P. books included: *Political Cartoons Source Exercises* by Raymond Spiteri and *Use and Misuse of History* written by Leonard Grech.³³

Other support material was offered through a number of resource publications published by UNESCO (Malta), two of which were also in cooperation with Heritage Malta. These books devised by Yosanne Vella to help on-site visits by students were *The Inquisitor's Palace*, *The Tarxien Temples* and *The Wignacourt Museum*.³⁴ Ingredients in these publications include role playing, investigative exercises, educational games, and follow-up work. All this helps the students to get the most out of a site visit and provokes their total attention. These publications have the scope of making of the students young historians in preparation for more exhaustive research later on in their lives.

It was then in 2008 that a new book appeared on the Maltese scene. Written in English by a group of history practitioners, it was published by the History Teachers' Association (Malta). This book aims at addressing certain shortcomings in the teaching of history, so still undeniably present in Maltese schools. The HTA felt that this book should enter into the secondary schools and become an established textbook, replacing the very dated and anachronistic *Ġrajjet Malta* series. Entitled *From the*



George Cassar, President of the HTA presenting the Association's latest text book From the coming of the Knights to EU membership to the Minister of Education the Hon. Dolores Christina on 27 April 2009. Also present was Yosanne Vella, editor of the book and Vice-President of the HTA

coming of the Knights to EU membership,³⁵ the authors of this book did their utmost to provide that much-needed boost and modern touch to history teaching in Malta with a dose of skills, concepts and other *New History* elements. It caters for the Secondary Education Certificate Examination which from the secondary level takes students into post-secondary education – in Malta this starts at about 16 years of age and is totally voluntary. In fact compulsory education in the Maltese Educational System stops at Form V of the secondary school.

Concurrently with the HTA's book in English, the Education Division decided also to introduce another set of history books in Maltese. These gradually came in between 2008 and 2011. The first book introduced was aimed at the Form V classes and was entitled *Storja ta' Malta fi sfond Ewro-Mediterranju*.³⁶ In the following scholastic year the book *Storja ta' Malta 1566-1800*³⁷ targeting Form III students was introduced, with the one intended for Form IV classes, *Il-Gżejjer Maltin fi Żmien il-Hakma Ingliża*³⁸ being scheduled for 2011. These books, authored by Tony Pace, kept to the relatively conventional set-up of history teaching and may be considered as a transitional textbook series which strides the two pedagogical and methodological traditions that have been in parallel existence in Maltese schools for these last three or four decades. Such a situation is symptomatic of the mixed feelings and diverse

views which are still very much present within our history teacher corps.

New History in Malta has now, however, been with us from the time when the history teachers' training course was restructured in 1974. It was developed through the unstinting and far-sighted work of Michael A. Sant, a keen history teacher who had taken over the teaching of this subject in the Department of Educational Studies at the MCAST at this time. From then history teaching and learning methodology entered into a new phase and this transition was reinforced with Michael Sant's appointment as the first lecturer of history in the newly set up Faculty of Education in 1978. His legacy is very much present to this day even though he is not with us anymore. His successors have continued to follow and build upon the skill- and concept-based methodology which is very much alive in the history educators that have been graduating from the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta every year. The new blood, coming from the newer graduates who have gradually joined the staff of the various state, Church and private secondary schools, has undoubtedly contributed to introduce more modern and innovative strategies and perspectives in the pedagogy and methodology of the subject.³⁹ It is hoped that these teachers are helped and encouraged by the resources supplied by their schools and by the positive approach shown to the subject by the powers that be so that history is understood and appreciated by the learners who in their turn will pass its benefits to the generations that will follow. One should remember that a strong history element is essential to appreciate the culture and heritage of a nation and its people and to safeguard this patrimony for posterity.

The training of history teachers in Malta

To become a history teacher in Malta there are presently two main paths: one can gain a Bachelor Honours degree in Education (B.Ed.) after four years of studies or the Bachelor in Arts degree (B.A.) followed by a one year P.G.C.E. course (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) in history teaching. Anyone with a Master's degree is allowed to teach in Malta, a route created in 1988 by Education Act No. XXIV. Unfortunately, this Act temporarily created an anomaly, that is, anybody with a Masters degree was being given a licence to teach. Therefore, for example somebody with a B.A. degree in history, followed by an M.A. in history could become a history teacher without ever receiving any form of teacher training. A few took this option, while the vast majority opted to follow the B.Ed. and P.G.C.E. courses; however this situation still implied various difficulties. This problem was addressed by the Education (Amendment) Act of 2006, which established that somebody teaching without training – referring to people with a Masters degree – was from now on obliged to undertake a course organized by the Faculty of Education. This course, entitled 'Pedagogy Course' was in fact launched in October 2011 and it consists of a two year evening course.

Pedagogical methods for the teaching of History promoted by the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta

The teaching method encouraged in the Faculty of Education is one where the ability to create a classroom environment in which students as well as young pupils can develop new ways of thinking in history is highly valued. Student teachers are trained in how they can teach history as a form of inquiry with a focus on history thinking skills, which school children can use to analyse and interpret historical material by themselves. The ability to demonstrate conventionally accepted historical knowledge is not the priority within the framework of this teaching paradigm. Therefore the pedagogical approach is one that has moved away from traditional history teaching, which rests on the assumption that history is a finished product, and moved towards one where the main concern is on the *how to teach* not on the *what to teach* in history lessons. Therefore the task of the teacher is to pass on this body of knowledge to his or her pupils.

This method originated from Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s and was known as *New History* – what R. Ben Jones outlined back in 1973 as a history teaching method that “lays less emphasis on content and more on the process of learning.”⁴⁰ The Faculty of Education at the University of Malta is one body where *New History* methods at all levels have been particularly emphasised. Since the Faculty’s creation in 1978, there have been continual efforts to promote this teaching method in history. In the early 1980s the late Michael Sant, history pedagogy lecturer, directed all his endeavours in introducing *New History* methods, in which he firmly believed. He was also totally in favour of introducing ‘the source method’ even at primary level (5 to 10 year olds) and advocated: “Even the very young child, can be trained to gather information and data (from various resources: people, places and objects) ... there is no reason why such a method, a training for life after all, be not introduced to children from as early in life as we can.”⁴¹

When Yosanne Vella took over Michael Sant’s post in 1999, she immediately embarked on consolidating this approach within the new programmes she created. Therefore *New History* methods continued to be implement – which are today sometimes also referred to as investigative source based history teaching. Having experienced this method, while she lived, studied and taught history in England in the late 1980s and 1990s, she became a total convert and advocate of this approach in the Faculty. As the only full time history pedagogy lecturer at the University she feels she has influenced considerably the direction of history pedagogy in these last ten years. In her lectures and practical pedagogy sessions the standpoint is that history itself is mainly concerned with enquiry and with giving valid interpretations, therefore within this paradigm accumulation of knowledge is not the only consideration. The pedagogy units given at the University of Malta are aimed at helping student teachers learn how to deliver history lessons in the classroom, where the focus is on pupils gaining skills that help them to analyse and interpret historical material for themselves.

The philosophy behind the history teaching approach in Malta's Faculty of Education

It is to assume that the choice of one teaching method over another should have its roots in learning research theories as well as in a concern over the philosophical debate on the nature of the subject, which is to be taught – in this case history.

The main objective of history pedagogy units at the Faculty is to create effective history teachers, which are competent to teach history thinking skills within a historical context rather than requiring pupils to merely memorise facts. It is important to accept that history is merely a discourse about the past but not the past itself and, to a certain extent, what Keith Jenkins says is correct: “History as discourse is thus in a different category to that which it discourses about, that is, the past and history are different things. Additionally, the past and history are not stitched into each other such that only one historical reading of the past is absolutely necessary. The past and history float free of each other, they are ages and miles apart.”⁴²

However, in regard to school history, it is important not to fall into the postmodernist trap of too much scepticism regarding ‘truths’ in history. Even, if we accept that history does not give us the truth and that ultimately the most we can hope for from historians is an interpretation, that can never be a sterile exercise in itself, as Peter Brickley says: “Thus since knowledge – historical knowledge – is, substantially at least, about interpretation, it follows that we never have a stable object to study. It is always changing under our interpreting activity and, therefore, as historians, we need to be able to see our historiographical ‘footprint’, for this is a part of the object itself.”⁴³

Pupils should be made aware of the main characteristics of the discipline. For this to occur, the classroom situation should offer an active learning situation for the pupils rather than one which presents the teacher as a supplier of information. If we limit history teaching to the mere handing over of one fact after the other, we would be missing the key objective of history teaching. Kitson Clark says that good history produces people that think about rather than merely accept information: “What is your authority for saying this? And, as a particular question: How do you know that this happened? They are questions which both historians, and men and women who are not historians, ought to learn to ask much more often than they do.”⁴⁴

Therefore, it is important not to teach just the factual knowledge in history lessons, but what Jerome S. Bruner calls the ‘structure of the discipline’.⁴⁵ Historical method involves historical thinking and it is the analysis of sources in particular, that provides the practice for a mode of thinking similar to what the historian goes through. This approach used in history teaching is in fact based on constructivist teaching methods.

Constructivism refers to the process of change that occurs in one’s thinking as learning occurs. Traditionally, knowledge has been treated as a collection of facts and information but *knowing* also involves organising information and the formation of concepts. The very process of collecting information brings about new frames of thought into which the knowledge can fit. The knowledge itself is not fixed but it is

continually transformed with each new discovery.

The above philosophical ideas and learning theories form the backbone of the units found in the history teaching course.⁴⁶ Apart from these units students must also attend school experience tutorials throughout their second year. They also have six weeks teaching practice in their second, third and fourth years. The final teaching practice is the final examination.

The organisation of history lessons in Malta

In Maltese secondary schools history lessons occur once or twice a week, except for special option classes where more time is allotted for pupils, who choose history as their special subject. The latter usually receive four lessons per week. In every case each history lesson usually lasts around 40 minutes.

Student teachers are required to prepare detailed schemes of work, which specify the topic and history knowledge and information being taught, yet also incorporate history teaching skills. Presently the list of skills, which is shown below, is used. These have been adapted and adjusted to local needs from Terry Hayden, Martin Hunt, James Arthur,⁴⁷ and Robert Phillips:⁴⁸

1. *Interpretation/Analysis of Historical Evidence*
 - a. Problems encountered in the study of historical interpretation
 - b. Understanding the range and diversity of historical interpretation
 - c. Building a historical account from primary sources
2. *Cause*
 - a. Speculation – what might have happened?
 - b. Difference between events and causes
 - c. Difference between short term and long term causes
 - d. Importance of causes – inevitable or not
3. *Consequence*
 - a. Speculation – what could have happened?
4. *Change*
 - a. Difference between change and progress
 - b. The concept of “then and now”
 - c. The concept of “before and after” in the same historic period
5. *Continuity*
 - a. Continuous and not/episodic flow
 - b. The concept of “then and now”
 - c. Analogies with today
6. *Time*
 - a. Mechanics of time
 - b. Chronology and sequence of events
 - c. Conceptualization of time

7. *Empathy*
 - a. Scripted role play
 - b. Open role play
8. *Historical Significance*
 - a. Magnitude of the historic event in its historical time
 - b. Influence of event on people's lives until today
9. *Writing Skills*
 - a. Writing frameworks to create analytical historical writing
10. *ICT Skills*
 - a. Word-processing
 - b. Internet use
 - c. Spread sheets and data bases to create patterns in history

Developments of history teaching in Malta in the last two decades

One cannot say that the Maltese journey towards investigative methods of history teaching is complete. While a good number of developments towards adopting these methods of history teaching have been achieved there are still various challenges and difficulties facing Maltese history teachers. Of significance is the problem of obtaining teaching resources, which are not available on a commercial scale due to the small and limited Maltese market. There are very few teaching resources, which can be used by teachers to teach history and often it is left to the initiative of individual teachers to create resources and find specific historical sources which these could adapt to their classrooms.

Back in the 1990s, while comparing English and Maltese Secondary history teachers' views Yosanne Vella found, that "it is clear that if one were to imagine a spectrum which represents the evolution of history teaching, English and Maltese teachers would be found in different places."⁴⁹ English teachers in the early 1990s had had time to absorb the ideas of *New History*, with almost two decades of actual experience in using this approach in history classrooms. It was not the case for their Maltese counterparts. Maltese teachers showed a clear bias against the methods associated with *New History*, in particular the source method. *Too much emphasis on source material* was one of their main concerns. At first, the fact that so many expressed this concern did not come as a surprise, since in the Maltese history textbooks of that time, sources to be used by pupils, were not given at all. This was also the case when one looked at the annual examinations of the first three years of secondary school (Forms I, II and III). All questions were heavily based on recall of detailed factual information. However, sources did suddenly appear in the 'O' Level Matriculation paper and this explained Maltese teachers' uneasiness in the 1990s about the use of sources. Understandably it was quite a difficult task to suddenly have to introduce source based questions with a group of fifth formers who had never been exposed to

source material before. At the same time it was proposed, that “if history students are to benefit from the use of source materials, their introduction should take place much earlier, preferably in primary school.”⁵⁰

In Maltese secondary schools (11 to 16 year olds) the situation did start to change, with the then President of the Malta’s History Teachers’ Association reporting in 1998 that: “Today, it is not a rare occasion for our students to handle photocopies of official documents, letters, diaries or caricatures particularly those dealing with the 19th and 20th century.”⁵¹

It is encouraging to note that progress in regard to history teaching is showing in the Maltese school-system. In a recent research study on history teaching in Malta, it was observed that “teachers who graduated prior to 1980 rarely, if ever, use *New History* methods, whereas almost all of those who graduated after 2000 often or always use *New History* methods in their classroom”.⁵² In 1996 Yosanne Vella had shown that a large number of Maltese teachers were not in agreement with giving prominence to historical thinking,⁵³ however 12 years later James Degiorgio’s study indicated that 78 per cent of history teachers were now strongly in favour of teaching history skills and, in particular, to giving students an opportunity to practice the skills of analysing historical primary sources.⁵⁴

Today, history as a school subject as represented in the New National Curriculum to be launched in 2012 falls under the heading of *Citizenship Education*, together with Geography, Social Studies, Environmental Studies, PSD (Personal and Social Education) and Home Economics. All these subjects do indeed possess common concepts and notions and in particular situations it might make sense to allot them a common branch title. However, the term *Humanities* would have been preferred instead of *Citizenship Education* as the main generic term.

It is important to point out that while Geography, Social Studies, Environmental Studies, PSD and Home Economics can be used to help develop the children’s sense of democracy and citizenship, it is however by far not their sole function.

It is hoped that the New Curriculum is not implying that these subjects will cease to exist as separate academic subjects in their own right and utilised only through an integrated approach to teach Citizenship Education. As explained in an article written in the *Times of Malta* back in 2009 “Unfortunately, rather than being the hoped-for dynamic new way of teaching, this method was the death knell of the three subjects”⁵⁵

More recently Annual Reports of HM Senior Chief Inspectors of Schools reported even more alarming results of ‘hybrid’ integrated courses. In seven of the ten schools visited between 2008 and 2010 in which curriculum changes had been made towards integrated approaches, history, with other foundation subjects, had greatly suffered. For example, as stated in one Ofsted Report:

“a series of themes was created and history teachers were required to make artificial links to them...so the history curriculum lacked coherence and undermined progression”

“schemes of work and lessons were created in which subject specialists had limited or even no input; the result was superficial and simplistic teaching and learning; feedback to students was of limited value because it lacked subject-specific comments about how they might improve”

“the work set was not as challenging as when students were specifically taught history in discrete lessons...with students saying the work was too easy”⁵⁶

Hopefully we will not be led down a similar path and history will survive the latest innovation in our schools.

Perhaps it is also important to point out that in the case of history there is also the added problem that history and citizenship do not always sit comfortably together; indeed, in some instances they are incompatible. Whereas, citizenship is concerned with developing certain attitudes and values which currently prevail in a society, history is about questioning evidence. Citizenship is essentially an initiation process while history is not designed for this.

On a positive note it was gratifying to note that the New Curriculum recognises the basic history thinking skills and concepts of chronology, empathy, cause and effect, change and continuity, and promotes active and investigative learning, although always, and in our opinion this is unfortunate, their use is limited only to “learn to employ citizenship skills”.

Research in history teaching in Malta

Research, projects and various initiatives have been and are being conducted in history teaching in Malta. A number of B.Ed. as well as M.Ed. dissertations on history teaching are supported by the Faculty of Education every year. There are also papers in international reviewed journals on history teaching featuring research papers on various aspects of investigative history teaching and there are projects like those funded by the Maltese National Commission for UNESCO,⁵⁷ which focus on the creation of history teaching resources. These UNESCO projects are freely available to all history teachers.

The University of Malta through the Faculty of Education is presently a partner in the E.U. Lifelong Learning Programme entitled ‘Assessment, tutorial structures and initial teacher education of trainee students in the subjects Political/Civic Education, Social/Cultural Studies and History in Europe – a comparative study’, while the Faculty’s history co-ordinator is one of the editors of *Historiana*.⁵⁸

Besides the Faculty of Education, an influential organisation which also has an impact on how history teaching is conducted in Malta is undoubtedly the History Teachers’ Association. This is a very active association which favours *New History* teaching and greatly promotes investigative learning. The history teaching memorial

lecture being presented today in memory of Michael Sant, who passed away in 1999, is open to the general public and is organised by the History Teachers' Association together with the University of Malta. Today we celebrate the tenth anniversary of this annual event, an event which has brought a number of distinguished international scholars to the island to give keynote papers on the latest development in history teaching.⁵⁹

The History Teachers' Association (Malta) and the European History Educators Network (Euroclio) jointly organised Euroclio's general conference in Malta in 2006. This event, entitled 'Using Historical Skills and Concepts to Promote an Awareness of European Citizenship', was attended by 140 delegates from 36 countries. One other important recent History Teachers' Association initiative was the production in 2009, for the first time ever of a Maltese History SEC level (13-15 year olds) based solely on tasks and activities involving historical sources. This is in fact one from the many publications connected with history teaching which the Association publishes on a regular basis.

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