THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL?

A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement

Sonia Galea

A thesis submitted to the University of Sheffield

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education

September 2018

Abstract

The thesis explores what makes an inclusive school in the Maltese context. Three main themes are discussed in the literature review: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. The study is focused in six Maltese secondary state schools across different parts of Malta and Gozo, where three groups of participants, Heads of School, Inclusion Coordinators and teachers discuss their views, their challenges and their strategies with regards to inclusion. They also share their lived experiences, feelings and attitudes within their work.

A mixed-methods approach is applied for the study; data comprise interviews with six Heads of School, six Inclusion Coordinators and twelve teachers; questionnaires distributed to two hundred and twenty-two teachers. Data are analysed according to four themes: views about inclusion, difficulties and challenges, good practices and recommendations. Findings indicate that the majority of stakeholders in Maltese secondary state schools believe in inclusion and do their best to implement the inclusion policy. However, the participants demonstrate feelings of worry and frustration, especially when catering for mixed ability classes, learners with multiple living and learning needs, gifted students and international students.

The principal implications for improvement that emerge from this study suggest that primarily, there is the need: to re-evaluate the national inclusion policy; to provide effective training for all educators; to offer more human resources and, to revise particular syllabi so as to further accommodate the educational needs of all learners. These implications are also presented as suggestions to policy-makers as a means to further develop inclusive schools.

Key words:

inclusion, inclusive schools, inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning, professional learning communities, teacher training.

Dedication

To my sons

Thomas and Matthias

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my main supervisor Prof. Cathy Nutbrown for her constant support, feedback, patience and motivation during this journey and the writing of the thesis.

I would also like to thank my second supervisor Prof. Peter Clough for his support and guidance during the first two years of this journey.

My sincere gratitude goes to all the participants: the Heads of School, the Inclusion Coordinators and all the teachers who were willing to find the time to discuss their opinions, feelings and experiences as contributions to my study. Their input during their busy schedules was highly appreciated.

I wish to deeply thank a good friend of mine, Dr Michelle Attard Tonna, for her time to provide me with professional and continuous guidance, support and feedback during my writing.

Special thanks go to my father who patiently translated all my interviews and proofread my writing. I thank him and my mother for their continuous encouragement and support.

Last but not least, I truly thank my husband, Stephen and my sons Thomas and Matthias for their endless patience during these four years. I really thank them for their encouragement and for believing in me.

Table of Contents

List of tables

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The aim of the thesis is to explore the perspectives of the key professional stakeholders about the inclusion policies in the Maltese secondary[1] state schools, with a view to present implications for the development of more inclusive schools. The study is carried out in the light of Vygotsky's constructivist theory (1978) where the learning process is developed through social and cultural interaction.

The thesis is organised into six chapters. In this chapter (Chapter 1), I will outline the main aims of this study together with my background to justify my interest in the area and introduce the theoretical framework which underpins the study. In Chapter 2, I will present an overview of the international organisational policies, leading to the discussion of the Maltese system and its inclusion policies, as the main context of this study. Chapter 3 will discuss the literature review where the main themes are: inclusive leadership, the Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. The methodology of the study, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 including interviews held with six Heads of School, six Inclusion Coordinators and twelve teachers and a questionnaire survey with responses from one hundred and forty-three teachers. Chapter 5 will present and discuss the findings of the interviews and questionnaires according to four main themes: views about inclusion, difficulties and challenges, good practices and recommendations. Finally, the conclusion of the study will follow in Chapter 6 which sets out limitations of the study, implications of the research reported in this thesis and puts forward suggestions for further research.

1.0   Introduction: Education for All

"How do we create a school, how do we create teaching that can reach out to every young person, whatever their background, whatever their

---

[1] In Malta, secondary schools include middle and senior schools.

culture, whatever their language, whatever their religion, whatever their personal characteristics? How do we create an educational system that reaches out to every child? Because diversity, I suggest to you, is going to increase, as people move around, as expectations are raised on what education has to achieve, then the teacher in the classroom has to respond to a greater range of variance".

(Ainscow, 2007, p. 3)

All over the world, the number of learners from diverse cultural and linguistic heritages is constantly increasing in schools (UNCRC, 1989; OECD, 2003; Ofsted, 2006; UNESCO, 2009, 2016). All learners have the right to education, therefore, schools must cater for their diverse needs. Malta, like other countries, is going through various changes and challenges to create more inclusive schools in order to accommodate the changing student population.

Every educator has the responsibility to guide learners to achieve their full potential in class and enjoy their time in education. This implies that the teacher has to cater for every individual's educational needs through the implementation of an inclusive approach in class. It is a challenging task but with the support of all stakeholders in the school, namely, the Senior Management Team, other teachers and the Learning Support Assistants, the principle of inclusion could be developed effectively both in class and in the school as a whole.

The term 'inclusion' is often associated with students with special needs, however, according to Booth and Ainscow (2002) inclusion in education is "about the education of all children and young people" (p. 1). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defined inclusive education as "a set of values, principles and practices that seeks meaningful, effective, and quality education for all students, that does justice to the diversity of learning conditions and requirements not only of children with disabilities, but for all students" (para. 67). This entails that inclusive schools must recognise and respond to the diverse needs of their students. The school has to adopt the belief that whenever possible all learners can learn together even though they are different from each other, that is to say, learners

with disability needs, learners with autism, learners with social, emotional and behavioural issues, learners with learning difficulties, gifted learners and learners from a variety of cultural and linguistic contexts (Department of Education, Victoria, 2014). This can be accomplished through various educational programmes together with other services and support, such as after-school programmes, reading interventions, physical changes in the school and peripatetic services (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2009).

The vision and commitment to create an inclusive school has to be primarily adopted by the school leader, it has to be his/her vision for the school (Wayne State University, 2000; Hehir & Katzman, 2012). School leaders need to promote an inclusive culture and eventually they need to manage change. They may encourage positive relationships between the staff and the parents for the benefit of the students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Effective leaders have to commit themselves to maximise the educational opportunities of all learners (Salisbury & McGregor, 2005). Furthermore, they have to support teachers, in order to create an effective curriculum and teaching innovations so as to increase the learning opportunities for all students (Department of Education, Victoria, 2014). Hehir and Katzman (2012) maintain that "the importance of school administrators and leaders wishing to build school practices that support all students is critical to the success of inclusive schools" (p.3). It is vital to make the students feel a sense of belonging in the school. This will motivate them to learn, be more attentive and participate actively (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2009).

1.1 Personal experience within the phenomenon

Through my teaching years, I encountered students with different abilities in my class and I constantly tried my best to engage them in the lesson. However, I always felt unsure about my teaching abilities when one of my students had complex disabilities. I felt afraid and uncertain because I lacked training and proficiency in this aspect.

After thirteen years of teaching, I became an Assistant Head of School and I was aware that one of the responsibilities of this roles would be the inclusion

programme in the school. When asked by the Head of School to take up the role, I was very reluctant because I felt I lacked knowledge about the various factors that were included in the role. Again, I felt afraid and incompetent to take up this duty. However, my Head of School insisted that I should be the Assistant Head in charge of the inclusion programme in the school, hence, I accepted this challenge as part of my work experience.

Initially, I spent most of the days with the outgoing Assistant Head who was mentoring me in order for me to be prepared for taking up the role. As a result, I felt that I was acquiring a type of informal training, through which I was learning a great deal. Furthermore, I started researching about the various conditions that our students were statemented for and by time I started applying for various continuous professional training courses.

I have been working in the inclusion sector for six years now through four different schools. I surely acquired a lot of experience and knowledge through these years. However, I still feel that I can never know enough in this field. Consequently, I attend training courses when they are available and I communicate with various colleagues in order to share and become aware of good practices and also to be more knowledgeable in the field. In their study, Hehir and Katzman (2012), stated that teachers referred to their colleagues as 'resources' to them. The same concept applies to us Assistant Heads of School. We need to collaborate together and form professional learning communities (Watson, 2014; Bates et al., 2016) not just among the teaching staff but also within the Senior Management Teams of different schools, so as to share expertise and work collaboratively.

Furthermore, in particular schools, I did not always feel supported enough by the Head of School. It seemed that the role and whatever it generates was my sole responsibility. However, I am of the opinion, that the Head of School should have the inclusion aspect as a top priority in his/her school's vision as will be discussed in the literature review (Chapter 3, section 3.1). Moreover, in particular schools, the Head of School seemed to prefer to focus upon other factors rather than on inclusion, they deemed that it was my responsibility.

During the last years, I worked in schools where particular teachers were accustomed to teaching high-achievers for a very long time. However, reforms took place in the Maltese Education System and these teachers were then allocated students with diverse needs in their classes, including those with lower than expected levels of literacy and numeracy skills. This change became quite a cause for alarm to these teachers who found it hard to adapt and accept these reforms in the system. In time, I observed that certain teachers started to accept the situation and they tried hard to engage all their students and try out new teaching methodologies. However, there was still a number of teachers who could not accept the fact that they had to revise their teaching styles after so many years of teaching. Eventually, particular students would become frustrated in class and behave in ways that were deemed inappropriate. Sometimes, such students would be sent out of class and sent to my office, where they would vent out all their anger and frustration about not comprehending the lesson or feeling unaccepted by the teacher.

Through these various experiences, I came to realise that developments are still needed in the inclusion sector in our schools. I observed that teachers and Heads of School need to change their attitudes and beliefs towards students with diverse needs. Heads of School need to prioritise inclusion within their school's vision in order to be owned by all stakeholders in the school. Furthermore, training is surely needed for every individual in the school, in order to gain confidence in the field with a view to being more knowledgeable and proficient, as will be discussed in the literature review (Chapter 3, section 3.3).

These personal experiences led me to embark on this journey in order to explore what is actually being done in the field of inclusion in Malta, and to ask, about the feelings and perspectives of the stakeholders and what needs to be done to further develop more inclusive schools.

This thesis puts forward my own perspectives on inclusion from the literature and my empirical study, based on interviews and questionnaires to investigate the beliefs, the challenges and the demands of the Heads of School, the Inclusion Coordinators and the teachers. Together these have elicited

recommendations for the development of more inclusive schools in Malta through which I have identified what national strategies are needed to develop more inclusive schools.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

Since 1999, Maltese schools have been going through various changes in order to become more inclusive (Malta National Minimum Curriculum, 1999). The introduction of Learning Support Assistants in mainstream schools came about only fifteen years ago and in spite of several developments accomplished in the inclusive aspect of our schools, there is still room for greater improvement (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014; Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024). Hence, I undertook the study reported in this thesis to investigate how Maltese schools could continue to move forward to become more inclusive. The three principal themes that I have identified in my reading of the literature (discussed in Chapter 3) are: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. These themes can assist the teacher to adopt an inclusive approach in his/her work and they can be implemented through the Senior Management Team, other teachers and the Learning Support Assistants so as to develop effective inclusive schools (Save the Children, UK, 2008; Hehir & Katzman, 2012).

The main research question for this study is:

"What makes an inclusive school?"

This breaks down into three further research questions that this thesis will investigate:

- What are the current inclusion policies and strategies practised in the Maltese schools?
- How do key stakeholders working in schools feel about inclusion policies in Malta?
- What national strategies are needed to develop more inclusive Maltese schools?

The empirical element of this study used a mixed-methods approach. Heads of School, teachers and Inclusion Coordinators were interviewed about their opinions, inclusive practices, challenges, recommendations and training. Their perspectives and experiences within the field were crucial to this study as were the questionnaire responses from teachers. Through this investigation, implications for improvement were elicited. Further detail on methods and methodology are discussed and justified in Chapter 4.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Constructivism and Vygotsky's Theory of Social Development

Constructivism is based upon the fact that knowledge is built upon the learner's activity and experience in society, and this applies to the classroom and to other social contexts (Glasersfeld, 1989; Steffe and Gale, 1995). The University College Dublin (UCD, 2016) stated that 'the constructivist classroom' focuses on the students rather than on the teacher. Thus, the students are encouraged to be highly active in the learning process by asking questions to investigate a topic and using a variety of resources to find solutions and answers (UCD, 2016). Furthermore, in a constructivist classroom, the teacher facilitates collaborative learning through the promotion of discussions and clarifications about various concepts and problems, thus, providing fruitful information while referring to previously learned material (Jordan et al., 2008; Ryder, 2009; UCD, 2016).

A constructivist learning approach is emphasised by a focus on *social* constructivism, that is, the importance of social interaction and cooperative learning (Da Rosa, 2012). Da Rosa (2012) describes Lev Vygotsky as 'the champion of constructivism'. Vygotsky (1978) developed a sociocultural theory of human learning in which he described learning as a social process. The major theme in this theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning is based on two levels: first, the child learns on the social level with others, which paves the way for later learning to take place on an individual level. He continued that learning occurs between people first and

before developing inside the learner. He also emphasised the role of culture and experience (Ferranti, 2012; Fawzi, 2014). Vygotsky (1926) stated that "the student's personal experience becomes the fundamental basis of pedagogical work" (p. 47). Furthermore, the student's experience is determined by his/her social environment (Vygotsky, 1926) which can include home, community and school. According to Vygotsky (1926), "the social environment is the true lever of the educational process" (p. 49) and therefore, the teacher must educate the student by varying the environment to create space and time for interaction between students and between students and teachers.

A second aspect to Vygotsky's theory (1978) is that cognitive development thrives in a "zone of proximal development", meaning, that what learners can do with help, they are more likely to move on to be able to do independently later (Vygotsky, 1978). The "zone" is an area where the learner explores an immediate learning need with the help of a more experienced 'other', who provides the necessary help and social interaction needed by the learner to take a next step. Therefore, the theory suggests that an educator may provide the learner with "scaffolds" in order to support his/her understanding of knowledge fields (UNESCO, 2003; Ferranti, 2012). McLeod (2014) stated that according to Vygotsky (1978) adults are an important source in students' learning because they transmit the tools of knowledge to children and these tools vary from one culture to another. Vygotsky (1926) stated that "the teacher is the director of the social environment in the classroom, the governor and guide of the interaction between the educational process and the student" (p. 49).

Vygotsky's (1978) theory was set as the theoretical framework for this study for the following reasons. One of the main principles of inclusion is to educate all children and young people together as equals in the community, where diversity is enriched and strengthened (The Alliance for Inclusive Education, 2012). Inclusion involves bringing all the students together in class where they learn from each other both socially and intellectually. Meanwhile, the role of the educator is to facilitate learning and guide students through the learning process using various approaches. Vygotsky's (1978) theory seems to

intertwine appositely with the main themes of the literature review in this thesis, especially in relation to: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and creating professional learning communities for inclusion.

Almost 100 years ago in 1926, in the book "Educational Psychology", Vygotsky was stressing the notion of providing education for all when he urged that "educational techniques have to be individualized" (p. 284). He was referring to the students' various needs, such as those who are visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically impaired, those who have a mental condition and he was also referring to students who were gifted. Vygotsky (1926) stressed the importance for educators to perceive individual differences and individual personalities and to find ways and means to adapt teaching and methodologies accordingly. He continued to state that there is no difference between what he called 'abnormal' students or gifted students, referring to giftedness as a problem, because no matter what, the educator has to respond to the individual needs whatever they might be. In his work, Vygotsky stressed that learning was individual and that, in effect, there is no "one size fits all", he stated that: "To force everybody into the same mould represents the greatest of all the delusions of pedagogies" (p. 324). Vygotsky (1926) also mentioned various methods which could be used to adapt to the students' diversity and these methods will be considered and discussed in Chapter 3, in the section of Universal Design for Learning (Section 3.2).

Another factor that Vygotsky (1926) emphasised in his writing was that it is highly important not to seclude students with physical or mental impairments in specialised schools: "Such schools intensify the psychology of separatism and locks them up in a tight and narrow little world" (p. 287). For this reason, Vygotsky's theory (1978) highlighted the importance of social interaction. Vygotsky was already stressing upon all these factors way back in 1926 and almost a century afterwards, the notion of inclusion is still being continuously discussed and debated. For this reason, this study was built upon this theoretical framework, which takes a positive view of all learners according to individual needs and interests, with a view to developing more inclusive learning environments in all schools.

This chapter has outlined the main aims of this study together with my background to justify my interest in the area and introducing the theoretical framework which underpins the study. Chapter 2 will give an overview of the inclusion policies of the international organisations, leading to the discussion of the Maltese system and its inclusion policies.

CHAPTER 2

Inclusion Policies and the Maltese Education System

CHAPTER 2:

Inclusion Policies and the Maltese Education System

2.1 An overview of the international organisational inclusion policies

Various countries around the world often unite together through particular organisations, such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), and Plan International, to discuss and plan strategies regarding global educational matters. Inclusive education seems to be continuously prioritised in their agendas of all these organisations. Gender equality, learning accessibility, early school leaving, adult literacy levels and low-income families are the most discussed issues by these global organisations (UNESCO, 2016; OECD, 2016; Plan International, 2016).

A common mission statement in global inclusion policies is that every child has the right for quality education that covers at least primary and secondary education and that education takes place in a safe and supportive environment (UNCRC, 1989; Salamanca Statement, 1994; Anati, 2013; OECD 2014; Plan International, 2015; UNESCO, 2015). UNESCO (2015) argued that globally extensive developments occurred in education, such as increasing numbers of students attending pre-primary education, primary and secondary education; percentage decrease in global illiteracy; percentage increase in school enrolment in low-income countries and considerable progress in narrowing the gender gap. However, about 58 million children and 70 million adolescents worldwide are still out of school and about 100 million children, coming from low or middle-income countries are dropping out of school before completing primary education (UNESCO, 2015). UNESCO (2015) mentioned a global 'learning crisis' (p.13) for the reason that there are still millions of children who leave school without basic skills and inequalities in education are still being felt. Therefore, UNESCO (2015) decided to prioritise these issues for the Education 2030 Agenda and it urged global governments to move towards a learner-centred pedagogy through sufficient

and appropriate learning materials and through the provision of proper teacher training.

Similarly Plan International (2015) developed a global education strategy for the period 2015-2020 and it aimed to ensure that all children complete an education without any financial, social, cultural and geographical barriers and a positive learning environment must be developed to support the children's full potential. Therefore:

- Education institutions must provide relevant formal and non-formal educational opportunities for every child whether male or female.
- The institutions must ensure that relevant curriculums, appropriate teaching and learning methodologies and resources are provided and the educational environment is safe, supportive and inclusive.
- Teachers must have the knowledge, skills and attitude to provide quality, inclusive education.
- Adaptations must be done to meet the different needs of the learners, especially those with a disability.
- The school management should be effective, participatory and inclusive.

(Plan International, 2015, pp. 11-13)

The OECD (2014) also highlighted that almost one out of five students was not reaching the level of basic skills to function in society. The organisation added that a high number of students were early school leavers and disadvantaged students with personal and social difficulties were not managing to achieve their potential in school. Similar to the other organisations, the OECD stressed that schools should be equipped with the right resources, leaders should have a clear focus on diversity and equity and teachers should be highly skilled in their pedagogy.

Various other global organisations, such as Education for All (EFA), Global Campaign for Education (GCE), Open Society Institute (OSI), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and The World Bank, insist on governments to provide every child with a free quality public education and to reduce illiteracy as much as possible. Likewise,

organisations, such as Mobility International USA (MIUSA), Inclusion Europe, International Networking and International Disability Alliance (IDA) strive to empower people with disabilities to achieve their human rights through international exchange and international development.

The prioritised goals of all these international organisations coincide with the principal themes that are critically discussed in this literature review in order to discover the strategies that eventually contribute to the development of more inclusive schools.

In the next sections, I discuss the introduction of inclusion in the Maltese schools, the present policies and strategies and further developments for the future.

2.2 The introduction of inclusion in the Maltese Schools

Special Education provision was introduced in Malta in 1951. Training for special needs was provided in England, for one Head of School and two teachers only, that is, only three people were sent from Malta to do the training (Ministry of Education, Malta, 2005). This was due to the fact that inclusion was not given as much importance in Malta at that time in comparison to the emphasis given to inclusion in Maltese schools and education policy today. Classes for students with hearing and vision impairments were opened, and various schools for students with a range of physical difficulties were opened too and special needs teachers were introduced in the educational system (Ministry of Education, Malta, 2005). In March, 1989, a circular was sent to all schools which emphasized that "handicapped children should be educated alongside other children in ordinary schools" if they could manage successfully in these schools. Consequently, in 1995, an inclusive educational policy was introduced in state schools, "where children with a disability began to be placed in mainstream schools in increasing numbers" (Ministry of Education, Malta, 2005, p. 16).

The Education Act (1988) highlighted that all students with or without special needs must attend school during their compulsory education age, between

the age of 5 and 16 years. At that time, students with special needs meant primarily, students with disabilities. However, when the Education Act was amended in 2006, students with special educational needs were referred to as "minors having special difficulties of a physical, sensory, intellectual or psychological nature" (p. 26). Therefore, the definition of 'special educational needs' in Malta includes students with a physical impairment, students with learning difficulties and those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Over the years, in Malta, there has been a growing interest in inclusive education. The Maltese society started to become more aware that inclusive education "is not only a human right but can be an asset to society as a whole" (Ministry of Education, Malta, 2005, p. 16). This led to the National Minimum Curriculum published in 1999 where inclusive education was recognised as one of the basic principles in education. This applied to all students with and without special educational needs. The concept recognised "the full range of educational interests, potential and needs of pupils and has been said to mark a paradigm shift in the way Maltese society looks at education" (EPASI, 2008, p. 4). Terminology started to change, and for example, terms such as 'students with special educational needs' or 'students with disability' or with 'learning difficulties' were replaced with 'students with Individual Educational Needs' (IEN) so that no student was stigmatised. Students with IEN were to be regarded "as part of the normal diversity among all students" (NMC, 1999). Furthermore, the National Minimum Curriculum (1999) ensured that those students whose first language was not Maltese were not excluded from the mainstream educational provision. The NMC (1999) policy promoted inclusive cultures in schools in order to celebrate diversity. This new curriculum refers to "celebration of difference" (p.18), "a sense of social justice and solidarity", "values and socialisation", and "a democratic society" (NMC, 1999, p. 14).

The document "Creating Inclusive Schools" was issued in 2002 to provide guidelines for the implementation of the NMC (1999) on Inclusive Education. This document has closely followed the corresponding principles, approach and materials from Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow (2002, Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools). The first part of "Creating

Inclusive Schools" (2002) builds upon the principles of inclusive education mentioned in the NMC, within the process for developing more inclusive school cultures, policies and practices proposed by Booth and Ainscow (2002). The second part consists of a slightly adapted version of the Indicators for Inclusion in the "Index for Inclusion" of Booth and Ainscow (2002). These adaptations and reproductions were permitted under contract by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, UK. Then, in 2005, a review was written on Inclusive and Special Education, where the Maltese policies, which were published up till 2005 were analysed and recommendations were derived from the analysis. Training and support were highly prioritised in the policy recommendations.

In 2011, a consultation document was launched: the "National Curriculum Framework" (NCF) (Ministry of Education, 2011). This represented a review and an update on the previous National Minimum Curriculum (1999) and was founded on six general principles: Entitlement, Diversity, Continuum of Achievement, Learner Centred Learning, Quality Assurance and Teacher Professional Support (Ministry of Education, 2011). The principles of diversity, learner-centred learning and teacher professional support are the key foci of this thesis. Moreover, the NCF (2011) created more awareness on the diverse needs of the learners because it promotes "initial teacher education and further opportunities for training and support in the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity" (NCF, 2011, p.12). The NCF (2011) was discussed for two years and in February 2014, the Framework for the Education Strategy 2014-2024 was launched. This strategy stresses diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities through four broad goals:

- Reducing the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools, decreasing the number of low achievers and raising the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence, and increase student achievement.
- Supporting educational achievement of children at risk of poverty and from low socio-economic status and reducing the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers.
- Increasing participation in lifelong learning and adult learning.

- Raising levels of student attainment in further, vocational and tertiary education and training.

These four goals are clearly promoting an inclusive culture in the Maltese schools and as already discussed, previous policies issued by the Maltese Ministry of Education always promoted inclusion. However, the Education Strategy 2014-2024 seems to further establish the notion of creating more inclusive schools and much work is being done in schools to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of students with a diverse range of difficulties, that is, "children with low literacy, numeracy, science and digital skills, the low level of children who master higher-order thinking skills, and the current drop-outs" (p. 5). Thus, challenges are arising from day to day and the Senior Management Teams together with the teachers reflect upon new strategies from one year to another in order to increase student engagement in class. Many good practices are carried out in various schools but unfortunately these are not always shared. The motivation for the study reported in this thesis stemmed from the Education Strategy 2014-2024 (Ministry of Education, 2014). During 2015 the Ministry for Education held consultations with various stakeholders in order to implement this strategy effectively. Furthermore, the NCF (2011) proposed a Learning Outcomes Framework which aimed to allow schools to be more autonomous and develop learning programmes to address the learning needs of all students in a better way. Additionally, a new educational reform is planned to be launched in 2019: 'My Journey, An update of the Maltese Educational System'. This reform is intended to replace the current secondary school model with a more personalised, relevant and quality education for all students. Therefore, the system will be more structured to the students' needs with a view to secure a move away from the notion of 'one size fits all'.

This thesis investigates current inclusion strategies practised in Maltese secondary state schools and suggests how Maltese practices might be improved and developed to create more inclusive schools in the Maltese islands.

2.3 Context for the study: Inclusion in Maltese schools

Through the introduction of the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) in 1999, inclusive education was accentuated as one of the basic principles in the Maltese educational system. Students with special educational needs started being introduced in the mainstream schools. Additionally, the NMC (1999) stressed that students whose first language was not the spoken language were not to be excluded from the mainstream educational provision and so, in these two ways, diversity of students and learning needs started to be recognised as a responsibility which schools must address.

Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) were introduced in classes through the implementation of the NMC (1999) and they are provided on either a one-to-one basis, full-time or shared between students and classes (Ministry of Education, 2005). LSAs are assigned to students with intellectual disabilities, specific learning disabilities, communication difficulties, sensory difficulties, physical disabilities, multiple disabilities and emotional and behavioural difficulties (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2010).

Each student follows his/her Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) which is a concise and practical written plan. Modifications and adaptations for the student's needs are described in their plan, which also details the services necessary to ensure that the student has full access to educational entitlements according to the National Curriculum (EPASI, 2008). Some students may require small adaptations and minimum levels of support while others with more complex needs would require a more detailed plan. The IEP is a primary tool to ensure equal opportunities to all students thus every school has to take every student's need into serious consideration (EPASI, 2008). An Assistant Head and a teacher are usually present in the development of an IEP, in order to get to know the student better and be aware of his/her needs. Additional services that could be mentioned in the IEP are those for the visually or hearing impaired, and can include home tuition classes, hospital classes, early intervention and services for students with communication

difficulties including those on the Autism Spectrum Disorder[2] (ASD). Psycho-social services are also provided, such as guidance and counselling and school psychological service. Furthermore, training programmes for various levels of staff are offered regularly from the Student Services Department (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2010).

In 2007, Malta introduced Inclusion Coordinators (INCOs) into the educational system. These are specialised teachers who identify and assist vulnerable students from an early stage, co-ordinate the provision of classroom support for students with special needs and assist schools to develop the capability of IEPs preparation and reviews (EPASI, 2008). Furthermore, they support the school's Senior Management Team (SMT) in the running of the inclusion programme in the school and they coordinate the transitions of students with special needs from the primary school to the secondary school so that the change for these students will be as smooth as possible. They also provide initial assessment and make referrals when necessary (EPASI, 2008).

During the school examinations and the national examinations, access arrangements are provided to students according to their specific needs including dyslexic students. These students may be provided with the services of a reader, a prompter, a scribe, mathematical tables, extra time, a quiet room, enlarged paper, coloured paper and other aids (Ministry of Education, 2005). Students with severe difficulties are given a formative assessment instead of sitting for the examination. The unit for Specific Learning Difficulties promotes awareness of dyslexia through the delivery of various courses to educators and parents, by providing total support to the dyslexic learner to fulfil his/her potential and by providing resources for teachers, students and parents (Department of Curriculum Management, 2009).

Students with severe special needs attend resource centres, where the focus is on developing their cognitive skills, gross motor and self-help skills. Some students attend both the mainstream school and the resource centre in order to benefit from additional social interaction to support their development of

---

[2] The term used in Maltese schools for students diagnosed with autism.

social skills, and the resource centres are networked so that they can complement each other's services and facilities and to work closer with mainstream schools (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2010). Additionally, two of the resource centres offer support to students who are experiencing social and emotional behavioural difficulties (EPASI, 2008). Continuous training is provided for all levels of personnel working in these resources centres (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2010). Students in the resource centres follow the mainstream curriculum with the adaptations and modifications necessary to ensure full access to the curriculum. This enhances equal learning opportunities and experiences for all learners to become educated individuals (EPASI, 2008).

In 2009, Learning Support Zones (LSZ) and Nurture Groups were introduced in the Maltese schools. These programmes are "an integral part of the school behaviour policy and reflect the inclusive philosophy and practice as defined in the National Minimum Curriculum (1999) giving all the students the opportunity to succeed" (Department of Student Services, 2009, p. 2). They offer support to students who are at risk of exclusion due to Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). Those who benefit from these programmes may lack self-worth or confidence, struggle with anger management, others may lack respect towards others, have poor social skills, may be shy, withdrawn or anxious and they may be bullies or victims of bullying (Department of Student Services, 2009).

A programme elicited from the NCF (2012) is the Core Curriculum Programme (CCP). This programme is primarily designed for students with learning difficulties and aims to ensure that learners develop mastery of all the core components of the curriculum, specifically, that they acquire basic skills in literacy, mathematics and science and it also seeks to ensure that the learners involved are not completely segregated form the rest of the learning community (Department for Curriculum Management and eLearning, 2013). Additionally, an overall aim of the programme is to decrease the number of early school leavers in Malta. Furthermore, the Alternative Learning

Programme (ALP) was introduced in 2014 for Form 5 students (those students in the last year of compulsory education – age 16), who do not apply to sit for their Matsec examinations. The aim of this programme is to learn by doing, therefore the content of the curriculum is based on hands-on sessions which are then accompanied by lessons in the core subjects namely, Mathematics, English and Maltese (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). Furthermore, within this programme vocational subjects are taught and they relate to engineering, community services and performing arts. Such options are created to open up many opportunities to students who wish to focus on vocational subjects and intend to proceed with their studies in further education (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014).

2.4 Towards more effective inclusive schools

The inclusion sector in Maltese schools has undergone various developments during the last fifteen years. Considerable work is being done in all aspects of inclusion, with attempts to meet different specific learning needs but because inclusion is a continuous process, changes and developments are required from one year to another in order to meet the increasing needs of our diverse students. When compared to other international policies, it can be observed that every country and every global organisation must strive continuously to make changes to better the learner's personal educational experience and to address his/her needs and potentials in an effective way. The test is whether and how national and school policies are borne out in practice and in the experiences of students and teachers.

Presently, one of the issues causing concern in the Maltese schools is the increase in numbers of students from diverse cultural and linguistic heritages. The NCF (2012) acknowledges Malta's growing diversity and values the history and traditions of its people. Thus, the NCF (2012) affirms that all children can learn, grow and experience success by respecting diversity in all its forms, by promoting an inclusive environment and ensuring that the policies and practices in the school address the individual and specific needs of the

learners. Moreover, since the growth in numbers of students' different cultural and linguistic backgrounds can also mean including different religions/faith, in an education system that has traditionally been Catholic, the NCF (2012) proposes the Ethics Education as an alternative to the Catholic Religious Education. Furthermore, as stated earlier on, the NCF (2012) accentuated gender equality, learning accessibility, lifelong learning and raising the student's level of educational achievement. These issues were all highlighted by the global organisations UNESCO (2016) and OECD (2016).

Another aspect that National policy in Malta has identified for further work, is how to meet the learning needs of gifted children, this follows a review report on inclusive and special education in Malta (2005) which stated that "inclusive education should also embrace gifted children" (p. 42). Hence, the report continues that a policy of inclusive education should also provide for gifted students. However, there seems to be no specific provision for these particular students and though the number of gifted students may not be high, "no person is a number and every individual's worth is important to the person and to society in general" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 72). Thus, the Maltese system needs also to develop further this aspect of inclusion.

During the year 2014, an external audit of "Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta" (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014) analysed 1,184 responses through an on-line survey circulated to all state, church and independent schools. Qualitative data were collected through school visits, focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews. The main findings in this audit were that:

- Certain system factors reinforce integration rather than inclusion.
- School stakeholders do not feel sufficiently enabled to meet individual learning needs, therefore they suggested more training and provision of support.
- The right of special needs students to access mainstream education is being met but this is not sustainable in the long term especially where post-secondary education is involved.

- Stakeholders view support services as being effective with various students, especially those with special needs, however, they state that their role needs to be re-focused so that their support will be extended also to the mainstream schools and staff.

Therefore, the audit recommends that:

- Inclusive education should be an integral part of all legislation and that the policies should focus on maximising learning opportunities for all learners.
- Clear roles and responsibilities should be outlined, to provide support at all system levels.
- Strong leaders are needed to build the capacity of mainstream schools and to implement the inclusion policy with a view to reduce barriers to learning and participation and increase collaboration among all stakeholders.
- Provision of training and support for teachers in the classroom is a priority.
- A flexible curriculum, assessment frameworks and various teaching approaches need to be developed in order to engage all learners.
- Links with parents need to be continuously established.

(Education for All, 2014, pp. 13-14)

The above recommendations are integral to the three main themes of this literature review: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. Presently, inclusion is a priority area in various Maltese policies, both work related policies and educational policies. The NCF (2012) is promoting "flexible learning programmes providing diverse and integrated learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners and which suits the interests and capabilities of individual learners" (p. 15). In this way, all learners will be given "an appropriate entitlement of learning" (NCF 2012, p. 15), so as to accomplish their full potential as individual persons. Furthermore, the 2019 reform, 'My Journey', was recently launched and this promises more possibilities to the students to learn according to their needs, their interests and their learning styles. Therefore, policy shifts are geared towards Maltese schools continuing to move forward towards being more inclusive. As stated earlier, all the inclusive aspects of the Maltese policies are similar to those of other

international organisational inclusion policies. In policy terms, Malta, like many countries continue to express high importance to the learner's right for education and for the provision of an effective and inclusive system of education.

In the next chapter I will critically review the relevant literature as it relates to three main themes: inclusive leadership, the Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion.

CHAPTER 3
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 3: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

3.0 Introduction

The literature review sets out to critically discuss factors that lead to the development of more inclusive schools. The aim of the discussion is to analyse strategies that assist Maltese schools to become more inclusive. Three themes will be discussed: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion.

To reiterate, the main research question for this study is "What makes an inclusive school?" This breaks down into three further research questions that this thesis will investigate:

- What are the current inclusion policies and strategies practised in the Maltese schools?
- How do key stakeholders working in schools feel about inclusion policies in Malta?
- What national strategies are needed to develop more inclusive schools?

The first research sub-question was discussed thoroughly in Chapter 2. In this chapter I will focus on the role of the Head of School, inclusive teaching methodologies and the teacher's attitude towards inclusion. The literature review together with the investigation findings and discussion will assist in the formation of implications for improvement. These will indicate what national strategies are needed to develop more inclusive schools in Malta.

All students can participate actively in class through the Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2012). This "requires that teachers reach a wide array of students by providing access to the curriculum and to the myriad ways that students learn" (Hehir & Katzman, 2012, p. 10). Universal Design for Learning is defined as "an approach to instruction that promotes access, participation, and progress in the general education curriculum for all learners" (CAST, 2012). In other words, teachers need to make the curriculum accessible to a wide variety of learners, such as those with disabilities, students with dyslexia, students with autism and those with challenging behaviours (National Institute for Urban School Improvement, 2000). Teachers must ask themselves

whether their way of teaching is engaging every student in class and a range of adaptations to the curriculum are at times carried out in order to meet a variety of needs (Wayne State University, 2000). Furthermore, it is essential for the teacher to have high expectations of all the students in class and to provide challenges that stretch learning (Department of Education, Victoria, 2014). This necessitates a respectful relationship with the learner and their parents, who are highly knowledgeable about his/her child's needs, learning, development and achievement (Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2012).

Clearly, inclusive teaching is not always an easy task and often it is the case that teachers need others to support them if they are to provide appropriately for all the students in the class. Teacher training is fundamental and support has to be provided from different sources, such as colleagues, special needs teachers and most importantly from school leaders (National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, 2010; Hehir & Katzman, 2012). That is why professional learning communities are required, where educators work together, share expertise and work collaboratively (OECD, 2012; Watson, 2014; Bates, 2016), teachers also need to know how best to work in collaboration with students' parents.

This literature review will give a critical discussion of the above-mentioned issues as they relate to inclusivity in schooling, namely: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. In so doing the chapter will demonstrate how these factors are valuable in the development of a more inclusive school, where all students have a right to achieve their full potential. Whilst the chapter will consider the roles of various stakeholders however, the role of the school leader will be given more detailed consideration since the position is crucial to change. The process of developing an inclusive school is never complete but an ongoing process, thus, the Head of School must be constantly active in establishing a clear vision for the school where education is for all and training, support and resources are provided regularly to further develop the inclusive aspect of the school.

3.1 Inclusive Leadership

3.1.1 The school leader's vision

The work of school leaders is challenging and includes building relationships with members of the school's community, advocacy on behalf of students, parents and educators, overseeing the delivery of the curriculum, fostering relationships of dialogue, facilitating professional development and providing feedback to staff members (Cobb, 2014). Consequently, "they are fundamental in setting the tone and expectations of a school's approach to curriculum, equity and inclusion" (Cobb, 2014, p. 2). They have institutional authority to function as front line interpreters and deliverers of policy (Cobb 2014), and ultimately, they are the vital and accountable instrument in schools to lead change.

Changes are fundamental to the development of more inclusive schools, and school leaders are key stakeholders to promote and sustain change in schools (McLeskey and Waldron, 2002; Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis, 2009; Currie-Rubin, 2013; Department of Education, Victoria, 2014). Without their efforts, schools cannot change and improve to become a place where all students feel welcome and "where all students learn essential academic and non-academic lessons in preparation for life in the community" (Salisbury and McGregor, 2005, p.2). School leaders play a unique role in helping students, staff and parents to think and act more inclusively. They need to guide and support the course of change and they have to draw together the resources and people necessary to be successful (Salisbury and McGregor, 2005; Bristol, 2014).

In England, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), *Achievement for All* (2010, p.3) stated that it is the responsibility of school leaders to provide:

> … the vision, strategic planning, motivation, support, resources, structures and environment for learning that enable staff in schools and other children's services to work with parents and carers to make the very best possible provision for all children and young people.

Achievement for All (NCSL, 2010) also indicated that this is not the task of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) or of the inclusion manager but responsibility for the leadership of inclusion lies with the school leader. The Head of School is responsible for leading inclusion across the whole school, supported by other colleagues with designated responsibilities.

In the United Kingdom, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL, 2007) identified vital factors for successful leadership, one being: Building vision and setting directions. This entailed identifying a vision, promoting shared understanding and ownership of this vision in the school community, encouraging high expectations and monitoring organisational performance (NCSL, 2007). Similarly, Beany (2006) classified vision and commitment as key aspects to effective inclusion. *Achievement for All* (2010) highlighted that the school leader's vision needs to be motivated by a set of core values and beliefs around the expectations for all children and young people, especially those with special educational needs. This vision should be shared with the staff so that they will develop innovative strategies in the teaching and learning process to create more inclusive classes. Furthermore, the outcomes achieved by the students will be monitored (NCSL, 2010).

Having said that, the school leader's vision includes the belief that all students have a right to achieve their potential and according to NCSL (2010, p. 8) this entails the following:

- The school leader needs to be aware and understand the context and issues of the school community to enable empathy.
- His/her vision should be clear in order to encourage creativity and innovative practices. In fact, it ensures that learning is fun.
- The school leader's vision is based on the understanding of one's own personal leadership styles.
- Ultimately, the school leader has to share and promote his/her vision by enabling all stakeholders in school to own and shape its direction and their commitment has to be based on collective responsibility and shared accountability.

Inclusion must be a priority in the school's mission and it must be owned by all stakeholders in the school. However, the school leader has the prime role to motivate the staff to own inclusion and work towards it.

A Swedish study (Lindquist and Nilholm, 2013) investigated the views of educational leaders on how to work with children in need of special support. The majority of the school leaders interviewed stated that teachers and special needs educators should have the greatest amount of influence on the pedagogical content. Only 7% of school leaders stated that educational leaders should have the greatest amount of influence on the pedagogical content of the education for students in need of support (Lindquist and Nilholm, 2013). Furthermore, all school leaders stated that "SENCOs should supervise staff members and do documentation, school assessments and complete evaluations" (Lindquist and Nilholm, 2013, p. 98). Some two decades earlier, Villa et al. (1996) showed in their study, that the vision and amount of support from the school leader was one of the most powerful factors of the educators' attitudes towards inclusion. Therefore, as stated earlier, the school leader's role in the inclusion sector is crucial to the leading and motivating of the other stakeholders in the school.

The Maltese educational system is giving priority both to inclusion and inclusive leadership, therefore all Maltese Heads of School should operate with the belief that all learners have a right to learn and they should reach their full potential. Through the school leader's vision and support, the teaching staff should feel motivated to develop new strategies and methodologies to include all their students in class. The OECD (2016) discussed the concept of 'learning leadership' (pg. 10) where learning is to be in the heart of the school's mission and where the vision is translated into strategy, and ultimately, to practice. Schools are learning organisations where the school leader establishes and promotes a learning culture, facilitates collaboration and knowledge exchange and encourages staff to participate in decision making (OECD, 2016).

3.1.2 The school leader's influence on the staff

One of the important factors in the school leader's vision is to help students and staff feel that they belong in the school (Causton-Theoharis, and Theorharis, 2009; Hehir and Katzman, 2012; OECD, 2016). When people feel that they belong, they are likely to feel "more motivated, engaged, attentive, participatory and more likely to take risks and learn" (Causton-Theoharis and Theorharis, 2009, p. 44). This indicates that if the Head of School has a clear vision for the inclusive aspect in the school, s/he has the potential to cause a ripple effect on the staff, so that the vision will be shared, believed and eventually implemented.

As well as 'building vision and setting directions', the National College for School Leadership (2010, p.5) recommended three more practices:

- Understanding and developing people: leaders offer intellectual stimulation, provide individual support to the staff and are an appropriate model in order to lead by example. Furthermore, school leaders may build on the knowledge, skills and qualities that teachers and other staff have in order to achieve the school's goals.
- Redesigning the organisation: successful leaders build a collaborative culture with the staff, parents and the community, thus, connecting the school to the wider environment.
- Managing the teaching and learning programme: school leaders ensure effective learner-centred leadership, assign teachers and support staff to deliver the curriculum and monitor school activity and performance.

Through these qualities, the school leader conveys his/her vision to all stakeholders and creates the necessary conditions for successful inclusive practice. In this way, barriers to inclusion can be removed, opportunities are provided for staff to lead and develop and a sense of ownership and commitment for inclusion is created, thus, ensuring the progress of students with various educational needs. Occasionally, school leaders may need to challenge their own ways of thinking and they need to interact more with the staff especially with those members who are resistant to change (OECD,

2016).   Clear roles and responsibilities can encourage staff to take responsibility and become accountable for their work (NCSL, 2010) and through this sustained commitment, school leaders can create an ethos and a culture of inclusion.

Curcic et al. (2011) interviewed new teachers in three different schools in Chicago and found that when school leaders do not have an inclusive vision, teachers may feel isolated. The notion of teachers' isolation was mentioned in a study by Attard Tonna and Shanks (2017) which was carried out in Malta and Scotland. They found that isolation led teachers to produce, "an attitude of individualism" (pg. 100). As a result, they end up trusting no one other than themselves.   Therefore, it is vital for the Heads of School to provide opportunities for teachers to interact and exchange information and experience (Attard Tonna and Shanks, 2017).

Meanwhile, Curcic et al. (2011) found that teachers argued between themselves about students' diversity and whether all students should be part of the mainstream school or not. In fact, they stated in their interviews that they experienced anxiety and confusion, suggesting that the school leader may have been influencing his/her staff in a negative way and not providing training or support. Since, the ethos of the school was not an inclusive one, the school leader was not conveying the right message to the staff and Curcic et al. (2012) argued that many teachers and school administrators are not aware of the broad responsibilities in the school and towards society when they enter the profession.   On the other hand, when principals were interviewed, they agreed that schools must be more inclusive, however, they were preoccupied about the fact that students with various needs may not do so well in the state exams, thus, the school's reputation could be damaged. Consequently, the teachers of these schools shared the same views and Curcic et al. (2011) stated that none of the teachers mentioned the possibility of models for creating an inclusive curriculum, such as the Universal Design for Learning, but instead they seemed to focus on 'sameness' (p.128).

The Curcic et al. (2012) study supports the view that there are still Heads of School who need training and support, and need to make an attitudinal shift

to become inclusive leaders. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the importance of vision, commitment, collaboration and communication as vital features of an inclusive leader. Principals and teachers must share leadership and communicate role expectations to create a whole school change and to establish the culture of dialogue necessary for inclusive school communities (Rice, 2006).

Consequently, communities of practice must be developed in the schools for all stakeholders to be involved. A teachers' community of practice involves building relationships to help each other and share information, experiences, tools and to engage in discussions to address frequent problems (Wenger, 2006). Eventually teachers form partnerships with Learning Support Assistants and with the Head of School, to share values, and aims to develop a supportive school culture and sustain professional development. In this community, students will also form an integral part, where they can talk about their own learning experiences. Furthermore, parents may join the community of practice too (Wenger, 2006, UNESCO, 2015). This will confirm Vygostky's theory (1978) mentioned in Chapter 1, where students will be learning through social interaction, with both their peers and educators, to further develop their cognitive skills.

3.1.3 Strategies for the school leader to develop an inclusive school

The National College for School Leaders (2010, p.5) explored how school principals create a learning community to improve learning for all, highlighting the following, as vital strategies for more inclusive school leadership:

- Motivation: school leaders have to encourage, trust and value colleagues to do well.
- Modelling: school leaders have to lead by example.
- Provisions of opportunities: school leaders should provide teachers with opportunities to undertake greater responsibilities.

- Promotion of professional development: teachers need training focused on teaching, learning and leadership and keeping abreast of change.

- Encouragement of initiative: staff feels free to experiment and is confident that it is supported by the Head of School.

- Show interest: the Head of School must praise, encourage and help in moving forward.

- Be community-minded: school leaders should involve, consult and engage with the local community.

- Build teams: successful school leaders build teams and empower them.

Similarly, Kugelmass (2003), Ofsted (2006) and Beany (2006) identified the above aspects as strategies for inclusion, with all highlighting the importance of training, support and provision of resources, however, various studies also identify the importance of the Head of School providing clearly defined roles (McLeskey and Waldron, 2002; Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Cobb, 2014). This issue was also recommended in the Maltese audit on inclusive education (European Agency, 2014). Cobb (2014) stated that the teacher's roles and responsibilities must expand in special education and this requires the principals to enrich their knowledge and skills in facilitating team buildings.

In his meta-analysis of 19 studies, "Principals as special education leaders", Cobb (2014) discovered that while principals encouraged inclusive programme delivery, they also facilitated staff collaboration to enhance school-wide inclusion. In addition, they fostered parental engagement to establish an inclusive atmosphere in the school community (Cobb, 2014) and in the studies reviewed, the Head of School tended to take on seven roles in order to be a special education leader: visionary, partner, coach, conflict resolver, advocate, interpreter and organiser.

The school leader's vision of inclusion (discussed in section 3.1.1) needs to be communicated effectively to all stakeholders in order for them to recognise that it is a valuable goal (Valeo, 2008). When the vision is shared, collaborative structures and processes are developed to make plans and decisions (Furney et al., 2005). Irvine et al. (2010) stated that in order to create an inclusive atmosphere, principals need to provide clear guidance in

the school by developing and communicating expectations, facilitating ongoing discussions with the staff and providing opportunities for all the workforce to develop skills in an atmosphere of constructive feedback and encouragement. As visionaries, principals become instructional leaders, where they promote student achievement, coordinate and monitor teaching and create a supportive work climate (Ross and Berger, 2009). They observe newly qualified teachers, provide constructive feedback, coach and mentor and promote effective pedagogy (Correa and Wagner, 2011).

Partnership between teaching staff and parents (who know their children best) is an important strategy for the Head of School in order to implement his/her vision. This involves engaging in collaborative practices, such as team planning, exchanging ideas and shared decision-making (Jacobs, Tonnsen and Baker, 2004; Smith and Leonard, 2005; Bristol, 2014; OECD 2016). These actions lead to feelings of shared approach and ownership and shared responsibility and to distributed and democratic leadership (Correa and Wagner, 2011; OECD, 2016). Teachers' participation in decision making and the concept of distributed leadership help teachers to develop collaboration and teamwork and they are encouraged to participate in professional learning communities and other networks (OECD, 2016).   Eventually, the teacher's sense of self-efficacy increases together with one's own job satisfaction.

School leaders need to create partnerships with other administrators, with special education coordinators and with curriculum coordinators, in order to implement the inclusion programme (Shepherd, 2006; OECD, 2016). Maltese schools coordinate with resource centres and various specialist teachers to help the learner reach his/her potential and ideally, specialist teachers form part of the school staff on a daily basis in every Maltese school. Shepherd (2006) mentioned the development of partnerships between administrators. Sharing of good practices between schools is beneficial because both leaders and teachers learn from each other's positive experiences. Staff collaboration and partnership among staff is highly recommended in many studies already discussed in this chapter, thus, school leaders should do the same between them.

Furthermore, it is important to build partnerships with parents in order to achieve trust (Irvine et al. 2010; OECD, 2016) because parents may be apprehensive about their children's progress, and how this is provided for in schools. This can especially be the case for students with special needs. Through my work as an Assistant Head in charge of inclusion, I meet with many worried parents especially when students have to change schools from the primary years to the secondary years. The primary school very often consists of a number of students coming from one town only. Thus, children will be in a smaller environment and teachers know the students on a one-to-one basis. On the other hand, the secondary schools are much larger both in the size of the buildings and in their population while students come from various towns, thus, both the children and their parents may be apprehensive at the prospect of entering a new and bigger environment and meeting new students and experiencing new expectations and unfamiliar ways of doing things. I try, with all parents, to confirm that their child's best interest is my priority, and I assure them that, as a school we are ready to help the child develop his/her full potential, whilst instilling in them a sense of belonging. Additionally, I insist that, as a school we value communication with them as parents, because after all, they know their child best.

Partnership leads to the coaching strategy where school leaders act as coaches to foster staff collaboration and encourage and advise staff members in special education (Cobb, 2014). Furthermore, school leaders need to coach teachers towards team teaching and provide ongoing and meaningful feedback to them (Burch, Theoharis and Rauscher, 2010). Through coaching and mentoring, school leaders will be continuously involved in the daily running of the inclusion programme. They will maintain "physical presence throughout the school day in and out of classes" (Cobb, 2014, p. 13). Their presence and support will enhance stronger teacher commitment to inclusive education, leading to job satisfaction. For this reason, school leaders need to be knowledgeable on inclusion and this is why they need continuous training on the subject. Stevenson-Jacobson, Jacobson and Hilton (2006, quoted in, Cobb, 2014, p. 224) stated that, "principals with training and experience in special education generally assume more responsibility for special education".

Conflict and tension are common occurrences within a professional learning community, therefore, the school leader must act as a resolver of conflict (Cobb, 2014). Sometimes, confusion may exist about who holds responsibility for students with special needs or who has to take ownership (Valeo, 2008), hence, role clarity is a priority in this case. Bristol (2014) refers to particular teachers as "blockers" or "resisters", because they question inclusion and they may be resistant to change, thus creating conflict and tension. However, a school leader participating in Bristol's study stated that these types of teachers may create ideal opportunities for the leader to hear an alternative voice and to see another perspective that confronts underlying assumptions. Thus, the school leader will be encouraged to think about other alternatives to direct, value and promote collective responsibility to sustain inclusive school practices (Bristol, 2014).

School leaders are important advocates when fostering the delivery of the inclusion programme. For instance, they need to advocate their school with the school board or in the case of the Maltese schools, with the Department of Education, for the provision of resources (human and material) that would help to enrich the inclusionary practices in the schools (Albus, Thurlow and Clapper, 2006; Shepherd, 2006).

Principals need to interpret research and policies well in order to implement inclusive practices in the school (Furney et al., 2005; Albus, Thurlow and Clapper, 2006). Through good interpretation, they would identify effective strategies which are eventually discussed with the staff. In this way, principals can provide guidance to their members of staff. School leaders need to offer their interpretation of policies and regulations for parents too so that they are aware of their rights regarding how to make requests, respond to communications and contribute to decision-making (Jacobson and Hilton, 2006).

Ultimately, the school leader has to be the organiser in the whole inclusive programme (Burch, Theoharis and Rauscher, 2010) because inclusion is not the sole responsibility of the SENCO or of the Assistant Head in charge of inclusion, but that of the Head of School. Therefore, principals need to gather

useful resources for teachers to utilise during their teaching process and to organise professional development that is engaging, effective and ongoing, and eventually remove any barriers to inclusion (Irvine et al. 2010). In addition, school leaders must formulate schedules, manage and monitor the inclusion tasks that need to be completed throughout the year, gather resources, formulate teams, budget and deploy staff (Irvine et al., 2010).

To summarise this section, inclusion is not an individualist project, but a community endeavour (Bristol, 2014), with the school leader at the helm to drive forward the development of the school and its stakeholders. The visions and the beliefs of the school leader have to be nurtured by the whole community so that the sense of belonging and ownership in the school will lead to excitement and enthusiasm in the teaching and learning process. Ultimately, of course, it is positive attitudes towards the project of inclusion that enable school leaders to enact the practical processes outlined above. This will be a focus of the empirical element of the study reported in this thesis in Chapter 5.

3.2 Universal Design for Learning

3.2.1 Definition of Universal Design for Learning

The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach emerged from the field of architecture whereby Federal legislation (in the US) required universal access to buildings and other structures for individuals with disabilities (Lieberman, Lytle and Clarcq, 2008). Thus, architects started to design buildings with accessibility, such as ramps, to aid persons using wheelchairs or walkers, parents with prams or pushchairs and even bicycles. Using this principle, UDL is a strategy to eliminate barriers to learning and it includes universally designed instruction, universally designed curriculum and universally designed assessment (Rose and Meyer, 2002; Senechal, 2016; Williams and Smith, 2016).

Universal design in education means that the social, physical and learning environments are designed to support the students' learning, thus, it is accessing the widest number of individuals in order to create a more inclusive environment (Odem et al., 2005; McGuire, Scott and Shaw, 2006). UDL involves flexibility and creativity and is a framework that provides alternatives for methods of instruction, delivery of instruction materials and student responses (Rose and Meyer, 2002). For these reasons UDL seems to be an effective pedagogy for inclusion.

In the United States, the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) defined UDL as a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice. It says that UDL provides flexibility in the way information is given, in the way learners react and demonstrate knowledge and skills and in the way they are engaged. Furthermore, it can reduce barriers in instruction, provide accommodation, and support, challenge and maintain high achievement expectations for all learners, including those with disabilities and others with diverse needs (HEOA, 2008).

Essentially, according to Lieberman, Lytle and Clarcq (2008, p. 33), the benefits of employing the principles of Universal Design for Learning are that it:

- motivates all learners to participate in class
- includes all learners in every activity
- increases learning
- increases acceptance of learners with diverse needs by their peers
- reduces frustration during the lesson for the learners and the teachers

UDL was identified as one of the main themes in this literature review because it includes multiple ways for learners to access education. However, good training and preparation must be organised to reach all stakeholders in the school since it involves several changes. Furthermore, it may also involve certain expenses for the school to implement its training. Its effectiveness and implementation will be discussed in detail in the next sections.

3.2.2 The effectiveness of UDL in an inclusive school

The UDL creates a structure for creating goals, methods, materials and assessments that function for everyone. Therefore, the solution is not a 'one-size-fits-all' result, but rather a flexible approach that can be customised and adjusted according to individual needs (UDL Centre, 2013; Senechal, 2016). Individuals bring a huge variety of skills, needs and interests to learning, and as the National Centre on UDL (2013) stated, neuroscience has shown these differences to be as varied and unique as our DNA or fingerprints. According to the UDL Centre, three primary brain networks come into play in learning development: recognition networks, strategic networks and affective networks, that is, the 'what' of learning, the 'how' of learning and the 'why' of learning. The 'what' of learning involves the way how we gather facts and categorize what we see, hear and read, such as identifying letters and words. The 'how' of learning refers to planning and performing tasks, that is, how we organize and express our ideas, such as writing an essay or solving a mathematics problem. The 'why' of learning means how learners get engaged and stay motivated, that is, how they are challenged, excited or interested. This indicates that a UDL approach can be utilised to help remove barriers to learning and provide for the inclusion of those learners who may be in the margins, for many different reasons.

Since the idea of UDL originated from the universal design in architecture it results in a flexible environment to serve a broad range of consumers (Meyer et al., 2002). This leads to the formation of a universal design for curriculum, that is, the creation of a flexible curriculum, where learning is accessed in various ways – according to learners' needs and abilities, where various assessment methods are applied and where assistive technology is employed to best support learning. Through all these practices many barriers to learning can be reduced, if not entirely eliminated (Meyer et al. 2002).

The Centre for Universal Design (Peterson and Hittie, 2003, p. 421) developed seven principles for the design of environments and products that cater for the diverse needs and abilities of humanity. Although, these principles were

published around twenty years ago, they are still valid for our era where they help us reflect on our present teaching and inclusive practices:

Principle 1: Equitable use: Provide the same means of use for all users.
Avoid isolating any users.
Provide security and safety for everyone.
Make the design appealing to all users.

Principle 2: Flexibility in use: Provide choice in methods of use.
Accommodate the use of right or left-handed students.
Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

Principle 3: Simple and intuitive use: Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.
Provide effective prompting and feedback during the task and after it is completed.

Principle 4: Perceptible information: Use various modes to present information, such as pictures and verbal and tactile modes.
Create a difference between essential information and its surroundings.
Make it easy to give instructions or directions.
Provide devices to people with sensory limitations.

Principle 5: Tolerance for error: Hazardous elements should be eliminated.
Provide warnings of hazards and errors.

Principle 6: Low physical effort: Allow user to maintain
neutral body position.
Minimise repetitive actions.
Minimise constant physical effort.

Principle 7: Size and space for approach and use:

Provide a clear sight for a seated or standing user.

All components should be comfortably reached by any seated or standing user.

Provide variations in hand and grip size.

Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

Whilst some of the strategies listed above are implemented in class by various teachers, much more awareness and training are needed in these principles of the effectiveness of a universal designed curriculum. Hehir and Katzman (2012), highlighted the incorporation of the UDL principles in the teaching and learning process, stressing that the ability of diverse learners will be enhanced through the provision of multiple means of presentation of lessons. For instance, students could be allowed to demonstrate what they know in multiple ways and this may result in a higher student's achievement and in an accurate teacher's assessment. However, Hehir and Katzman (2012), also stated that implementing UDL in the classroom can be a complex undertaking, thus, teachers need training to implement and maintain such an approach.

In the next section, I will discuss the implementation of UDL, considering the practices of UDL in more detail, with particular reference to different stakeholders in the school: school leaders, teachers, students and parents.

3.2.3 The Implementation of UDL in the school

The Universal Designed Curriculum involves three aspects: clear goals, learning how to learn and the use of varied tools (Meyer et al., 2002; Salend, 2008). Goals should be defined for the class as a whole and communicated and agreed with the students to enhance their participation (Meyer et al., 2002). According to Rose and Meyer (2002) true participation in a universally designed curriculum leads to learning how to learn, and learning involves the mastery of skills and strategies. The use of varied tools supports active learning, includes digital technologies (Meyer et al., 2002; Meo, 2008; Messinger-Willman and Marino, 2010) and may also include specialist technologies to support specific learners.

Messenger-Willman and Marino (2010) stressed that assistive technology and UDL go hand in hand especially in secondary schools. Similarly, Silver-Pacuilla (2006) stated that assistive technology and UDL promote access, participation and progress of learning disabled students. UDL and assistive technology allow teachers to easily identify 'scaffolds', support that does not interfere with learning and which can gradually be withdrawn. These scaffolds help students with diverse learning needs to work effectively towards a common goal (Meyer et al., 2002). The notion of 'scaffolds' was also strongly emphasised by Vygotsky (1978), whose ideas underpin theoretical framework for this study. Assistive technological devices range from low-tech devices, such as pencil grips, highlighters, reading guides, magnifying lenses to more high-tech and digital devices, such as audio books, reading pens, talking calculators, word prediction software, text-to-speech software and laptop computers (Kaplan, 2003). Students with diverse needs benefit from these devices to access the curriculum through social, emotional and cognitive scaffolds (White, Wepner and Wetzel, 2003). Assistive technology supports students' academic progress by providing a means to reduce or eliminate literacy barriers since it is used as a reading support that helps students to strengthen and improve their overall reading skills (Hasselbring and Bausch, 2005). Furthermore, assistive technology allows the learner to learn at his/her own pace, which then results in the improvements of the learner's

communication skills, behaviour and attention (Parette and Stone, 2008). Many modern classrooms are incorporating digital technologies – such as ipads – as learning tools for all students thus, for students to use such technologies in their learning is now becoming established practice for all students.

Successful inclusion depends upon effective training of teachers who need to be trained to successfully select, implement and monitor the student's progress when using assistive technology (Messinger-Willman and Marino, 2010), and they need to know what is available to support learners' individual needs (White et al., 2003). This may be one of the main challenges in the implementation of UDL. Not all teachers like to change their methodologies and for some the introduction of technologies can be seen as a form of 'cheating' (Darmanin, 2017). Thus, it is fundamental for teachers to be offered training and support in the implementation of the UDL framework. Another challenge for schools is the cost of class resources. As discussed earlier, assistive technology is one of the main tools of the implementation of UDL, therefore, the school needs an amount of funding to buy various technological devices (Senechal, 2016; Wikispaces.com, 2016). In Maltese schools, assistive technology is present in the use of interactive white boards in class and through the use of the teacher's laptop and a class computer, these assist in the visual aspect of the lesson. However, students with special educational needs are not routinely assisted with any technological devices to eliminate barriers in their learning. Therefore, reading software and text-to-speech devices which would address the diverse needs of learners, such as those with dyslexia are not readily accessible. However, most recently, tablets are being introduced in the fourth year of the primary school and high technology computers are being installed in each class in every school. Properly used, these devices will assist both the teachers and the learners in the teaching and learning process.

Assistive technology, whilst important for some learners, is not the only aid in UDL, various other materials are essential to facilitate teaching and learning. Salend (2008, pp. 329-330) highlighted the UDL principles mentioned in the

previous section. He gave ideas about various ways and means to implement these principles in the classroom, such as:

- Using multilingual materials
- Offering instructional choices to learners
- Providing multiple examples of concepts
- Establishing classroom management routines
- Using visual and auditory instructional formats
- Giving clear, concise step-by-step written, pictorial and verbal directions
- Giving hands-on directions
- Providing students with adaptive switches and keyboards, sensors and voice-activated systems
- Breaking lessons and assignments into smaller parts
- Allowing extra time to work on assignments
- Using proper seating arrangements and specialised chairs and desks
- Providing students with adapted grips
- Using cooperative learning groups and peer tutoring
- Fostering friendships among students

The above are simple and practical examples of how UDL can be implemented in any classroom to meet the individual learning needs and styles of all pupils. As already stated, much depends on the teacher's willingness to be inclusive, as much as teaching approaches. Salend (2008) maintained that the UDL approach provides differentiated learning based on the student's learning styles and cognitive, physical, sensory, motivational, cultural and language characteristics. It allows the teacher to offer flexible options to the learners in order to access and respond to various formats of information. Directions, content and learning activities are presented in multiple formats and learners choose the most appropriate format and pace that fits their learning preference (Meyer et al., 2002; Salend, 2008,).

Peterson and Hittie (2003) offered other practical strategies to create a universally designed class. Primarily, they insisted that a class environment has to be decorated in a way which is inviting, warm and cosy, so that the

students can feel relaxed and secure, especially in primary schools. They stated that quiet areas for reading and writing are organised on one side of the room, while, louder areas for science, mathematics and art, are arranged on the other side of the classroom. For instance, they suggested that windows could be used to create a science area that includes plants and a bird feeder. An aquarium or an art centre may be stationed near the sink. A poetry area could include simply a bucket full of poetry books (Peterson and Hittie, 2003). A secondary school class could also include plants and animals as a means of comfort and security and a sense of responsibility is instilled in the students to take care to them. Additionally, these ideas encourage a sense of ownership for the learners (Causton-Theoharis and Theohais, 2009; NCLS, 2010). Peterson and Hittie (2003) mentioned strategies similar to those mentioned by Salend (2008) and add that it is also crucial that students become aware of the additional needs of their peers. They further suggest that hearing students might better appreciate the needs and experiences of hearing impaired students by wearing earplugs, then draw on this experience to empathise and consider better ways to communicate and improve the learning experience of everyone. Similarly, they suggest that sighted students might try wearing blindfolds and experience being guided by sighted peers to get a sense of the needs of a visually impaired student when getting around the school. Students could also use a wheelchair for a day in order to make them become aware of particular access difficulties and be encouraged to identify various solutions and recommendations. Whilst there must be sensitivity to students with impairments, these simple examples can be used in some circumstances to create more awareness and understanding on behalf of all students and ultimately, enhance inclusion and understanding in a class.

Hehir and Katzman (2012) during their observations in inclusive schools, encountered universally designed positive behaviour support. Teachers and administrators focused on creating a positive school culture by teaching and rewarding positive behaviours. Rather than reacting to inappropriate and destructive behaviours, schools aimed at teaching students, appropriate and constructive behaviours (Hehir & Katzman, 2012). In Maltese schools, good

behaviour reports and comments truly motivate students in their school work, however, students with very challenging behaviour still take a very long time to improve their behaviour and it is surely not an easy process. At times, educators automatically give out punishments for bad behaviour especially when it is very challenging, however, nowadays school administrators are highlighting the promotion of improving behaviour through positive reinforcement. To that end, committees are being formed in various schools as part of the Staff Development Plan, specifically to work upon the promotion of positive behaviour.

Another important aspect that relates to universally designed positive behaviour support is the curriculum. A teacher who was interviewed in the study by Hehir and Katzman (2012) stated that her first approach to behaviour was to ask whether her curriculum was engaging or not. She added that a lot of behavioural issues occurred because the curriculum did not touch the kids, thus, they did not relate to it, it put them off. Over the last two years, the curriculum content has created much discussion in our Maltese education system and in this context the aforementioned remark, one of the factors leading to challenging behaviours was an unappealing syllabus. In a seminar, held in Malta in 2015, it was stated that one out of every four students reaching school-leaving age, was quitting the educational system prematurely and being 'lost' (Times of Malta, Oct. 6, 2015). This is why the curriculum is now being revised and as mentioned in the previous sections, alternative educational programmes have been introduced, especially in the secondary years. Furthermore, vocational subjects, such as Agribusiness, IT, Health and Social Care, Engineering and Hospitality, have been introduced in the secondary schools (Times of Malta, Aug. 20, 2014). Through these subjects, students can prepare themselves for a career in an early stage of their secondary schooling. However, one still needs to have good academic skills, and furthermore, vocational, employment-focused programmes may not suit all students.

Assessment is another aspect within the curriculum, that needs to be flexible in order to provide the teacher with accurate and ongoing information (Meyer et al., 2002). Universally designed assessments are intended to improve

access to learning and assessments for all students. These can result in more accurate understanding of what students know and what they can do (National Centre on Educational Outcome (NCEO), 2013). These assessments are based on the premise that each student has to be tested and test results should not be influenced by disability, gender or race (Thompson et al., 2005). Some of the tips given by NCEO (2013) to create a universally designed assessment were that first of all, it should measure what it intends to measure, one needs to avoid content that might unfairly advantage or disadvantage any student, it should have a clear format for text, such as the use of a big font, wide spacing between letters, words and lines, the font should be age appropriate, and one should use high contrast between colour of text and background. Furthermore, these assessments should include pictures and graphics that are clearly defined and labelled, text which is concise and readable, where the vocabulary is appropriate for grade level, technical terms and abbreviations should be avoided, and sentence complexity is appropriate for grade level.

Finally, UDL assessments should allow for changes to assessment formats without changing the meaning or difficulty (such as the use of Braille, oral presentation, assistive technology or translation into another language). As one can observe, these types of assessments do not only accommodate students with special needs but they are essential to accommodate each and every learner. If adjustments can be made to the mode of assessment according to the needs of all students, this promotes more inclusive practice. Assessment grades can be presented instead of the exam marks, where to sit for exams is an unsuitable mode of assessment for some students. Thus, whatever form of assessment is developed for each student – these have credibility. Where this breaks down, is in the examination-based system which discriminates against students whose individual educational needs are not conducive to sitting examinations (Cefai, Fenech and Galea, 2007). Therefore, in order to decrease these differences, assessments can be presented in ways that they indicate a clear picture of a student's progress, as has been the case during recent years in the Maltese schools, where formative assessments in the vocational subjects are now given more weight,

so that the final mark does not result solely from an examination, but also through hands-on class work (Matsec Support Unit, University of Malta, 2015).

Staff collaboration is highly important in the implementation of UDL and this was stressed in Hehir and Katzman's study (2012), where participating teachers stated that their colleagues were as 'resources' to them and that teachers relied on one another for ideas and team teaching. School leaders must develop collaborative cultures in the school with a focus on teachers' collaborative problem-solving (Wayne State University, 2000; Hehir and Katzman, 2012). In the above study, the administrators also provided time for the teachers to be able to develop strong working relationships, by scheduling time for teachers to plan together and hold staff meetings. In contrast, in Maltese schools, teachers find it really difficult to find time to meet within their schedules. In their study, Attard Tonna and Shanks (2017), identified this element as a major barrier to teacher collaboration in Maltese schools. Clearly, in order to implement this strategy, the school leader must have a strong inclusive vision, so that teachers actively share that vision, and opportunities are created to work together and grow professionally (Stanules and Burril, 2004; Draper and O'Brien, 2006; Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Attard Tonna and Shanks, 2017; Calleja and Bezzina, 2017). Furthermore, the school leader needs to invest in resources and allow teachers to experiment with new universally designed approaches. Relating to this, lately in some Maltese schools, class conferences have been introduced, where teachers teaching a class where they find things difficult, met together to share their concerns and preoccupations and together generated solutions and teaching ideas. These class conferences were highly effective, however, they had to be held during the teachers' breaktime, in order for all teachers to be available. To give value to such collaborative problem solving and sharing, and to value the process, time allocation for staff collaboration in Maltese schools needs to be considered a priority.

Finally, and arguable most important, is the need for administrators and teachers to collaborate with parents and carers (Wayne State University, 2000; Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2012). Parents act as advocates for their children, and this may result in particular

disputes between them and the school. At times, parents may seem to be in denial about their child's special needs, or else their concerns and emotionally charged responses could be viewed as excessive over-action when they demonstrate deep concern and speak up for their children, especially when this means that they disagree with the school approach. For some parents, it may also be difficult to know how best to address their child's needs, and there may be disagreement with the school, other parents may have a clear view of what their children need, but this is not a view held by the school. Crow (2018) stated that as a parent of a child with special needs, she may have "the tendency to be overprotective" (Families.com) in order to cope with her child's behaviours. For instance, she said that parents may not believe the view of some professionals when they say that their child may attain a good level of educational achievement. Thus, they would not want to challenge their child so that s/he would not be "upset ….. because s/he becomes unglued and can't calm down" (Crow, 2018, Families.com). Crow (2018) concluded that this type of overprotection or denial does not allow for growth. Weidner (2014) regarded this type of overprotection as parental fear, which according to him may contribute to exclusion and segregation.

At times, some parents may give more emphasis to the development of social skills, independence and confidence rather than to the academic achievement (Ferguson, 2014). For this reason, parents may be reluctant to push their child further, in order to achieve a higher level of attainment. In their study, Chandramuki, Shastry and Vranda (2012) found that parents of children with learning difficulties tended to feel anxious, guilty and emotionally insecure and at times, negative attitudes were developed towards their child. As a result, they may seem over-protective and less able to identify their child's strengths. They stated that these children may still reach a good level of achievement. However, they may be high achievers in performing arts subjects instead, such as, music, dance, drama, sports and painting. If parents deny these strengths and cannot recognise and encourage them, this could be detrimental to the child's accomplishments (Chandramuki, Shastry and Vranda, 2012).

In some other cases, it may well be that the school should listen more to the views and knowledge of parents when making decisions about a student. Therefore, parents and schools need to find ways of developing trust and collaboration for the benefit of the child. Clearly, parents know their child best, thus, they would know very well what their needs are. Then, administrators and teachers must think about strategies, such as UDL, to suit the child's needs. However, where a school implements UDL approaches, it is important for the parents to be given information and opportunity to discuss the approach and the school rational for adopting universally designed inclusive education (Hehir and Katzman, 2012) where all students with varying needs learn together. Parents and educators need to work together and engage in discussions for the benefit of the child and this often takes work on the part of school and parents to see different viewpoints, respect responsibilities, whilst always bearing in mind that parents know their children best.

In conclusion, one may say that the Universal Design for Learning means learning without barriers. It provides for learners' various ways of acquiring information and knowledge and alternative ways to demonstrate what they know. Therefore, the Universal Design for Learning is incorporated within inclusion. If teachers implement UDL principles and strategies, various students' needs are met successfully in class, in so doing the climate of expectation that the needs of all students are met is established. Administrators have to be the founders of UDL in their school and consequently they need to share this vision with their staff. School leaders need to encourage and train teachers to use UDL in their teaching strategies in order to engage all their students in class. Furthermore, they need to encourage teachers to collaborate together for the benefit of the whole school, in order to give them good opportunities to work together and grow professionally.

3.3   Professional Learning Communities for Inclusion

In this section, the literature on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for inclusion will be critically discussed. First it will focus on the teachers' inclusive

values and attitudes. This will be followed by a discussion on both pre-service and in-service training and professional development in the field of inclusion.

3.3.1 Teachers and inclusive values

Internationally, many schools are changing and developing to address students' diverse needs (OECD, 2009). All stakeholders working in the school, Heads of School, teachers and Learning Support Assistants are faced with challenges throughout their working years. Therefore, continuing professional development (CPD) is a priority in one's career to maintain a high standard of education in the school (OECD, 2009, 2016). CPD may involve courses, workshops, education conferences or seminars, qualification programmes, observation visits in other schools, participation in a network of teachers, research, mentoring or peer observation (OECD, 2009). The involvement in CPD of all stakeholders working in a school, can be part and parcel of the concept of creating professional learning communities in schools.

A professional learning community (PLC) is a group of educators that work together, share expertise and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students and ultimately, educators share a mission, a vision and a set of goals (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014; Watson, 2014; Bates et al, 2016). The OECD (2012) and Bates et al. (2016) made it clear that the concept of PLCs was embedded in the ideas of socio-constructivism stemming from Vygotsky's theory (1978) which stated that the adults' role is to facilitate and guide the child's learning and that knowledge is constructed through interaction and collaboration with knowledgeable others. Effective interactions between students and their teachers lead to the success of students' learning (OECD, 2012). Furthermore, Stoll et al. (2006) stated that the key purpose of PLCs is to "enhance teacher effectiveness as professionals, for students' ultimate benefit" (pg. 229). PLCs may be also referred to as 'learning organisations' (OECD, 2016, p.1), where collaboration amongst teachers is highly promoted and therefore, teachers are encouraged to share each other's values and knowledge. I will discuss this concept further, later in this chapter.

Bolam et al. (2005) carried out a survey on the effectiveness of PLCs and among the key characteristics that were found, some of which were similar to those mentioned above, they identified three other qualities of effective PLCs, namely: inclusive membership, mutual trust, support and respect and openness, networks and partnership. All these qualities indicate that teachers surely adopt inclusive values throughout their work, the question then is, how such values are manifested in practice. Additionally, Watson (2014) said that, through these qualities of effective PLCs, teachers can also be regarded as "agents of change" (p. 26), therefore, the community will be progressing more towards being an inclusive one where such values are realised in practice.

Sydney (2010) suggested that the three principles of inclusion are: equality, diversity and cohesion. All students are of equal value and they should have equal opportunities to learn and to be successful. However, this does not mean that students can, or should, all be treated in the same way; their differences should be recognised and respected. Ultimately, it is important that students feel that they belong to the class and to the school, and feel welcomed, accepted, and entitled to participate and contribute both in class and in school (Sydney, 2010). These three principles of equality, diversity and cohesion are applicable both for school leaders and teachers. The school leader's vision has been already discussed in detail in the previous sections. This section will next consider teacher's views about the development of inclusive methodologies and inclusive classes as reported in the literature.

There are mixed opinions amongst educators about the principle of inclusion. For instance, Dore et al. (2002) argued that some teachers and administrators support inclusion only if it requires minimal accommodations, thus not inclusive at all. McLeskey et al. (2001) stated that educators who are working in inclusive classrooms tend to have more positive views than those who are not working in inclusive settings. The factors affecting these views include: the effectiveness of the inclusive programme, the administrative support, the family support, the support services and teacher training (DeSimone and Parmar, 2006; Idol, 2006). If educators develop an inclusive vision, they will increase confidence in their teaching efficacy, they will develop more favourable attitudes towards students with special and specific needs and they

will acquire more skills to meet the needs of all students, whatever their needs are (Cawley et al., 2002; Burstein et al., 2004). On the other hand, educators could develop a negative attitude towards inclusion if they lack the support and training, if they lack time to collaborate with others, if they have a large number of students in class and if they have a lot of behavioural challenges in class (Burstein et al, 2004; DeSimone and Parmar, 2006; Idol, 2006) with insufficient support and knowledge.

Peterson and Hittie (2003) discussed how teachers can be action leaders, that is, moving from lonely despair to activism for positive change (Palmer, 1998). They stated that initially, teachers feel isolated and disconnected to deal with particular issues, such as teaching diverse needs, ranging from gifted students to students with specific and complex physical and cognitive needs. Then, upon reflection, teachers start to think about new practices to implement change in their class. They could even start searching for support outside the classroom. In this way, they would share their concern with other teachers and staff and a support network will be formed. Peterson and Hittie (2003) maintained that furthermore, through introducing new inclusive strategies, a rippling impact may occur both in their school and across schools since people will become aware of what other teachers are doing. Consequently, partnerships are formed and a support network of teachers with whom to share ideas and support will develop. Similarly, MacFarlene and Woolfson (2012) stated that mainstream teacher attitudes can be a barrier to successful inclusive practices. Teachers may tend to be positive about the principle of inclusion while at the same time they view the practical implementation as problematic. However, Avramadis and Kalyva (2007), and Cagran and Schmidt (2011) found in their studies that in-service training and support influenced teacher attitudes towards inclusion in a positive way. Through my experience in Maltese schools, I observe that when teachers need to make effective changes in their teaching approach, there are individuals who flee from the situation and go to other schools where changes are minimal while other teachers may be resistant to change at first, but eventually they give it a try and start brainstorming and researching new strategies. The latter types

of teachers are almost always successful and effective in the end and it is also observed that they acquire high job satisfaction.

Salend (2012) raised possible concerns that teachers may have when trying to evolve inclusive practices and values in their class and solutions were offered for these concerns. For instance, if they express negative attitudes about working in inclusion programmes, first of all, they need to be given information and research about these programmes, one needs to identify the sources of these negative attitudes and plan activities to address these concerns, teachers need to be provided with opportunities to talk with other teachers who are already working in inclusion programmes and ultimately they need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of these programmes. Teachers could show concern when they find difficulty meeting the requirements of the general curriculum or when they have a large class size which means little time for individual pupils and specific needs. Salend (2012) proposed that they need to be given appropriate curriculum materials, technology and equipment and furthermore, one should explore ways to differentiate instruction and diversify and modify the curriculum. With regards to class size, this needs to be appropriate to enable teachers to teach and not spend entire lessons managing behaviour of focusing on a small number of students.

Another great concern that teachers indicate in schools is that of not having the expertise and training to implement inclusion effectively. Salend (2012) recommended to the school administration to conduct a needs assessment to identify teachers' training needs. One should offer systematic, ongoing and well-planned staff development activities. Teachers should be encouraged to attend professional training and conferences. Moreover, access to professional journals and other resources addressing current trends, research and strategies should be available for all the teaching staff. Finally, as already discussed in the previous sections, Salend (2012) suggested that flexible schedules are developed in order to give the teachers the time to collaborate and communicate, and training should be offered to help teachers work collaboratively (Hehir and Katzman, 2012; OECD, 2016; Attard Tonna and Shanks, 2017; Calleja and Bezzina, 2017).

The theme of teacher collaboration was highly stressed by Ainscow (2007) as a principal factor towards developing inclusive schools. He stated that we have to understand the practice as it is carried out in our classrooms, in order to find starting points to move along the journey of inclusion. He maintained that in order for schools to make progress towards inclusion, teachers have to learn from one another, share ideas, share practices and spend time talking about how teaching can be improved. This point was stressed earlier in the discussion of the concept of Professional Learning Communities. Furthermore, the factor of staff collaboration has been emerging in literatures several times.

The Senior Management Teams in the Maltese schools are also accentuating this factor in the professional development sessions. Teaching staff in some particular schools are ready to help each other and collaborate and share ideas and resources. On the other hand, other schools have teaching teams who are reticent about inclusion, and reluctant to share practices and resources and many teachers who wish to operate inclusive classrooms, may end up working in isolation. This factor emerged in the study by Attard Tonna and Shanks (2017) which was carried out in Malta and Scotland. Staff collaboration was found to be a key factor in this study, where teachers discussed the concept of collaboration as being pivotal both to professional learning and also to better ways of teaching. Attard Tonna and Shanks (2017) observed that there were schools that administered high levels of collaboration while in other schools it was less visible. Additionally, teachers remarked that staff collaboration was fruitful for them because they shared ideas and difficulties and above all they felt that they learnt from each other too.

Ainsow (2007) continued to stress the sharing of good practice, because according to him this is a positive start towards the inclusive journey. Furthermore, he mentioned team teaching where through the formation of teaching partnerships, pairs of teachers support one another in the implementation of ideas and they spend short amounts of time in each other's classes, so as to observe and reflect on one's strategies. This is similar to peer coaching. Finally, Ainscow (2007) mentioned the role of the school

leader, one of the themes discussed earlier in this chapter. He accentuated that this role is critical because the school leader has to commit himself/herself "to see the core business of teaching and learning as being the most important part of his/her duties as a school manager" (p. 18).

In conclusion, it is clear that teachers have a pivotal role in the development of inclusive schools. They need to develop inclusive visions and values and, importantly, they need to have a will to implement them. Moreover, training was also highlighted in the above literature as a contribution to develop more positive attitudes towards the inclusion programmes. I wish to refer once again to Ainscow's (2007, p. 19-20) paper where he concluded with the following implications for teachers to become more inclusive in their pedagogy:

- Teachers need to be positive towards learner diversity.
- Teachers need to be skilful when planning their lessons in such a way that they have to consider the learner's diversity in all sorts of senses.
- They need to be skilful in experimenting and inventing new ways of working.
- They need to be skilful in analysing and reflecting on their own practice and challenging themselves to think creatively.
- Teachers need to recognise that they analyse and reflect better upon their work if they do it in teams.
- Ultimately, teachers must have the beliefs and commitments that this is about social justice, equity and diversity. It is about creating an education system where every child has a fair opportunity to do his/her best and to develop one's own talents and assets.

These implications need to be set as teaching principles by every educator because they give a clear indication of how to develop inclusive teaching. To this, I would add, that to accomplish all of the above, teachers need to learn from and collaborate with parents, who can provide a unique perspective on their own children's needs and abilities.

3.3.2 Training for Pre-Service teachers

Ainscow (2007) raised the question: "How do we create teaching that can reach out to every young person, whatever their background, whatever their culture, whatever their language, whatever their religion, whatever their personal characteristics?" (p. 3). He said that diversity is increasing due to the fact that people are moving around and expectations in education are raising, thus the teacher in the classroom has to respond to a greater range of variance (Ainscow, 2007). Though this factor was discussed some years ago, the argument is still valid for today, especially in Malta, where we are welcoming international students every day in every school. Many of these students do not speak English, thus, school leaders and teachers are always thinking about new induction programmes and strategies to include these students effectively. Bartolo (2008) stated that from his experience at the Faculty of Education, most Maltese pre-service students enter teaching programmes with a lack of experience and understanding of diversity. Though pre-service training may have improved during the last years, however, new challenges are evolving every day in our Maltese schools. Bartolo (2008) stressed that teacher education programmes need to take seriously the task of preparing pre-service teachers for diverse classrooms. He continued that, "providing teachers with the awareness, knowledge and skills to effectively teach all their students should be a central concern for teacher educators" (p. 24).

Similarly, Florian (2011) in her article published in TES Newspaper, debated the fact that mainstream schools are still struggling to deliver the promise of inclusive education to achieve good academic and social results for every student. She continued that it is of great concern that many classroom teachers report feeling unprepared for inclusive education. She also stated that teacher training is vital in how well-prepared new teachers feel for the challenges of the classroom. New thinking about teacher training is needed to meet these challenges, which include linguistic, cultural and developmental diversities along with the pressure to achieve high academic standards for everybody, including students with special educational needs, disabilities and learning difficulties (Florian, 2011). Those who prepare teachers need to

figure out new approaches to teacher training that keep abreast of social change, technological innovations and shifting demographics. Florian (2011) continued to debate the fact that there may be contradictions between what is taught in a course and what is experienced in school. This factor has been debatable for many years in Malta too and therefore, it was an issue that motivated my study.

Maltese educators argue that teacher training at the university is designed to equip students to teach in the stereotypical 'ideal' classroom while the reality indicates another picture (Cefai, Fenech and Galea, 2007). Additionally, some have argued that the reason could be that trainers have been absent from schools for a long time, thus, they are no longer in touch with school realities. Furthermore, as a school Assistant Head, I meet new teachers every year all of whom seem to experience difficulties in including every student in class, especially, students with lower than 'average' ability and those whose behaviour they find challenging. I observe their frustration in class and at times they appear helpless and I am amazed that as newly qualified teachers they find it so difficult to adapt to the needs of the class. Then, as a Senior Management Team, we discuss these difficulties with them and we suggest different approaches to their ways of teaching. We also ask their subject colleagues to help them with the resources and teaching materials. However, this begs that question, as to why it is, that newly qualified teachers have to go through this 'baptism of fire' in the beginning of their career? I ask, why are not they equipped to understand the principles and practices of helpful strategies, such as the Universal Design for Learning? Whilst UDL is a relatively new concept in Malta, I suggest that this – and other contemporary and innovative approaches - should be part of any initial teacher training course. Another aspect that I observe in the newly qualified teachers is that they are not knowledgeable enough about special educational needs, about what adaptations are needed, for example, to support dyslexic students, hearing impaired students, students with specific learning difficulties. Thus, I further suggest that more knowledge and training in this field is needed in pre-service courses. Understanding the importance of multi-disciplinary collaboration and partnership with parents are important professional training

elements as well. It appears that these difficulties are not unique to Malta; Florian (2011) stated that teacher trainers in England, should accept Ofsted's findings that the knowledge contained in many special needs courses has proved insufficient to improve inclusive practice in schools. Therefore, she suggested that new strategies for preparing teachers entering the profession, should be established in order to help them accept individual and collective responsibility to improve the learning and participation of all students.

Perhaps a key factor in teachers implementing inclusive practices in class is a personal attitude towards students with individual educational needs (IEN). Teachers must have favourable and positive attitudes towards the individual educational needs of all students, if the inclusion policy is to be effective in schools (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Cefai, Fenech and Galea, 2007; Mintz, 2007). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) added that besides having positive attitudes towards inclusion, newly qualified teachers need to acquire the necessary skills to teach in inclusive settings. Cefai, Fenech and Galea (2007) stated that this has significant implications for initial teacher education and this implied responsibility on teacher education institutions to provide adequate training to prospective teachers. However, it seems that newly qualified teachers, despite their education, tend to be concerned about their competence to teach students with IEN in the classroom, thus, indicating lack of confidence in the field because they do not feel fully prepared for the challenges (Cefai, Fenech and Galea, 2007). This may concern long-serving teachers too, that is, teachers may show reluctance towards inclusion because they lack training and thus they lack confidence and demonstrate fear. Some are reticent in seeking further information from parents because they feel that, as teachers, they should be 'the professional' who will have the answers, but it is parents who hold specific and detailed knowledge about their children.

Cefai, Fenech and Galea (2007) conducted a study in Malta, with newly qualified teachers on the challenges they were facing in class when teaching students with individual educational needs and how well trained they felt for the task. Most of the teachers agreed with the principle of inclusive education. However, they expressed concern and frustration when they were faced with

the challenge of meeting the needs of all the students in class, especially when a student demonstrated a specific impairment, such as cerebral palsy or a condition, such as autism: "We as teachers feel at a loss with such children for we haven't received the necessary training" (Cefai et al., 2007, p. 69). As the study indicated, teachers had reservations about inclusion and the reasons given for this attitude were lack of resources and support at school, an overloaded and rigid curriculum and lack of adequate training.

Clearly, from the time when this study was conducted till today, many factors have changed in Maltese schools to improve the inclusion programmes in our schools, that is, resources have increased, a more flexible curriculum has been implemented and various training programmes are being offered to serving teachers. However, there is always room for improvement. The newly qualified teachers who took part in the above mentioned study, stated that they felt prepared and confident about inclusion and disability issues in theory, however, they said that they lacked adequate preparation and confidence when it came to the actual teaching and support of IEN students, when their educational needs became more complex and challenging: "I still believe that the training I received at University was inadequate in helping me to develop the necessary competencies to facilitate inclusive education" (Cefai et al., 2007, p. 70). These teachers argued that they needed more practical skills for classroom reality. They said that they had to rely on their own teaching experience after their initial training education, to gain certain skills and knowledge. Furthermore, they felt that they did not have enough support and resources in their schools, they did not have the opportunity and time to participate in the planning of the Individual Educational Programmes, they did not have enough support from professionals and they lacked resources such as flashcards, social skills story books and educational games and software (Cefai et al, 2007). Here, I may add that nowadays, these mentioned resources are more available in schools and a substantial sum of the school's budget is spent on these types of resources. However, the overarching issue here, is the attitude of individual teachers in making inclusion work.

The recommendations emanating from the study by Cefai, Fenech and Galea (2007) were that primarily Initial Teacher Education has to be developed on

openness to diversity and this needs to be balanced with practical training. Additionally, student-teachers have to be provided with the opportunities to observe and work in a classroom where inclusive practices are being implemented, such as collaborative planning and problem-solving activities as well as curriculum adaptions and modifications. Another recommendation was that of offering more training in problem solving in order to enable teachers to be more flexible and creative to find solutions to challenging tasks. A final recommendation was that of an induction phase which includes mentoring and other forms of preparation for the challenges of an inclusive classroom. In fact, this idea of an induction phase has been implemented in Malta a few years ago, with a mentor assigned to every newly qualified teacher especially during the first year of teaching. The mentor observes the new teacher's lessons and provides reflective comments and suggestions for the teacher to be more effective in the job. Cefai et al. (2007) concluded that adequate preparation for newly qualified teachers will help them develop positive attitudes towards inclusive education very early in their career and this will eventually lead to confidence and competence in teaching in inclusive settings. This issue also enhances the importance of creating professional learning communities, since they would be highly beneficial to novice teachers. It is interesting to note that little work has been done around supporting student teachers and newly qualified teachers, to develop skills and positive attitudes for working with parents – who are the vital link in successful inclusive education.

Waitoller and Artiles (2016) suggested what they called "school/university partnerships" (pg. 361). The idea was to reduce the gap between theory and practice as much as possible, which was mentioned as a strong issue earlier. Pre-service teachers will be able to combine teaching practices together with the reality of school life and in this way the school's capacity for inclusive education will be developed further (Waitroller and Kozleski, 2013). However, some tensions can occur because every institution has its own understanding of teaching and learning. Therefore, student-teachers are expected to comply with the school's agenda, curriculum and practices, while following the

university's demands (Smagorinsky et al., 2008; Bartholomew and Sandholtz, 2009).

Similarly, Harvey et al. (2010) conducted a study about pre-service teacher preparation for inclusive classrooms being offered in various institutions. The majority of the respondents who took part in this study agreed that pre-service teachers were being offered coursework regarding exceptional students and special education. Additionally, these teachers were participating in field experiences which offered them opportunities to collaborate across disciplines. In this way, they added that they were acquiring experience through working with diverse learners. Kurniawati et al. (2014) indicated the importance of field experience too, finding that training programmes focused primarily on attitude, skills and knowledge. However, they added that these programmes were also centred on short term practice and supplemented with field experiences. Furthermore, they discovered that these types of teacher training programmes had positive effects on teachers' attitudes, skills and knowledge.

Earlier, the concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) was briefly discussed and additionally, Bates et al. (2016) promoted PLCs through the use of technology. They stated that since PLCs unite teachers because of the common interest in particular matters, technology could enhance this practice to widen these communities, with what they called "technological platforms" (pg. 100) where documents, presentations, images, audio files, videos, links, quizzes and other resources are shared among the participants. Therefore, they suggested that this concept could also be integrated in pre-service training by introducing pre-service teachers to the various online platforms which form part of the PLCs (ex: VoiceThread, BlendSpace etc). Thus, they could take part in collaborative online discussions about various topics of teaching interest and during their induction phase as new teachers, this type of PLCs could continue to help them stay connected with other various colleagues as a means of support (Bates et al., 2016).

Through these types of programmes, pre-service teachers will be more prepared and confident to teach all students in inclusive settings (Harvey et

al., 2010). Richardson (1998) mentioned essential elements in changing attitudes, namely, a willingness to change and use of collaboration, training and administrative support. Jung (2007) confirmed that these elements affect the interaction between the teachers and the students with special needs. Thus, he confirmed that pre-service teacher training is a critical factor in shaping the teacher's beliefs and attitudes. Similarly, Arthur-Kelly et al. (2013) stated that the teachers' readiness and willingness to accommodate the learning needs of students with special educational needs is determined by their training.

Inclusive education has challenged teacher preparation programmes to better prepare teachers to work with students identified as having particular special educational needs, as well as, students in the classroom who have no specifically identified needs (Kurniawati et al., 2014). Teacher training programmes are required to generate graduates who are able to respond to student diversity (Rouse, 2010). Consequently, particular components should be addressed in teacher training, namely, developing behaviour management skills, creating effective learning experiences, managing inclusive curricula for all students, understanding teaching theories, disability characteristics, attitudes towards students with special educational needs and the legal and ethical issues involved in inclusive education (Harriott, 2004; Florian, 2009; Rouse, 2010). Ainscow (2007) insisted that teacher educators should not lecture only about inclusive practice but they should actually model it in their own lecture room. He argued that teacher education "is well behind the field" (p. 21) because he observed the best inclusive practice not in universities but in schools. He considered this as a challenge to teacher education. Therefore, Ainscow (2007) suggested that teacher educators have to be researchers, they have to be engaged with, watch and learn from practice. Thus, they have to spend time collaborating with teachers in school because otherwise they will be missing a very important process. The notion of collaboration has been highly stressed in various literatures for the benefit of both newly qualified teachers and also long-serving teachers, as I will discuss in the next part of this literature review.

3.3.3 In-Service Training and Professional Development

The 'Education for All' in Malta presents us with a challenge relating to the preparation of teachers to meet the challenge of teaching in inclusive schools (Florian, 2009). Teachers encounter a wide range of students in the classroom, who are expected to produce high results in their academic performance, whilst putting pressure on schools to satisfy the diverse needs of all learners (Grubb and Lazerson, 2004). Similarly, Runswick-Cole (2011) argued that schools are "required to 'drive up' their academic results while at the same time they are required to 'include' children whose achievement falls outside the sphere of literacy, numeracy and science test scores" (p. 116). When teachers face student diversity, they may not have the requisite knowledge or skills to teach them (Florian, 2009). They tend to be very positive about the principle of inclusion, however, they may view its practical implementation as problematic (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). It is argued that barriers to student learning, such as inflexible curricula and inappropriate systems of assessment and examination are worsened by the inadequate preparation of teachers, particularly, in the area of special educational needs (Forlin, 2001). Certain studies have reported that in-service support and experience influence teacher attitudes in a positive way (Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007; Batsiou et al., 2008; Cagran and Schmidt, 2011). Turkoglu (2007) maintained that the most important factor in inclusive education is the teacher. A major element in the effective implementation of the inclusion policy is the views and attitudes of the teachers, namely, their beliefs, feelings, thoughts and ideas (Secer, 2010). Furthermore, Artan and Balat (2003) stated that for inclusion to be successful, the teacher needs a positive attitude towards inclusion, sufficient knowledge of inclusive education together with certain skills and enthusiasm towards the students. Teachers' attitudes are affected by variables such as the level of support received from the school and other support services, the teacher's knowledge of inclusion and the number of in-service training courses attended (Sari, 2007; Imrak, 2009).

Some teachers are afraid that they may not have the necessary specialised knowledge and skills to work with students with special educational needs in

the classroom, thus, they may be reluctant to accept inclusion (Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie-Richmond, 2009), the result being that students are included by location alone, they may be physically sharing the same space but they are not experiencing 'belonging'. Teachers' beliefs are influenced by the school and the school system's approach to inclusion. In-service support can help teachers to alter their beliefs, however, as stated earlier in this chapter, the beliefs of the school principals about inclusion is said to be one of the most influential variables in the model of effective inclusion (Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) stressed that the school principal is the key figure in the school and the teachers' views depend on how their school principal reacts to inclusive practices.

Following an earlier discussion, Nevin, Thousand and Villa (2008) focused on collaborative teaching in teacher education as a means to develop new ways of working to support inclusive practices and suggested that teachers should collaborate together to develop inclusive pedagogical practices. Additionally, they argue that teacher educators must also model the practices they expect prospective teachers to adopt. Recently, the Wisconsin Centre for Education Research (2016) and the OECD (2016) have also highlighted the concept of collaborative teaching and learning, which can be applied both to teachers and students. In these reports, collaborative learning is considered to be the formation of learning organisations, where teachers can develop a shared vision based on the learning of all students, where continuous professional learning is promoted and supported, and inquiry, exploration and innovation are encouraged. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1980) was a proponent of collaborative learning because he saw learning as a social act which could not take place in isolation. The Wisconsin's Guiding Practices for Teaching and Learning (2011) connected the concept of collaborative organisations to the notion of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where it was emphasised that through PLCs, teachers would less feel isolated, their commitment and responsibility would be enhanced, collaborative problem solving would be encouraged and new skills and strategies would be developed.

Similarly, Calleja and Bezzina (2017) discussed the concept of 'teachers learning together' (pg. 51) as part of their continuing professional development (CPD), where teachers share knowledge and learn together. They stressed that "when educators engage in professional development with colleagues at their school and beyond, they can learn and support each other to raise the standards of students' learning" (pg. 51). One of the main strategies that they mention is that of co-teaching, where teachers may work more closely, with a view to reach higher standards and learn together for the benefit of their students too. Therefore, they suggest for schools to hold sessions of professional development, where teachers conduct presentations and lead workshops in order to share their good practices.

Calleja and Bezzina (2017) take a focus on "technological platforms", and consider the notion of video clubs, where teachers may share resources, analyse and reflect on their pedagogical practices. They suggested that through these video club meetings, teachers upload a five-minute clip from their lesson as a source for discussion. They added that the participants should not judge the teacher but instead they should ask questions and investigate possibilities.

MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) found that teachers who attended more INSET courses held more positive feelings towards inclusion. They focused their study mainly on including learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Teachers in Maltese classes report SEBD students to be of increasing concern, and subsequently the focus of many professional development sessions held in schools are often about dealing with these type of difficulties. MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) also found that teachers who held more positive beliefs and high levels of teaching self-efficacy (believing in one's ability to organise and execute courses of action necessary to bring about desired results), had high intentions to engage in inclusive practices when working with SEBD students. They concluded that the school principal has an important role in communicating clear expectations of an inclusive ethos to the staff and s/he should provide them with appropriate support and training and promote a collective sense of efficacy. Furthermore, they added

that if teachers are open to new experiences and show enthusiasm, they will be more effective in their teaching.

Another study at the University of Cyprus (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2009) discussed the issue of teacher in-service training. First of all, the study proposed that when planning the in-service training, one should consider what teachers already know about inclusion and that in-service training should be provided to all teachers and not solely to special education teachers. This study also indicated that teachers feel the need for in-service training about different aspects of inclusion. In fact, teachers showed positivity to have further training on a variety of aspects, such as teaching skills, ways of differentiation, characteristics of different groups of students with special needs, legislation about inclusion and theoretical background of inclusion (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2009). Another interesting, and important suggestion from this study was that the parents' views should be taken into consideration when planning the training. Teachers stated that the attitudes of parents of students with special needs form an important part of the inclusive project, thus, they could give a clear understanding of their position and their experience in the educational system. Finally, Symeonidou and Phtiaka (2009) proposed that the training courses for inclusion should be part of a knowledgeable approach to teacher training in general, one that promotes "the development of teachers' confident personality, social conscience, tolerance and deep commitment to social justice" (p.549).

Artan and Balat (2003) reported that inclusive practices were not yet so common in Turkey, and the issue of inclusive education was the subject of debate in a later study by Selcuk University (Secer, 2010), which analysed the effects of in-service training on pre-school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The study questioned whether students with special educational needs were being included effectively in class. According to Artan and Balat (2003) the success of inclusive education depends on various factors, such as the adoption of inclusive education by teachers and school personnel, the preparation of the inclusive class, the individual educational programmes and the use of effective classroom management techniques, interestingly, but not

uncommonly, there is no mention of the role of parents in achieving inclusion. However, Artan and Balat (2003) highlighted that the most important factor in inclusive education is the teacher, whose views and attitudes are crucial in effectively implementing the inclusion policy. The teacher's beliefs, feelings, thoughts and ideas are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices. Class teachers influence the success of students with special educational needs specifically, and inclusive programmes overall. The teacher needs a positive attitude towards inclusion, sufficient knowledge and skills to implement the inclusion programme, and to be enthusiastic about the student (Artan and Balat, 2003). The judgements teachers make about students' ability to learn, clearly limits what is possible for students to achieve (Hart, Dixon, Drummond and McIntyre, 2004). Imrak (2009) added that the teacher's attitude towards inclusion also depends on the number of in-service training courses attended, though this seems somewhat simplistic. In fact, it was stated in the Turkish study that there are still barriers to accepting and implementing inclusion in schools simply because many Head teachers and teachers believe they do not have sufficient knowledge about effective inclusion (Secer, 2010). Sari (2007) found that when information about inclusion was delivered to teachers, their attitudes were altered in a positive way, so in some cases information can change attitudes.

The above-mentioned Turkish study consisted of an INSET course delivered to preschool teachers which included particular topics, such as special educational needs, the meaning of inclusion, assessment, individual educational programmes, changing attitudes towards children with SEN, the involvement of parents in the education of children with SEN and the support services. The findings showed that the teachers believed that both before and after the course, they felt quite competent to meet the needs of children with SEN. However, it was found that teachers possessed more positive beliefs after the course rather than before. They agreed that inclusion is beneficial in class and that it did not have a negative effect on the students' development (Secer, 2010). Teachers also indicated that being more knowledgeable meant being more self-confident. Additionally, this study discussed the teachers' prejudices about inclusive education. It was pointed out that teachers may

have certain prejudices because of the following factors: lack of theoretical and practical application in teachers' initial training at university, lack of practise in inclusive classes, the fact that not all teachers receive INSET courses by the Department of Education and the short duration of these courses. Finally, the teachers in this study recommended that to be more effective in their inclusive teaching, they need more adequate resources, such as teaching and learning materials, more suitable classroom settings and appropriate curricula.

Various other studies highlight the same aspects mentioned in the previous studies, that is, the change of attitude, knowledge and skills are vital elements to increase the teacher's capability and willingness to educate students with SEN (Rose, 2001; De Boer, Pijl and Minnaer, 2011; Arthur-Kelly et al., 2013). Moreover, other authors, such as Cook (2002) and Forlin (2010) declared that the above three elements are prerequisites for inclusive teachers. Consequently, it is argued that teacher training should be carefully planned and well structured (Desimone, 2009). Kurniawati et al. (2014) found that teacher inset courses were highly effective when they included field experiences, besides coursework, because in this way teachers had direct contact with students with SEN. These included school visits, guest lecturers by people with SEN and short-term practice sessions. These experiences reduced the teachers' concerns, improved their attitudes towards inclusion and increased their knowledge and skills. Though perhaps obvious, some researchers have specifically stressed how important it is for teacher training to consist of rich content and opportunities to practise what they learn (Birman et al, 2000; Garet et al., 2001; Brunero, Lamont and Coates, 2010).

Training could be also focused on a specific type of need or impairment. Studies have shown that this type of training was more effective than other training programmes that addressed all categories of need (Lieberman and Wilson, 2005; Sari, 2007; Leblanc, Richardson and Burns, 2009; Rae, McKenzie and Murray, 2011). Specific training included teaching strategies, materials and assessments associated with particular curricula to meet a specific need, such as behavioural and learning difficulties, students with

autism, students with hearing or visual impairment or other specific needs and disabilities. Yoon et al. (2007) also suggested that training programmes could be more effective if they are long-term and include follow-up sessions. Furthermore, ongoing coaching and technical assistance is imperative to support teachers' teaching practices after the training is carried out (Fixsen et al., 2013; Odom, Cox and Brock, 2013).

On the other hand, Edwards, Carr and Siegel (2006) discovered a different view with regards to in-service training. In their study, they found that teachers' attitudes were less positive after the INSET training. The researchers stated that though the teachers' knowledge and skills increased, they became more aware of the classroom challenges represented by students with SEN, thus becoming more concerned about the amount of support required to assist these students in regular classrooms. Therefore, from this point of view, it seems that more experienced teachers may need a different approach during INSET training in order to become more positive towards inclusion (Kurniawati et al., 2014). In addition, teachers who are trained in the required skills may be able to teach effectively, however, this does not guarantee that they will value all children in their class equally, which is arguably, the fundamental principle of inclusive education (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2012).

An interesting comment made by a young teacher taking part in a study conducted at the University of Cyprus (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2012) stated that senior teachers may have 20 years of experience and be knowledgeable, but their approach may be outdated. She continued that "they wear blinkers and you have to struggle if you want them to accept you and then the children. If they were trained, they would understand better" (pre-primary school teacher) (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2012, p. 116). Teachers in the Cyprus study stated that many more experienced colleagues were not comfortable with their role in an inclusive school and their beliefs were a barrier to other teachers who believed in an inclusive philosophy (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2012). This issue was raised earlier in this chapter in relation to a number of long-serving teachers in Maltese schools who find it harder to adapt to the

recent increase in diversity of students' needs, and this is especially the case where such teachers have been accustomed to teaching what might be called 'high-achievers' for a long period of time. Ultimately, there are some teachers who realise that they need to change their methodologies in order to adapt to new class realities. While other teachers continue to resist changing their course of teaching and some asking to be transferred to other schools, hoping that they will find students who do not challenge the approach to teaching through their diversity. As previously stated, one of the reasons that these teachers feel frustrated and helpless and resistant to change is because they do not feel confident enough to teach students with different needs. In Malta, attendance at INSET courses about inclusive teaching is voluntary, which means, that those motivated towards improving inclusion, are more likely to attend. However, since, the demands are continually increasing for every teacher, and inclusion is important in all schools, attendance at these courses should, I argue, be compulsory.

Teachers need to become familiar with the concept of differentiation and they need to be supported in designing and implementing differentiated teaching approaches on site. Florian (2009) stated that to challenge a system that creates injustice, requires teachers who have to be convinced that they can bring about change. Unfortunately, many teachers are still unaware of an inclusive education philosophy and feel that it is impossible to educate all children effectively within the same environment (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2012).

The implementation of inclusive education creates challenges for teachers who must satisfy the learning needs of students with or without special educational needs (Kurniawati et al., 2014). A growing number of students with SEN are being educated in mainstream schools, and it is important that they experience, not simply physical, locational integration, but that they are also fully included physically, socially, culturally and emotionally (Moen, Nilssen and Weidemann, 2007). This is why teachers play a decisive role in positive inclusive contexts (Jerlinder, Danermark and Grill, 2010) and thus teachers need to acquire new skills, beliefs and behaviours (Bransford,

Darling-Hammond and LePage, 2005). However, Kim (2011) stated that though research on teacher training programmes and inclusive education has been conducted over two decades, no consensus has been reached about how training programmes can best prepare teachers to be inclusive in the most effective way. Ainscow (2007) stated that we can make inclusion sound very complicated and present it as an enormous challenge, but argued that that it is not new techniques, skills or technology, that are important, but the big challenge is a matter of *will*. Personal, institutional and political *will*, can make for successful inclusive environments (Ainscow, 2007). Furthermore, it is the time to remove the "blinkers" and welcome the calls for a more humane and equitable approach to the education of *all* children (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2012). Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton (2013) said that "inclusion is ultimately about how people treat each other …… and this, for us, is a matter of respect, and respectful educators ……… are inclusive" (p. 4). To achieve inclusive education all students and their parents need to be treated, as is their right, as people with individual needs and abilities, as a matter of right, and human respect.

3.4 Conclusion

This literature review has addressed three main themes: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion, with a view to answer the main research question of "What makes an inclusive school?" The term 'inclusion' has been defined in the beginning, in order to indicate that the study is highlighting the inclusion of all learners, namely, those with special needs, learners with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, those with learning difficulties, gifted learners and those coming from a variety of cultural and linguistic context. An overview of the current Maltese educational system and its inclusion policies was given in order that the context within which the study took place is better understood, and furthermore, a global overview of the inclusion policies was also included in order to compare the local ones with those in foreign countries. In this way, the first two sub-questions were addressed. Through the literature review, I

made suggestions about particular national changes that need to be implemented in order to develop more inclusive schools.

Vygostsky's theory was set as the theoretical framework of this study. It fits the main themes of this literature review and also with the purpose of this study. The theory emphasised the importance of learning on a social basis and that the teacher facilitates learning by creating 'scaffolds' to adapt more to the learner's educational needs. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) stressed that by supporting a learner from 'where they are' to take the next step means that every learner is unique and no one needs or should be excluded. Vygotsky's emphasis on socially constructed learning, learning in the company of knowledgeable others, challenges the notion that one approach works for all learners, an argument that is also accentuated through this study.

In this literature review, I have discussed in detail the crucial role of the school leader in an inclusive school. His/her vision is reflected on the rest of all stakeholders in the school. The school leader has to induce an inclusive culture where diversity is embraced and every student is supported throughout his/her learning experiences. Leaders must create learning organisations, where collaboration and knowledge exchange, are prioritized as part of the staff development (McLeskey and Waldron, 2002; Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis, 2009; Currie-Rubin, 2013; Cobb, 2014, Department of Education, Victoria, 2014).

Through the school leader's inclusive vision, change is brought about to all stakeholders, particularly to the teaching staff, so as to develop more inclusive teaching strategies. Similarly, students also learn to accept all their peers in the school. Ultimately, I discussed the fact that the position of a school leader involves various roles, such as that of a visionary, a partner, a coach, a conflict resolver, an advocate, an interpreter and an organiser (Cobb, 2014).

The second theme that I examined in this literature review, was that of the effectiveness of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The idea of UDL emerged from architecture, where buildings started to be accessible to various individuals, from people using wheelchairs to parents using prams. Hence,

this same concept was extended also to the field of education, where learning became accessible to students with diverse needs through the use of assistive technology, the implementation of various methods of assessment, the use of various devices and through adaptations to teaching styles. Since UDL involves a big variety of resources, various literatures stressed upon staff collaboration, an aspect which was already mentioned in the previous theme. Through staff collaboration, resources are shared and ideas are multiplied, thus creating both a learning and collaborative culture in the school.

The third and final theme discussed here was that of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for Inclusion. To reiterate, staff collaboration is key in the school community in order for values and resources to be shared together, whilst sharing day-to-day difficulties too. However, above all, through PLCs, trust and respect among members are created and these lead to effective partnerships and inclusive communities. In this theme, high importance was given again to the role of school leaders, since they are pivotal in the creation of PLCs for inclusion, through their visions for the school.

Since PLCs and staff collaboration involve a great deal of learning, I have included pre-service training and in-service training within this theme. Various sources debated whether pre-service teachers are actually being prepared enough to deal with students' diverse needs. Writers had various opinions whether pre-service training is being effective or not. Furthermore, field experience was mentioned as being valuable within the training.

Meanwhile in-service training was also discussed in detail since it affects change in the teachers' attitudes in becoming more inclusive in their teaching methodologies. Yet again, writers expressed different opinions in their writings and ultimately, the concept of teachers learning together was found to be the most effective type of teacher training, through the formation of PLCs, through technological platforms and through subject meetings and staff development committees. Furthermore, teachers are learning and gaining 'practical wisdom' (Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009) from their day-to-day experiences at their own workplace.

Like many other countries, Malta developed and implemented various policies and strategies over the years so as to develop more inclusive schools. Currently, the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 (Ministry of Education) is being implemented and the inclusion principle is the main premise of the policy. In 2019, the new reform, My Journey, is designed to eventually create a more applied and inclusive curriculum with a view to offer various learning opportunities to students who wish to learn matters which vary from the traditional ones, thus, learning in a different environment other than the traditional classroom. Presently, in Malta, a variety of training sessions for teachers are being offered to various stakeholders in the educational field through the Institute for Education. Courses should also include working with and learning from parents. However, I think that courses about students' difficulties in class and about developing inclusive practices need to be compulsory rather than optional, for the reason that every teacher needs to be very knowledgeable about their students' needs, thus increasing their self-confidence in class.

Collaborative school structures need to be created in order to facilitate professional development and improve student learning (Calleja and Bezzina, 2017). In this ever-changing world, school leaders and teachers must adjust practices in their school communities to develop in the context of continuous changes. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology of the study reported in this thesis.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the research methods and justify the methodology of this research reported in this thesis. The study investigated how Maltese schools could continue to move forward to become more inclusive. My work experience as a school Assistant Head in charge of inclusion in a secondary school motivated me to embark on this study. Through the last six years, I observed the importance of the role of an inclusive school leader and the significance of the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, together with the progression of their teaching strategies. These aspects inspired me to develop the main research question for this study:

> **What makes an inclusive school?**

This breaks down into three further research questions that this thesis investigates:

- What are the current inclusion policies and strategies practised in the Maltese schools?
- How do key stakeholders working in schools feel about inclusion policies in Malta?
- What national strategies are needed to develop more inclusive schools?

The above questions were discussed in the literature review chapter, where the main themes were: Inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and Professional Learning Communities for Inclusion. However, through the field questions I explored how the inclusion policy is being administered in Maltese schools, with a view to include sharing of good practices. I also tried to investigate the attitudes and feelings of school-based stakeholders towards the concept of inclusion and eventually, the difficulties and needs felt by these professionals were drawn out from these investigations. Furthermore, implications for improvement were elicited from the investigation with the aim to identify ways of developing schools which are more inclusive through changes in national policy and enhancement of teaching leadership practices.

I carried out my research study in six Maltese secondary schools where I interviewed three categories of research participants: Heads of School, teachers and Inclusion Coordinators. Through the interviews, I gathered information about the characteristics, opinions, ideas, attitudes and experiences of these three groups of people. I have selected these particular participants because they are the leading roles in the inclusion programme of the school. Furthermore, questionnaires were distributed among the teachers of three schools, chosen within the sample of the above mentioned six schools.

4.1 The philosophical epistemology

As stated in my literature review, I applied Vygotsky's (1978) theory as the theoretical framework for my study, since the main principles of this theory correspond to the fundamental beliefs of the phenomenon of inclusion. Therefore, my study was shaped upon "the constructivist worldview" (Creswell, 2014, p. 37). Social constructivists seek to understand the world in which they live and work. Therefore, the researcher relies on the participants' views of the phenomenon being studied. This is usually done through open-ended questioning, so that the researcher listens carefully to what people are saying and doing. Clearly, social constructivism is based upon the interaction with others (Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2010; Lincoln et al., 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2014).

Creswell (2014) stated that the constructivist researcher needs to address the interaction among individuals and s/he has to focus on the context in which the participants are living or working in order to understand their setting. Furthermore, he added that the researcher shapes his/her interpretation through his/her own background and positions himself/herself in the research in order to interpret the participants' personal experiences.

This is the reason why I founded my study upon this worldview. I wanted to explore the attitudes, beliefs, fears and difficulties of Heads of School, teachers and Inclusion Coordinators towards the inclusive paradigm in their

work and in the school as a whole. This was done both through open-ended questioning and also through close-ended responses (mixed-methods approach). Through my own roles and experiences, both as a teacher and as an Assistant Head, I could relate to the participants' particular feelings and easily understand and interpret their responses.

4.2 A mixed-methods research

A mixed-methods approach to research was used, defined as "an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms of research" (Creswell, 2014, p. 293). Creswell (2014) argued that when the qualitative element of open-ended data and the quantitative element of closed-ended data are combined, they produce "a stronger understanding of the research problem or question" (p. 264). Many authors have argued favourably about this type of research approach. For instance, Reams and Twale (2008) argued that mixed-methods are "necessary to uncover information and perspective, increase corroboration of the data and render less biased and more accurate conclusion" (p. 133). Similarly, Denscombe (2008) remarked that mixed-methods research increases the accuracy of data and a more complete picture of the phenomenon is provided, since more than one approach is used, thus overcoming the weaknesses and biases of using a single approach. Cohen et al. (2011) stated that in mixed-methods research, the research question should include 'how' and 'what'. As already stated, my main research question was "What makes an inclusive school?" The literature review and the approach to collection and analysis of data, have been developed to explore how a school could further develop to become more inclusive and furthermore, I wanted to know what types of challenges or shortcomings, the participating school leaders and personnel believe are hindering the process.

Creswell (2014) stated that though the concept of mixed-methods research is relatively new, its origins are traceable to 1959 where Campbell and Fiske used multiple methods to study psychological behaviour. It seemed that the idea behind this approach was that all methods had their bias and

weaknesses, therefore, the collection of both qualitative data and quantitative data seemed to neutralise these weaknesses. As a result, triangulation of data was developed (Drew et al., 2008; Creswell, 2014). There are three primary models of mixed-methods research: convergent parallel mixed-methods, where both forms of data are collected at the same time; explanatory sequential mixed-methods, where the researcher collects the quantitative data first and after it is analysed, the qualitative data is collected and the exploratory sequential mixed-methods where qualitative data collection precedes quantitative approaches (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell, 2014).

In this study, I used a version of a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, where both types of data were collected at the same time and the results were integrated in the analysis of the overall results. Through the collection of both the qualitative (the interview) and the quantitative (the questionnaires) types of data, I could compare and contrast the results of both methods and I could also develop a better understanding of particular feelings and beliefs about inclusion in the six participating Maltese schools, especially those of the teaching staff. Creswell (2014) stated that the convergent mixed-methods approach is the most basic and familiar in this type of research.

4.3 Data Collection and Methodology

4.3.1 The sample

4.3.1.1 Interview participants

Purposive sampling, which is also referred to as non-probability sampling, was applied in this study. The participants were chosen for a specific purpose (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013). The Heads of School, the teachers and the Inclusion Coordinators were all closely involved in the phenomenon of inclusion in the school, and their participation in my study was crucial, for as Ball (1990) suggests, in purposive sampling, people are chosen because they are highly knowledgeable about particular issues through their professional role, experience and expertise. Similarly, Creswell (2013) said that the

chosen participants need to have a story to tell about their experiences. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) also mentioned the notion of stratified purpose sampling, and my sample was stratified into three groups of people in order to get a better overview of the phenomenon of professional perspectives on inclusion and also to be able to compare between different professional groups. Patton (2001) suggested that this type of sampling increases the reliability of the study.

Purposive sampling was applied both for the interviews and also for the questionnaires. In my study, six Heads of School were chosen to be interviewed. Two of them were chosen from the North Area of Malta, another two from the Central Area and another two Heads of School from the Southern Area. This was done in order to ensure that schools in different areas of Malta were represented, and to try to develop a sample where rural and more developed parts of Malta, and their different inhabitants and social groupings and affluence were included. Furthermore, three Heads of School were chosen from the Middle Schools (students aged between 11 and 13 years) and the other three from the Senior Schools (students aged between 13 and 16 years), again, to include a spread of views, understand how ideas change or develop and to be able to make some comparison. Twelve teachers from these six schools were also interviewed with the aim of gaining class-based perspectives as well as leadership views. The two teachers from each school were purposely selected, one of the teachers was in the early career, in his/her first five years of service, while the other teacher had over twenty years teaching experience. Choosing teachers at different points in their careers enabled me to understand something of any differences in their views of inclusion, including their teaching strategies, their training and staff collaboration. Finally, six Inclusion Coordinators (INCOs) were interviewed, their roles are to oversee and support inclusion in the Secondary Schools, where they assist all professional stakeholders in the running of the inclusion programme in the school. The INCOs, were chosen because they have a highly significant role to play in building inclusive schools, and, in my experience, they are resourceful and effective in their work.

4.3.1.2 Questionnaire respondents

A questionnaire was distributed to teachers in three schools. These three schools formed part of the sample of schools where the interviews took place, one from each of the three areas of Malta. The purposive sampling applied in selecting the schools, was also applied in the distribution of the questionnaires. Two hundred and twenty-two questionnaires were distributed in all: eighty-nine in the Northern school, fifty-three in the Central school and eighty in the Southern school. One hundred and forty-three questionnaires were returned in all: forty-eight from the Northern school, forty-two from the central school and fifty-three from the southern school, see Table 4.1.

School	Number distributed	Number returned	Percentage response rate
Northern school	**89**	**48**	**53.9%**
Central school	**53**	**42**	**79.2%**
Southern school	**80**	**53**	**66.3%**
Totals	**222**	**143**	**64.4%**

Table 4.1 Distribution and returns of questionnaires

With the overall response rate of 64.4% and an average response rate in each school of 66.5% indicated that the responses were sufficient to warrant analysis and give a good indicator of teachers' perspectives in those schools.

4.3.2 The Interview

Interviewing is a useful tool for research, and it is widely used and regarded as the main method of data collection in a phenomenological approach (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1982; Cohen et al., 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2014). Through interviews, the participants discuss part of the life in which they live while giving their own point of view with regards to

the situation being discussed (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, the interview does not only involve data collection but "it is part of life itself" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 409). Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (2012) see the purpose of interviewing as a means by which the participant shares his/her experiences and perceptions in relation to the topic that the researcher has established. Interviews involve a relaxed atmosphere, asking questions well, taking notes, establishing trust, follow-up enquiring and keeping track of responses (Drew et al., 2008). Additionally, "interviews are a fruitful source of information when handled skilfully, either as a sole means of enquiry or in conjunction with observations, diary analysis or questionnaires" (Wragg, 2002, p.144).

Cohen et al. (2011) argued that though the interview is a flexible and a powerful tool for researchers, it is also "expensive in time, open to interviewer bias, they may be inconvenient for respondents and anonymity may be difficult" (pg. 409). Similarly, Drew et al. (2008) maintained that interviews may be flexible and provide depth of information, however, they may be expensive especially when they involve a lot of travelling and hours of training, thus, also being time-consuming, even where transcription and interpretation are involved. Furthermore, they claimed that interviews may involve manipulation of answers on behalf of the respondents and they also involve intense concentration, that is, "the ability to listen, write and anticipate questions; strong interpersonal interaction skills; note taking; maintaining neutrality while encouraging cooperation" (p. 15).

Therefore, careful preparation of the interview is highly important. Drew et al. (2008) noted that background information on the setting, selected respondents, existing documents and other literature about the topic should be gathered first, in order to plan the interview questions. Then, piloting of the interview questions is required. This is done as a training to develop the interviewing skills and to test the questions. In this way, one will avoid wasting the respondents' time, there will not be over repetition of questions and the interview will eventually be organised in a better way (De Leeuw, 2005; Drew et al., 2008; Cohen et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2011) stated that the interview can be enabled through various means: "verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard" (p. 409). Similarly, Glasow (2005) referred to interviews as verbal surveys, which include, telephone and face-to-face interviews. She stated that through face-to-face interviews one could capture verbal gestures and body language too. However, interviews may be also carried out by telephone, web-cam, skype or by other internet communication methods, such as by e-mail. (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). In my research, I carried out face-to-face interviews with seventeen of my participants and six participants opted for an email interview exchange, while another participant requested a telephone interview. Braun and Clarke (2013) stated that face-to-face interviews involve rich data about the participants' experiences and attitudes. Furthermore, they stated that they offer the interviewer the flexibility to probe and ask unplanned questions, a small number of interviews can generate a considerable amount of data and the right setting and interview relationship can make it possible to consider sensitive issues. Such 'deep' interviews can be time-consuming for the participant and for the interviewer who, in addition to conducting them, will later transcribe and analyse them. It must also be born in mind that some people may feel uncomfortable talking about certain issues (Braun and Clarke, 2013), and they will retain the right not to respond.

Braun and Clarke (2013) refer to e-mail interviews as "virtual interviews" (p. 98). As already stated, I had a small number of participants who opted for an e-mail interview since I offered them an option between a face-to-face interview and an e-mail interview. I offered the option in order for the participants to feel as comfortable as possible to answer my questions, hence encouraging them to participate more willingly. Braun and Clarke (2013) mentioned various advantages about e-mail interviews:

- The participants can respond in the comfort of their home or in any other location they choose.
- The interview can be completed in the participant's own time.
- Participants feel more in control because they can respond whenever they are ready and have time to reflect and edit their responses.

- They facilitate the participation of shy people or those who lack confidence while enhancing people who express themselves better in writing.

- It is also convenient for the researcher because there is no need for transcription and raw data are never lost.

As the researcher, I felt that an e-mail interview involved particular disadvantages too, such as not being able to probe, in order to help the participant respond deeply and additionally, there was no direct observation of the participant's verbal gestures and emotions (Braun and Clarke, 2013), it was less easy to develop a rapport and relationship with the participant. De Leeuw (2005) stated that a face-to-face interview has a large potential and can last for a long time, while in a telephone or an email interview, the participants can terminate the interview in a quicker way and responses may be briefer. However, across both forms of interview, I continuously kept in mind that people are usually very busy, therefore, I appreciated the fact that they were dedicating some time for my research. This was the main reason why I offered them the option to choose between a face-to-face interview and an e-mail interview, and timed interviews in length and scheduling, to meet their requirements and availability.

Various types of interviews are used in a research, such as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, ethnographic interviews and focus groups (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). Creswell, (2014) said that in a phenomenological interview, the researcher needs patience and skill to ask the appropriate questions and to rely on the participants to discuss their life experiences.

In my study, I used semi-structured interviews where the same set of pre-determined questions were asked to every participant in the same sequence, and participants were free to express themselves at length. Patton (2002) suggested that this type of interview is the most popular where the researcher has pre-planned questions and the participants may express themselves freely and they may also raise issues that the interviewer may not have anticipated. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that using open-ended questions is quite advantageous allowing for flexibility, where the interviewer can probe in

order to clear any misunderstandings or delve deeper in the conversation with full involvement of participants.

I made use of direct questioning in my study, where I asked the participants about their opinions about inclusion in their class or in their school, in the case of the Heads of School. In this way, I got to know the personal views of the participants regarding this phenomenon in an appropriate atmosphere where the participant feels secure to express himself/herself freely. Having obtained the informed consent from the participants, they were aware of the purpose and the structure of the interview, thus building trust from the very start, and initiating a good relationship between the interviewer and the participant (Cohen et al., 2011). Ethical considerations will be discussed later on in the chapter.

Piloting of the interview is essential before carrying out the actual study (Cohen et al., 2011; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2014), to test the questions and practise them in order to check their clarity, their sequence, their ease and difficulty and the amount of time that the interview takes in all (Cohen et al., 2011). According to Braun and Clarke (2013) interviewing is quite challenging and can involve a lot of multi-tasking, thus, practice through a pilot is helpful not just in checking the questions but also in rehearsing listening approach including how to be attentive to the tone of voice and body language and identify the relevant information in the responses and probe when needed.

As stated earlier, in my study, I interviewed six Heads of School, twelve teachers and six Inclusion Coordinators. Since one of the main themes of the literature review was inclusive leadership, it was vital for me to interview the Heads of School about the inclusion programme in their school and about their visions, feelings, difficulties and recommendations with regards to the phenomenon of inclusion. The findings were then compared to the literature review. Three Heads of School were chosen from the Middle Schools, where students aged between 11 and 13 years of age attend. While three other Heads of School were chosen from the Senior Schools, which cater for students aged between 13 and 16 years.

The other two themes of the literature review chapter were Universal Design for Learning and Professional Learning Communities for Inclusion. Therefore, I interviewed twelve teachers from the same schools of the six Heads of School selected to be interviewed, in order to investigate their feelings and attitudes towards the inclusive aspect in their class and training in the field and also about their teaching methodologies. Twelve teachers, two from each participating school were also interviewed representing early career and long-serving teachers.

The last set of interviews was conducted with all six Inclusion Coordinators for the Maltese Secondary Schools. Five Coordinators work in Malta and another one in Gozo. Inclusion Coordinators are responsible for three or four schools and they support the school management team in the smooth running of the inclusion programme in the school. They also provide support to teachers and Learning Support Assistants so as to help them develop more inclusive strategies in class and they act as liaisons between the school and the Students Services Department, which provides the services of special teachers. There are only seven Inclusion Coordinators in the state secondary schools. Therefore, I interviewed one of them as a pilot study and the other six formed part of the sample in my research. The INCOs are in a position where they meet with different Senior Management Teams, different teachers and different situations and their views were valuable to the research because, through them, I could obtain a perspective which offers a national overview of inclusion in all the secondary state schools, in Malta and Gozo. They observe various views regarding inclusive schools and they have an awareness of different inclusive strategies being implemented in schools, as well as, encountering resistance to inclusion.

Interviewing these three key professional stakeholders in schools, was designed to give me important insights into their feelings, their opinions, their work and the challenges they meet every day, with regards to the phenomenon of inclusion. As mentioned earlier, the interviews were semi-structured to allow the respondents to express themselves freely and at length. The questions were pre-planned and required participants to give open responses, so as to place no limit on how much the participant could say

(Glasow, 2005; Drew et al., 2008; Cohen et al., 2011). Polland (2005) stated that these types of questions encourage free expression, however, they tend to be time-consuming for people to complete and for researchers to interpret. In order to increase trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013) the same format and sequence of questions were applied for every respondent (Patton, 2001; Cohen et al, 2011).

Both Heads of School and the teachers were chosen from three regions in Malta: the North, Centre and South, as a way of representing differences across the countryland to allow for differences to emerge in perspectives on how the inclusion programmes are implemented and whether the locations experience different successes and challenges.

The Heads of School were initially contacted by email, and invited to participate in the study. The email included a copy of the participant information sheet, an interview schedule, a consent form, a copy of the permission for research from the Education Department of Malta and a copy of the approval from the Ethics Review Board of the University of Sheffield. All the Heads of School accepted my invitation and they were contacted by phone, in order to set an appointment. However, one of the Heads of School, referred me to her Assistant Head, in charge of inclusion, to attend to the interview instead of her. All the interviews were conducted in their own schools, in their office. As already stated, all the Heads of School accepted to do a face-to-face interview and they were digitally recorded. The transcript of the interview was sent to them within two weeks. The interview consisted of four questions only, because I was aware that the Heads of School have a tight schedule and I had previously agreed that the interview would take no more than thirty minutes which influenced their decision to participate. A pilot interview was done with one Head of School who was not part of this sample, in order to test the questions and check the length of time. The questions that were asked to the Heads of School were the following:

- What are your views about inclusion?
- What are the greatest difficulties that you encounter in this aspect?
- Do you use any particular strategies to create a more inclusive school?

- Do you think that there are any developments that are needed to make your school more inclusive?

The responses were categorised and analysed according to: their views, difficulties, strategies and developments.

As mentioned earlier, two teachers from each school were interviewed. I wished to interview one teacher who was in his/her first five years of service and another teacher who had over twenty years teaching experience because I wanted to understand if and how the view of teachers in my study compare with those reported in the literature. The Heads of School suggested to me three names of early career teachers and three long-serving teachers. I chose one name from each group and sent them an email invitation to participate in the study which included a participant information sheet, an interview schedule, a consent form, a copy of the permission for research from the Education Department of Malta and a copy of the approval from the Ethics Review Board of the University of Sheffield. All the invited teachers agreed to participate, two teachers from one school, asked to participate by email because they were very busy and preferred to answer the questions when it was convenient for them. Nine teachers agreed to face-to-face interviews and one asked me to conduct the interview by telephone because it was difficult for her to make an appointment and she preferred expressing herself in words rather than writing. On reflection, both email and telephone interviews involved certain restrictions, such as not being able to observe non-verbal behaviour and also not having the opportunity to clarify and probe in the same way as is possible in face-to-face interviews, nevertheless, I preferred to use these alternative methods in order to secure the teachers' participation. The following interview questions were piloted with a teacher who did not form part of the sample:

- For how many years have you been teaching?
- Do you agree that students with diverse needs are included in class? Why?
- What type of difficulties do you encounter in the inclusion process?

- Do you use any particular teaching strategies in class to cater for every learner's needs?
- Do you share ideas and difficulties with your colleagues? Why?
- Do you feel that you were prepared for inclusion during your pre-service training?
- Do you think that you need further training in the field of inclusion?

The responses were categorised and analysed according to their views about inclusion in class, their difficulties, their teaching strategies, communication with their colleagues, pre-service training and continuous professional development in inclusion.

Six Inclusion Coordinators also took part in my study and the purpose was to get a wider overview of the Maltese Secondary Schools, both in Malta and Gozo. They were all contacted by email, and sent the participant information sheet, the interview schedule, the consent form, a copy of the permission for research from the Education Department of Malta and a copy of the approval from the Ethics Review Board of the University of Sheffield. Like the other groups, I offered them the option to do the interview face-to-face or by email. It was difficult to reach them all, this is a small team with a large number of schools to cover and a high workload. However, I was able to meet them all together after a team meeting to introduce myself and to inform them about the study. Two Coordinators opted for a face-to-face interview while the other four agreed to answer my questions via email when it was convenient for them. The following questions were asked to the Inclusion Coordinators:

- Can you mention any good practices that you encounter in your schools?
- What type of difficulties do you encounter in your work?
- What are your recommendations for teachers and school leaders to develop more inclusive schools?

I asked three questions only so that I would not take a lot of their time because I was very aware of their busy schedules so I kept my questions to the themes of good practices, difficulties and recommendations which were essential for my study.

The experience of interviewing all these different participants was enriching and challenging especially when recruiting participants and gaining their trust and establishing my credibility with them (Creswell, 2013). A small number of the participants seemed uneasy at the beginning of the interview, however, by the end, they told me that they actually enjoyed the interview.

The phenomenon of inclusion in schools has been discussed for a very long time and it is still an issue that is debated by various educators. Therefore, the participants were discussing an issue which was part of their everyday job, and they did so willingly. I could feel and see, their passion for their work, their hesitations, their worries, their frustrations, their challenges and their job satisfaction. These aspects will be discussed in detail in the next chapter where the findings will be presented and analysed.

4.3.3   The questionnaire

The questionnaire is a useful instrument and it is generally widely used. It offers the potential for generating numerical data, as well as more qualitative insights into the participants' experiences and attitudes (Cohen et al., 2011; Clough and Nutbrown, 2012; Creswell, 2013) without the presence of the researcher. De Leeuw and Hox (1988) stated that this could be regarded as a disadvantage because it relies on the respondent to read and answer the questions without the assistance and explanation of the researcher, however piloting can ensure the questionnaire will yield the kinds of data that are needed, and I found that, data generated by the questionnaire were fruitful and contributed to answering my research questions. I decided to use self-completion questionnaires alongside interviewing, in order to generate views from a larger sample and increase its robustness (Reams and Twale, 2008; Denscombe, 2008). Questionnaires were distributed to teachers to obtain a better overview of the phenomenon of inclusion.

Cohen et al. (2011) stated that if a questionnaire is distributed to a large sample, the questions should be closed and structured, whilst a smaller target sample can include open-ended questions, this for manageability of data. In my study, the questionnaire was distributed to two hundred and twenty-two

teachers, from three different schools selected from the original sample of six - one each from the North, Central and South areas of Malta. Following Cohen et al. (2011), given the size of the sample, I designed closed and multiple-choice questions which were similar in content to the interview questions, to allow for comparison and generate more perspectives on the issues. I designed a very short questionnaire which required only a tick to answer in order to maximise the response rate. As Lynn (2003) notes, the main drawback of participation in a questionnaire is the amount of time it takes to finish it. Lynn (2003) advises against including open questions, which could take longer to answer if a closed question would provide the equivalent information. I followed this advice and kept it as short as possible, whilst still being meaningful and only included necessary questions, but also left space for any comments that respondents wished to record. This proved to be a good strategy because forty-nine teachers left valuable comments, therefore, I think that the fact that the questionnaire was short and did not take much of their time, made them willing to offer more, by writing a comment. In piloting, I discovered that the questionnaire took 3 minutes to complete. I gave the teachers two weeks to return the questionnaire.

Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that highly structured, closed questions are useful to generate frequencies and they can be answered, coded and analysed more quickly than open text. Conversely, structured and close-ended questions may prevent the participants from any remarks or explanations and therefore only the issues identified by the research are given importance (Oppenheim, 1992). However, by leaving an opportunity to comment (but not a question requiring participants to answer) at the end of the questionnaire proved fruitful.

In the multiple-choice questions, I gave a statement together with a number of answers and the teachers were asked to choose the answer (or answers) according to their views. A copy of the questionnaire is to be found in Appendix 4. Cohen et al. (2011) emphasised that in the multiple-choice questions, it is important to include all the possible answers that enable the respondent to present his/her views.

Possible answers to dichotomous questions were: agree, disagree and perhaps. Whilst dichotomous questions usually offer two possible responses, yes and no, or, agree and disagree, I felt that polarisation of views was not always helpful so I included the choice of 'perhaps' in order to see where there was uncertainty around particular issues in inclusion.

The questionnaire consisted of the following questions and possible responses:

1) As a teacher, I agree that students with diverse needs should be included in class: (Please select one)
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Perhaps

2) As a teacher, I find it difficult to include and cater for:
   (You can tick more than one)

   o Dyslexic students
   o Students with mild autism
   o Students with severe autism
   o Low ability students
   o Gifted students
   o Students with physical disabilities
   o None of the above

3) In order to cater for every learner's needs, I use different strategies in class together with various resources: (Please tick one)
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Perhaps

4) I share ideas and difficulties with my colleagues: (Please tick one)
   o Agree
   o Disagree

o Perhaps

If you agree, please skip to question number 6.

5) I do not agree to share ideas and difficulties with my colleagues because:
   o I simply do not want to share my resources and feelings.
   o I feel afraid to share my ideas and difficulties.

6) When I was a student teacher I had good training in the field of inclusion:
   (Please tick one)
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Perhaps

7) I feel the need of further training in inclusion: (Please tick one)
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Perhaps

A participant information sheet was also attached to the questionnaire where the purpose of the study was explained and as I stated earlier, I included blank space in the paper, where I asked them whether they wished to add any further comments. Furthermore, whilst thanking them, I asked them to return the questionnaire within two weeks. Through these questions, I wanted first and foremost to get an overview of their perception of inclusion, what makes them feel challenged in class, whether or not they use various methodologies in class, whether they share resources with their colleagues and I also wanted to know their opinion about pre-service training and continuous professional development. Data from the questionnaire responses contributed to my research third sub-question, where I wished to investigate what further developments are needed to develop more inclusive schools.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Primarily, a formal application was submitted to the Ethical Review Board of the University of Sheffield where the purpose and methodology of the study was explained and copies of the interview schedules and the questionnaire were presented. Eventually the study was approved. Furthermore, another formal application was presented to the Education Department of Malta, in order to ask for permission to carry out the study in the Maltese State Schools. The permission was approved.

A participant information sheet and a consent form were given to the participants that were interviewed. Both sheets were attached in the email that was sent to them beforehand. The participant information sheet explained the purpose of the study, that is, what the study is investigating and what contributions may evolve from the investigations. Furthermore, it explained to the participant that s/he could choose between a face-to-face interview and an email interview and that the researcher will ask for their permission to be recorded. Participants were also informed that confidentiality and anonymity will be respected and a transcript of the interview will be sent to them for their acknowledgment. It was also made clear that the study was unlikely to cause them any physical or psychological harm, and I, also emphasised that their views, opinions and practices surely contributed to my study, I clarified that participants were free to decide whether to participate or not and that they were free to withdraw at any time during the study. The participants could also contact me or my supervisor if they wished to have further information. Through their signing of the consent form, they confirmed that they read and understood the information sheet, that they were willing to participate anonymously in the study and that they were free to withdraw at any time.

The questionnaire also included a participant information sheet, with the same type of information as detailed above. The participants' completion and return of the questionnaires indicated their consent to participate. Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that informed consent involves freedom and self-determination, that is, freedom to choose whether to participate or not and

self-determination in weighing the risks of participating, and therefore, having the right to withdraw from the study. Anonymity was of high importance in this study because I was seeking personal views and attitudes from the participants with regard to inclusion and since the study took place in a small island state, it was highly important to protect the identity of all the participants. Both in the interviews and the questionnaires, no names were given and no other personal details were included (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992; Cohen et al., 2011). Another important issue is that of confidentiality. Though the researcher may know or identify the participant of the given information, s/he should not divulge the information to anyone. Researchers have the obligation to guarantee anonymity and to keep that promise (Cohen et al., 2011).

As stated earlier, in this chapter, the study involved a type of methodology that involved convergent parallel mixed-methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the interviews and the questionnaires were conducted concurrently.

4.5 Trustworthiness

Often applied to quantitative and statistical studies, validity is defined as the means of checking the accuracy of the findings by applying different procedures (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) recommended the use of particular approaches in order to increase the accuracy of the study:

- Triangulation: data is gathered through different sources of information.
- Member checking: the researcher takes the major findings back to the participants to check whether they were accurate in their responses. This could be done through follow-up interviews.
- Using rich and thick descriptions to convey the findings: when the researcher provides a detailed description of the settings, the reader is given more realistic results.

- Clarifying the bias that the researcher may add to the study: Self-reflection brings honesty to the study; thus, the reader increases his/her trust in the study. The researcher usually interprets the findings through his/her background.

- Spending a length of time in the field: Eventually, the researcher will develop in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, thus gaining more experience in the field and also with the participants. Therefore, the findings will be more accurate or valid.

- Using an external auditor: A person who is not familiar with the researcher or the study can provide an assessment throughout the collection of data or at the end of the study.

(Creswell, 2014, p. 226)

The above-mentioned suggestions are common in various studies in order to cross-check the validity of the study, but they equally apply to the concept of 'trustworthiness' (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985; Shenton, 2004) which better applies to studies involving qualitative data, such as that gathered in the interviews and the open text part of of the questionnaire survey. Cohen et al. (2011) defined triangulation "as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (p. 195). Traditionally reference is done to three data sources, but now used to describe the use of multiple sources, they also stated that triangulation in the social sciences help to study the phenomenon from more than one standpoint, therefore the data are enriched. Thus, a mixed-methods approach is ideal for triangulation of data (Cohen et al., 2011). As already stated, this study involved both qualitative data and quantitative data. Therefore, the results could be compared as a means of validation and are securing trustworthiness in the findings.

Other suggestions mentioned above were also applied in this study, especially through the fact that the respondents were asked to share their experiences in the field and additionally, I, as the researcher, spent a lot of time in the field too, both whilst conducting the study and also through my work. However, I would like to note here, that though I work in the field of inclusion, I tried my

best not to influence and create bias in my study. Therefore, all the participants felt free to discuss their views and attitudes towards inclusion and the fact that there were different views, which were in favour or against inclusive schools, made the study more interesting and I suggest, added to its trustworthiness. In Creswell's (2014) recommendations, it was stated that the researcher interprets the findings through his/her background. As I already stated, though I work in the field every day, I wanted to elicit the true feelings and opinions of the participants regarding inclusive schools, for the reason that through their experiences, I would be able to present valuable recommendations to the policy makers.

In order to limit sample bias for the interviews and the questionnaires as much as possible, the participants were chosen from different schools and from different areas, (what Denzin (1970) referred to as space triangulation) so as to investigate a range of views across the country. Additionally, teachers were recommended for the interviews by the Head of School, and whilst this may have introduced some bias, it meant I, as the researcher, had never met them before, and so was not selecting according to my anticipated view, nor I could not influence their opinions. Following the interviews, the transcript was sent to each participant by email, within two weeks of the interview, so that they could confirm their statements and points of view, and amend as they saw fit. By interviewing three different categories of professionals, I was able to triangulate the data in this way as well as two different types of data sources (Drew et al., 2008) thus having different points of view. However, I acknowledge that if students and parents were also involved in this study, it would have been more interesting to note their feelings and lived experiences in the field as they are absolutely the most important stakeholders in the inclusion programme.

Gibbs (2007) argues that a study is reliable if the findings are consistent when repeated by other researchers, however, this does not necessarily always apply to qualitative studies and depending on the population represented in the study, different views can emerge. This is not necessarily rendering one study less 'reliable' than another, but it is rather pointing up that differences exist, and I suggest that these should be identified and understood. Cohen et

al. (2011) also suggested that for a study to be reliable, the results must be consistent if another researcher and other respondents are involved in the same context. Again, whilst this can apply to some quantitative, statistical studies and to scientific studies, it is not necessarily (and often not at all) the case for the social sciences. Where different individual participants give their views, it can be understood (perhaps even expected) that views differ. Context, geography, politics, resources, religion and tradition are just some of the factors that can give rise to different perspectives. Similarly, whilst Cohen et al. (2011) suggest that validity in interviews could be checked by comparing the interview with another measure, I argue that the views of individuals are just that, and therefore difference in perspectives should be expected rather than be seen as a matter of concern. In this study, the findings of the interviews are compared with those from the questionnaires and similarities and differences are highlighted.

4.6 The analysis

Data analysis in research can be a complex undertaking (Thorne, 2000) and thus, clear explanation and justification of processes must be given to add rigour to the outcomes (Thorne, 2000; Malterud, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, thematic analysis was chosen as the main analytical approach. Braun and Clarke (2013, 2006) stated that though thematic analysis has been poorly acknowledged, it can be applied to studies focusing on various theories and research questions. Thematic analysis is a flexible approach which can be modified for the needs of different studies while providing a rich and detailed account of data (King, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Holloway and Todres (2003) warn that since thematic analysis is a flexible approach, this might lead to inconsistency and lack of coherence when themes are developed from the data, in my description of my approach to analysis, I have provided a clear justification of my processes to ensure coherence and consistency and enhance its trustworthiness.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four criteria to establish trustworthiness in a research study: credibility, transferability, dependability and

confirmability. With regards to credibility they stated that this factor is demonstrated by use of different activities, such as observations and data collection triangulation (as discussed earlier). Lincoln and Guba (1985) added that transferability is carried out through the provision of thick descriptions, while dependability is shown when the research study is audited (Koch, 1994). Finally, confirmability is established when the interpretations and findings of the researcher are clearly derived from the data and when readers relate with similarities and differences to the research accounts provided in the study. Hence, by offering clarity about how conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Tobin and Begley, 2004), confirmability is established.

Braun and Clarke (2013) developed a six-phase process to approach thematic analysis:

- Getting familiar with the data
- Coding
- Searching for themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Writing up

Though these phases are in sequence, one phase building on the other, in reality, the researcher is likely to move back and forth between and within the process, checking and rechecking as new themes are identified.

The first step in my study, after collecting all the data, was to transcribe all the interviews, first in the Maltese language (the language in which they were conducted), and then to translate them into English. Though this was time-consuming, it was a valuable part of the process of familiarising myself with the data (Riessman, 1993). Poland (2002) insisted that the transcript must be faithful to the verbal account in order for the researcher to have a thorough understanding of the data. While conducting the interviews, I was already generating knowledge and thoughts prior to the analysis, as I listened to what the participants were saying (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

After reading and re-reading the transcripts, I started generating codes manually by highlighting texts and writing notes on the side of the texts. It is important to note that almost all the data in the interviews were utilised in my thematic analysis, there was very little that was not deemed of some relevance. Each interview took about 15 to 20 minutes and kept very tightly focused because participants had very busy schedules, some made it clear to me that they did not have time for a long interview and agreed to be interviewed on this basis. This is probably the reason for the high level of relevance of the contributions of participants, there was no time for meandering around a question, and answers were pertinent and concise. By keeping my questions very clear and straight to the point, elicited direct answers to my questions. As a result, all the data obtained from the interview responses was utilised and it was all valuable information in answering my research, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

After highlighting the data into different codes, they were organised within different themes. With regards to this factor, Boyatzis (1998) stated that themes have to be identified either at a semantic level or at a latent level. Within the former approach, themes are identified according to the "surface meanings of the data" (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 84), that is, data is presented as a real and descriptive account of the participants' experiences. While the latent level involves identifying and examining underlying ideas and assumptions of the data. In my study themes were formed on a semantic level because the analysis involved the discussion and interpretation of the participants' views, attitudes and experiences in the field of inclusion. Through this type of analysis, the research questions of the study were addressed.

The main themes were derived from the literature review, which led to the development of the research questions, which in turn led to the development of field questions asked during interviews and in the questionnaire. Further themes were derived from the data generated. The themes that emerged in the Heads' interviews were:

- Personal views on inclusion
- Difficulties

- Strategies
- Suggested Developments

Themes derived from the Inclusion Coordinators were:

- Good practices
- Difficulties and challenges
- Recommendations

Themes derived from the teachers' interviews were:

- Personal views on inclusion
- Difficulties
- Teaching strategies
- Sharing and collaborating with colleagues
- Pre-service training
- Further training

Table 4.2 shows how the themes of interview data overlap and diverge:

	Heads of School	INCOs	Teachers
	Personal Views		Personal Views
	Difficulties	Difficulties and Challenges	Difficulties
	Strategies		Teaching strategies
Themes	Suggested developments	Recommendations	
		Good practices	
			Sharing and collaborating with colleagues
			Pre-service training
			Further training

Table 4.2: Themes derived from interviews with Heads of School, Inclusion Coordinators and Teachers

The participants' perspectives on these themes presented the lived experiences of the participants within the field of inclusion. This implies that the participants shared their stories and their personal real-life experiences within the school and in class. They divulged their personal feelings towards, and attitudes about the concept of inclusion and additionally, they discussed their challenges and inclusive strategies, while speaking about their lived experiences. Therefore, through these themes I investigated how the current inclusion policies, discussed in the literature review, were being implemented in Maltese schools and furthermore they helped to form recommendations for specific national changes in order to respond to the third sub-research question.

Finally, the next chapter brings the themes together using direct quotations from the participants in order to aid in the understanding of specific points of interpretation (King, 2004). The participants' direct discussions were included in most of my analysis, because they were truly interesting to my study and they helped me to substantiate my own arguments and connect back to the literature.

Furthermore, as Chapter 5 will show, in telling the participants' story in my analysis, I have discussed and interpreted all their personal views, attitudes and accounts while relating to the literature review. Thus, the analysis is a critical account as well as a descriptive story, presented with a level of depth about the phenomenon (King, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006). I followed the advice of various authors who have argued that researchers can build valid arguments for choosing particular themes by referring back to the literature and ultimately, the research findings would be confirmed and the validity of the study would increase (Aronson, 1994; Cote and Turgeon, 2005; Tuckett, 2005). For me, the words of participants demonstrate the important element of trustworthiness of the data and of the account I have rendered from those data. Cote and Turgeon (2005) stated that in order to increase the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher must discuss all the relevant results, including those which were unexpected or did not correspond to the main explanations of the phenomenon being studied. I have remained true to this advice, and my research findings involve differing perspectives with

regards to inclusion. The participants presented various views both in favour and against inclusion, and many ambiguities, and these diverse perspectives led to the generation of a more interesting and realistic study and helped me to expand my discussion with regards to new developments that could contribute to the development of more inclusive schools.

Meanwhile, the results of the teachers' questionnaires were interwoven within the discussion of the findings of the teachers' interviews. Because questions were similar, the results could be easily discussed together for the reason that they were actually compared, in order to observe whether the outcome results were similar. Basic quantitative analysis included totalling of frequencies of responses to the questionnaire items, and these were tabulated across the three schools, to allow for comparison between the schools in different parts of the country. Questionnaire respondents were simply asked to select from a choice of responses, and this presented valuable data, as will be discussed and shown in the next chapter. Importantly, many teachers who responded to the questionnaire opted to add further comments often justifying or further explaining their reasons for their response, and these more personal and individual responses too have been included in the analysis alongside those from interview participants.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and justified the methods and methodology of this research study. It has explained the mixed-methods approach applied in the investigation. Further, this chapter has set out the approach to analysis using a form of thematic analysis, where themes were developed from the literature and the raw data. These themes and detailed discussion of each of them will be the focus of the next chapter which will also present the findings and discuss them in discreet participant groupings: the Heads of School, the Inclusion Coordinators and the teachers. Teachers' perspectives were analysed and are discussed in two categories of participants: the early career teachers and the long-serving teachers so as to identify any differences between the two groups.

In this study, the participants talked about their opinions, and beliefs and recounted their experiences about inclusive education. Their contribution was highly valuable in this study in order to understand something of how the current inclusion policies are being implemented in Maltese secondary state schools and what national strategies might be needed to develop more inclusive schools. These findings will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and discusses the findings of this study. The views of the Heads of School, Inclusion Coordinators and teachers were investigated in order to understand the developments and the demands needed for our schools in Malta to become more inclusive. The research question which was answered through the data from questionnaires and interviews was: *What national strategies are needed to develop more inclusive schools?* All the educational participants discussed their attitudes and opinions with regards to inclusion in the educational field. They talked about their difficulties and challenges encountered through their lived experiences and discussed the various strategies that they implemented in their schools and classrooms, with the intention of eliminating barriers that may hinder each learner's educational potential.

The theoretical framework of this research was based upon the constructivist view of Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theory where the focal point is learner-centred learning. For learning to take place, learners need to be active in the learning process and their individual and unique personalities, cultures and personal experiences are fundamental to their initial education. Meanwhile, the teacher facilitates learning through various tools of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). The concepts discussed earlier in the literature review (Chapter 3) were based upon these principles and eventually the field research questions were developed.

The main themes of the interviews and the questionnaires that are connected with the literature where relevant in order to demonstrate convergent and divergent findings from this study. Furthermore, the results of the teachers' interviews and questionnaires will be compared in a form of triangulation. The findings presented here offer an account of the current inclusion strategies implemented in the participating Maltese schools together with the challenges that evolved from these practices. The chapter concludes with suggestions

arising from the discussion of findings on what might be done to develop more inclusive schools.

5.1 The perspectives of Heads of School

Six Heads of School were interviewed, three from the middle schools (11 to 13 years) and three from the senior schools (13 to 16 years), chosen from the North, Centre and South areas of Malta.

In the next section I will present the data of the Heads of School.

5.1.1 The views about inclusion

During the interviews, the Heads of School were asked to discuss their views, difficulties and strategies regarding the inclusion policy and programmes in their schools.   Additionally, they were questioned about their recommendations and suggestions on how to better develop more inclusive schools.   For this reason, the following themes were developed.   The responses of every theme discussed by the Heads of the middle schools will be presented first, followed by the responses of the Heads of the senior schools, in order to observe both similarities and divergences according to the themes which evolved from the questions, namely:

- Personal views about inclusion
- Difficulties
- Strategies
- Recommendations

Pseudonyms are used in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants and their schools.

5.1.1.1   Heads of middle schools

All the Heads of School (HOS), all acknowledged that their schools must promote the inclusion policy, a factor which was emphasised in the literature review chapter (Wayne State University, 2000; Salisbury and Mc Gregor, 2005; Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Department of Education, Victoria, 2014). Non-dissented from the view that inclusion of all the students is a priority in the school's development plan, as was highlighted in Cobb's literature review (2014), the following comments confirm this view:

"We approach inclusion holistically and with great determination"

(HOS, north middle school)

"…if you are a good educator you must be inclusive"

(Assistant Head, southern middle school)

"inclusion of all students has now become part and parcel of everyday life"

(HOS, central senior school)

"inclusion helps to create one united society"

(HOS, southern senior school)

These statements from participants in the study also verify Booth and Ainscow's (2002) definition of inclusion, where they stated that inclusion is "about the education of all children and young people" (p. 1).

Mr Pace, a middle school Head in the northern area stated that inclusion is dealt upon on two different levels, on one level there are students with special needs or with other particular needs while on the other level, there are non-Maltese students. He said that in the school, they try their best to help the latter students in order to help them *"feel welcomed, loved and part of our school community"*. When asked on his opinion about inclusion, he said that:

"We approach inclusion holistically and with great determination. I am totally in favour of inclusion and we work as a team to make our students' life at school a happy one. "

Furthermore, he added that *"all children, whatever their disability or nationality, will be included, somehow or other, in the various school activities".* This shows that he tried his best to include *all* the students in the school activities in order to enhance their sense of belonging to the school.

On the other hand, he argued that where students have extreme cases of disability or behaviour there can be a degree of difficulty. Though noting that they were few in number, he stressed that he does not have the necessary means to help these students effectively, especially those with profound, multiple and learning disabilities (PMLD) and those on the higher-end of the autism spectrum and therefore these particular students were not benefitting so much from the inclusion policy. He continued that:

> *"This can have a negative effect on the other members of our school community, the school is an interactive community, we learn from each other. We influence each other, whether positively or negatively."*

He acknowledged the fact that students with different abilities and diverse backgrounds living, learning and playing together is surely helpful and beneficial to all. However, he said that few very difficult pupils at times disrupted the classes and caused tension in the school. He felt that in the school, they did not have the necessary backup to help these students. He concluded that:

> *"We have made great strides in inclusion but sometimes I have mixed feelings when it comes to these difficult cases. The teachers and I are not yet satisfied with solving the problem."*

Mr Briffa, another middle school Head in the centre of Malta, was also asked what his views and opinions were about inclusion. My question was followed by long moments of silence. After giving him time to think, I probed further about the matter. He responded, *"Because by inclusion, one means: to include everyone and everybody, isn't it?"* He declared that he did not agree with the fact that what matters was whether the students with special needs felt content or not in the school, as at times, parents believed. He stressed that, actually, the most important factor was students' educational entitlement: "*For me, inclusion means that a pupil comes to school and at least learns*

something". He expressed disappointment about the fact that certain students were just present in his school for the sake of inclusion, however, according to him, these students were not reaching their educational goals, as they should. He was pointing out the difference and dilemma of physical inclusion in a building or institution without 'belonging'.

He continued that such students should attend resource centres (special schools) where their needs would be met efficiently and successfully. This opinion goes against Vygotsky (1926), where he stressed that students with physical or mental disabilities should not be secluded in specialised schools for the reason that they end up locked "in a tight and narrow little world" (p. 287). Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of social interaction. From my own experience, I have observed that, on a social level, all the students, whatever their needs and abilities, benefit immensely from inclusive education, because I see them all learning to live together and respect one another. However, I am aware that various educators, as seen in these findings, are very doubtful about the inclusion of some students in mainstream schools.

The Head of School of a middle school, in the south area of Malta, referred me to Ms Galea, the Assistant Head in charge of inclusion for the interview. For her, inclusion meant *"being a good educator … if you are a good educator you must be inclusive".* She added that, though the curriculum is important, one must keep in mind the child's background and family environment. However, she stated that she does have certain misgivings about the concept of inclusion:

> *"I believe that inclusion should not be so widespread. I mean, there are serious difficulties … certain pupils simply do not fit into the mainstream. It is unfair for them and for the other students".*

The idea of 'fitting' into the mainstream seems to go against the concept of an inclusive school, since the school should identify the students' needs and be run in a way that fits these needs. Her main concern was lack of resources and staff to meet the needs of specific students, whom she felt were not

benefitting from inclusion, and these limitations might have affected her reasoning:

"Our school environment is not fit for all our students. Some pupils need a different environment where they can learn in a different manner from the one we are providing here".

5.1.1.2   Heads of senior schools

Ms Galdes, the Head of School of a senior school in the northern area was more optimistic of the concept of inclusion, especially with regards to the inclusion of students from minority ethnic groups:

"I believe that they are God-sent and beneficial to the school, for the simple reason that they are really motivated, especially when compared with the other students".

Though she was aware that particular students who were severely disabled or behaved in an anti-social manner presented considerable challenges, and may not have fitted within the levels of the rest of the class, she insisted that one of the crucial factors in an inclusive school was teacher training. She clearly stated that good preparation and effective training are fundamental to the teaching staff.

In another senior school in the central area of Malta, Ms Grima, the Head of School, remarked that *"inclusion of all students has now become part and parcel of everyday life. We seem … to have got used to it. It isn't so strange anymore".*

Furthermore, she was the only Head of School who referred to gender diversity and religious diversity as essential elements of inclusion. She said that particular activities were being organised on these issues, as will be discussed later on within the 'Strategies' theme.

She briefly discussed her concern for gifted students. She felt that these students were the most who suffer within the inclusion policy because she felt they were somewhat marginalised, and she expressed regret that she did not

know them personally. She felt that it was unfair that these particular students were not given a lot of attention. For this reason, she stated that *"inclusion is also bringing about exclusion … I mean there is a lacuna in the inclusion policy".* Ultimately, she felt slightly frustrated when dealing with students experiencing severe social, emotional and behavioural problems:

> *"we simply don't have the necessary know-how, the necessary personnel, the necessary tools, to help these individuals. We do try to help them … but with no positive results whatsoever!"*

Mr Tanti, the Head of School of a senior school in the south area of Malta stated that:

> *"Inclusion, as such, has several effects on society in general. It has its positive and negative aspects. When we talk about inclusion, we are affirming that exclusion exists".*

In principle, he agreed with the concept of inclusive schools, because all the students, whether they were with special needs or with other diverse needs, benefitted from the system, and eventually, as Vygotsky (1926) stated, they will learn from each other on a social level. Furthermore, Mr Tanti declared that *"inclusion helps to create one united society".* Therefore, according to him, it was a very good opportunity for different pupils to mix and adapt themselves to each other. However, like the other Heads of School, he voiced his doubts and concerns in relation to students with profound, multiple and learning disabilities (PMLD). He said that he was not sure whether they were actually benefitting from mainstream schools or not. In fact, he believed that much more needed to be done about this matter: "*Many resources are being utilised for their education but we are still at a crossroad."*

In summary, all the Heads of School were highly in favour of the inclusion of non-Maltese students. They all regarded these students as part of the school's success, for the reason that many of them had good academic skills. Furthermore, all the Heads of School organised committees and activities where these students were highly involved. Therefore, the inclusion of students from minority ethnic groups who had recently arrived in Malta was seen as beneficial to the school's development. In this way, the Heads of

School induced a sense of belonging within these students so as to be engaged and motivated in their learning, a factor that was underlined by Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2009) and the OECD (2016).

The factor which perplexed these Heads of School was the inclusion of students with particular and complex physical and mental difficulties. They all talked about students with various conditions, such as autism, hyperactivity or profound and multiple learning difficulties and, in these cases, they confessed that they were not being effective enough in helping these students to reach their full potential. They said that the main reasons for this are a lack of both human and material resources. This matter led them to question the issue of inclusion, because they felt that these students were affecting their peers in a negative way:

> "*This can have a negative effect on the other members of our school community*"

> (HOS, north middle school)

> *"inclusion is also bringing about exclusion … I mean there is a lacuna in the inclusion policy"*

> (HOS, southern senior school)

The issue of resolving the negative impact on some students but excluding others does not sit well with a notion of social inclusion, but this seemed to be the solution being reached for by some Heads of School, something which is discussed in more detail later.

Having presented the views and opinions of the six Heads of School regarding the concept of inclusion in Maltese schools, the next section focuses on, their accounts of the greatest difficulties that they encounter around leading an inclusive school.

5.1.2 The greatest difficulties encountered in inclusion

5.1.2.1 Heads of middle schools

The greatest difficulties that were pointed out by the Heads of the middle schools were the following:

- Lack of human resources
- Lack of material resources
- An inability to cater for non-Maltese students
- An inability to effectively support students who are on the higher-end of the autism spectrum
- An inability to effectively support students with mental health difficulties
- An inability to effectively support gifted students

The issue of lack of human and material resources was mentioned by all the Heads of middle schools. They said that more human resources were needed to cater effectively for various students' needs.

When I asked for his opinion about the greatest difficulties encountered when implementing inclusion his school, Mr Pace, in the northern area, immediately replied the following:

> *"Not enough manpower. To make inclusion effective one needs the necessary manpower and resources. Otherwise, we can fail and the students will suffer inadvertently. The necessary tools are vital to creating a safe, happy atmosphere in the school, an atmosphere which enhances learning and helps the development of the children's abilities".*

He argued that, in the mainstream schools, there were no multi-sensory rooms or swimming pools because these facilities were only found in the Resource Centres (previously known as Special Schools). He added that, for this reason, students with profound, multiple and learning disabilities felt more content and satisfied when they attended the special schools while he assumed that they felt disappointed when they attended his school. Hence, it seems that regrettably, he felt that his school was offering these students a disservice:

"Inclusion, therefore, is at times not helpful and beneficial to all the students in our school. More teachers and LSAs are needed to make inclusion really valid, but our requirements often fall on deaf ears".

From my own experience, I must say that it is a challenge for the parents to decide whether their child attends a Resource Centre or not. They understand that the curriculum and the school environment in a Resource Centre is much more adapted to the needs of their child, however, they are often afraid that their son or daughter will copy another students' behaviour. This may result in increasing bad habits and behaviour. For this reason, students may alternate between different types of schools, that is, they attend twice a week at the Resource Centre and three times a week at the mainstream school. In this way, the student socially interacts with different types of students. However, in the mainstream school, an individual educational plan must be well-designed for the student in order to complement the curriculum carried out in the Resource Centre.

The last challenge that Mr Pace mentioned was that of the inclusion of the recently arrived non-Maltese students. According to him, more human resources were needed in this matter because of the need to support students who did not yet speak Maltese or English. He was frustrated with what he felt was a lack of adequate support by the Department of Education:

"We really need more manpower to solve the problem of foreign students. The language barrier is a problem, and to overcome it, one needs the necessary tools. However, the Department doesn't seem to understand what we face here in the school and, as a result, we don't get the much-needed back up".

Mr Briffa, whose school is in the centre of Malta, felt that the greatest challenge was dealing with the behaviour of students with severe autism[3]. He discussed the fact that, when these students were in primary school, they were able to follow a routine, where they had one teacher only, stayed in one class all day, and every day, and their classmates were always the same students. On the

---

[3] The term *'severe autism'* is generally used in Maltese schools to refer to students on the higher-end of the autism spectrum.

other hand, when they started their secondary schooling, all of a sudden, these students were expected to adapt to a different routine with many different demands. They started seeing different teachers in their class every day, every forty minutes the bell rang to change lessons and classes were changed from one lesson to the other, and held in different parts of the school. According to the Head of School, all these changes resulted in an overwhelming number of changes for the student to cope with. He sustained that the rest of the students in the class were affected negatively when students with autism were not able to cope with these expected routines. He said:

> "Students who are severely autistic … When they suffer a tantrum, all hell breaks loose in the classroom. All the other students suffer setbacks when this happens and precious time is lost ... this is simply unfair on the other students".

Mr Briffa's perception of 'unfairness' seemed to show that the needs of some students were being prioritised over those of others. He clearly indicated that students are in his school to learn, therefore, students with difficult behavioural needs were hindering other students' learning. As an Assistant Head of a school, I was aware of these views and attitudes of some Heads of School, and these factors motivated me to do the study in order to confirm and show the real feelings of the key school stakeholders with regards to inclusive schools in Malta.

Unlike the previous Head of School, Mr Briffa argued that mainstream schools should not include particular resources such as multi-sensory rooms or swimming pools because according to him one would be exaggerating:

> "We have exaggerated the concept of inclusion so much that we have become 'a laughing stock of inclusion'! They pretend that my school provides a multi-sensory room! Come on! Has Malta become a new Saudi Arabia? We can't afford such luxuries! And some pretend to have such amenities in every secondary school!"

These comments indicate a certain anger towards both towards inclusion and its demands. This Head of School perceived certain resources as a luxury

and not as a means of meeting the needs of his students. He seemed to make it clear that these students must attend the Resource Centres and not a mainstream school. In my opinion, the principal reason for this kind of attitude is due to a lack of training in the field. Specific training in inclusion for the Heads of School will help them develop more positive attitudes and enhance knowledge in the field. Furthermore, better communication with the parents also helps to understand the needs of these students with a view to develop an effective individual educational plan.

Ultimately, another matter that he referred to is that of gifted students: *"I am sorry to say but the present system is giving a disservice to gifted children. This system is simply punishing the gifted pupil"*. The Head of School is repeatedly giving priority only to the needs of average students or higher. An inclusive school requires much more. Various authors said that Heads of School should function as front-line interpreters of inclusion polcies, and they are a vital instrument in school to lead change (McLeskey and Waldron, 2002; Salisbury and McGregor, 2005; Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis, 2009; Currie-Rubin, 2013; Bristol, 2014;). Effective training for *all* stakeholders and effective planning for the implementation of the inclusion policy must be identified as national strategies to develop more inclusive schools.

When asked about their challenges, Ms Galea, an Assistant Head in the southern area, initially made it clear that they are quite lucky to have hard-working and dedicated teachers and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) in their school, and that they all worked as a team. However, she declared that the main difficulty is the system in general, that is, the fact that there exists *"one system for everybody … this simply does not work so efficiently"*. She stated that the number of students diagnosed as having ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and Autism are on the increase, and according to her, certain students do not fit in a school like theirs.

Another great challenge that she mentioned was the students suffering mental health difficulties. She felt that no one was equipped with the right training to support such students, going so far as to claim that these matters were beyond the school's remit:

"Yes, we have various mental health issues … and these cause disruptions, panic, and disorder in the school. Our school is not a hospital! We do not know how to help these individuals when a crisis arises. We do not have nurses in our school! We don't have the resources to tackle mental illness. It is an insurmountable hurdle … something beyond our abilities. We were not trained to face such situations".

These comments indicate a fear of the unknown, resulting from lack of training in inclusion. Additionally, stakeholders may not be empathic enough to understand the students' needs, due to lack of knowledge. If a student has a mental health issue, it does not indicate that s/he specifically belongs in a hospital. For this reason, I insist on increased communication with parents and other professionals on behalf of the school administration, for the benefit of the student's needs (Irvine et al., 2010; OECD, 2016).

Space was another obstacle mentioned by this Assistant Head: "*our school is rather old and small in size".* According to her, since space is restricted, particular adaptive programmes were not implemented to the full. Furthermore, she felt disappointed that sports programmes which were highly beneficial to students with particular needs, could not be held because of space limitations.

A final challenge that she brought up was the curriculum. She maintained that the present curriculum did not always fit the needs of particular students effectively. Therefore, she said that it was difficult for the teacher to satisfy every student's demands in the class. In fact, one of the strategies that Plan Organisation (2015) developed for the period 2015-2020 was that of the provision of relevant curricula by the educational institutions. Therefore, she suggested that special classes should be set in order to be suitable for students' learning capacities. Furthermore, she insisted that the Senior Management Team should be given the freedom to adjust the curriculum according to the needs of their students:

"We know that these students and others with learning difficulties would benefit greatly if they attended special classes suitable for their learning

capacities. One cannot teach everyone in the same manner … and we
cannot expect the teacher to use different methods of teaching in a 40-
minute period".

Similar to what the previous Heads of School said, she concluded that many more resources, teachers, and LSAs are surely needed in the school for inclusion to be more effective.

So, to summarise views of the Heads of School, dealing with cases of severe autism, physical disability and mental health issues was one of the greatest challenges of the Heads of the middle schools. They felt that it was difficult for students with such particular needs to adapt to the secondary school routine which involved a variety of teachers, classrooms and subjects. Therefore, the everyday situation presented a great challenge to these particular students. Furthermore, they stated that when a student at times reached the point of 'meltdown', the class situation became hazardous and unstable, with some instances where students might do harm to themselves or others. The Heads of School continued to argue that this matter also resulted in the loss of valuable time for everyone and, therefore, high ability students were not acquiring their full potential as a result. Thus, it seems that Heads of middle schools are concerned that meeting the needs of challenging students means that the needs of others are not met.

5.1.2.2   Heads of senior schools

The Heads of senior schools mentioned the following points as their greatest challenges:

- Lack of teacher training
- Students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Lack of resources
- Too much administrative work

The above-mentioned difficulties seemed to be slightly different from those mentioned by the Heads of the middle schools.

The greatest difficulty that Ms Galdes, whose school is in the northern area, mentioned was the training needed for the teachers: *"our teachers are not well trained or prepared to face mixed ability classes which include students with special needs".* She referred to the time when several teachers were sent to study in England so as to prepare themselves to teach students with special needs. She said that, way back, she was one of these teachers and according to her, teachers gained immensely from such training. This matter was also developed as a strategy by Plan Organisation (2015), where it was recommended that teachers must have the knowledge, skills and attitude to provide qualitative inclusive education.

In addition, she felt frustrated about the fact that students with severe special needs could not attend a resource centre twice a week as they used to in previous years, because of lack of teachers. Thus, she felt that *"the mainstream schools have become a sort of dumping ground where we just place all our students, come what may!"*

Students with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties (SEBD) seemed to be the greatest concern and difficulty for Ms Grima, whose school is in central Malta, and she seemed quite upset about this matter. She argued that primarily, students identified as having SEBD caused a certain amount of trouble, which resulted in precious time being lost during the lessons. Though the school offered support for these students through the Learning Zone and the Learning Centres where programmes of behaviour management were organised, they still continued to behave inappropriately. Furthermore, she stated that:

> *"the teachers are really frustrated because they come to school prepared for a day's work, prepared to deliver the day's lessons, they have a syllabus to cover you know, but these disruptive students simply do not let them. It's very unfair for the teachers and the other students."*

This Head of School also appeared disappointed about the fact that, at times, students with SEBD issues seemed to be at the root of a rift between the teaching staff and the Senior Management Team: *"the teachers accuse us that we are doing next to nothing to help them".* Expressing similar views to

other Heads of School, she added that lack of human resources was the main factor for these types of challenges:

"I myself am in favour of inclusion but we must have the necessary personnel, the necessary resources and these are lacking in our school. The teachers are disappointed, down-hearted and unsatisfied. We are left alone! We don't have sufficient back up".

She concluded that, besides dealing with these difficulties, one would still have loads of other work to do:

"So, inclusion is a very nice concept and ideally it is beneficial to all students and we do try to do our best … but unfortunately, the Central Administration doesn't help at all. There are still loads of paperwork, meetings, a heavily packed syllabus, and exams".

Mr Tanti, whose school is in southern Malta, mentioned administrative difficulties as a hurdle in the inclusion programme. He said that there are a hundred and ten students with special needs in his school and more than fifty LSAs, that is, half of his staff consists of LSAs. Consequently, he felt that this situation is difficult for him to manage:

"Difficulties include: where to allocate these students, how many LSAs in each class, the different kind of help they need etc. These difficulties hinder the smooth running of the school, no doubt".

He felt that another hindrance in the system is the fact that some of the students rely a lot on the LSA and expect that their school work to be done for them:

"Some of them expect that the LSA to do all the writing for them. This is certainly detrimental to the students themselves. An inclusive society ought to empower the individual to become independent and not to be dependent on others".

For this reason, he went on to add that the number of LSAs in schools has increased uncontrollably, and that this phenomenon is hindering the students' personal development:

"This system has created a monster vis-à-vis the LSAs, and now it has become uncontrollable. Secondly, I think that certain particular needs cannot be catered for by the establishment and by the Department, although we do our utmost to provide them. In such instances, we feel helpless".

The wide concept of inclusion was mentioned almost by all the Heads of middle and senior schools. All the Heads of School claimed that efforts to meet the needs of students with specific difficulties often left them feeling frustrated, helpless, and confused. Therefore, training, support and guidance are surely essential to all stakeholders in the school in order for them to be knowledgeable in the field as much as possible.

The next section will discuss the various strategies and good practices that are being applied in their schools.

5.1.3 Applied strategies for a more inclusive school

5.1.3.1 Heads of middle schools

Though inclusive schools involve particular day-to-day challenges, all the Heads of School tried their utmost to implement various effective strategies in order to help all the students develop holistically. All the schools involved in this study implemented some very good practices within their inclusion programmes and it would be ideal if these were shared among various other schools. This matter was suggested by Shepherd (2006) and the OECD (2016), where they stated that school leaders need to create partnerships with other administrators in order to implement the inclusion programme more effectively. These applied strategies differed from one school to another and, for this reason, it would be beneficial if these practices were to be shared.

As stated earlier, unrest in North Africa and internal migration in Europe have resulted in a rapid increase in the number of non-Maltese students attending Malta's schools. These pupils brought about particular changes to the national curriculum because adaptations had to be made to cater effectively for them effectively. For instance, as will be seen in this study, specifically

designed lessons in the Maltese and English languages are being delivered for these students so that they can begin studying the basics of these languages. This eventually makes it possible for them to understand other subjects.

In the northern area, Mr Pace made it clear that inclusion was a priority in their staff development plan. Therefore, two sub-committees were formed by the teachers. One committee catered for students with special needs and other particular needs, while the other committee catered for non-Maltese students in the school:

> *"First of all, we all believe in inclusion and, therefore, we work as a team, helping each other along the way. We have a special team of teachers who are divided into two sub-committees. The first sub-committee caters for students with disabilities, all types of disabilities. This group does its utmost so that these students integrate as much as possible in our school life. None of these students should feel excluded or rejected. This group of teachers often gives personal attention to these students".*

With regards to the other sub-committee, he stated that:

> *"Nowadays, the influx of foreign students has increased so we must, therefore, address this situation effectively, hence the need for more manpower. The second sub-committee works continuously to help these foreigners[4] to integrate fully into our school life".*

These types of committees involved the teachers in the decision-making process and also helped to develop collaboration and teamwork among the teaching staff (OECD, 2016). He added that he appointed an Assistant Head to be in charge of these committees and also to monitor the inclusion programme in the school. However, he also argued that, during the first term, this Assistant Head was not available enough to help in the smooth running of the school because she organised about a hundred meetings to discuss the individual educational programmes for the statemented students (students

---

[4] It should be noted that the Maltese use the terms 'Foreign', and 'Foreigner', to refer to someone who is not Maltese. The terms are not used in any pejorative sense.

supported by an LSA).   Hence, the issue of lack of human resources was continuously felt in the school.

Mr Briffa, whose school is in central Malta, referred to the non-Maltese students as the least demanding matter in the inclusion aspect.   He said that the solution was:

> *"by organising five long time-tabled lessons to teach these students Maltese and English.   These special lessons are bearing fruit and some of the students are really improving in these languages".*

Another strategy that he felt was effective and inclusive was that of involving all the students in a school musical:

> *"We have put up a school musical and we have involved all the students … we have involved also the non-Maltese students and they were really content.   They felt welcomed and loved by the other Maltese students".*

The inclusion of students who were new arrivals to Malta seemed to be a top priority in the inclusion programme of this school.

Surprisingly when Ms Galea, whose school is in the southern area, was asked about the type of strategies they implement to be more inclusive, she immediately answered: "*Patience and calmness!!   That is our secret".* She said that, at the beginning of the year, statemented students were observed by their LSA, their strengths and weaknesses were identified, their needs were noted and an individual educational plan was developed.   Furthermore, she noted that:

> *"if we are sure that some individuals are not fit for mainstream teaching, we give them individual programmes, alternative teaching methods, special independent living skills with much individual attention and much more practical (hands-on) teaching and learning".*

She said that these types of programmes were also applied to those students involved in the Core Curriculum Programme.   As stated in Chapter 2 (p. 21), this programme involved students with a very low level of attainment, therefore, their curriculum consisted of more practical lessons and subjects,

and more continuous assessments rather than examinations. Moreover, Ms Galea insisted upon the teaching of independent living skills, such as learning how to send an email, order food and go to a convenience shop to buy everyday things. This helped the students acquire necessary skills such as handling money. As an Assistant Head with responsibility for inclusion, I often get to meet the parents of pupils with SEND needs. These parents' biggest concern is how their children will handle their transition into adulthood and whether they will be able to cope after their parents die. As parents, they always support the school in its decisions to deliver programmes centred around living skills. The parents are sure that their children will benefit immensely from them.

Ms Galea voiced her frustration about two issues. Primarily, she wished that the skills-for-living programmes could be offered to many more students, but lack of human resources and particular restrictions within the curriculum prevented this. Secondly, as was mentioned earlier by other Heads of School, she felt regretful that gifted students were not being catered for at all:

> *"I would like that more care is given to the gifted children, who are often bored stiff with our system. Some of these students are really bright. They are not many in number, but I still feel that we are doing a disservice to these special children. They soon get unhappy and bored with the quality of education they are getting. I would like to activate special programmes for these gifted pupils. They need something challenging and not repetitive. The teacher, on the other hand, can't perform miracles! He can't deliver various lessons simultaneously!"*

She concluded that she believed in *"pull-outs"*, a system in which particular students are pulled out of class during certain lessons in order to be given individual attention:

> *"I am here referring to those students who are at the two extremes of the spectrum. This could be done in the main subjects, such as English and Mathematics. Special lessons could be organised for these pupils, thus enhancing their education and providing better soil to improve their abilities."*

As already stated, all the Heads of the middle schools tried their best to implement various strategies to develop inclusive schools even though human resources were limited. In the next section, the strategies implemented in the senior schools will be presented.

5.1.3.2 Heads of senior schools

The issue of non-Maltese students was also raised by the Heads of the senior schools. For the most part, the Heads did not feel overwhelmed or unhappy with these new arrivals. On the contrary, they felt that these students presented their schools with new opportunities and gave interested teachers the chance to devise new, interesting programmes. Furthermore, these students also became a source of knowledge for their classmates (Ainscow, 2007).

Ms Galdes, Head of a northern senior school, said that, in their school they organised a special class called "Welcome Class", in which students had a good number of lessons in English and Maltese every week in order for them to get a very good grasp of both languages. This led them to understand and learn other subjects. She added that:

> *"They have a special curriculum. They are not put immediately into the mainstream. Therefore, they don't have History, Geography and Social Studies lessons. They have a special timetable with nine Maltese lessons and ten English lessons per week. We include a few lessons on Mediterranean Studies, given voluntarily by one of our teachers. This means that this teacher integrated History, Geography and Social Studies and prepared a special scheme of work for these students".*

Furthermore, she stated that, within this special programme, students received a few lessons of Science and PSD but did not have to learn subjects which might be too demanding for them. When teachers deemed the students to have reached a very good level of attainment in the overall curriculum, they joined the rest of the students in the mainstream classes. Ms Galdes

appreciated the fact that teachers voluntarily offered to implement these alternative programmes.

She went on to discuss particular strategies regarding students with special needs. She said that statemented students were placed in each and every class so that they would not be grouped together in one particular class thereby defeating the purpose of putting these students in mainstream schools. Furthermore, she also explained another special programme that is organised in her school, called *"For Practical",* in which lower ability students are taught an adapted curriculum. For instance, Physics was removed from their curriculum and more lessons in Physical Education were given instead. Students following the *"For Practical"* programme also took part in the Prince's Trust Programme, where they learnt various skills: how to work in a team, to live a healthy lifestyle, manage money and various other topics useful for future independent living. At the end of the programme, students were given a certificate which was recognised in their post-secondary education. All these programmes were felt to be beneficial to the students of this school and, if other schools follow Ms Galdes's lead and implement similar programmes, they may usefully contribute to the education of many more students. The greatest challenge in the running of these programmes is human resources. It is important to note that most of the special classes were run voluntarily by teachers who, in the meantime, still had to deal with their usual workload. This is one of the reasons why lack of staff resources is an issue which is continuously referred to by all the Heads of School.

Ms Grima, Head of the senior school in central Malta, spoke about the committee of teachers that worked together to develop the inclusion concept in her school. This type of committee was already discussed by Mr Pace, Head of the northern middle school. Ms Grima said that the next event on their agenda was "Awareness Week", where various speakers were invited to give talks regarding gender and religious diversities. Through these activities, it was hoped that all students learn to adapt and live with their peers who may be of a different religion from their own or of a different sexual orientation. Ms Grima noted that some students were intolerant of their peers' diversities, so

such activities were designed to challenge prejudice by providing information and creatiing opportunities to develop their interactive and social skills.

Another activity involved putting up a huge world map in the school's foyer to indicate the countries where all the students and staff come from. Another strategy that was mentioned was:

> *"holding inter-disciplinary exercises between the different subjects taught in our school, thus creating more awareness towards inclusion on different levels".*

She concluded that, as a school, they needed support and guidance in implementing strategies that support students who sometimes present challenging, difficult behaviour: "*Our main difficulty, and here we do need help, is the SEBD students".*

Mr Tanti, the Head of the southern senior school stressed that:

> *"in all our activities, whether curricular or extracurricular, we make it a point to include the students with special needs. Although, this is not always possible. However, all my staff and myself, do our utmost to include these students in all the activities organised by the school. They are even present in the students' council, some of them are the ambassadors of our school".*

With regards to non-Maltese students, he said that subjects like History and Social Studies, which are usually taught in Maltese, were being offered in English too, so that these students could understand them. Moreover, special English classes were also organised for these particular students so that their attainment level in English and, eventually in other subjects, rises. These types of special programmes for non-Maltese students seemed to be organised in various schools in order to help these students adapt to their new education and also to improve their attainment levels.

It was very interesting to get to know about all these strategies being implemented in various schools. One of the purposes of this study was to develop an awareness of the good practices being carried out in different schools with the hope of these being shared between schools. As the

literature review demonstrated, the concept of communities of practice was accentuated, where relationships are built among educators so as to help each other and share information, experiences and tools (Wenger, 2006).

In the next section, the final theme will be presented. The Heads of School will discuss what type of developments are needed in the Maltese education system so as to develop more inclusive schools.

5.1.4 Developments for more inclusive schools suggested by the Heads of School

5.1.4.1 Developments for more inclusive schools suggested by Heads of middle schools

The Heads of the middle schools suggested the following developments:

- To re-evaluate the concept of inclusion in our schools
- To tailor the curriculum to the learners' needs
- To increase the number of resources available, especially staff

The Heads of the middle schools all argued that the concept of inclusion in the schools became too broad. Therefore, they suggested that one should evaluate what has been accomplished and think about new structures, ideas and solutions in order to formulate a new philosophy of inclusion. Furthermore, they maintained that the ever-increasing demands of students with different abilities are leaving teachers and Learning Support Assistants with an excessive workload. Thus, they highlighted again the need for more human and material resources.

Mr Pace, Head of the northern middle school, suggested that *"the time has come to evaluate sincerely what we have accomplished and what is the way forward that we should take"*. He said that the most difficult matter within the inclusion programme is that of meeting the needs of students with extreme and severe cases of disability because, according to him, some of these students:

"drain a great deal of energy from our teachers and LSAs and cause disruption in our school life. I believe that certain very difficult students should not remain in our school and be given special educational care. It's not beneficial either to the students concerned and to the other students".

He argued that parents should not be the ones who decide which school their child should attend. He insisted that professionals should carry out tests and studies upon students with multiple and challenging needs and then decide whether they should be sent to a mainstream school or a resource centre. He said that*: "the parents are not the best judges in this situation".* He felt that particular students were actually suffering in his school, for the simple reason that their parents decided that their children should attend a mainstream school. According to him, these particular students would benefit greatly if they attended a special school. This opinion is controversial and goes against the perspectives of many contemporary researchers whose work was discussed in the literature review. The dominant view in the literature is that the Head of School needs to form partnerships and collaborate with parents so as to involve them in dialoguing and shared decision-making (Jacobs, Tonnsen and Baker, 2004; Smith and Leonar, 2005; Bristol, 2014; OECD, 2016). Furthermore, Runswick-Cole (2011) also debated this issue as a kind of "bias towards inclusive education", where she insisted that this bias must actually end and "try inclusion" instead (p. 117). This was my rationale for this study. In Malta, inclusion has been highly prioritised in diverse work policies, especially in the education sector. However, as can be seen from this study, some stakeholders are resisting to implement it. Thus, I believe that in this day and age, all educators must be willing to be inclusive and care for every student, whatever his/her needs are. Mr Pace concluded, that ultimately, more staff and more resources were continuously needed to implement the inclusion programme in the school in the most effective way.

Similarly, Mr Briffa, the Head of the central middle school, stated that, one must evaluate what has been accomplished so far within the inclusion aspect in Maltese schools. He ended by arguing that particular students in his school who could not follow the whole curriculum in class and needed a timeout were

actually not gaining or learning anything. Therefore, he questioned whether, in these cases, inclusion is effective or not.

Ms Galea, the Assistant Head of the southern middle school, primarily suggested that the Heads of School must be given more freedom on how to teach and apply the curriculum and the syllabus:

> *"Our teachers are overloaded and they are restricted in their work. They aren't so free to adapt their lessons to the pupils in their respective classes … We need to do more 'educational tailoring'".*

Similar to other Heads of School, more resources and additional staffing were another matter that Ms Galea claimed are needed in order for Malta's schools to become more inclusive:

> *"Many more resources are needed in all our schools to make inclusion a reality. A multi-sensory room can be a great help. More 'services' are needed to help those with physical disabilities. Maybe we need more special schools to cater for these children. Many more LSAs are sorely needed to help students who suffer from challenging behaviour".*

Ultimately, she argued that the concept of inclusion must be re-structured, an idea which is echoed by other Heads of School too:

> *"We need to formulate a new philosophy of inclusion. We have now gone from one extreme to another! Putting everyone in mainstream education is impossible and unfair. The two extremes of the spectrum need special care and attention, and not only those who are severe. Yes, these children need time away from the class, a change of atmosphere so to speak. The policy must be more personalised. We need new structures, new ideas, new solutions with more resources and much more manpower with which we can give individual attention".*

All these suggestions for further developments were given by the Heads leading the middle schools. The suggestions of the Heads of the senior schools will be presented next.

5.1.4.2 Developments for more inclusive schools suggested by Heads of senior schools

The Heads of the senior schools suggested the following points:

- More hands-on programmes must be included within the curriculum.
- Resources are needed in order to implement these types of programmes.
- The accommodation of gifted students should be enhanced.

These Heads of School highlighted the importance of hands-on programmes in order to include students with various abilities. Presently, in Malta, various schools already implement programmes which help students engage more easily. These have been found to be greatly beneficial for students with behavioural difficulties. Nevertheless, for the Heads of School to implement these programmes, they have to rely on the teachers' willingness to cooperate. On a positive note, as stated in the literature review, the Maltese education system is planning an updated reform for 2019 called 'My Journey'. Through this reform, the curriculum will be revised to a more applied form with a view to include all students in the most effective way. This reform will hopefully incorporate the above suggestions of the Heads of School concerning the re-evaluation of the concept of inclusion, a more tailored curriculum, more hands-on programmes and more resources.

The only suggestion given by Ms Galdes, the Head of the northern senior school, is a reduction of the student population in each school in order to be able to organise more activities and practical sessions:

> *"I spent several years working in a centre. In this centre, there were 50 students. We knew them individually and we used to organise many 'hands-on' experiences through which the students gained significantly. But here, in such a crowded school of 700 pupils, how can we organise many 'hands-on' learning sessions?"*

Similarly, Ms Grima, the Head of the central senior school, insisted upon hands-on experiences together with the necessity of plenty of resources:

"We need lots of resources, especially for those students who are not academically minded. These pupils need hands-on experiences. Otherwise, these students suffer from the system. We must cater fully for these students. After all, that is what inclusion is all about. Different students have different aptitudes. I believe that every student should develop fully his particular aptitudes and abilities by means of our educational system. I think that we have not yet reached this level of efficiency. Not yet! We must also nurture the gifted pupils".

Mr Tanti, the Head of the southern senior school referred mainly to the issue of non-Maltese students, saying that when they started school midway through the scholastic year, it was very difficult to put them in a class where they would adapt and catch up with their peers. Therefore, he suggested that special classes and a special curriculum be created to cater for these particular students. He agreed that more English lessons should be offered to them in order to enhance their schooling in the initial phase. However, he stressed that more should be done, foremost of which is an increase in staffing levels.

His final concern was the matter of gifted students. He felt disappointed about the fact that he was not doing enough for them and wished that greater support and guidance would be provided in this area:

"… the gifted pupils, oh how I wish to do more in that area. Alas, the comprehensive system doesn't help so much the gifted pupils. What is really happening is that these students are being 'watered down' to become like the 'average' students. Of course, this isn't fair to these students. This is an unfortunate situation no doubt. What can we do? I really don't know. Of course, we all wish to do more in this area, but, honestly, we don't know what we can do with our limited manpower".

These were the final suggestions given by the Heads of the senior schools.

5.1.5   Conclusion

In conclusion, all the six Heads of School who participated in this study agreed with the principle of an inclusive school and they believed that they were trying their best to implement effective strategies in order to include all the students. However, it seemed that they had doubts over whether inclusion of some students in mainstream schools was in their best interests. They particularly expressed concern about students with special, educational needs and disabilities that required intensive support. Students with behavioural issues were also of great concern for these Heads of School since they felt limited in their capacity to help such students effectively. As a result, one particular Head of a middle school was very doubtful about the inclusion of these students because, according to him, they were not gaining any educational outcomes. The Heads of School were also broadly in favour of the inclusion of non-Maltese students and many had strategies in place to include them.

Finally, the issue of sufficient resources was continuously highlighted by different Heads of School, with two of them stating that they felt that the higher authorities were not listening enough to their feelings and suggestions with regards to the challenges in inclusion of all students, especially those with complex needs and challenging behaviour. This issue generated expression of particular frustration by the participants, therefore, it seems that collaboration between the Heads of School and the Department of Education must be strengthened and more effective communication must be established so that the Heads of School feel more supported. Shepherd (2006) and the OECD (2016) stated that it is essential for school leaders to build partnerships with other administrators and with curriculum coordinators for the benefit of their schools.

From the Heads of School's point of view, more resources, a more tailored curriculum and a re-evaluation of the concept of inclusion would facilitate schools to become more inclusive. These factors were highlighted by the global organisation Plan International (2015) in its strategy for the period 2015-2020, where it stated that educational institutions must provide relevant curricula and that resources and adaptations should be carried out to meet

the learners' needs. A shortcoming in this part of this study was that the Heads' viewpoint regarding their staff's methodologies of inclusion were not sought. Interview questions focused more on the school leaders' *vision* for inclusion and the challenges they encounter rather than how they presently *practice* inclusion. However, one could also explore whether the school leaders promote an inclusive *vision* effectively to all their stakeholders and whether they apply particular strategies to guide the staff towards the inclusion of all their students. There was a view of some that inclusion of students does not necessarily involve the inclusion of parents as part of the school community or as part of decision-making about their children.

In the next section, the findings of the interviews held with the Inclusion Coordinators will be discussed.

5.2 Perspectives of the Inclusion Coordinators

In Malta and Gozo, there are only seven secondary school Inclusion Coordinators (INCOs), six in Malta and one in Gozo. The team is quite small and their job is highly valuable in Maltese schools. Primarily, they assist in the coordination of the implementation of the inclusion policy in the school. Their role is to help and support the Senior Management Teams to implement effectively the inclusion programme in the school. Together with the Assistant Head in charge of inclusion in each school, they coordinate several meetings, such as those regarding individual educational programmes and transitions, that is, when students are transferred from the middle school to the senior school and from the senior school to the post-secondary school. Furthermore, they assist the school in any difficulty that may arise in the inclusion programme and they guide and support all the staff in the development of new, inclusive teaching methodologies. However, every Inclusion Coordinator is responsible for three or four secondary schools. This limits the time a Coordinator can dedicate to a single school to approximately one day a week.

In this study, one of the Inclusion Coordinators was interviewed for the pilot study. Then, the other six, including the one based in Gozo (who was in

charge of two secondary schools in Gozo as well as two others in Malta), were interviewed for the study. Since I was very much aware of their schedule, I limited myself to asking just three questions, and there was not much opportunity to probe responses more deeply. However, though their responses were short and straight to the point, they were still rich in detail.

The first question was about the good practices that they encounter in their schools.

5.2.1   Good practices in schools

All the INCOs put forward quite positive perspectives about the good practices in their schools. I will discuss their perspectives using the following themes:

- An effective guidance team
- An effective psycho-social team
- Teachers working as a team through the sharing of resources
- Teachers using effective strategies to include each and every student
- Effective work carried out by the Learning Support Assistants
- Alternative programmes being offered for students with severe needs
- Senior Management Teams working willingly to support and include all the students

The INCOs reported that these aspects were not found in every school, however, they said that they observed them very often during their school visits. Therefore, they seemed to be quite satisfied with these outcomes.

Ms Borg worked in five different schools, and one of the good practices that she encountered was a school that maintained a good guidance team involving a group of teachers who had special posts of responsibility as guidance teachers. They assisted the students emotionally and psychologically, thus ensuring that students would not feel excluded from the school community. Furthermore, this Inclusion Coordinator stated that the rest of the teachers worked as a team, a factor which was very much

accentuated in the literature review chapter when the concept of Professional Learning Communities was discussed (Stroll et al., 2006; OECD, 2012; Bates et al., 2016). Indeed, Ms Borg talked about an example of a Professional Learning Community:

"In a particular school, I notice one of the best practices at work, namely that there is a splendid guidance team. Besides, all the teachers work as one team, helping each other without any boundaries between them. Resources are shared equally and also ideas, strategies, and difficulties. No one is excluded, whatever his duties. This reflects positively on the inclusion practice".

She continued that:

"when a guidance teacher notices that a student is not making as much progress as his friends, he informs me, as the INCO responsible, but he does not wait for my instructions to initiate a referral but does this straight away, saving valuable time in the process. The guidance teacher gets going with all the paperwork needed. He does this even though, strictly speaking, it is not part of his job description".

Regretfully, though, she said that this spirit of inclusiveness was not present in the other schools she worked with, where she said that there seemed to be guidance teachers who were not helpful at all and made it a point that they carried out not more than what their duties required. Furthermore, the issue of lack of human resources was mentioned again in this case:

"However, in other schools the guidance teachers, aren't so helpful. 'This isn't part of my work', is all they say. We are understaffed, and at times, I am quite overloaded. I don't like to work in such an environment. We must all work together as one team. Of course, one must know clearly one's duties but if one sees a colleague who is really hard up, one should lend a helping hand".

Mr Gatt stated that, in the majority of the schools he visited, the best characteristic of the inclusion programme was that of having effective Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). He highlighted that, through these LSAs,

no students were left behind, because they gave their care and attention to all students as much as possible:

"When children with difficulties/disabilities are included in schools and are supported by an efficient LSA, they become active members in the classroom and improvement is noted. Furthermore, I notice that, in such situations, the mentioned students are truly part of the school community. In such an environment I also notice that not just students with difficulties/disabilities benefit, but all students. They learn to live and share everything together and respect each other, no matter the differences between them".

Positively, he concluded that:

"in my schools, there are a lot of staff members, including Senior Management Teams, who welcome diversity and go out of their way to make everything possible for all learners to achieve the maximum of their abilities".

Through one of the email interviews, Ms Falzon, concisely pointed out the following good practices in her schools:

- *"Sharing of resources"*
- *"Teachers who use teaching strategies to cater for all children, that is, not only for children with a statement of needs. For instance, hands-on activities, resources, multisensory activities, the use of different activities, e.g. ICT, group work.*
- *Good preparation by teachers and LSAs, who prepare daily schedules and resources beforehand.*
- *Multi-disciplinary approach, for example, during the Individual Educational Programme meeting, we do our best to invite all professionals who work with the students to attend, for instance: the speech therapist, the occupational therapist, the autism services support team and other professionals who may be supporting the student, so that, together with the parents, we discuss the way forward".*

Meanwhile, through another email interview, two factors were identified by Ms Cassar as good practices, namely strong collaboration between the teachers and the LSAs and the implementation of a life skills programme tailored for students with special needs:

"I see a lot of good practices as well as ones which are not so good … The best practice is when teachers and LSAs really work together for the benefit of the whole class. Though, unfortunately, this is a rare occurrence, I can think of a number of teachers who do this. Another good practice is where schools have a life skills programme in place for students with a disability who really need training in basic daily living skills to make them as independent as possible".

We must note that this Inclusion Coordinator remarked that the collaboration between the teachers and the LSAs *"is a rare occurrence"* in the schools that she visits, and Hehir and Katzman's (2012) study highlighted the significance of staff collaboration, noting that the participants in their study felt that their colleagues were 'resources' to them. Therefore, this practice is highly beneficial to all staff members.

On a positive note, Ms Cauchi stated that most of the teaching staff and the Senior Management Teams were keen to help and support each and every student, whatever his/her needs were. This was done through the requisition of various support services offered by the National Support School Services and through the constant communication with the parents:

"Most of the staff and the Senior Management Teams are very willing to learn about each student in the school. The students who have difficulties, be they academic, mental, social or emotional, are given importance and all at the school seek ways in which best to assist these students. Services to support students are applied for and meeting with parents are held regularly and when needed".

As already stated, this Inclusion Coordinator stressed upon the factor of communication between the school and the parents, and also between all stakeholders in the school. The importance of staff collaboration was mentioned earlier as being beneficial to all staff members:

"Communication is the key, I believe, so the better the communication between home and school, the better for the benefit of each student. Communication between members of staff is also very important so that each person involved with the student pulls in the same direction. This very often happens already".

In line with other INCOs, Ms Brincat, who visited the Gozitan schools, confirmed that the best practices that she observed in her schools were those that entailed efficient Senior Management Teams, effective pastoral care, enthusiastic teachers who applied different methodologies in the class so as to cater for diverse students and, ultimately, having effective and caring Learning Support Assistants on board:

"Every school has some good practices … because of pastoral care, an efficient Senior Management Team or maybe because dedicated teachers carried out differentiated teaching in which all the students were catered for in the lessons. Other good practices were fully dedicated Learning Support Assistants, an efficient literacy programme or a combination of the above-mentioned methods".

Nevertheless, she concluded that *"certain schools take inclusive education more seriously than others".*

This section listed all the good practices that the Inclusion Coordinators presented in their responses. In the next section, they will talk about their difficulties and challenges that they encountered in their schools.

5.2.2   Difficulties and challenges experienced by Inclusion Coordinators

Ms Borg expressed her disappointment with regards to communication and the feeling of isolation. She stated that, very often, there is lack of communication between her and the Senior Management Teams, and she was not always informed about new rules or about matters that involve the running of the school. As a result, she may end up going against certain school policies unwittingly:

"Mostly, it is lack of communication between me and the Senior Management Team. We very rarely meet. The reason is that when there is a meeting between the members of the Senior Management Team we, the Inclusion Coordinators, are not present, so I am not informed about the goings on, rules etc. which are going to be introduced in a particular school. And then I go to meet a Learning Support Assistant or particular students in order to implement a certain strategy and they tell me that the measure isn't permitted in the school. So, I feel left out and, moreover, I am looked upon as one who is breaking the school rules! And all this because I am not informed about the policies being implemented in that particular school".

The document *Achievement for All* (NCSL, 2010), which has already been discussed in the literature review, considered the fact that the responsibility for the leadership of inclusion was not the task of the Inclusion Coordinator but of the Head of School. Therefore, this indicates that communication between the school leader and the INCO is a necessity in order to develop an inclusive school efficiently. Furthermore, the fact that Inclusion Coordinators were present once a week only in a school may have hindered effective communication between them and the rest of the stakeholders in the school.

The main challenges that were mentioned by Mr Gatt were lack of training of both the teachers and the Learning Support Assistants, and members of the latter group being unprofessional in their work and, as a result, not performing well. The issue of lack of training was discussed extensively in the literature review chapter and it will be debated later when presenting the findings from the teachers' interviews and questionnaires. However, as stated in the literature review chapter, an external audit was carried out in 2014: *"Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta"*, where school stakeholders reported that they were not trained enough within the inclusion field. Therefore, provision of training, especially for teachers, was one of the main recommendations in this document. Mr Gatt also said that students with severe disabilities posed various challenges for all stakeholders in the school:

"Students with all types of learning difficulties/disabilities are included in mainstream schools. Many teachers do not feel adequately trained to teach these students, especially the ones with moderate, severe or with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many times, the latter end up working solely with their Learning Support Assistants, who are not adequately trained to support all students no matter what the difficulty/disability".

With regards to the Learning Support Assistants, he stated that the majority of them were very effective and caring in their work, however, he felt frustrated about a number of them who were unreliable in their job and showed lack of responsibility, even though they were warned several times:

"Although many LSAs are doing a great job, unfortunately, there are others who do not care less. They just want a job and these create a lot of problems in schools. When we start receiving complaints from parents and from students themselves about their LSAs, there is not much that we can do. Sometimes, students are better off without support. When I try to guide and support these LSAs, they still do what they like and, many times they can be very problematic. If they are reported, many times, no disciplinary actions are taken against them. One reason for this could be the shortage of LSAs. It is almost impossible for Inclusion Coordinators to continuously monitor every LSA all the time and offer support. The only way to do this is by having an Inclusion Coordinator in every school".

Lack of human resources was surely one of the main difficulties for INCOs. Their workload was truly demanding and this led to feelings of frustration and helplessness.

Similarly, Ms Falzon, referred to lack of knowledge on behalf of all stakeholders in the school regarding particular difficulties and conditions of certain students:

"Lack of knowledge on the part of professionals, sometimes even the Senior Management Team, about the different conditions, led to their inability to help…"

Another difficulty that was mentioned by this Inclusion Coordinator was the fact that *"sometimes teachers or Learning Support Assistants are reluctant to try new methods of teaching".* This was also due to lack of training, which made it was difficult to fulfil the students' needs.

Ms Cassar felt that, due to an excessive workload, she was not doing what she was supposed to do in her job, which is providing support in class and to the school as a whole:

> *"The greatest hurdle is the amount of paperwork and meetings (Individual Education Plans and transitions). These keep me from doing what I am meant to do: support teachers and Learning Support Assistants in class".*

Furthermore, she said certain aspects of the system were creating barriers to inclusion:

> *"Another barrier to inclusion is the system itself. Students in Core Curriculum Programme classes are not really being included in the schools they are in. They are grouped and segregated in their own separate classrooms and programmes".*

The above-mentioned programme consisted of a specific curriculum designed for students with a low level of ability, usually much lower than the average. The curriculum consisted of the main subjects, as well as other topics like science, geography and history, being taught at a much more basic level than the regular curriculum. The programme was very effective in schools. However, according to this Inclusion Coordinator, whilst successful in terms of students' learning, this programme was creating a form of exclusion for these students because they were separated from their peers of the same age by virtue of being in a different classroom.

Ms Cauchi also mentioned the amount of work and lack of training as the main challenges in her work. She referred mainly to the Learning Support Assistants who may not be trained enough to support their students in the class:

> *"The main challenge is that a great number of LSAs are not well prepared and need much guidance in how to support their students. This makes it*

a challenge for me as an INCO because I have to attend to many issues at the same time. This makes supporting all the LSAs impossible".

Furthermore, Ms Cauchi felt that particular teachers did not try to include the students with certain difficulties because they relied on the LSA's support. However, she insisted that both the teacher and the LSA must be prepared and trained for these students in order to provide fruitful support.

As mentioned by one of her colleagues earlier, Ms Brincat, stated that she was not actually carrying out her proper role during her working day, for the reason that there was a great deal of paperwork to be done within the inclusion sector. Therefore, she felt that because of this type of workload, she did not have enough time to assess the quality of learning that each individual student was getting:

"Each individual student is different from the others and should have full access to learning. Quite often, 'inclusion' entails lots of referrals and access arrangements for exams and meetings etc … and very often assessing how much actual learning is really taking place is forgotten! And that worries me".

Overall, the following points were mentioned by all the participating Inclusion Coordinators as their main difficulties and challenges:

- Lack of communication between them and the Senior Management Team
- Lack of training for the teachers and the Learning Support Assistants
- A small number of Learning Support Assistants who are not competent in their job, create difficulties and lead to complaints by parents
- Lack of human resources
- An excessive workload
- Insufficient time to monitor inclusive programmes in their schools
- The Senior Management Team's lack of knowledge about particular students' needs or conditions

Because there are only seven Inclusion Coordinators working across all Malta and Gozo's secondary schools, their workload is heavy and this was surely

felt by all six participants. Despite this, their presence in the schools was very effective because they supported all stakeholders who had inclusion queries and difficulties. Therefore, one of the big questions is how to encourage more individuals to apply for INCO roles. Unfortunately, since there is an awareness that the job is quite demanding, few people apply for such posts when they become available.

Since their schedules were quite tight due to various meetings and paper work, the INCOs felt that they had very little time to carry out classroom observations for the monitoring of the inclusion process, both with regards to the teaching strategies and also to the work carried out by the Learning Support Assistants.

Through my working experiences, an aspect that the Inclusion Coordinators sometimes complained about was the lack of communication between them and the Head of School. When I held a position as Assistant Head in charge of inclusion, I communicated continuously with the Inclusion Coordinator because, in certain cases, s/he would be more knowledgeable than I was and I sought their support as much as possible. However, at times, they expressed their regret about feeling left out, especially by the Head of School. The reason probably was that the Head of School relied on me, as an Assistant Head, to take charge of whatever took place in the inclusion aspect of the school. Therefore, the Head of School would not feel the need to communicate with the Inclusion Coordinator. However, I understand that these participants wish that their work would be appreciated by all the Heads of School and that inclusion is led from the top, a point raised by several studies (Wenger, 2006; Achievement for All, 2010; NCSL, 2010; Cobb, 2014) in the literature review.

Finally, a highly important aspect mentioned by these participants was the lack of training of all stakeholders, namely, the Senior Management Team, the teachers and the Learning Support Assistants. This factor was mentioned earlier, in relation to the Heads of School, and will be discussed further by the teachers in the next sections. The importance of training in inclusion was one of the vital elements that emerged in this study. Both the Heads of School

and the teachers demonstrated particular frustration and, in some situations, fear, with regards to meeting the needs of particular students with special needs because of the fact that they were not knowledgeable enough about certain conditions and ways of supporting students if difficulties arose.

Short in-service courses already take place in the system periodically, however, the participant stressed that effective field training should be carried out in order for the course to be successful. Furthermore, these types of courses are usually undertaken on a voluntary basis, however, if particular courses, for instance, such as those dealing with dyslexia or autism, were compulsory for all teachers, this could help, because every teacher works with students who are identified as autistic or dyslexic. Because this training is also highly beneficial to the Learning Support Assistants and their pupils, they too should have access, preferably compulsory attendance alongside their basic training.

This section dealt with all the difficulties and challenges mentioned by the participating Inclusion Coordinators. In the next section, their recommendations on how both teachers and Heads of School can develop more inclusive schools are discussed.

5.2.3   Recommendations for enhancing inclusion

Ms Borg insisted that all stakeholders should believe in diversity, that is, one should not perceive the student as someone with special needs but as an individual different from another person:

> *"They should look at disabilities not as physical or mental shortcomings but only as individual differences. Because if one addresses a difference as a disability, then one is being exclusive in approach. We must change our approach and our mentality. We simply can't address a class as one single group of pupils with the same abilities. All children are different and they are separate individuals with different backgrounds and capabilities".*

In a few words, she highlighted her view that stakeholders should understand that there is 'no one size fits all'. She suggested that, primarily, the school buildings should be easily accessible for wheelchair users (for the benefit of disabled parents and pupils alike). Furthermore, she said that timetables should be flexible in order to be able to meet the students' needs. Importantly, a flexible curriculum was also recommended in the external audit review document *"Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta"* (2014) which recommended a reduction in rigid timetabling and curricula. Ms Borg stated that:

> *"One must make the school accessible to everyone, even to those using wheelchairs. Inclusion must be holistic. Nobody ought to feel excluded in any way. Access should be easy for wheelchairs … Every school must have a multi-sensory room. Timetables ought not to be so rigid, but they should be a little flexible in order to meet the requirements of the pupils. Certain students are not able to remain in the same class for a long period of time. Yes, we have to adopt a new mentality. We must cater for diverse needs, diverse cases, and diverse individuals".*

A change in teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of all students was considered a must by this Inclusion Coordinator. She said that teachers ought to be empathic and caring towards their students in order for them to feel included and accepted in class:

> *"I believe a lot in personal love and commitment …. A charisma that a real teacher should possess. Teachers should approach students with loving care and attention. Teachers must be seen as real friends who interest themselves in the problems faced by their students … Empathy is a must in teaching".*

She concluded that, when teachers have a positive teaching attitude, *"students participate more willingly and happily during lessons".* The literature on this issue highlights the points raised by this participant. McLeskey et al. (2001), Cawley et al. (2002) and Burstein et al. (2004) insisted that, when teachers develop favourable attitudes towards inclusion, they increase their teaching efficacy and show more care and support to their students' needs.

This is why a Head of School must set an inclusive vision for the school, because this helps all the stakeholders develop inclusive classes (McLeskey and Waldron, 2002; Salisbury and McGregor, 2005; Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis, 2009; Currie-Rubin, 2013; Bristol, 2014; Cobb, 2014)

Mr Gatt concisely emphasised that teachers should strive more through their teaching approaches to include each and every student in their class, that the training of all stakeholders must be a priority in the school development plan and more Inclusion Coordinators are needed within the education sector:

> *"In my opinion, all teachers should make a bigger effort to include and teach all learners in their classes, no matter what their condition is. Moreover, I think that more training should be given to members of staff to make our schools more welcoming and inclusive for all learners. I think that more INCOs should be deployed to better support inclusion in schools".*

Likewise, Ms Falzon who was interviewed by email, recommended the following points to stakeholders:

- *"To be more knowledgeable about the different conditions that exist"*
- *"To actively participate in the students' Individual Educational Programme"*
- *"To organise more learning sessions about inclusion and find ways to improve inclusive practices"*

Creating opportunities for the students, changing teachers' attitudes and curriculum adaptations were highly recommended by Ms Cassar. She stated that *"Even within the curriculum's framework, school leaders can create opportunities and activities that encourage all the students to work together".*

This would lead and encourage students to accept one another and accept diversity among themselves too. As stated earlier, teachers must be empathic and care for their students' needs in order for every individual to feel included and accepted:

> *"Teachers should adopt more inclusive methods, keeping in mind principles of Universal Design for Learning. I also recommend to*

teachers that they become truly interested in the lives and difficulties of their students and how they can help them".

Ms Cassar also confirmed that training is highly important, however, she also pointed out that teachers can self-train by using the many resources that are freely available online:

"There are loads of sites and resources on the internet, accessible at the touch of a button. So, all the training and resources that teachers need can easily be found!"

On a final note, she added that maintaining a positive attitude towards the job is vital for inclusion and, furthermore, she said that the curriculum should be modified to the students' needs when necessary:

"Anyone anywhere can become inclusive. I think the most important factor is having the right attitude towards students. If I am teaching a particular group and I know that the syllabus is not right for them, I modify it and not try to shove it down their throats just because the syllabus has to be covered!"

The importance of the teachers' performance in class was highlighted by Ms Cauchi:

"Teachers need to cater better for students with a disability in their class by getting to know them and discussing their needs with the Learning Support Assistants and passing on an adapted lesson plan to the LSAs, thus remembering that they are responsible for all the students in the class".

She recommended to the Heads of School that, primarily, they themselves should act inclusively towards all their students and see to their needs (Beany, 2006; NCSL, 2010; OECD, 2016). Furthermore, they should offer more support to the Learning Support Assistants and carry out more class visits in order to monitor the inclusion programme and also to support all the stakeholders involved:

"School leaders need to help and guide LSAs better and promote more inclusion because all students have a right to be taught and educated, no matter their situation. Having said this, it is also important for school leaders to be adaptable and take each situation independently as each student is unique and might require different strategies in order to benefit and feel included … To carry out more class visits because, in that way, teachers and LSAs feel more appreciated and are more likely to do their utmost to promote inclusion and work towards it".

Ms Brincat recommended that Heads of School provide effective training in inclusion during the professional development sessions held in schools (Kugelmass, 2003; Beany, 2006; Ofsted, 2006; NCSL, 2009). Furthermore, she suggested that a proper plan of action be devised and implemented:

"I believe that the Professional Development and the Staff Development programmes should focus much more on inclusion. All the problems and difficulties that teachers and LSAs face should be evaluated and discussed fully. As regards administration, a serious plan of action towards inclusion must be prepared and put into action".

Ms Brincat referred to teachers as a crucial component of the inclusion programme. She suggested that teaching should be more learner-centred and that teachers should cooperate much more with the LSAs for the benefit of students with particular needs:

"Yes, teachers are the most important factor regarding inclusion. I have visited many different schools both in Malta and in Gozo… and I believe that teaching is not quite child-centred. And, therefore, even the LSAs are, in a certain way, being left out. If the teachers are completely in charge during the whole 40-minute lesson, the LSA is simply a child-carer or guardian. Quite often, the LSA has no chance to re-enforce, repeat, revise or make special resources for the student".

In a final question, Ms Brincat was asked whether she observed any differences between the inclusion programmes held in Malta and those in Gozo. She replied that, in actual fact, the programmes were very similar and they both involved good practices such as holding hands-on activities and

creating a physical environment which is beneficial to the inclusion programme:

"At present, I am lucky to belong to two efficient and competent Colleges in Malta and Gozo. There are many similarities between them when it comes to inclusion. Both in Malta and Gozo, the physical environment is beneficial towards inclusion. There are many open spaces and, thus, learning can also take place in the common areas and not always in the classroom. In these schools, one finds various good practices: many dedicated teachers prepare hands-on experiences and teaching for their students. Moreover, I am given quite a free hand in my work and this enables me to meet quite often with the LSAs and discuss their problems".

The only difference that was mentioned in the system between Malta and Gozo was that of the involvement of multi-disciplinary teams for Gozitan students. She stated that, in Gozo, when dealing with students with particular needs, various professionals, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychotherapists and others, worked closely with the student and were usually present for the IEP meetings. In Malta, these professionals were available as well, however, there was usually a long waiting list for a child to be attended to. In Gozo, the student population is much smaller, therefore, a multi-disciplinary team is much more available than in Malta:

"In Gozo, there are many more multi-disciplinary teams than in Malta. I sincerely hope that these will increase in Malta. For instance, in Gozo, at times, ten members of this team work closely together on one student only. Of course, the student population in Gozo is very much smaller than the one in Malta and this helps quite a lot. In Gozo, one finds a whole culture of teamwork while everyone knows exactly his/her particular role as regards the student in question. Of course, the parents are always present too. Most probably, this is evident in Gozo because of a smaller student population than in Malta".

5.2.4 Conclusion

The Inclusion Coordinators presented the following recommendations during their interviews:

- All stakeholders should accept diversity and accept the fact that one size does not fit all.
- All the schools should be physically accessible to all students including those who use wheelchairs.
- The teacher's attitude and approach should be positive, inclusive and caring towards all students.
- Teaching methods must be inclusive, bearing in mind the principle of Universal Design for Learning.
- Training in inclusion should be provided to all stakeholders.
- There should be better coordination and collaboration between the teacher and the Learning Support Assistant.
- School leaders must guide and support their staff, both teachers and Learning Support Assistants, in order to promote inclusion and effectively convey the message that every learner has the right to be taught and educated.

As one may observe, the Inclusion Coordinators were continuously stressing the importance that inclusion must be implemented by all stakeholders and primarily this could be done through a positive and caring attitude on behalf of all members of staff towards the learners, no matter what their needs are. It is vital for all the Heads of School to develop an inclusive attitude, so that they would be able to promote inclusion and be role-models to the rest of the staff (Booth and Ainscow, 2002; NCSL, 2009; Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Cobb, 2014).

As will be discussed in the coming sections, a good number of teachers try their best to implement innovative pedagogies in order to include all learners. However, one still finds a number of teachers who are resistant to change. In Bristol's (2014) study, a school leader stated that these types of teachers created ideal opportunities for the leader to hear an alternative voice and to observe different perspectives with a view to improve and sustain inclusive

school practices. Therefore, I suggest that school leaders promote their inclusion agenda to these members of staff and support them where needed (OECD, 2016). Staff collaboration is continuously being highlighted throughout these findings and was also discussed in the literature review chapter. If teachers collaborate more with the Learning Support Assistants in their classes, they would surely benefit and learn how to meet effectively all the students' needs. The majority of the Learning Support Assistants are knowledgeable about various conditions and students' needs due to the training they are given along the years. Therefore, they are surely a very good source of knowledge to the teachers (Ainscow, 2007; Hehir and Katzman, 2012).

Finally, the issue of lack of training was already discussed in the previous section, since it was one of the difficulties encountered by the Inclusion Coordinators. However, the training factor would be continuously highlighted throughout the discussion for the reason that its importance emerged in all the interviews.

As already stated, during their everyday work, Inclusion Coordinators visit various schools, therefore, they gain different experiences and contribute enormously to the inclusion sector. This was why I felt it was important to seek their views and opinions in this research. In the next section, the responses of the teachers' interviews and questionnaires will be presented.

5.3 The teachers' interviews and questionnaires

5.3.1 The teachers' interviews

Twelve teachers were interviewed in this study, nine face-to-face, two by email and one over the phone.

The responses were categorised according to the following themes:

- Views about inclusion
- Difficulties
- Teaching strategies

- Sharing and collaborating with colleagues
- Pre-service training
- Further training

These themes were investigated through the interview questions and, so, they were chosen as the main themes, both for the teachers' interviews and the teachers' questionnaires. For the interviews, the responses of the early career teachers will be discussed first, followed by those of the long-serving teachers.

5.3.2 The teachers' questionnaires

Two hundred and twenty-two questionnaires were distributed within the three schools. One hundred and forty-three questionnaires were returned, that is, 64.4% of the total sample. Eighty-nine questionnaires were distributed among the teachers in the north school. Forty-eight questionnaires were returned, that is, 53.9% of the teaching staff filled in the questionnaire. Fifty-three questionnaires were distributed in the school in the central area and forty-two were returned, that is 79.2% of the teaching staff. Eighty questionnaires were distributed in the southern school and fifty-three were returned, that is, 66.25%.

These results are shown in the table 5.1:

Questionnaires	North Area	Central Area	South Area
Total number:	**89**	**53**	**80**
Returned questionnaires:	**48**	**42**	**53**
Percentage of the total:	**53.9%**	**79.2%**	**66.25%**

Table 5.1: Distribution and completion of questionnaires

The results of every question of the three schools will be presented together, in order to observe any differences between one school and another. The

interpretations of the results will be discussed together with the interview findings in the next sections.

5.3.3 The teachers' perspectives

5.3.3.1 The perspectives of the early career teachers

All the early career teachers agreed with the concept of the inclusion of all students in class. However, they all declared that putting the concept into practice is quite demanding. Their greatest hurdles were when they met with students with complex needs and others with challenging behavioural issues. They said that, at times, unfortunately, these students' behaviour disrupted the class with the result that other students did not achieve their full attainment. These factors were very similar to the findings of another Maltese study carried out by Cefai, Fenech and Galea (2007) with newly qualified teachers regarding their challenges in an inclusive class. They found that most of the teachers agreed with the principle of inclusive education. However, these new teachers expressed concern and frustration when they faced students with severe disabilities or autism. This matter was also reflected in the findings of the teachers' questionnaire, as will be observed later in this discussion.

When the teacher taught a subject which involved the setting system, in which students were grouped together in a class according to their subject examination marks, it was easier for the teacher to adapt to the students' needs. These subjects included Mathematics, English and Maltese. However, in optional subjects, such as History, Accounts or other languages, the classes were not set, therefore, the teacher had to adapt their teaching to classes with a mixed ability of students. These classes entailed particular challenges for the teachers, since student abilities spanned a wide range. These matters will be discussed further, drawing on the participants' views.

Pierre was a newly qualified teacher working in his first year of teaching in a middle school in the northern area. When asked his opinion about having students with different abilities in class, he pointed out that, at times, certain

lessons were carried out efficiently but this was not always the case. Students with particular needs sometimes disrupted the class, which resulted in a lot of wasted time. However, he also noted that Learning Support Assistant were of great help in minimising disruptions:

"In certain classes, the work is carried out rather smoothly. No special problems arise. The support of the LSAs is vital, of course. The students help each other and they get along quite well. Unfortunately, however, there are certain classes where the teacher can't deliver a lesson properly. Inclusion is a wonderful idea but, at times, it cannot be practised".

With regards to behaviour difficulties, Pierre stated that:

"One may be giving a lesson, a well-prepared lesson, and then suddenly a student, suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) gets up and simply doesn't want to sit down in his place. Disruption occurs … loss of precious time …. laughter and what not. The atmosphere of the lesson is lost. This may go on for a long time. Some students simply do not want to do anything. Inclusion is a lofty ideal… but, sometimes, it is not practical. At times, it is simply impossible to be put into practice".

This teacher insisted that new ways and solutions must be found to resolve these issues for the reason that various stakeholders are feeling frustrated with particular situations:

"We have to think of new ways of how to put it into practice. It is of no use that the teachers talk about these problems but no solutions are forthcoming! Something must be done about all this. Teachers are suffering and many students are disappointed. Maybe, unfortunately, it is because I don't yet have the necessary experience or maybe because I am still in my first year of the teaching profession … but at present, I can't perceive of any solutions".

Diane, who worked in a senior school in the northern area, had been teaching for four years. She admitted that she was slightly confused about the concept

of inclusion. She said that a teacher had to be aware of the various abilities of the students in class:

"To be honest, I have mixed feelings about this situation. During these four years, I have taught in inclusive schools, that is, mixed ability classes. However, I have not yet encountered students with special needs in my career. It is important that the teacher is aware of the various abilities present in his/her class. Therefore, s/he can then adapt his teaching according to the children's abilities. It is then our responsibility as teachers to cater for individual differences".

In her case, she said that she was not having particular difficulties in class, however, she speculated that when a student has complex special needs, it might be difficult for the teacher to cater effectively for the child:

"However, the problem arises when there are students with severe special needs present in class. A teacher cannot perform miracles. There is a limit as to how far a teacher can adapt his teaching. Certain situations are unjust, both to the teacher and to the students. No one can achieve the impossible. Children with severe special needs disrupt classes, precious time is lost and this is very unfair to the other students. I feel strongly about this".

Though she was not speaking from personal experience, she made it clear that she believed that inclusion of students with complex needs was not always an easy task. She still highlighted again that the teacher had to make his/her best to help the students reach their full potential:

"Mixed ability classes can be taught and handled, but there is a limit up to how many individual differences can be integrated. As yet, my experience is limited. The teacher is the leader in the class and he must make sure that each child develops his capabilities fully. One cannot expect his students to reach the same level of learning".

Similarly, Lorraine, who taught in a middle school in the central area, confirmed that, though inclusion is a valuable concept, it is not an easy task to handle:

"When I was still a university student, 'inclusion' was the buzz word. In theory, the idea is wonderful, and one can always learn from the students themselves. However, in practice, 'inclusion' is no easy matter. The idea is fine, however, for the teacher, it is very difficult to meet the needs of every particular student in his/her class".

She added that, in her case, she felt advantaged because her teaching subject entailed having not more than sixteen students in class. Therefore, her groups were quite manageable. However, she said that, within a small group, her class still encompassed students with physical disabilities, non-Maltese students and others who were coming from various family backgrounds. Thus, she still had to cater for diverse needs, including those who presented behavioural challenges and who experienced emotional difficulties:

"In my case, things are much simpler. I teach Home Economics, so I have an advantage when compared to other teachers. My classes consist of only 16 students. However, even in such a small group, I have students with physical disabilities, foreign pupils and others coming from very different family backgrounds. Concerning the latter, the teacher has to face serious behavioural difficulties, while other students are suffering from emotional problems; all these can be found in the same class".

Maria, who had five years of teaching experience, highlighted that what really mattered in a class was students' motivation to learn. She was more concerned about this matter rather than having students with different learning abilities:

"What I think is really essential in class … is that all the students should be motivated to learn … to make progress, and not that the students have the same learning abilities".

She seemed truly frustrated by the lack of interest shown by some students, and this seemed to discourage her in her work. Furthermore, she felt that students who were not motivated and caused disruption were really hindering those who were gifted, with the result that their progress was impeded:

"Unfortunately, there are several students, almost in every class, who are not motivated and these cause and create problems. Quite often, these students are under-achievers and they are really selfish. They don't care about the other students. The gifted pupils suffer because of this situation. I feel that we are catering much more for the under-achievers rather than the gifted ones. We have gone from one extreme to the other, I feel that this is really unfair. We used to look down on the weak students, but now they are the ones who are given the most importance!"

There seems to be an allocation of blame here. The clear view being put forward is that students who struggle cause disruption deliberately. Furthermore, Maria raised the issue of gifted students not being catered for, which is something that concerns the Heads of School too, as was discussed earlier. Both groups of participants wished that they could give a much better service to gifted students, therefore, this matter invites further serious thinking and discussion. Effective strategies must be set to enhance gifted students' learning so that they too can reach their full potential. Although very gifted students and very weak students are two sides of the same coin, both of which require special attention, teachers do not always see the two sets of students as having equal value.

In a middle school in the southern area, Elizabeth, who had been teaching for two years, insisted that careful planning of the lessons is needed in order to include all students effectively in class: *"Unless careful planning takes place before the actual lesson, students with diverse needs are not included in class".*

Just like the teacher written about earlier, Elizabeth said that the different social backgrounds that students come from make integration hard:

"It is not easy integrating everyone in the same class, especially bearing in mind that students come from different social backgrounds and they all carry individual, personal baggage".

Another factor that she mentioned as being influential on the teachers' attempts to create an inclusive class was the number of students in the class, something which was previously mentioned by Lorraine, who suggested that

having few students in class makes it easier to adapt and meet diverse needs. However, this teacher said she found it difficult to include each and every student whenever she had a large number of students in class:

> *"Another factor which does not contribute to making our utmost in including everyone in the class is the large number of students present in each class. This makes coping with individual needs a more difficult process, especially when you have 20 students or more sitting in front of you".*

Salend (2012) raised particular concerns that teachers might have when trying to implement inclusive practices in their classes, one of the teachers' concerns was the class size. Salend (2012) recommended that class size should be appropriate in order to encourage teachers to develop positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Brian, who worked in the senior school in the southern area, sounded slightly frustrated about the objective to include each and every student in the class. He was in his second year of teaching History. This subject involved only one lesson a week per class. Therefore, teachers like him usually found it very difficult to finish all the History syllabus in time. Furthermore, the fact that the population of non-Maltese students is increasing in Maltese schools makes teaching History more challenging because the subject is usually taught in Maltese. History teachers now find themselves delivering lessons in Maltese but also giving English translations on the side for non-Maltese students. This uses up precious time and makes teaching more demanding:

> *"I am teaching History. For me, this is a very difficult situation. To teach a mixed ability class, such a subject as History is no joke. Another problem is the foreign students, who are a great hurdle to tackle. History is taught in Maltese, so how am I going to cater for the foreign students?"*

He acknowledged that he did his best to teach in both languages. However, in the class, there were non-Maltese, some of whom had just arrived from a foreign country, who understood neither Maltese nor English. This made it really difficult for the teacher to meet all the students' needs:

"I do try to teach in English too. But many foreign students don't even understand English. There are students who don't understand English and students who don't understand Maltese. The result is that, for several students, lessons are at times boring. In every class I teach, there are foreign students. Even if only one student in a class is foreign, I have to cater for him".

These were the views of the teachers who had very few years of teaching experience. Through these views, some of them also expressed the difficulties and challenges they face when trying to include each and every pupil in class. They all continuously highlighted the importance of meeting all the students' diverse needs and believe that doing so is every teacher's duty. However, they admitted that they still had mixed feelings about the issue because of the various challenges and barriers they faced.

In the next section, teachers who have been teaching for more than twenty years will discuss their views.

5.3.3.2   The perspectives of long-serving teachers

The early career teachers were clearer in their responses when they all said that they agreed with the principle. However, the long-serving teachers expressed considerable doubt about the concept. Like their early career colleagues, they reported that when their subject involved the setting system, it was much easier to cater for every student. However, as will be seen from their comments, when long-serving teachers had a mixed ability class, they reported that they found it to be a frustrating situation, because their class included students with a wide range of needs and abilities. One of these teachers reported that she felt so irritated with this circumstance that she did not agree at all with the concept of inclusion.

Lourdes, who has been teaching in a middle school in the northern area for twenty years, stated that it was a disadvantage for the teacher when the class involved students with different abilities: "*I feel that this is a disadvantage both for the students and for the teacher".*

Her subject involved the setting system, that is, students in her class were usually grouped according to their academic ability. Yet, despite this, her class included students with different abilities, some of whom had special needs. She confirmed that these particular students created a challenge for her, but she said that she tried her best to adapt to everyone's needs:

> *"If a student finds himself in a set which is not of his intellectual ability he will not feel at ease and he cannot work freely or easily with his companions. I do try to give such pupils different work so as to help them according to their abilities. One tries to adapt the lessons to the different abilities present in class".*

Josette was a French teacher who has been working in a senior school in the northern area for twenty-six years. She asked to do a telephone interview and, because I was not able to record the conversation, notes were taken instead.

The first thing Josette said about the inclusion of students with diverse needs was voice her disagreement. She expressed her frustration about the fact that she had to cater for different needs in class. She felt that students who were supported by a Learning Support Assistant created particular difficulties because, when these students needed further explanations by their LSAs during the lesson, their talking created a disturbance in class, making it more difficult for the others to understand. Her subject, French, requires pupils to be very attentive during the lesson because it is not a native language of any of the students. For these reasons, she stated that inclusion is not viable and that pupils with different needs and abilities should be kept apart.

The next two long-serving teachers worked in the centre of Malta. Margaret has been teaching Maltese in a middle school for twenty-eight years. In her class, pupils were grouped according to their exam marks. That meant that all the students in her class were within the same level of ability. When she was asked whether she agreed with the idea that students with diverse needs were included in the class, she responded:

"For me, that is not a serious problem. I teach Maltese. Since we use the setting system for Maltese, my students are almost streamed according to their capabilities".

She said that she agreed with the setting system because teaching Maltese to students with various abilities is very tough. She said that a teacher might prepare a lesson for different students by making use of graded handouts, for instance, however, she claimed that the lesson might be unsuccessful to accommodate various ability levels:

"Setting is beneficial for students and teacher alike. Teaching children of very different abilities is not easy and, I would say, almost impossible if the teaching is done with children of different abilities during the same period in the same class. The teacher prepares the lesson for a certain level of students. Even the handouts will be graded, but if the students are of very different abilities, the lesson would not be so successful. There are those who get bored and those who understand very little. So I am not yet totally convinced about inclusion".

Paul worked in a senior school in central Malta and he had been teaching for twenty years. He confirmed that inclusive classes may involve working with students with diverse needs, which involve catering for all the students in the class. However, he stated that, to cater for a variety of needs within one class, there should not be more than ten students in the class. According to him, having small population classes is very difficult because of a lack of human resources. He said that the administration of his school adopted the setting system to group students of the same level of ability as much as possible. It seemed that this setting system was being implemented by various schools, as indicated in the above interviews. Paul said:

"Technically speaking, our classes should all include students with diverse needs. That seems to be the national policy. Let us now turn our attention to our particular school. We have to think seriously about how our classes can be truly manageable. If we had to mix the pupils without paying due attention to their abilities, our classes would have been much smaller than they actually are. Mixed ability classes should contain ten

students only, including two Learning Support Assistants. The timetable has to be flexible. Our classes are actually made up of 20 to 25 students and we have a hard task drawing up a timetable, let alone having ten-student classes".

As already stated, his school applied the setting system by grouping the students according to their examination results:

"Therefore, the administration is using the setting system. The Senior Management Team considers the result obtained by the students in the examinations and then sorts out the students accordingly. Of course, we still get mixed ability students because one can't place all the students strictly according to the marks obtained. Therefore, in every class, one finds those few pupils who are below the class average".

For this reason, he said he wished that classes would include a smaller number of students rather than twenty or twenty-five students, so that the teacher could cater to everyone's needs effectively. This was also recommended in Salend's (2012) study, as stated in the previous section.

Mario had been teaching for twenty-three years. He was working in a middle school in the southern area. He stated that he agreed with the inclusion of diverse students, but only to a certain extent and depending on each particular case. He said that, occasionally, pupils with special needs succeed in their academic studies with the right assistance but this is not always the case:

"I agree with the notion, but only to a certain point. It all depends on each particular case …. How serious is the diversity in question? When I started teaching …. there weren't any LSAs. I had a deaf student. However, a close friend of his used to help him along because he was a lip-reader and, finally, the deaf student succeeded in passing his Ordinary Level Examinations".

However, when LSAs were introduced and the inclusion of pupils with special needs became more systematic in mainstream school, many of these pupils failed to follow the same curriculum as the others. This resulted in academic

underachievement, with the only notable benefit being an improved ability to socialise:

> *"Later, LSAs were introduced in our schools and they helped greatly with the difficult cases. However, although the pupils were present in the class, they carried out work with the LSA which was completely different from that done in class by the other students. The only advantage being that of socialisation …. being with the other students, but academically the situation didn't help them at all".*

George had been teaching for twenty-six years, in a senior school in the southern area. He said that he agreed with the principle of inclusion because all students should have the right to reach their full potential in class. However, he argued that teaching mixed ability students in one class was a huge challenge:

> *"Personally, I agree with the principle that all the students should have the opportunity to develop fully their capabilities and I believe that, if it weren't so, some students would be left behind. However, mixed ability classes create a difficulty both for the students and the teachers. It is not an easy situation. I now believe that, if the students were set in a class according to their abilities, they would certainly benefit much more. I am talking from experience. When I taught streamed classes, students benefitted much more than they do today, even the low-achievers. I really had great satisfaction seeing the students progressing according to their abilities. We also must not forget the gifted children. Yes, the streaming system gave better results".*

It is important to note here that, some years ago, all students in secondary schools were streamed according to their examination marks. There was an 11+ examination and those who passed attended schools targeted towards high achievers while those who failed the examination attended schools which catered for lower levels of achievement. Furthermore, classes in these schools were formed by streaming students again according to their annual examinations. In time, the 11+ examination was eliminated and the Benchmark examinations in English, Maltese and Mathematics were applied.

Most secondary schools still group the students according to marks in order to form classes, and this setting system is applied in particular subjects. However, in George's case, the setting system could not be applied to his subject because he taught an optional subject, Accounts, which was only ever chosen by a small number of pupils, and which consequently did not make it feasible for schools to set up numerous classes in the subject or to have more than one teacher teaching the subject. This meant that George had to teach a mixed ability class, which is something that he found very challenging:

> *"I have now quite a long experience in teaching Accounts and … in these recent years, the level in this subject has regressed considerably. Just imagine a class where a student gets 94 marks in a test while another one gets only 7!! Others get 60s while others get 30 or 40. The whole spectrum!! How can you teach effectively in a class like that? I tell you, that if I had a class where all the pupils were all very low achievers, I would surely be able to teach them effectively, and gradually, they would be able to make progress. One can adapt the teaching material according to their ability. I am sure that the students would benefit much more if such classes were organised".*

As one can see from the viewpoints expressed, the majority had quite mixed thoughts about the issue because they said that it was not an easy task to cater for students with diverse needs within one class. Those whose classes were organised by the setting system were more satisfied with the teaching situation than the others because their students largely had the same learning abilities. However, those teachers who had to teach mixed ability students felt that they were not actually succeeding in the job with each and every student. They felt disappointed that particular students seemed to be left behind. Hence, it is vital for teachers to have continuous administrative support together with other support services and effective training (McLeskey et al., 2001; Burstein et al., 2004; DeSimone and Parmar, 2006; Idol, 2006; Cagran and Schmidt, 2011). Teachers said that serious thinking needed to take place in order to obtain solutions for the particular difficulties they perceived and experienced. This was similar to one of the recommendations made by the

Heads of School, when they suggested that the concept of inclusion needs to be re-evaluated in Maltese schools.

Through these interviews, one may note that both groups of teachers expressed their doubts about the concept of inclusion and this aspect was also reflected in the data given in the questionnaires. However, the early career teachers seemed more committed to the concept of inclusion than the more experienced ones. This may be due to the fact that they were fresh in their career experience and, therefore, they were motivated to develop teaching methodologies which lead them to job success and satisfaction.

The first statement of the questionnaire was: *As a teacher, I agree that students with diverse needs should be included in the class.* The responses are given in Table 5.2:

	North Area N=48	Central Area N=42	South Area N=53	Totals N=143
Agree	24 (50%)	18 (45%)	15 (28.3%)	57 (40.4%)
Perhaps	15(31.3%)	16 (40%)	28 (52.8%)	59 (41.8%)
Disagree	9 (18.8%)	6 (15%)	10 (18.9%)	25 (17.7%)
Total	48	40	53	141

Table 5.2: Students with diverse needs should be included in the class

The total number of teachers who chose *Agree* or *Perhaps* was almost the same in all three schools. This indicated that there were many teachers (41.8%, 59 out of 141) who were doubtful whether students with diverse needs should be all included in class. As previously demonstrated, this factor also emerged in the interviews, with teachers giving various reasons for this. Meanwhile, 17.7% (25 of the total sample of 141), tended to disagree with the statement that students with diverse needs should be included. This showed that almost one-fifth of the total sample disagreed with inclusion. Therefore,

the whole result to the above statement indicated that only 40.4% totally agreed with the inclusion of students with diverse needs. The rest of the participants either disagreed or were still doubtful about the issue. Furthermore, the teachers in the southern school, who showed the most disagreement, seemed to be very ambivalent toward inclusion. Their *Disagree* and *Perhaps* options were also quite high compared to the other schools. These results indicate that the majority of the teachers tend to have a negative attitude towards inclusion. Therefore, policy makers need to continue working towards change, through effective communication and training to all school stakeholders, to further develop positive beliefs and attitudes towards inclusive schools.

For the statement *Students with diverse needs should be included in the class*, there were also particular teachers who decided to write a comment near their response, as a means to justify their answer. The total number of returned questionnaires in the above table consisted of 141 instead of 143, because two teachers did not tick an answer but decided to leave a comment near the statement instead. For instance, in the central school, one respondent ticked *Agree* and wrote that *"it depends on the severity of the case"*. Another respondent did not tick any answers but instead wrote that *"it depends on the level of diverse needs"*. Meanwhile, another teacher ticked both *Agree* and *Disagree* and wrote *"mild"* near the *Agree* option and wrote *"severe"* near the *Disagree* option.

Furthermore, one teacher in the southern school, ticked *Disagree* because *"most of the times, their disability excludes them just the same. Moreover, for them to be included, they distract all the others"*. Another teacher ticked *Perhaps* for this reason: "*I do not agree that students with severe disabilities, such as severe autism are included in the mainstream. They can surely benefit more from special needs schools"*.

All these comments surely indicated that the major teachers' concern was that of including students with complex conditions and difficulties. The reason for this probably lie in not having enough knowledge and training to work with and include students with specific needs and, furthermore, probably, some

students exhibit behaviour which can distract other students in class. These factors were mentioned in questionnaire comments and several times during the interviews. They reflect issues raised in other studies and considered in the literature review (Chapter 3) including Burtein et al., 2004; DeSimone and Parmar, 2006; Idol, 2006; Cefai, Fenech and Galea, 2007.

Many teachers wrote comments at the end of the questionnaire in which they expressed their views more clearly. Whilst there were a range of views, teachers' comments revealed that their main concern seemed to be that the level of achievement of the gifted students was being hindered by their classmates' behaviour and their lower level of ability. The following comments are illustrative of the views expressed:

> *"Although inclusion is beneficial, it causes various constraints for lesson preparation and sometimes for lesson delivery. Having high flyers in class, I feel that we cannot give them the amount of material they are able for".* *(northern area)*

Along with the idea of inclusion being *constraining* in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, there is introduced, the notion that, meeting the needs of some students can disrupt the learning of others.

> *"Inclusion is an ideal which could be really realised in schools, however, using different methods can lead to the disruption of other students since some gifted students may find it a bit 'boring".* *(northern area)*

Belief in the principle of inclusion seems to be one thing, but the concern of several teachers seemed to be for those abler students who they felt missed out.

> *"I believe a lot in inclusion. My thesis was on inclusion as well. However, today we are emphasising so much on inclusion that we are ending up excluding the others who can work and are gifted!"* *(northern area)*

"I feel that since students have been mixed, high achievers have started performing less. Education was much better when students were streamed". *(southern area)*

"I agree with inclusion but only to a certain extent. We can't neglect the needs of gifted students and high achievers".
(southern area)

Thus, the broad definition of inclusion is challenged by many of the respondents. All the early career teachers interviewed and some questionnaire respondents agreed with the principle of equality, but the notion of inclusion without sufficient teacher knowledge and training was being questioned in some responses to the questionnaire:

"I do not entirely agree with inclusion. I believe that, despite the good intention behind it, students who need guidance and attention are falling behind. This always depends on the case. I believe that there should be people who are highly and specifically qualified in the particular case. Students with dyslexia, for example, need teachers who are specifically qualified in this field. I, as a subject teacher, feel that I am not qualified to do so. And I am not talking about short courses but about people who have a Masters in the subject and experience and still working as teachers". *(central area)*

Thus, concern for specific students who might be *falling behind* despite *good intentions* was expressed by many teachers. For some, the answer was more training in specialisms of learning and learning difficulty and, for others, the solution was to challenge the whole notion of inclusion in schools. The sentiment that the lack of support for students with very specific needs means *wasting the time* of others, was a common thread in the questionnaire responses. The dominant feeling was that more gifted students were *losing a lot* whilst a disproportionate effort from teachers was devoted to those with specific and complex learning needs:

"Don't totally agree with inclusion. Some students need a specific environment to cater for their extremely particular needs. Quite often, they end up wasting the time of students who are much more capable (in the same class). No matter what we're doing, the clever students are increasingly losing a lot while the others gain so little. The balance is not proportionate". *(central area)*

The issue of fairness was mentioned by a number of teachers who suggested that some students had their learning *disrupted*:

"Although I am in favour of inclusion, I do not think it is fair for other students when special needs students are disruptive". *(southern area)*

"Students with diverse needs should be included in the class, depending on the students' disability. There are disabilities which make it difficult for a student to be included during lessons". *(southern area)*

"Certain cases of inclusion are not beneficial either to the included student or to the rest of the class. Certain included students simply need programmes (such as life skills) that are not offered in schools". *(southern area)*

The idea of included students seems to introduce a new term, and the implication seems to be here that students who experience difficulties are those 'included' and thus, by extension, other students (who experience 'disruption') are those who belong and have an assumed and unchallenged right to be there. This use of terminology seems to point to the heart of the issues raised in the comments of many teachers which, through close reading, implies that inclusion actually is defined by many as the *integration* of students with complex difficulties and challenging behaviours into the *established mainstream,* where those who do not experience such challenges, already

exist. What the teachers seem to be saying is that their schools and classrooms are for those who do not have difficulty learning, and that into these classrooms, *others* are introduced.

Through all these comments, teachers gave a clearer picture of their opinions. Whilst some say that they agree with the notion of inclusion as a principle, many had mixed feelings whether or not the phenomenon was feasible in the classroom, and some did not agree with inclusion as an educational principle at all. This factor was also reflected in the responses of the questionnaire which focused on the difficulties that were met by the teachers in an inclusive class.

Furthermore, during the interviews, the teachers talked in detail about the difficulties and challenges that they experience in class while trying to implement inclusive teaching. All these findings will be presented and discussed in the next section.

5.3.4 The teachers' difficulties and challenges

5.3.4.1 The early career teachers

The early career teachers mentioned various difficulties and challenges:

- disruptive students
- students with special needs
- failure in students' progress
- mixed ability students in class
- lack of teacher training
- a vast syllabus
- lack of student motivation
- a long time to prepare inclusive lessons
- the inclusion of non-Maltese students
- large class population

As might be expected, all the early career teachers mentioned different difficulties and challenges. The issue of students with behavioural difficulties and those with special needs were mentioned several times across this study, by all the different groups of participants. In the teachers' questionnaires, such students were identified as presenting the greatest challenges for the teachers in class.

The matter of mixed ability students in one class was also mentioned several times throughout this study. The majority of the teachers confirmed that it was very demanding to cater for the diverse needs of the students in a mixed ability class.

Pierre, in a northern middle school, showed his concern about the academic aspect of his class. He stated that he prepared the lesson very well, however, when there were particular disruptions in class, time and work were lost:

> *"One has to keep in mind the academic aspect … when certain students are continually disrupting the class, the other pupils suffer, the prepared planned work is not done. And I mean all the students suffer".*

He added that, in certain cases, inclusion might not be ideal for both for the low-achievers and for students with special needs because they might not be concurrent with the class curriculum, thus, they get bored and end up disrupting the class:

> *"Inclusion is not even beneficial to the low achievers or children with special needs since they feel out of place. They don't pay attention during lessons, and they feel bored. Their classwork and their homework are of a low quality and then they get very low marks in the exams".*

This raises the question as to what teachers think inclusion is, and what their role in being inclusive is. The comments raise the question about which pupils the teacher is preparing the lesson for. This is especially the case when several students are identified as missing out. Pierre continued to discuss the issue, expressing his disappointment at not feeling effective enough with the students, he identifies as '*the low achievers or children with special needs*':

"Believe me, it is very disappointing for me as a teacher to watch students failing repeatedly without doing any progress. I became a teacher to help students improve their abilities, to give children the opportunity to learn".

Ultimately, as an early career teacher, Pierre stated that different academic abilities created problems of interaction in class, leading to increased behavioural problems. He insisted that he tried his best to control his class, however, at times particular behavioural issues were a huge challenge:

"Very different academic abilities in the class also create problems of socialisation or interaction. Even in class, certain students cannot get along with each other and fighting ensues … chaos reigns for some time … all the students lose their attention. I do my best to keep good control of the class but, at times, it is almost impossible. We don't have the necessary tools. Behaviour is an obstacle vis-à-vis inclusion".

Diane had been teaching for four years in a northern senior school. She mentioned the lack of teacher training as one of the main difficulties in inclusion. She said that she enjoyed researching about its different aspects and thus creating a more inclusive class. However, she stated that lack of awareness and appropriate preparation of the teacher will not help to develop an inclusive class. She also said that, because in the pre-service training teachers do not get enough hands-on experiences, they end up being shocked when they have to work in a mixed ability class for the first time:

"Come to think of it, and I have done some research on this topic, I feel that the main difficulty is lack of awareness and preparation on the part of the teachers. So many years at University … mostly theory and then, when one embarks on his career, one is simply shocked and even frustrated. Lack of hands-on experience hinders greatly our ability to teach mixed-ability classes. I feel that this is a great drawback. I did my best to attend specific courses to help me face everyday difficulties in an inclusive school".

Pre-service training and inset training will be discussed further in the coming sections. When I probed Diane specifically about whether she met with any difficulties or challenges in her class, she said that though teaching is always

challenging, showing care and attention to the students is highly important. Furthermore, she insisted that, in class, the teacher must show that she meant business:

> *"Teaching is no bed of roses for anyone. It is important that you persuade the students that you mean business … From day one. Of course, the students will 'test' you from time to time, but if you show them that you really care about them and if you challenge them, quite often they co-operate".*

The main challenge for Diane, a biology teacher, was the vast syllabus that she had to cover within the scholastic year. Biology is not organised by the setting system so she had a mixed ability class. For this reason, she found it very difficult to cover all the syllabus in the time available, because certain students took longer to catch up:

> *"Another hurdle to overcome is the length of the syllabus and the short time available to cover it. I teach Biology and the syllabus is simply vast and, because of mixed ability students, one cannot skim over the various topics. However, as the scholastic year rolls on, I have to speed up my teaching to cover the whole syllabus. This is unpleasant for me".*

The issue of the curriculum was identified in the literature review as one of the main concerns in an inclusive programme (Cefal et al., 2007; Salend, 2012).

Lorraine, a teacher in the central middle school with four years experience, referred to student motivation as one of the main issues that could be challenging. She said that certain students did not like her subject so she tried her best to engage them in the best possible way. However, when she had classes with a large number of students, the situation was much more challenging:

> *"It is a great challenge. There are so many factors involved. Let us take a simple example. There is an 'average' child in the class who simply does not like the subject you're teaching. So, one does one's best to cater for that particular student so that s/he begins to interest himself in*

the subject. But what about all the others, especially in bigger classes? All the students are different, with different abilities and aptitudes".

She stated that her subject was Home Economics and the subject itself involved several challenges especially when students with special needs were involved. For instance, she had particular students who suffered from a physical disability, therefore, it was quite challenging for the student to carry out practical tasks in the laboratory. However, she said that she adapted particular exercises specifically for them so that they would be catered for too:

"'Rubbing in' is part of the syllabus I must cover and, in my class, there is a student suffering from a physical disability which impedes him from using his hands adequately, he can't perform the exercise the others are doing. So, I prepare special exercises for him and he feels contented".

Other challenges that she mentioned were the fact that she had non-Maltese students in the class, recently arrived in Malta and from different backgrounds and cultures, further, the issue of students with particular food allergies also presented challenges. Lorraine talked about different strategies that she applied in class in order to include each and every student:

"One has to face also the problem of cultural differences even in such classes as Home Economics. However, this doesn't bother me so much and one can always learn from such situations. Then we have to face the problem of allergies … so, one cannot put everyone in the same boat".

Student motivation seemed to be the greatest challenge for Maria in the senior school, in the southern area, having five years of teaching experience. Primarily, she said that through the setting system, her difficulties decreased, since the students were within the same ability which made planning and teaching easier. Furthermore, besides the setting system, in her subject, which was the French language, another system was applied: the Subject Proficiency Assessment (SPA) which involved an easier curriculum for those students who achieved low marks in the French language. Therefore, through this system, the students were streamed further:

"Since we are now using the setting system, I am not facing great problems really, yes we are now making use of the Subject Proficiency Assessment (SPA) … Which means that the students are put into classes according to the marks they get. I think that this system is beneficial both to the students and to the teacher".

However, she remarked that though these systems were implemented, she still had students in the class who were not engaged within the lesson and she felt that these students were a huge challenge for her:

"However, although we are using the SPA system, there are still students with different learning abilities in the same class. But the greatest hurdle, for me at least, remains that several students don't seem to want to learn. They are not motivated at all".

The two teachers in the middle and senior schools in the southern area of Malta were both in their second year of the teaching career. Elizabeth referred to large class populations as the main difficulty that she encountered. She said that it is not easy to include each and every student in class because of the fact that each student had his/her personal baggage. Therefore, classes with twenty students and over made it very difficult to attend to every student's needs:

"The main issue is that classes are usually large, thus, making inclusion a more difficult concept to implement in our classrooms ... students come from different social backgrounds and they all carry individual, personal baggage … this makes dealing with individual needs a more difficult process, especially when you have 20 students or more sitting in front of you".

Another difficulty that she referred to was the amount of time needed for the preparation of lessons. She said that in order to carry out an effective lesson and trying to meet all the students' needs, a teacher had to dedicate a lot of time for preparation:

"While diversity is a reality not only in the Maltese classrooms, I personally feel it takes a lot of time and preparation to deliver a lesson

that caters to every student's learning strategies. I try my best to include a variety of tasks and resources, using audio, visual, text and kinaesthetic tasks which make the lesson appealing to different students. This is not always possible and truly I find difficulty when it comes to preparing 25 lessons a week".

Brian in the senior school had already mentioned particular difficulties when he talked about his views regards the inclusive aspect in class. He confirmed that his main challenge was teaching non-Maltese students in his History lesson because the subject had to be taught in Maltese. He had to cater for students who did not speak Maltese in his lessons and so used both English and Maltese, preparing handouts in both languages.   This created considerably more work and stress for him:

"For me, this is a very difficult situation. To teach a mixed ability class, such a subject as History is no joke. Another problem, the foreign students are a great hurdle to tackle".

He did not elaborate on quite what he means by the 'great hurdle to tackle' but it seemed he was referring to the languages spoken and understood by students.   He mentioned that at times non-Maltese students understood neither English nor Maltese, while Maltese students with low literacy levels did not understand enough of the English language to understand the lesson in English. Thus, at times, he felt frustrated:

"I do try to teach in English too. But many foreign students don't even understand English. There are students who don't understand English and students who don't understand Maltese. The result is that for several students, lessons are at times boring".

Multiple languages and students who do not speak Maltese or English is a recent phenomenon in Malta's schools, arising only in the last few years due to planned economic migration, refugee and asylum seeker status, due to political unrest in countries whose shores border the Mediterranean Sea. All the early career teachers discussed their challenges and difficulties in detail and interesting aspects emerged from their conversations, upon which recommendations will be drawn out later in the thesis.   Of course, it is not

possible to know whether the workload issues, these early career teachers are experiencing, is because they are inexperienced (such as the length of time lesson preparation takes them) or whether this is entirely due to implementing practices of inclusion in their classrooms. In the next section, the types of difficulties and challenges mentioned by the more experienced teachers will be discussed.

5.3.4.2   The long-serving teachers

The difficulties and challenges mentioned by the more experienced teachers were largely similar to those of the early career teachers:

- Students with severe autism
- A mixed ability class
- A vast syllabus
- Teaching bilingually

It is interesting to note that the early career teachers mentioned many more difficulties and challenges, while this group referred specifically to the above difficulties.   Three of these were already discussed earlier, namely, the difficulty of catering for a mixed ability class, the delivery of a large syllabus and the need to cater to non-Maltese students through the use of both the English and the Maltese language.

Lourdes with twenty years of teaching experience, in a middle school, in the northern area referred to complex difficulties as the greatest challenge in her class. She said that students with severe autism disrupted the class because of their behaviour:

"The greatest challenge, I think, is when children with special needs are present in your class. For instance, autistic pupils are not so easy to handle. They cause disruption in class … loss of precious time … laughter ... Quite difficult to maintain class control. Just imagine … Starting a lesson which, you have well prepared and then suddenly a student stands up, walks around the class and starts making noises … students with severe physical needs is another problem altogether".

Furthermore, another challenging aspect that she mentioned was the fact of having mixed ability students in the class. She stated that she always tried her best to apply various teaching strategies to include all the students as much as possible. However, she said that at times she felt helpless in finding effective ways and means to be productive with all students:

"Having students with different mental abilities is tough but somehow I try to handle the situation. Of course, it is true that having a mixed ability class is sometimes disappointing both to the students and to the teacher. I try to do my utmost to include all my students during the lesson whether it is reading, poetry, comprehension etc … however, certain pupils benefit only a little from the lesson … one doesn't know how to help them … one feels helpless".

Similarly, Josette in a northern senior school (via a telephone interview) mentioned behaviour and mixed ability students as the main challenges in her class. This teacher had been teaching French for twenty-six years and her subject did not involve the setting system, therefore, her class entailed students with different levels of ability. This difficulty was also mentioned earlier by a young teacher who also taught French.

This experienced teacher stated that she actually had a wide spectrum of abilities, from the high flyers to the very low achievers. This resulted in a huge challenge for her to try and cater for everyone's needs. She sounded really frustrated about this matter. In addition, behavioural issues caused her a lot of stress because she saw this as precious teaching time being lost on many occasions. For instance, particular students took longer to settle down at the beginning of the lesson, other students forgot their books and homework, a student with special needs kept going around the class whenever he decided to do so and another student diagnosed with Down's Syndrome kept switching the lights on and off several times.

She concluded that consequently, valuable time was lost, which was detrimental to the high-achievers who were given a hard time to obtain a fruitful lesson. Josette seemed to be very concerned about these students, and according to her they are the ones who might be suffering from the

situation. However, other students in the class (such as the average students) were probably falling behind as well due to certain disruptions.

Margaret, in a middle school, in the central area, taught Maltese. She had been teaching for twenty-eight years and when asked about her challenges in class, she said that in actual fact she was not facing many difficulties, because her subject involved the setting system and that in that particular year she did not have any students with special needs in her class. Nevertheless, she stated that though her subject involved the setting system, she still had students with different abilities in particular classes. However, she tried her best to plan her lesson in a way where all students could benefit from it:

> *"Although we make use of setting in Maltese I still get students of different abilities in my classes. So, usually, while I do the explanation, I aim mostly at the low-achievers because I am sure that the others will surely comprehend what I am doing or saying. However, I aim my lesson, at times, to the high achievers to challenge them and thus I make the lesson interesting to the different levels of students. I care about all my students. So, during the same lesson, I do try to cater for all the students in my class".*

Paul (with twenty years teaching experience) taught in a senior school in the central area, he mentioned mixed ability students and a large class population as the main challenges in his work. He taught Geography, therefore, his subject was not involved in the setting system. As a result, his class was made up of students with mixed abilities. Another challenging aspect that he mentioned was that of including students with lower levels of ability who seemed unmotivated:

> *"Let us say that in a particular class there are many weak unmotivated children, teaching is very difficult. For instance, I have just taught such a class. I gave them a very simple exercise. They had to 'vote'. The first one voted wrongly. And all the others followed his example and voted wrongly".*

The terms 'weak' and 'unmotivated' suggest perhaps a lack of awareness about how students might be perceived and described, and seem to imply that

the problem is with the student. Furthermore, he referred to the syllabus as another significant challenge. His subject entailed only one lesson a week with every class. Therefore, he could never afford to lose a lesson because the syllabus was too vast to cover in the time available:

"Time is a problem. Quite often I have only one lesson in every class, so I have to make sure that I make the best of the time available. If I am sick or there is a school activity, I lose a lesson with a particular class, which means that I lag behind in my scheme of work. Unfortunately, quite often I have to skim over certain topics so as to cover the whole syllabus. We are greatly restricted by the syllabus. It's too vast and impossible to cover in a year with one lesson a week per class. In fact, almost every year I deliver extra lessons during the breaks".

Another matter that seemed to frustrate him was the difficulty of teaching bilingually. The syllabus had to be delivered in Maltese according to the National Curriculum Policy. Therefore, this teacher had to explain the lesson both in Maltese and English which, he said, annoyed some students:

"Because of several foreign students, I have to deliver the lessons in English. The Maltese students grumble because I am not delivering the lessons in Maltese as I am supposed to do. Our notes are all in Maltese now, so the foreign students ask me to give them notes in English. Who is going to change all the syllabus from Maltese to English? Am I obliged to spend all the summer holidays preparing all the syllabus in the English language for a couple of foreign students?"

The last two long-serving teachers worked in the south of Malta and respectively they had twenty-three years and twenty-six years of teaching experience. Mario who was working in a middle school said that his greatest difficulty in class was that of dealing with the behaviour of students with special needs. He stated that their unpredictable behaviour caused confusion in the class. In keeping with the views of several other teachers, Mario was troubled about the fact that attending to challenging behaviour was having a detrimental effect on other students' progress:

"Children with disability problems are at times uncontrollable. They may start shouting and walking around the class and thus create a lot of confusion. Although the other students are aware of their special needs, precious time is lost until the atmosphere of the class is again peaceful. This is really unfair to those students who really want to learn, especially when this is a common occurrence".

Moreover, this teacher had his reservations about the academic attainment on behalf of the students with special needs. He stated that the Learning Support Assistants carried out brilliant work in their adaptations of his lesson, however, the fact that these students did not follow the actual curriculum in his class, made him question whether they were actually benefitting from the situation or not:

"I had a Down's student, a girl, who had an LSA. She was in 6-7 level in the Maths class. Obviously, she was well below the level when compared with the other students. The LSA carried out wonderful work with this girl, however, the work done was completely different from the one I did with the other students. The LSA taught her how to hold a pencil, to write numbers and how to draw. Otherwise, she was just present in class".

This is another example of students who are logistically included, they are in the same space, but they are not necessarily an integral part of the lesson. Meanwhile, George in the senior school declared that it was impossible for him to include all students in his class. His subject (which was Accounts), involved a certain level of attainment, therefore, regrettably, the less able students often struggled to understand and progress within the subject. As stated earlier on, at times, when this teacher tried to cater for the students who struggled, the other students could not achieve their full attainment. Likewise, when he tried the other way round, that is, aiming the lesson for the more able students, he said that the others felt totally lost:

"In my subject, it is almost impossible to include each and every student in the lesson. When one doesn't understand the basic principles involved, one lacks behind. When you adapt the lesson to the low ability students the average and gifted students suffer considerably. Is this fair?

When I try to give suitable work to the 'weak' students, they still need individual attention. How can the teacher do this? This is an impossible situation. So, in such a situation, a group of your students suffers. And when you aim the lesson mostly towards the 'average' or 'gifted' pupils, the low achievers get bored and discouraged. I do my best to include everyone in my lessons … striking mid-way … but it is not a fair solution to all the students. I am hundred percent sure that if the classes were streamed, I would surely help the students much better and they would be happier".

This teacher felt that he tried his best to cater to everyone's needs but his approach did not appear to be successful.

Students whose behaviour presented challenges, and the need to give support to students with specific special needs were already mentioned as the reason why considerable lesson time was taken up by a small number of students. However, this group of teachers referred specifically to students with severe autism as another challenge in their lesson deliveries. The reasons being that due to their autism, at times, a student might have behaved in particular ways which led to disruption, and other students focused on that behaviour rather than on the lesson. Once more, the factor of the gifted students was mentioned during this point of discussion with teachers feeling that when difficulties arose high achieving students missed out on lesson time as well. For these reasons, the teachers felt confused, and it's fair to say, resistant to, the practice of inclusion.

The responses to the questionnaires regarding what types of students were challenging for the teacher to include, mirrored the above comments, as highlighted in Table 5.3:

	North Area N=48	Central Area N=42	South Area N=53	Totals N=143
Dyslexic students	**8** **(16.7%)**	**7** **(16.7%)**	**3** **(5.7%)**	**18** **(12.6%)**
Students with mild autism	**7** **(14.6%)**	**2** **(4.8%)**	**4** **(7.5%)**	**13** **(9%)**
Students with severe autism	**40** **(83.3%)**	**32** **(76.2%)**	**46** **(86.8%)**	**118** **(82.5%)**
Low ability students	**2** **(4.2%)**	**3** **(7.1%)**	**5** **(9.4%)**	**10** **(7%)**
Gifted students	**1** **(2%)**	**3** **(7.1%)**	**2** **(3.8%)**	**6** **(4.2%)**
Students with physical disabilities	**15** **(31.3%)**	**13** **(31%)**	**13** **(24.5%)**	**41** **(28.7%)**
None of the above	**3** **(6.25%)**	**7** **(16.7%)**	**4** **(7.5%)**	**14** **(9.8%)**

Table 5.3: Difficulty to cater for particular needs

The table 5.3 clearly confirmed that the main challenges were students with severe autism (82.5%) and those with physical disabilities (28.7%). The percentage of the teachers who found it difficult to cater for students with severe autism is significantly high and the result is similar in the three schools where teachers participated in the survey. This finding, surely suggests the need for some serious thinking about how to create effective and meaningful strategies where the teachers increase their particular knowledge about the needs and capabilities of students with autism, so that they are better able to include students with defined learning needs, such as those identified as living with autism.

In very particular cases, it may turn out to be that certain students with autism may gain more from a resource centre, where their needs are better understood and can be met. However, in my experience, under such circumstances, the students in question, usually share between the two schools by attending two days at the resource centre and three days at the mainstream school, in order to benefit from both schools, and this should happen in consultation with all stakeholders, with parents and the student at the heart of the decision making. I am aware that some teachers are reluctant to learn what is best for students with particular and identifiable needs, and how to accommodate to their needs in order to facilitate effective and meaningful inclusion. When this is the case, one needs to think about how to help the teacher's change their viewpoint so as to develop a more positive attitude. The teachers' comments from the questionnaire reflect particular attitudes and opinions regarding the inclusion of students whose needs and behaviour present teachers with challenges:

> *"I feel that certain students will benefit more if they have special schools with activities and an environment that is more adapted for them".*
>
> *(northern area)*

> *"I think that some students who have severe autism and disabilities will benefit more in schools which cater to their needs because they have the resources which are not found in other schools".*   *(northern area)*

> *"It would be more beneficial for a student with severe autism or certain physical disabilities to attend specialised schools that address their particular needs directly. It is in vain for them to be in a class with other students for the sake of it but then can't carry on with them or waste time doing something else altogether".*   *(northern area)*

Some teachers strongly believed that students with difficult needs must attend the resource centres where they *'benefit'* more and not *'waste time'* or stay in class *'in vain'*.

"Students with a more severe learning disability should not follow all lessons. They should be included in lessons that they can benefit from them otherwise they should have more specified lessons for them. Schools need resources, such as multisensory rooms and white rooms. Keeping them in class just listening to a lesson is not inclusion".

(central area)

This teacher seemed to have a different attitude from the others. S/he suggested that students with complex needs may follow a more individualised program within the mainstream school through the development of adapted lessons and also through specific resources, such as multisensory rooms and white rooms. I think it would be ideal if the setting of the resource centre would be within the mainstream school, so that, all the students will continue to interact together while at the same time, individual needs are met, especially to those students with complex learning difficulties.

"Don't totally agree with inclusion. Some students need a specific environment to cater for their extremely particular needs. Quite often they end up wasting the time of students who are much more capable (in the same class). No matter what we're doing, the clever students are increasingly losing a lot while the others gain so little. The balance is not proportionate".   *(central area)*

"By including everyone in one class doesn't mean that we are practicing inclusion. Most of the time students with severe disabilities don't gain any advantage in being placed in a mainstream class. Moreover, teachers dedicate most of their time to create resources for less motivated children with the consequence that motivated students are being set apart risking highly that their motivation is lost".   *(southern area)*

The teachers' concern was repeatedly towards the 'clever' students. It seemed that it is difficult for the teacher to strike a balance and cater for different needs in one class. In the next two comments, teachers stated that they feel unprepared and not trained to meet all the students' needs.

"I feel that not all students with specific needs can be included in the classroom, for example, students with a severe mental disability or severe autism. Inclusion is not beneficial for them in 'normal' school conditions and I feel they can benefit more if they attend more specialised schools. Without sounding too severe I also think that students with severe disabilities might hinder other students from learning. I feel I am not trained at all to deal and teach students with different abilities. I would like to receive more training so as to be able to help these students more in class". (southern area)

"As teachers, we are not always prepared for situations which occur in class, particularly, from students who are severely autistic. Sometimes this results in the detriment of the teaching and learning, not just of the student him/herself, but of other students in the class. While I understand that inclusion can be beneficial, in some cases it is not, and one should keep in mind that each case is individual". (southern area)

As seen both from the interviews and the questionnaires, teachers found it quite challenging to include and cater for students with complex and demanding behavioural and learning needs. This was also reflected in the opinions of the Heads of School. For this reason, training in the field is highly essential for all stakeholders in the school, but also what is needed for some, is an attitudinal shift where teachers see the students as human beings with a right to education (UNCRC, 1989; Salamanca Statement, 1994; Anati, 2013; OECD 2014; Plan International, 2015; UNESCO, 2015).

The next section will present the various strategies that the teachers implemented in their classes as a means to include all their students effectively.

5.3.5 Teaching strategies

5.3.5.1 The early career teachers

The early career teachers implemented the following strategies in their classes in order to include each and every student as much as possible:

- Pair work
- Group work
- Audio-visual aids
- Questioning techniques
- Hands-on activities
- Power-points
- Word games
- Graded work
- Choice of tasks

The majority of the above teaching strategies were used mostly by the early career teachers interviewed in this study, namely, pair work, group work, the use of audio-visual aids including power-points, hands-on activities, questioning techniques and graded work. Two of the teachers also mentioned word games and giving a choice of tasks as other inclusive strategies. On the whole, the data indicate that the early career teachers used most of the methods at their disposal, and varied their strategies, to adapt to their students' various needs.

Pierre in the northern middle school, primarily mentioned pair work and group work as common practices during his lessons. However, he felt disappointed when particular students were not motivated enough to participate:

"I make good use of pair work and group work. Children enjoy such activities and they do benefit from each other. However, there are always some students who simply don't want to learn, don't want to participate. Although I do my utmost to include all my students during the lessons, some students are impossible to include. This is a fact which cannot be overlooked".

When he was probed about the use of audio-visual aids, he instantly confirmed that he used these aids regularly in order to engage all the students. Furthermore, he stated that he tried to use visuals that they could relate to their life so as to understand the lesson's content effectively:

> *"These make the lessons much more interesting. Surely, I plan the lesson accurately, I have my own personal material, but if I feel the need to change something, I don't stick to my plans. I always adapt myself to the situation at hand. I try to be practical as much as possible. For instance, if I have a lesson about 'narrative', I include the day's weather or their own environment, thus they can understand and participate better. Once I showed them parts from the film 'The Lion King' and they all liked that".*

Nevertheless, though visual aids were useful, he said that at times they may have not been effective enough in particular classrooms, especially if certain students did not seem to be motivated at all:

> *"Naturally one doesn't get the same results from all the classes. For instance, in some classes, several students were only keen on cracking jokes about the visual. Of course, I try to cope with such situations, children will always be children".*

He continued that in these cases, he would try different methods of teaching and ultimately, he would apply the most effective in that particular class. Another strategy that he liked to use in the class was questioning, in order to stimulate his students:

> *"Another strategy I like to use often is the 'questioning technique'. For instance, I want to carry out a poetry lesson. I remember once we had a poem called 'Road Trip'. So, I asked the students to help me to create a web for them. We read the poem and then I requested their ideas. We read the poem again and checked our ideas as related to the poem. We examined the related notes on the poem".*

He said that through this strategy, students felt free to give their own views while learning to accept each other's opinions as well. During the reading

lesson, he liked to read himself to the class: *"Sometimes, during a reading lesson, I read to the class myself first, so that the pupils get the correct intonation and diction".*

He stated that at times, certain students felt awkward or shy or afraid to read in front of their peers, however, in spite of this issue, he still invited students to read aloud to the class, since reading was one of the skills that were tested within his subject:

> *"At times when pupils read aloud in class, they are more attentive to their friends' reaction than to the actual reading material. When a student reads loudly to the whole class, most probably he is not understanding what he is reading. Of course, I do let my students read in class, they enjoy doing this and it gives me an opportunity to check the students' ability to read. I just invite the students to read to the class. Sometimes I invite a student by name. Some of them really feel shy about reading to the class. Some are afraid that they would be laughed at. I coax them to read even a few lines so that they can overcome their shyness".*

Diane (with four years of teaching experience), working in a senior school in the northern area, referred to a particular pedagogy course "Let Me Learn" as being effective in her teaching strategies. She said that through this training course she was implementing strategies that created more motivation in class, together with better understanding of her subject content, which was Biology. Strategies included pair work, hands-on activities, more focus on learner-centred learning rather than teacher-centred learning, students carried out the experiments themselves while taking notes, and lessons were carried out in open spaces rather in the class, together with other teaching strategies. Diane seemed to be echoing Vygotsky's theory (1978) through the use of scaffolding learning. She stated:

> *"I have recently done the 'Let Me Learn' pedagogy course. I have seen it in practice and it gives positive results. So, I try to make use of it. I am not yet using it fully since this is the first year that I am making use of it. Even my Head needs to be aware of this method of teaching. For instance, I notice that certain students learn by 'sequence', so I use this*

method with them and I also help them to take notes in that method. Yes, I make use of differentiated teaching".

Regrettably, the teacher said that her colleagues did not always support her methods and others were not aware of them at all. This comment echoed another young teacher's statement in a study conducted at the University of Cyprus (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2012) where she stated that many older colleagues were not comfortable with inclusion in their school and at times she felt they were a barrier to other teachers who believed in an inclusive philosophy. However, as a teacher, Diane said that she was always eager to research and explore new practices in order to be continuously highly effective in her profession:

"Of course, other teachers might not agree with my methods or they are not aware of the 'Let Me Learn' methods. Every year I do my best to improve myself, so each year I try something new. First, I do some research and then I try to put it into practice. I have seen improvements in the grades the students get. Because of these methods, certain topics which were not so interesting to the pupils have now become more challenging and pleasing to the children".

Lorraine (with four years of teaching experience) in a central middle school, applied various strategies since her subject, Home Economics, required various practical sessions. She confirmed that visual aids were necessary, however, they were not always the best strategy. She insisted that one must apply various teaching methods:

"In a way, I am lucky because in my classes I can easily use the hands-on approach. Mostly my students learn by doing. Let us say I am teaching First Aid, all the students practice putting on the bandage on the 'wound'. Children simply love these activities, even those having low abilities. Visuals are also necessary … although some students find them boring. Yes, one has to use different methods of teaching, thus keeping the students interested and alert".

She continued that students in her classes had quite a variety of needs, including physical needs, some were of backgrounds which required

abstinence from particular foods or specific food-handling practices, some students had food allergies or intolerances. Hence, this teacher had to modify her lessons according to these students' needs, and a particular backing technique has already been discussed to enable a student with a physical impairment to participate.

Another topic within her subject content is "The packed lunch", which was prepared according to the students' cultural traditions and contributed further to the students' learning:

> *"One has to face also the problem of cultural differences even in such classes as Home Economics. However, this doesn't bother me so much and one can always learn from such situations. So, let me give an example of 'cultural differences'. One of the items on my syllabus is 'The packed lunch'. If one of my students is a Muslim, his packed lunch will be different from the others. However, this offers an opportunity to understand others who belong to different religions. This also applies to students coming from foreign countries bringing with them different cultures".*

As already stated these differences enhanced students' learning, and where this teacher mentioned a 'problem', I think the interpretation of this terminology would be more accurately expressed as 'context', the arrival of non-Maltese students is a relatively new dynamic and one that this teacher seems quickly to be adjusting to. Furthermore, she continued that at times, when particular discussions took place during the lesson regarding food cultures or food intolerances and allergies, the students concerned gave their own views, explanations, and experiences, this certainly indicated learner-centred learning:

> *"These problems offer opportunities for all of us to understand others better and thus we can live in harmony. Mind you, the students enjoy this diversity. When we mention, 'Halal', Muslims take over and we all learn from them. Then there are students who are coeliac or diabetic, so their 'packed lunches' will also be different from the others. Yes, we do learn from each other. So, we have to adapt our recipes as much as we can.*

Let us take the example of 'Rock buns'. We have obtained fructose which we can use instead of sugar. Sometimes instead of sugar we use honey, we are using more dried fruit and so on. One has to adapt the lessons according to the children's needs".

Maria (with five years teaching experience), working in a senior school in the central area, taught a foreign language to the 'low achievers'. She said that low ability students who followed a special programme adapted for them, were not provided with any books for the subject she taught. Therefore, she needed to provide all the resources for her students to help them understand the content better: *"I make use of power points, sometimes I use videos, pictures and of course handouts".*

She continued that whenever possible, she prepared graded work for her students so that everyone felt capable of reaching his/her own level of ability:

"While preparing the work to be done, I make sure that the children's work is graded and that they enjoy doing it. The work must be adapted to their capabilities. I, therefore, use such techniques as crosswords, word search and so on. Visuals make the lessons more interesting and easier to understand. Low-achievers love this kind of approach".

When probed about the type of strategies she used for high ability students, she insisted that visual aids were an asset to any lesson and to every student, no matter what his/her level may be. However, she said that the textbook is highly beneficial as well during the lesson:

"With the 'average' and the 'high-achievers', the book is a great help naturally. During certain lessons, the book is almost enough but I must prepare handouts almost for every lesson. Levels are always rising and we have to work hard. Sometimes I do make use of power points and pictures and videos. Visuals make the lessons much more interesting. All children enjoy making use of these resources. So, I make use of them whatever the level of students".

The provision of graded work on behalf of the teacher was similarly mentioned as a principal strategy by Elizabeth (two years of teaching experience) in a southern middle school:

"I give graded worksheets and graded material and allow students the possibility to work a number of exercises if I personally feel the student in question cannot handle a whole entire worksheet".

This teacher tried to motivate the students through their homework too by offering them the choice to hand in their work in written form or typed, together with visual items:

"I also give students the possibility, whenever it is practical to do so, to hand in their work in whichever way they want. Therefore, if I set a writing task, I give them the possibility to hand write it or type it. Some students prefer to include pictures or drawings as well as visuals so I encourage them to do so".

Through this mentioned strategy, various students were surely included, such as those who were dyslexic together with students with intellectual difficulties, and also the high-achievers. The teacher continued that she also provided them with a choice of tasks to work upon and additionally offered them to choose their working companions:

"I also give students the possibility to choose which tasks to work on and with whom to work as long as I monitor the work myself. The fact that I give them the possibility to choose how and what to work on creates a more harmonious atmosphere and students work more at ease and present their work with more confidence".

These choices seemed to challenge the students' abilities, however, the teacher stated that unfortunately, at times, particular students chose the easiest way out:

"I try to create different worksheets for certain students, however, this does not always work well in certain classrooms. Some students shy away from choosing a less difficult worksheet and others are too lazy and

opt for the easy worksheet. This takes time to prepare and monitor and I tend to use it only in particular circumstances".

Meanwhile Brian, in a southern senior school and also in his second year of the teaching career, stressed upon the issue of delivering his lessons in bilingual form. Earlier on, he had stated that this was quite a challenge for him because his class entailed mixed ability students, therefore, some students did not understand both languages. For this reason, the strategies that he usually used were worksheets and power-points, where he could apply both languages:

"For example, when I prepare a power point, I prepare it both in English and in Maltese. In this way, if I forget a particular point in the lesson, all the students can see it explained in both languages. Even when I use the whiteboards I write in Maltese and English. When I prepare worksheets, I have to prepare them in English and Maltese. This is also done in workbooks. These are the main strategies I make use of".

The use of audio-visual resources, graded work and giving a choice of tasks were all effective strategies in mixed-ability classes. In this way, the teachers made their best to engage all students as much as possible. All the strategies that were mentioned by the early career teachers were in fact modelling the Universal Design for Learning, a theme which was deeply discussed in the literature review chapter. These teachers were maybe not aware of the term; however, they were actually implementing it in their classes. The principles of the Universal Design for Learning involved student-centred learning, a flexible curriculum, alternative methods of instruction, the use of assistive technology and adopting various ways of assessment (Rose and Meyer, 2002; Odem et al., 2005; McGuire, Scott and Shaw, 2006; Senechal, 2016; Williams and Smith, 2016). All these principles were discussed and implemented by the early career teachers.

In the next section, one will observe what strategies were implemented in the class by the more experienced teachers. These teachers also applied the same strategies and principles of the Universal Design for Learning.

However, there could be the possibility that they needed further knowledge in the field.

5.3.5.2   The long-serving teachers

The long-serving teachers used almost the same type of strategies mentioned by the former group, namely:

- Group work
- Audio-visual resources
- Handouts
- The interactive whiteboard
- Games
- Questioning
- Graded work

Similar to what was discussed earlier on, the use of audio-visual resources seemed to be a priority in these teachers' strategies, for the reason that students understood the lesson content much better and all abilities could be included in this way.

Lourdes (twenty years of teaching experience) in a northern middle school, included group work and audio-visual resources as the main approaches in her teaching in order to include all her students in class:

> *"I make ample use of group work. Students enjoy helping each other and they do learn from each other. Of course, I do not expect the same kind of work from all my students. What I am after is … that everyone produces some work according to his own ability. I also make use of audio-visual aids because they are a great help during the lessons".*

Josette (twenty-six years of teaching experience) in a northern senior school mainly made use of handouts to facilitate her teaching of the French language. Through the telephone interview, she stated that she tried to enlarge the handouts to attract everyone's attention. Furthermore, she designed the handouts with drawings and colours so as to motivate her students further. In

fact, she said that through these visuals, low ability students were encouraged to do their best during the lesson. She said that the delivery of the lesson had to be both in English and Maltese, in order to include the non-Maltese students. However, she was concerned about the fact that particular students did not know how to write properly in English or Maltese, therefore, these students found difficulty to understand the lesson and also to develop in the attainment level of the French language.

Margaret (twenty-eight years teaching experience) in a central middle school gave priority to simple methods of teaching as a means of inclusion. However, she confirmed that visual aids enhanced her teaching as well:

"*I try to use very simple methods of teaching which everyone can grasp. At times I dedicate some minutes to the high achievers and some minutes to the low achievers. I also make use of power-points, especially in Literature classes. I use many videos. Nowadays one can get videos which are a tremendous help while teaching. Of course, these make the lessons more interesting. However, one must be careful in the use of these videos … I mean for teaching purposes only. For instance, first I show them a video related to some poem, then the poem is read and evaluated by the teacher and by the students themselves. This helps the students a great deal*".

However, with regards to audio-visual resources, she said that the students remembered only the content of the video, rather than the poem itself. Therefore, she said that, at times, these resources created a contradiction:

"*However, when in an exam, the students had a question about that particular poem, to say why they loved the poem, some of them answered the question vis-à-vis the video and not the poem! To make the poem interesting the video was discussed … so, the students answered by giving examples from the video and not from the poem! They remembered much more the visual than the printed words*".

With regards to students with intellectual difficulties, she preferred to use the interactive whiteboard with a coloured background in order to facilitate learning:

"I also use other strategies … I try to use the interactive whiteboard with a coloured background. When underlining for emphasis, I use different colours to help the students better. One must remember that a number of our students are dyslexic, therefore they can get mixed up quite easily".

Paul (twenty years teaching experience) in a central senior school used quite a variety of strategies similar to what other teachers have already mentioned, such as games, the interactive whiteboard, handouts, graded work and group work:

"I make use of games to capture their interest. The use of the interactive whiteboards helps the students. I make sure that all the students participate in one way or another. Handouts are a must. The better classes are given short clear notes and exercises are graded so as to include every student in the class. Quite often I make use of group work, making sure that everyone participates by taking short notes or points".

This teacher taught Geography and he said that the textbook was an asset, however, for the last ten years, he had gathered a large number of visual resources to be displayed in his classroom. In fact, I must confirm that his classroom was very creative and interesting since one could find a large variety of resources which definitely attracted the students' attention:

"The book is a great resource, but my room is full of visual resources about the Geography topics, as you may see. I have been increasing the resources for ten years now. Every year I put in something new. The visual aids have increased year by year".

Handouts and questioning were also the strategies used by Mario (twenty-three years teaching experience) in a southern middle school. Additionally, he confirmed that graded work was essential so as to include all the students in the class:

"I try to include every student in my lessons by asking questions and preparing handouts according to the class ability. The handouts are graded in a way that all students can work the greatest part of them".

He stated that he guided the Learning Support Assistants that formed part of his class so that they would be able to support their students effectively. He also preferred to encourage low-ability students through hands-on activities and useful resources:

"I explain to the LSA which parts to tackle with their particular students so that every student is taking part in the lesson. Low-achievers need 'hands-on' work. So, I make use of plastic money, flashcards, and others. These make the lessons more interesting for all".

Finally, George (twenty-six years of teaching experience) in a southern senior school taught Accounts. It was quite a challenging subject to the students. He said that his classes entailed mixed abilities. Therefore, he tried to start the lesson with a simple introduction. Then he would move on the main topic:

"I try to get the attention of all the students right from the beginning. I keep my introduction as simple as possible. By so doing I encourage the 'weak' ones to participate fully in the lesson. And then I proceed gradually to the main topic to be tackled, meanwhile, I repeat the basic principles involved".

Usually, his classes involved a small number of students, hence, he could dedicate some time to individual attention. However, he argued that this type of attention was at times done at the expense of others:

"Those students who are average or above average are then given separate work to do, while I give a helping hand to the other students. In a way, I am lucky because I teach small classes, so I can go around helping individual students. It is not as easy as it sounds, however! In a way, all my students need individual help. When helping one, you are ignoring the others!"

Through these teachers' experiences one may observe that they did try their best to include all the students just like their early career colleagues. The only difference could be that the former group used the same tools in a variety of ways and furthermore, one of the early career teachers mentioned the fact that one could easily search online for new strategies, besides attending for

further training. Some strategies that were mentioned by these teachers may not be so innovative, however, these teachers showed that these approaches were effective and universally-designed for the inclusion of all their students.

In the questionnaire, though in the first two statements, the majority of the teachers indicated certain reservations towards including all the students in their classes, in the following statement 86% of the total sample agreed that: *In order to cater for every learner's needs, I use different strategies in class together with various resources.*

	North Area N=48	Central Area N=42	South Area N=53	Totals N=143
Agree	43 (89.6%)	37 (88.1%)	43 (81.1%)	123 (86%)
Disagree	0	1 (2.4%)	2 (3.8%)	3 (2.1%)
Perhaps	5 (10.4%)	4 (9.5%)	8 (15.1%)	17 (11.9%)
Total	48	42	53	143

Table 5.4: Using different strategies in class to cater for the learner's needs

As Table 5.4 indicates, the majority of the teachers reported that they did their best to include all the students in their class, as was also indicated in the responses of the interviews. However, as stated earlier, their main worry was those students with complex needs. This is the reason why further training is needed in this field and developing professional learning communities for inclusion where teachers work together and share expertise to improve their teaching skills, might also be an effective strategy (Watson, 2014; Bates et al., 2016; OECD, 2016). Further to the above statement, one respondent in the central area ticked the *Perhaps* option for the reason that *"it is becoming increasingly difficult".*

Some teachers added comments in the questionnaires where they suggested particular strategies and resources:

"In cases where the student is gaining little from the lesson, it would be better if an adapted timetable will be set, which will include more hands-on activities, such as games, crafts, more PE lessons and ICT, and if needed reduced school hours should be permitted to particular students".

(northern area)

Speaking from my experience as an Assistant Head in charge of inclusion, at times, there were instances, when together with the parents, it was decided that, the student would be following an adapted timetable. This would be regarded as an Individual Education Plan. Since, this decision entails a lot of responsibility, the timetable is carefully planned together with the parents, so that they would indicate the subjects from which their child would mostly benefit.

"For me, an important strategy to manage an inclusive class is to engage all the students, cater for all the levels and see that all the levels are moving forward. Just a small improvement gives me satisfaction. It is important that, especially parents, understand that not all the students can reach the same level but all can move forward. Good grouping of classes can help the class management especially when poor behaviour students are involved".

(central area)

"Please let us move to having LSAs assigned to the class, not to the student. The LSA would know what needs there are in class and cater accordingly. Having one student with an adult is an exclusion in itself".

(southern area)

Till now the LSAs are assigned to individual students, however, policy makers were thinking about assigning LSAs to the class rather than to particular students.   Teachers were indicating positive thoughts towards this

arrangement, since they could work together as a team for the benefit of the whole class. However, there seems to be logistic difficulties to implement this kind of strategy, especially in the secondary schools.

These comments indicated that one needs to listen to the teachers' concerns and difficulties more often and offer them more support in various ways, such as offering further training, provision of resources, learning platforms and staff collaboration. For these reasons, the Head of School and the rest of the Senior Management Team, need to set the inclusion policy high on their agenda and promote it to the staff by acting as role models of inclusion, not solely in terms of practice but also in terms of positive attitude towards inclusive practice for all students to belong (NCSL, 2009; Burch, Theoharis and Rauscher, 2010; OECD, 2016).

Staff collaboration, communities of practice and professional learning communities were discussed in detail in the literature review chapter. The responses to questions about sharing ideas and strategies discussed below indicate the teachers' willingness to collaborate with their colleagues and their views regarding both initial teacher training and further training in inclusion.

5.3.6   Sharing of ideas and strategies with their colleagues

5.3.6.1   The early career teachers

There appeared to be different views within the group of the early career teachers with regards to the sharing of ideas and strategies. Four of the six teachers fully agreed with collaborating with their colleagues where ideas and strategies were involved. Through this collaboration, they said that they felt supported, particularly when students' behavioural issues were involved and furthermore, they felt that they learnt from each other (Ainscow, 2007; Attard Tonna and Shanks, 2017).

Pierre, in a northern middle school, totally agreed with the idea of staff collaboration. He insisted that sharing of ideas is vital in order to increase one's resources and to enhance collaborative learning:

> *"Of course, I do. I myself can learn quite a lot from my older colleagues. They have more experience than I do. However, even I have new ideas which they have never dreamed of. For instance, I make use of power points. So, I can help the others with the making of such teaching aids. I even organised a group of English teaching teachers on Facebook where we can share our ideas, plans, strategies and where one can ask for help in particular situations".*

On the other hand, when Diane in a senior school, was probed about this factor, she took a while to respond because she was not sure about the issue: (*After a long silence*) *"I do try, mind you, but it all depends on how other teachers appraise my methods".*

In the earlier section, this teacher had mentioned that she used to research about innovative pedagogies and was implementing new methods of teaching in her class, after she finished the course of "Let me learn". However, she felt that her colleagues did not entirely approve of her methodologies. Therefore, in this case, she expressed her feeling that particular teachers, especially those with more experience, were resisting change in their methods of teaching:

> *"One has to weigh the contest where one is working. This does not mean that the staff here is not united, but one feels a strong resistance to change, especially by those who have been teaching for a long period of years".*

This factor was also identified in the study from the University of Cyprus (Symeonidou and Phtiaka, 2012) where a young teacher referred to long-serving teachers as resistors to inclusion, stating that they seemed to wear *"blinkers"* (p. 116) for the reason that they found it hard to accept and include both young teachers and the various needs of students. This issue confirms the importance of the Head's role in the inclusion programme, for the school leader is the key person to promote and sustain change in the school and s/he must promote favourable attitudes towards the formation of an inclusive school (McLeskey and Waldron, 2002; Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis,

2009; NCSL, 2010; Currie-Rubin, 2013; Bristol, 2014; Cobb, 2014; OECD, 2016).

The two early career teachers in the central area completely agreed with the sharing of ideas and strategies with their colleagues. Lorraine confirmed that through staff collaboration, one felt supported and encouraged and additionally, one's own knowledge was enriched: "*Yes of course. We all share our ideas and our difficulties too. We help each other along the way. We learn from one another*".

This teacher also stated that through their collaboration, they supported each other when dealing with students' behavioural issues. She said that sometimes, her colleagues suggested to her, particular approaches in the way certain students could be handled:

> *"Let us say I find a particular student behaving badly in my class, I inquire about him among my colleagues and ask them how they deal with him. Some may say, 'invite him to sit in front near you' or another might say, 'try to involve him more in the lesson'. Sometimes it only takes just a little more love and attention to make the student contented".*

Furthermore, she highlighted that her colleagues encouraged each other to respect the students and to treat them equally in the class, thus, ensuring that each and every one of them is included:

> *"Of course, each teacher has his own particular problems while teaching because a lot depends on the subject being taught. Some subjects are more interesting than others, so each teacher has specific challenges to face. Naturally, teachers teaching the same subject can help each other out with ideas, plans, and resources and so on. Each teacher, however, must make the effort to try to get to know his students individually even by name. Our students are not just a number".*

Maria in a senior school confirmed that through the sharing of ideas and strategies, the teachers worked as a team and similarly, she felt that they learnt from each other. However, she argued that it was very important that all the teachers contributed their ideas and resources:

"Of course. We all do. We all work as a team. We learn from each other. We help one another along the way. However, it is quite important that each and every teacher contributes to these resources. After all, I never have in mind to be the number one! What we are after is that all the students succeed".

The two teachers in the southern area did not agree between them about this matter. Elizabeth in a middle school declared that lack of time was the reason for not sharing or collaborating with her colleagues:

"Not really. We do not really find the time to talk about such issues unless it is during a professional development session or a work-related talk. Most teachers in my school have a full load and therefore, the time spent in the staffroom is usually spent correcting or relaxing between lessons".

This element of lack of time was in fact mentioned as one of the major barriers to teacher collaboration in Maltese schools, in the study of Attard Tonna and Shanks (2017).

On the other hand, Brian in a senior school confirmed in brief that staff collaboration provides support and knowledge: "*Of course I do. Helping each other is beneficial to all of us. We learn from each other*".

These were the views of the early career teachers. Most of them acknowledged the fact that sharing of ideas and strategies is vital and beneficial to each member of the teaching staff, whilst others might have particular reservations.

In the next section, the views of the more experienced teachers on sharing resources and strategies are discussed.

5.3.6.2 The long-serving teachers

All the long-serving teachers fully agreed with the factor of sharing and collaborating. They perceived this to be a great means of support both psychologically and practically through the effective teamwork that they established. They also referred to the Learning Support Assistants as

important colleagues through whom they learnt about various students' needs and also acquired effective resources and strategies.

Lourdes and Josette, in the northern area responded in brief and they simply agreed that they shared ideas and resources with their colleagues.

The two teachers in the central area elaborated a little further. Margaret in the middle school stated that as a staff, ideas, resources, and strategies were not only shared among the teachers but also between the teaching staff and the group of Learning Support Assistants:

> *"Yes, of course, we do share our ideas with each other. We share our resources amongst ourselves. In fact, I teach the Core Curriculum Programme so I come in contact with many LSAs. We all work as a team".*

The Learning Support Assistants are very resourceful in their work since they might have cases of special needs where individual lesson adaptations would be needed.

Paul in a senior school said that he taught his subject together with one other teacher only, within the school. Therefore, this made it easier to collaborate. However, he made it a point that they met with other teachers as well, in order to be able to discuss other difficulties that may arise in the class:

> *"Of course, I do. When we have the subject meeting, we discuss strategies and ideas. In our school we are only two teachers teaching Geography, so we meet regularly and help each other along the way. Besides that, we also meet with the other teachers and we discuss how best to tackle the common problems we encounter. After all, we are all in the same boat. Sharing and helping others is a must in a teaching job!"*

The two long-serving teachers in the South also responded briefly that they agreed with the sharing of ideas. Mario in the middle school stated that: "*We do help each other. We share our resources and we discuss the problems we all face in our classes. Sharing of ideas is quite helpful*".

George in the senior school agreed with the above and additionally he acquired innovative ideas as well: "*We all discuss and share our ideas. We try to work as a team. Sometimes I get new ideas from others too*".

All the above comments indicated that the long-serving teachers seemed to be more positive about this matter than the early career teachers, and there could be various reasons for this. One of the reasons mentioned in the questionnaires, is that at times not all teachers gave their input to share ideas and resources. Therefore, it could be that the new teachers spend a lot of time and energy building their resources, while maybe the long-serving teachers do not offer the same input, thus they relied mostly on the new teachers. Maybe this felt unfair on the early career teachers. There could be other reasons but this was one of the main issues which was discussed in the teachers' questionnaires.

In fact, the next two statements of the questionnaire regarded the issue of staff collaboration, that is, whether they agreed with the sharing of ideas and difficulties. The result obtained in the questionnaires coincided with that of the interviews:

	North Area N=48	Central Area N=42	South Area N=53	Totals N=143
Agree	42 (87.5%)	36 (85.7%)	49 (92.5%)	127 (88.8%)
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Perhaps	6 (12.5%)	6 (14.3%)	4 (7.5%)	16 (11.2%)
Total	48	42	53	143

Table 5.5: Sharing of ideas and difficulties with colleagues

One hundred and twenty-seven respondents, that is, 88.8% agreed to share their ideas and difficulties. This result was very positive. Those who marked *Disagree* or *Perhaps* were asked to tick a reason in the next question. However, out of the sixteen teachers who ticked *Perhaps*, only six of them

ticked a reason. Three of them said that they simply did not want to share their resources and feelings, while the other three respondents said that they felt afraid to share their ideas and difficulties. In this case, there were again no discrepancies between the three schools. Only one teacher (southern area) left a comment regarding this matter:

> *"I do not feel comfortable to share my resources with my colleagues because they do not share their resources with me. Everybody must pool in, in order for things to be fair".*

Therefore, it is highly important that every member of staff collaborates with other teachers in order to be fair for everyone, as was discussed earlier.

Training was discussed in the last two questions of the interviews and the questionnaire. In the next section, the effectiveness of pre-service training regarding inclusive practices will be discussed first.

5.3.7   Pre-Service Training

5.3.7.1   The early career teachers

Almost all the early career teachers stated that their pre-service training did not prepare them enough for inclusive classes. They said that they had a couple of credits however, the training entailed theory only. They all agreed that this type of training was not effective enough to coach them for inclusion and continued to say that when they faced the real situations in the classrooms, it was truly a challenging task. Only one teacher in this group approved that she was prepared well for inclusion, however, she still confirmed that when she started the real experience in class, she still had to learn a great deal about how to cope with differentiated abilities. This factor was reflected in the literature reviews where various authors were concerned, when they found that classroom teachers were feeling unprepared for inclusive teaching (Cefai, Fenech and Galea, 2007; Bartolo, 2008; Florian, 2011). These authors continued to highlight the importance of adequate and effective pre-service teacher training.

Pierre in a northern middle school, expressed irritation about this matter, saying that he was acquiring the concrete training and learning in his everyday experience in the class:

> *"Speaking truly … No, I was not trained. I do not want to belittle the University where I received my special education. Our training was mostly theoretical and not practical. We never saw a lecturer delivering a lesson in a mixed ability class! It is now that I am learning, really learning, how to face a mixed-ability class. Here in this school, I am facing challenges, situations, which I have never dreamed of. I never imagined in my whole life that I would encounter such difficulties in my teaching career".*

Similarly, Diane in a senior school also stated that pre-service training in inclusion was largely effective in theory only: "*Not so much. Mostly theory. We had only two credits in this regard. Teaching practice was fruitful but six weeks practice is really not enough to get accustomed to inclusion*".

The two teachers in the central area did not agree between them in view of the pre-service training. Lorraine in a middle school, besides confirming that she was mostly trained in the theoretical aspect, added that she primarily learnt from her colleagues at school while carrying out the teaching practice: *"In theory yes. However, the teaching practice was not enough. I tried to learn as much as possible from the teachers working in the school where I was practicing. One learns a lot from the other teachers".*

On the other hand, Maria in a senior school felt that she was well prepared during the pre-service training. However, she still confirmed that when she started her teaching career, the experience was rather challenging:

> *"I feel that I was quite well prepared because we were given valuable help. The lecturers showed us various methods of teaching which I am still using today. Of course, when one starts teaching in a class … it is another matter. Experience is also an important teacher!"*

The two teachers in the southern area also agreed that the pre-service training was not effective enough to help them develop further their inclusive practices.

Elizabeth in a middle school said: "*Not really. The focus was more on pedagogy and delivery of lessons".*   Brian in a senior school said that he had some practice but it was not enough:

> *"We did have some practice about the difficulties we would face. But certainly, it was not sufficient. One has to experience himself the situation … we only had a short period of teaching practice. We had some valuable help and I still make use of it, but it isn't enough".*

All the views of the early career teachers indicate the need of practical training in inclusion since these teachers reported that they felt that, through their everyday experiences, they were acquiring the best training. The studies of Harvey et al. (2010) and Kurniawati et al. (2014) confirmed that pre-service training in the field was found highly effective by the participating teachers.

The opinions of the long-serving teachers will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.7.2   The long-serving teachers

As with the early career teachers, all the long-serving teachers agreed that they were not adequately prepared for inclusion during their pre-service training. They confirmed that, they have obtained their real training, during their everyday experiences in the classes. One teacher expressed the view that, the Learning Support Assistants were more knowledgeable and trained than the teachers themselves with regards to aspects of inclusion. This indicated again the importance of staff collaboration and of professional learning communities where knowledge can be shared effectively between colleagues.

Lourdes in a middle school confirmed the above, adding that, she tried to attend in-service courses on differentiated teaching however she said that the outcome was disappointing:

> *"No, I feel that I was not adequately trained or prepared to practise 'inclusion'. Recently I attended a course on differentiated teaching.*

However, it wasn't so relevant and it didn't really answer our questions/problems vis-à-vis 'inclusion'".

Furthermore, she felt that the Learning Support Assistants were much more trained than the teachers themselves, this factor was mentioned earlier, and this teacher admitted that she felt frustrated when she did not how to deal with particular situations in class:

"Sometimes I feel that the LSAs actually have more training and experience than us teachers in this regard. It is so frustrating … not knowing how to deal with certain students … with certain situations".

Josette in a northern senior school maintained that during her pre-service training, she did have learning modules about learning difficulties, however, she said that the knowledge was not enough because the class is a different reality. Similarly, the two teachers in the central area felt that they were not prepared enough for an inclusive class. Margaret in a middle school stated: "*In our pedagogy courses we had very little training in this area".*

Paul, in a senior school, elaborated more about the matter and disclosed a certain frustration regarding the trainers in the Educational field:

"Our training consisted mainly of theory and I am not sure whether the lecturers we had really knew what inclusion really meant. I mean they hadn't practised it themselves. During their lectures or while reading their articles one gets the feeling that they weren't in touch with the reality of mixed ability classes. It was simply clear that they hadn't been in a class for twenty years at least. University lecturers and top Education officials are cut off from reality".

Similarly, the two teachers in the southern area felt that they were not adequately trained in this field. Mario in the middle school confirmed that theoretically, training was fruitful, however, he felt that in practice, he had to do his own research and training. Furthermore, he felt that the Learning Support Assistants were a good resource as well:

"Absolutely not. We had lots of theory but no practice. It is now that I am learning about the different cases of special needs like Autism, ADHD,

Asperger's and other conditions, and I get the information from the LSAs and during some staff development sessions which we sometimes have. And that is why I find it difficult to understand the feelings of certain students, I fail to comprehend fully what these pupils are facing".

George in the senior school felt that too many changes were going on and he admitted to feelings of disappointment and helplessness:

"To tell you the truth I feel a little disorientated. There are too many changes going on during such a short span of time. So, at times, I feel very disappointed. I do enjoy teaching but the changes are so rapid that one loses many of the material one had gathered. Nowadays I find it so difficult to prepare well my lessons. I am at a loss sometimes. There is a gap between the teachers' training and the actual teaching in class".

It is clear that, all the long-serving teachers felt that their pre-service training was effective in theory but not in practice. The majority stated that their actual learning took place during their everyday job in the class and also through the collaboration with their colleagues, including the teachers and the Learning Support Assistants.

All the opinions indicated in the interviews were reflected in the responses of the questionnaires. As can be seen in the Table 5.6, the majority of the teachers disagreed with the statement: *When I was a student teacher I had good training in the field of inclusion.* Furthermore, there were others who were not certain about this factor. It is noteworthy that few teachers confirmed that they had good training in the field of inclusion.

	North Area N=48	Central Area N=42	South Area N=53	Total N=143
Agree	5 (10.4%)	6 (14.3%)	5 (9.4%)	16 (11.3%)
Disagree	30 (62.5%)	29 (69%)	37 (69.8%)	96 (67.6%)
Perhaps	13 (27%)	7 (16.7%)	10 (18.9%)	30 (21.1%)
Total	48	42	52	142

Table 5.6: Effective pre-service training

With regards to whether they had effective pre-service training for inclusive teaching, three teachers in a southern school left a comment near their answer. One said that, this question was not applicable. His/her reason for this remark was not clear. Another respondent who agreed with the statement said that *"Most of them were optional credits. In my opinion, these should be compulsory".* While another teacher marked the *Perhaps* option and said that the training was *"not enough".* Three of the comments left at the end of the questionnaires were relevant to the above statement:

"There should be more university credits on how to cater for students with different needs".   *(northern area)*

"I think that teachers must be trained in inclusion because otherwise when they face the real situation, they would not know how to handle matters".   *(northern area)*

"I got training in inclusion through experience and took the initiative to look online for information on how to include different ability students during the lesson. However, including different abilities in the same class is a disadvantage for gifted students".   *(southern area)*

Gaining training through one's own experience was mentioned several times in the interview discussions. These results indicate that pre-service training needs to be more effective and the credits or modules that are offered within the inclusion field need to be compulsory for all student teachers. Bates et al. (2016) recommended "technological platforms" (p. 100) where documents, presentations, audio-visuals and other resources could be shared among the participants. This was recommended both for pre-service and long-serving teachers. Jung (2007) and Arthur-Kelly et al. (2013) confirmed that effective teacher training is a critical factor in shaping the teacher's beliefs and attitudes.

The factor of further training was discussed in the last question of the interviews and the questionnaires. The results will be presented and discussed in the next section.

5.3.8   Further training in inclusion

5.3.8.1   The early career teachers

All the early career teachers agreed that further training in inclusion would be an asset in their everyday experiences. They stated that one never knows enough and since changes in the education system are continuous, they agreed that one must keep up-to-date.

The two early career teachers in the northern area both agreed that they needed further training in inclusion. Pierre in the middle school stated: "*Of course, I will accept. One needs to learn throughout life, as we say, 'life-long learning'. One never knows enough".*

Meanwhile, Diane in the senior school expressed a similar sentiment and insisted that further training is a must since changes in the educational field are on-going:

> "*Everybody needs further training in this particular field of work. This is a must in order to improve oneself. One must explore new methods of*

teaching and learning. People change. Society changes. One has to adapt to change continuously".

Similarly, the two teachers in the central area agreed that they needed further training in the field. Lorraine in the middle school was somewhat hesitant when she started responding, because she had a considerable workload, so she thought that, going to training would be time consuming. However, she confirmed that further training would be highly beneficial:

"To be honest it is not so easy to accept to go for further training. We have loads of work which are too heavy to carry. However, I am sure that I would benefit greatly from such training courses. But it needs to be a practical course not simple theory only. Otherwise, it would not be fruitful. Theories can be easily read. Practical examples are what we need".

Maria in the senior school confirmed that further training is essential in order to be prepared for any class situation:

"Yes, I would go for further training. One never knows enough. In class, one always faces new situations. I realise this also during the professional development sessions we have regularly. It is better to be prepared beforehand how to face and tackle certain situations that arise vis-à-vis inclusion".

The two early career teachers in the south both agreed as well, that they need further training. Elizabeth in the middle school stated briefly: "*Yes, as I personally feel I was not made aware or fully equipped with the knowledge needed to deal with such a reality".* Brian in the senior school confirmed in brief as well that he would attend further training: *"Of course, I certainly would".*

All the early career teachers agreed that further training in inclusion is highly beneficial in order to be more knowledgeable in the class. The views of all the long-serving teachers on this issue will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.8.2   The long-serving teachers

Almost all the long-serving teachers primarily agreed with attending further training, however, they all highlighted that training had to be valuable and effective and preferably it had to take place in the class itself. Some of them said that they had attended some courses in the past, however, they were mainly theory based.

The two teachers in the north area expressed different views with regards to further training in inclusion. Lourdes in the middle school said that she needed more training:

> *"I feel that I really need more training to deal with inclusion. Yes, we definitely need more courses and training on how to put inclusion into practice. And this for the benefit of the students and the teachers".*

On the other hand, Josette in the senior school said that, she had her doubts about further training. She affirmed that, she did not agree with inclusion, therefore, she felt that she did not need further training in the field. She concluded that inclusion should be carried out within particular subjects only and not through all the subjects.

The two teachers in the central area had mixed feelings as well with regards to further training. Margaret in the middle school said that she would agree to attend further training even though she was retiring the following year:

> *"Although I am now approaching retirement, I would surely attend. One would acquire the necessary skills to face a mixed ability class. Then one can choose those methods most suitable for that particular class. All they used to tell us was to prepare graded handouts. That's all. But that is not training!"*

Paul in the senior school argued that he had been attending for in-service training, however, he felt that training was always based on the theoretical aspect rather than on the practical side:

> *"I did attend several in-service courses, but I doubt whether they were helpful or not! Only theory, no hands-on activities. As regards inclusion,*

we had a professional development session, but again it consisted only of theory with no practice at all. It is so easy for a trainer to tell one to do this or to do that without showing himself how it could be done with the pupils. For instance, I would like a lecturer to come to my class and deliver a lesson while I can sit and see him at work!"

The last two teachers, in the southern area, also maintained that further training is continuously needed, however, it had to be fruitful and effective. Mario in the middle school stated:

"Yes, I do (need training), however, we need more practical work and training. It is not enough to know about a particular condition or disability, but how to tackle these situations effectively. Each subject must be faced separately, with its particular problems and solutions".

The opinions of George in the senior school corresponded to the above. He insisted that further training is beneficial, however, it had to be relevant to one's subject. Additionally, similar to the views of the previous teachers, he emphasised the importance of hands-on training rather than theoretical training:

"I always attend the in-service courses. One never knows enough. However, the training offered must be relevant to our classroom situations. Many in-service courses are simply ineffective and quite a loss of time. The training given must be relevant to our particular subject and not in a general way to all teachers without attention to the subjects taught. Training must be practical and not theoretical. The training must show us how to help the students present in the class. We are dealing with human beings and our duty is to help these children in the best possible manner".

In summary, one may note that the long-serving teachers had particular reservations about further training. Primarily, they agreed that further training is positive, however, they persisted that in order for training to be valuable, practical work and demonstrations had to be included in the courses (Birman

et al., 2000; Garet et al. 2001; Desimone, 2009; Brunero et al., 2010; Kurniawati et al., 2014).

Mixed thoughts were again reflected in the questionnaire results to the following statement: *I feel the need of further training in inclusion*.

	North Area N=48	Central Area N=42	South Area N-53	Total N=143
Agree	38 (79.2%)	22 (52.4%)	33 (62.3%)	93
Disagree	2 (4.2%)	6 (14.3%)	4 (7.5%)	12
Perhaps	8 (16.7%)	14 (33.3%)	15 (28.3%)	37
Total	48	42	52	142

Table 5.7: The need for further training in inclusion

Table 5.7 shows that the majority of the teachers agreed with the need for further training in inclusion. However, in the central and southern area, the number of teachers who were undecided was about one third; 33.3% of teachers in the central area, were hesitant about the matter, compared to 28.8% of the teachers in the southern area. However, in the southern school, one participant though s/he ticked *Perhaps*, added that *"any training is always welcome"*. Moreover, in this same school, one teacher did not respond at all to the statement but decided to cross out the question completely. I took this gesture as a disagreement with the statement.

As was discussed in the discussion of interview responses, teachers indicated that they would prefer hands-on training rather than lecturing, because they felt the need for reliable and valid workable solutions to their class difficulties. Furthermore, they reported that they would prefer to learn through real classroom situations. These factors were echoed in the teachers' comments at the end of the questionnaires:

"More hands-on rather than an explanation of theories. Showing us a variety of resources which we can use to help certain students to learn better". *(northern area)*

"We urgently need training and resources to cater for the different needs of the students as I strongly feel that we are not catering for them".
(northern area)
"A lot of training is needed. A Professional Development session of just 2 hours is definitely not enough". *(central area)*

"Before including all abilities in class, teachers need good training. I think that without proper training I am putting both "average" students and "other" students at a disadvantage as I am experimenting and not teaching". *(southern area)*

"I do believe that there should be more training as regards to inclusion and thus be given the possibility to see and treat each student as an individual. There could be planned sessions between teachers and LSAs to give feedback or share information re: statemented students".
(northern area)

In the final comment, one teacher emphasised the need for more collaboration between the teachers and the Learning Support Assistants; an issue that is continuously emphasised by the Senior Management Teams in many schools, because the LSAs are knowledgeable about certain needs and conditions and the teachers could highly benefit from their knowledge. Furthermore, if they work together as a team, they would both benefit from more resources.

Various authors in the literature reviews noted that in-service courses contributed to the development of positive attitudes on the teachers' behalf towards inclusion (Ainscow, 2007; Avramadis and Kalyva, 2007; Sari, 2007; Batsiou et al., 2008; Imrak, 2009; Secer, 2010; Cagran and Schmidt, 2011; MacFarlane and Woolfson, 2013). Meanwhile, other authors constantly

highlighted the importance of staff collaboration as a means of inset training, especially through the practice of co-teaching (Nevin, Thousand and Villa, 2008; OECD, 2016; Wisconsin Centre for Education Research, 2016; Calleja and Bezzina, 2017). Therefore, these factors lead to the significance of Professional Learning Communities, also referred to as 'learning organisations' (OECD, 2016) where teachers work together and share expertise and ultimately, they will not feel isolated, collaborative problem solving will be encouraged and new skills and strategies will be developed (Stroll et al., 2006; Watson, 2014; Bates et al., 2016; OECD, 2016; Wisconsin Centre for Education Research, 2016).

5.4   Concluding statements

All the teachers, both those early in their careers and long-serving teachers stated that they broadly agreed with the principle of inclusion and that they all made efforts to implement various strategies to establish an inclusive class. However, sometimes, their comments indicated feelings of uncertainty, frustration and anxiety because the real classroom situation presented challenges, even though they said they felt they had prepared well for the lessons they taught (Dore et al., 2002; MacFarlene and Woolfson, 2012). This was also reflected in the responses to the questionnaires where 41.8% were undecided on whether students with diverse needs should be included in the class or not. It seems that the agreement with the principle becomes considerably diluted in practice with just under half the sample dissenting from their agreement in principle.

When teachers met students with particular conditions, especially those who presented challenging behaviour in their class and led to disruption and interruption of learning of others in the class, caused them to be hesitant about the issue of inclusion (Cefai, Fenech and Galea, 2007; Florian, 2011), with some saying that they disagreed with full inclusion, especially where complex difficulties and behaviour were concerned. Respondents to the questionnaire, indicated that they found it difficult to include and cater mainly for students with difficulties due to autism and those with physical difficulties.

They said that this was because the high-achieving students, especially, those who were identified as gifted were being continuously disrupted by these challenging students. It seems here that, though not stated, some teachers felt that the entitlement to education in an inclusive classroom was detrimental to others, and so there is an implication that some students are more highly valued than others.

The majority of these teachers both in the interviews and in the questionnaire responses, agreed that effective and valid further training was needed in the field. Furthermore, mostly agreed that through the sharing of ideas, resources and strategies, they would act as a support to each other in order to deal with particular challenges and barriers. But this is not exceptional practice, and should be something expected of most teachers regardless of whether they are focusing on teaching inclusive classes or not.

Finally, the inclusion of non-Maltese students was another matter that was referred to, by the majority of the teachers several times. At times, these students had reasonable difficulty in understanding English or Maltese. Therefore, lesson preparations had to be more intensive in order for the teachers to deliver the lesson and provide resources in both languages. Working in multilingual classrooms is new to Maltese teachers, and they are having to change practices and learn quickly as the number of languages spoken in schools increases rapidly with migration. The focus on multicultural and multilingual education is not a major issue of this thesis but it is reported here because the teachers have identified new arrivals to Malta as an aspect of inclusion.

There did not seem to be huge differences in the interviews between the early career teachers and the long-serving ones. Maybe the former group seemed to experiment more in their teaching strategies, however, the primary views about the aspects of inclusion were quite similar between the two groups, and generally positive.

Furthermore, as seen in the previous sections, most of the responses of the questionnaire confirmed those of the interviews, and particular comments in the questionnaire responses, further confirmed their various feelings

regarding inclusion in our schools and provided a clearer picture of their opinions.

An overview of the whole study will be given in the final chapter together with recommendations emanating from the findings and their analysis.

CHAPTER 6

THE CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 6: THE CONCLUSION

6.1 The aims of the research

This study aimed to investigate the main research question: *"What makes an inclusive school?"* In the introductory chapter of this thesis, the term 'inclusion' was broadly defined as "the education of all children and young people" (Booth and Ainscow, 2002, p.1). Therefore, 'inclusion' does not refer to the factor of catering for learners with special needs only, but the term also encompasses the provision of education for different students, including those with social and behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties, gifted learners and those coming from a variety of cultural and linguistic contexts.

As a teacher and more recently, as an Assistant Head with specific responsibility for inclusion in a secondary school, I recognised that the inclusion of all students in Maltese secondary state schools was becoming a continuous challenge for all professional stakeholders in the school, and surely for parents and the students themselves, due to the increasing diversity of the learners' educational needs. I was also aware that there existed various attitudes and beliefs with regards to the notion of inclusion among the teaching staff and the Senior Management Teams.   Meanwhile, I also observed teachers who did their best to accept change and try out new teaching approaches as a means to include all their students in their class. Therefore, through this study, I also aimed to understand more of the attitudes and practices towards inclusion, both through teaching methodologies and also through school leadership strategies. These investigations were designed to answer the first sub-research question: *"What are the current inclusion policies and strategies practised in the Maltese schools?"*

Chapter Two discussed in detail, various Maltese inclusion policies that were developed by time until the present years and the chapter also discussed the various programmes that are being implemented in schools as part of the inclusion policy. These policies were compared with those of international organisations, in order to observe any differences and similarities between them. Through the discussion of both the Maltese and the international

organisational policies, it seemed that every country, including Malta, was giving policy priority to the learners' right for education and for the provision of an effective and inclusive system of education (UNCRC, 1989; Salamanca Statement, 1994; Anati, 2013; OECD 2014; Plan International, 2015; UNESCO, 2015).

The third research sub-question was intended to be answered through the findings of the interviews and questionnaires: *"What national strategies are needed to develop more inclusive schools?"* The findings presented a view of the beliefs, attitudes, challenges and recommendations of the Heads of School, the teachers and Inclusion Coordinators. These findings exhibited the efforts and good practices that these stakeholders applied in their schools in order to implement the inclusion policy and also to truly provide education for all. Drawing on the participants' reported perspectives, recommendations were developed in this chapter and these indicated the national strategies needed for the development of more inclusive schools.

6.2 Summary of the literature review

The literature review chapter discussed three main themes: inclusive leadership, the Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion.

The significance of the school leader's vision for **inclusive leadership** within the inclusion policy was deeply discussed in the first section of the literature review chapter. In summary, the research highlights the importance of the school leader, building relationships between all stakeholders, acting as an advocate on behalf of students, parents and educators, encouraging collaboration, facilitating professional development and ultimately, being the key person to lead change (Salisbury and McGregor, 2005; Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis, 2009; Currie-Rubin, 2013; Bristol, 2014; Cobb, 2014). Furthermore, if the school leader has an inclusive vision, this will cause a ripple effect upon the rest of the staff. Therefore, it is vital for the Head of School to motivate and encourage the teaching staff and the Learning Support

Assistants, s/he must lead by example, s/he must provide professional development so as to keep abreast with change and also encourage communities of practice.

The **Universal Design for Learning** is regarded as one of the main components of an inclusive school for the reason that it stimulates the participation of all students in the class, including those with various needs; it increases students' learning and therefore, it reduces frustration on behalf of both the students and the teachers (Lieberman, Lytle and Clarcq, 2008). Furthermore, it eliminates barriers to learning, thus, also leading to universally designed curricula and assessments (Rose and Meyer, 2002; Senechal, 2016). In the literature review, I discussed in further detail, the various strategies that teachers may implement to teach universally through the use of different resources. Training on UDL and staff collaboration were also highlighted in this section as effective assets within an inclusive school.

Professional learning communities for inclusion assist all educators to work together, share expertise and work together to improve their teaching skills (Watson, 2014; Bates et al., 2016). In this way, learners will highly benefit and improve their academic performance. The effectiveness of pre-service training was also discussed, for the reason that it is debatable whether it is truly preparing teachers for the classroom reality (Cefai, Fenech and Galea, 2007; Florian, 2011). However, the teacher's favourable attitude towards inclusion was perceived to be fundamental to the effectiveness of inclusive education (Aviamidis and Norwich, 2002; Cefai et al., 2007; Mintz, 2007). In-service training and professional development was the last factor that was discussed in the literature review chapter. In-service training helps teachers to alter their beliefs, acquire the skills to cater for the different needs of the students and ultimately gain specialised knowledge in the field (Jordan, Schwartz and McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Staff collaboration was also regarded as a valuable factor since it enhances the notion of teachers learning together, thus confirming the effectiveness of professional learning communities (Nevin, Thousand and Villa, 2008; Calleja and Bezzina, 2017).

These were all the main aspects of the literature review chapter. In the next section a summary of the findings will be presented.

6.3 Summary of findings

A mixed-methods approach was applied in this study as a means of triangulation and also to enhance reliability and validity. Interviews and questionnaires were the tools administered in the study. Three groups of participants were interviewed: six Heads of School, twelve teachers and six Inclusion Coordinators. Furthermore, two hundred and twenty-two questionnaires were distributed to teachers in three different schools, with a response rate of one hundred and forty-three questionnaires. The study was carried out across six secondary schools, that is, two in the North of Malta, two in Central Malta and another two in the South of Malta.

6.3.1   The Heads of School

Six Heads of School were interviewed about their views, difficulties, strategies and recommendations with regards to the inclusion programme within their schools. There were no specific differences in the responses of the Heads of the two types of school throughout all the questions asked.

All six participating Heads of School agreed with inclusion in principle. However, they all had serious doubts and confused feelings with regards to the inclusion of students with complex difficulties. They seemed to feel helpless to be able to provide them the proper educational entitlement in order to help them reach their full potential. The main worry of these Heads of School was that according to them, the students were not gaining much from their school. Thus, they felt burdened by this responsibility, some did more than others to address this. Heads of School were also concerned about the fact that the disruptive behaviour of some students, who they felt it was more difficult to include, were at times hindering the progress of high ability students in the class. This matter led to the issue of gifted students; all the Heads expressed their disappointment that gifted students were not being catered for

enough, and agreed that they deserved to be provided with a more challenging curriculum where they could really reach their full potential.

Another aspect that they agreed upon was that of the inclusion of non-Maltese learners. They all agreed that newly arrived students were an asset to the school and Heads of School did their best to make them feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the majority of non-Maltese students were doing well academically thus the school leaders felt successful with regards to their inclusion.

Finally, all the Heads of School insisted on the need for the increase of human resources in order to implement the inclusion policy in a more effective way. They felt that more staff were needed to cater for the variety of students' needs, especially those who may need individual attention. These needs spanned from students with profound and multiple learning difficulties to those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and students with specific learning difficulties. Various professionals are needed to cater effectively to these learners.

Participating Heads of School discussed their difficulties and challenges within the inclusion programme in their schools. The issues of human resources, students with complex difficulties and gifted students were already mentioned earlier, as part of their viewpoints. The other factors mentioned were discussed by some of the participants during the interviews. One Head of School in the northern area added that one of his greatest challenges was the large number of non-Maltese students within his school. Since, people from many different countries have begun to settle in Malta, usually in the North, the schools in the northern area are experiencing this major change in their school population. Therefore, more human resources are surely needed to cater for students who bring new cultures and languages to the schools, and these are needed on a more individual level, especially where they need to learn English and/or Maltese.

The challenges of students with autism, students with mental health issues and those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties presented the greatest challenges to Heads of School, who, yet again mentioned the matter

of not catering enough for gifted students because staffing was needed to meet the needs of students with complex and challenging difficulties in the school. **Whilst the participating Heads of School agreed with inclusion in principle, all expressed concerns about operationalising inclusion for some categories of student.**

Some valuable work is being done in Maltese schools with regards to the strategies applied by the Heads to develop a more inclusive school. The majority of these participants mentioned that school committees were formed to cater effectively for the inclusion of all students. Teachers formed part of these committees and they worked upon various strategies for every student to be included, such as including all students within various school performances and organising a good amount of extra lessons in English and Maltese for international students. Furthermore, adaptive programmes were planned to cater for the various needs of particular students, such as those with severe difficulties, including those with particular disabilities and also those with learning difficulties. Some of these programmes mentioned, involved independent living skills, an adaptive curriculum entailing the most important subjects for low ability students and the Prince's Trust Programme, where various life skills are taught through various activities. Other activities mentioned were talks regarding gender and religious diversities.

Finally, the following developments were suggested by the Heads of School, as necessary for the further development of inclusive schools:

- The concept of inclusion must be re-evaluated in Maltese schools.
- The curriculum should be more tailored to the learners' needs.
- There is the need for more resources especially for more staffing.
- More hands-on programmes must be included within the curriculum.
- Resources are needed in order to implement these types of programmes.
- The accommodation of gifted students should be enhanced.

All the above points were discussed in detail by the Heads of School in the interviews throughout the questions asked. Whilst some valuable work is

being done to develop more inclusive practices, Heads of School suggested the above as a range of practical measures towards better inclusion.

In the next section, a summary of the findings of the interviews with the Inclusion Coordinators will be presented.

6.3.2 The Inclusion Coordinators

The team of Inclusion Coordinators in the Maltese secondary schools identified good inclusive practices alongside several challenges to be overcome and strategies to enhance inclusive education.

The good practices they observed within their schools included:

- an effective guidance team
- an effective psycho-social team
- teachers working as a team through the sharing of resources
- teachers using effective strategies to include each and every student
- effective work carried out by the Learning Support Assistants
- offering alternative programmes for students with complex needs
- Senior Management Teams working willingly to support and include all the students

Though the Inclusion Coordinators were very positive on these factors, they still faced challenges in their work, namely:

- isolation, because of lack of communication between them and the school administration
- lack of training, on behalf of teachers and Learning Support Assistants
- a small number of Learning Support Assistants were unreliable in their job and lacked responsibility
- a high workload, because of lack of human resources
- insufficient time to monitor the inclusive programme in a school

- lack of knowledge, on behalf of the Senior Management Team about particular students' conditions

Since, the Inclusion Coordinators met with these challenges, they presented the following recommendations during their discussion in the interviews:

- All professional stakeholders in the school and related services should do their best to cater for every learner's needs.
- All the schools should be physically accessible to all students including those who use wheelchairs.
- The teacher's attitude and approach should be positive, inclusive and caring towards every student.
- The teaching methods must be inclusive, bearing in mind the principle of Universal Design for Learning.
- Training in inclusion should be provided to all stakeholders, including the Senior Management Teams.
- There should be better coordination and collaboration between the teacher and the Learning Support Assistant.
- School leaders must guide and support their staff, both teachers and Learning Support Assistants, in order to promote inclusion and effectively convey the message that every learner has the right to be taught and educated.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 5, the work carried out by the Inclusion Coordinators is truly valuable because they support the school administration and assist in the implementation of the inclusion programme in each school in their area. **If their suggestions were put into action, inclusion would be likely to improve in Maltese state schools.**

In the next section, a summary of the findings of the teachers' interviews and questionnaires will be presented.

6.3.3   The teachers

Twelve teachers were interviewed and two hundred and twenty-two questionnaires were distributed to other teachers, out of which, one hundred and forty-three were returned. Their responses were discussed in Chapter 5.

Whilst the majority of the participating teachers agreed with the principle of inclusion and declared that the teacher should meet all the students' needs, most went to say that they felt confused and frustrated when dealing with mixed ability classes and with students with complex needs. Some long-serving teachers in the interviews, had some reservations about the notion of inclusion because it was often difficult to achieve. One teacher made it clear, that she did not agree with the principle of inclusion because she was having great difficulty teaching effectively in a mixed ability class.

Furthermore, many teachers also showed their concern for the gifted students, a factor mentioned earlier by the Heads of School. Teachers felt that gifted students were being disadvantaged in the class and thus, they were not reaching their full potential. Of course, we must consider the apparent detriment to pupils identified as 'gifted' alongside the evident loss of appropriate education for 'average' and 'lower ability' students. No one raised the questions about when there was disruption in the class, that all students suffered, including the student or students who instigated (whether willingly or by virtue of their specific difficulties) the disruption.

There seems to be a view amongst some of the participating teachers that only the 'gifted' students miss out, whereas, it could be the case that, where a teacher is not able to create an inclusive classroom, using inclusive teaching strategies, all students, whatever their needs, miss out. Less than half the sample, 40.4% of the questionnaire respondents, agreed with the inclusion of students with diverse needs in the class;   the remaining majority of the respondents reported that they were doubtful or totally disagreed with inclusive classes.

The difficulties and challenges that teachers said they encountered in their inclusive classes included:

- disruptive students
- students with complex needs
- students with severe autism
- failure in students' progress
- mixed ability students in class
- lack of teacher training
- a vast syllabus
- lack of student motivation
- excessive preparation time to teach inclusive lessons
- the inclusion of newly arrived non-Maltese students
- large class population

A detailed discussion of these challenges was included in Chapter 5. The responses of the questionnaire also indicated that the main challenge for the teacher was to include students with severe autism and those with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

Though the teachers reported having mixed feelings about inclusion and they voiced their opinions about the challenges they faced, they reported that they applied various strategies in class in their efforts to include all students. Such strategies include:

- pair work
- group work
- audio-visual aids
- questioning techniques
- hands-on activities
- power-points
- word games
- graded work
- choice of tasks

Reflecting on this list, these strategies might be in the repertoire of all teachers, and not specifically unique to the inclusive classroom. Apart from one teacher who mentioned the usefulness of a particular pedagogic programme in which she was recently trained, none of the participants discussed any innovative strategies that might be said to be distinctly innovative for the inclusive classroom. Nevertheless, **schools might do more to encourage the sharing of resources and ideas between the early career teachers and the long-serving teachers. Further sharing could also be facilitated across schools, so that successful ways of working can be more widespread.** Of the questionnaire respondents, 86% agreed that **different strategies together with various resources should be utilised in class to cater for every learner's needs.**

The majority of the teachers agreed with the notion of collaboration and sharing of teaching resources. Only two early career teachers were a little doubtful about the matter because they had found that not every teacher in their school collaborated or shared resources with his/her colleagues. Those who agreed confirmed that they felt collegiality and support from their colleagues. The responses of the questionnaires were similar to those of the interviews, where 88.8% of teachers agreed to collaborate and share their resources.

Issues of pre-service and inset training were discussed with the participants in the interviews and the questionnaires. All the teachers who were interviewed declared that they were not adequately prepared for inclusion during their pre-service training. They confirmed that when they faced the class in the beginning of their teaching career, they realised that classroom reality entailed much more than the theory they studied during their pre-service training. They continued that theory was still very useful, however, they felt that the practical component was not evident within the training. In the questionnaires, only sixteen teachers (11.2%) out of one hundred and forty-three respondents agreed that they had good training in the field of inclusion. Therefore, the majority of the teachers responding to the questionnaires were not convinced that pre-service training was effective.

This points to the need for a general review of initial teacher education with regards to preparedness for and attitudes to inclusive education.

With regards to continuing professional development in inclusion, all the teachers agreed that this was beneficial, however, the long-serving teachers stressed that any such CPD must be truly valuable and effective and it should take the form of practical sessions. Their answers were based on their experience of attending several courses, which they found them to be ineffective to help them develop professionally. In the questionnaire, ninety-three teachers (65%) agreed with the need for further training, twelve teachers (8.4%) disagreed and thirty-seven (25.9%) were not sure whether they needed further training. This showed that **a considerable number of teachers did not want further training in inclusion, not because they felt well equipped, but rather because they felt that CPD was not effective in supporting them in their work.**

This was the summary of the findings of the teachers' interviews and questionnaires in this study, which were interpreted and discussed in Chapter 5.

6.4 Limitations of the study

Though the results of the study revealed important factors of success and areas needing change in the field of inclusion within the Maltese context, there were particular limitations. Primarily, time was a considerable constraint, especially when the interviews were done. All were completed during the school day because I wanted to maximise participation and I did not wish to burden the participants to stay after school hours. Almost all the participants had a tight schedule and high workload, so it was necessary to produce relatively short interviews and be clear and pertinent in my foci. Some participants made it clear at the beginning of the interview that they could allocate only fifteen or twenty minutes of time. Furthermore, a number of teachers and Inclusion Coordinators chose to do an email interview, simply because of time constraints, this may have restricted the data to a certain

extent, though I think this is less the case with the INCOs who gave me full and rich responses.

Since I was aware that the Heads of School often had a tight schedule, I could not elaborate the interview questions as much as I wished to and so planned to restrict the interviews to four questions only. Their responses were valuable to my study, however, it would have been interesting to investigate their perceptions with regards to their teaching staff, that is, whether or not they perceive their teachers to be inclusive, and furthermore, what strategies would they implement, as Heads of School, to induce the inclusion concept within their teaching staff. I respect the time constraints of these senior education professionals and I am grateful for their participation, but I do wonder if the limited time they were able to give me to discuss the issues reflected their interest in the matters I was investigating.

Another limitation in my study was the fact that investigations were carried out in state secondary schools only. In Malta there are church schools and independent schools. Therefore, it would have been interesting to carry out the study in these schools as well, to learn about any differences between the State inclusion programmes and other school providers. It would be interesting to see how attitudes, curriculum, CPD, resources and practices varied. This is a matter for future research.

A final limitation that I wish to mention is that of not including the parents and the students' perspectives in this study. I approached the study from my concerns as an Assistant Head and wanted to know more about the education professionals responsible for inclusion. However, I am acutely aware of the crucial role of parents in the education of their children, especially those who battle to have their children fully included and achieving to their potential in schools. And I know too, that students' perspectives should shine a bright light on understanding how schools operate and how teachers teach them. This is the focus for future research so that their viewpoints are given priority as well as those of educationists.

6.5 Recommendations for further studies

Since the limitations of the study were identified, these could be recommended as further studies in the future. There may be two principal studies that could be done. Primarily, I would recommend that of comparing the inclusion programmes within the three types of schools, that is, the state schools, the church schools and the independent schools. It would be interesting to investigate any differences in the viewpoints of the Heads of School and the teachers.

Furthermore, another study would be useful if it included the participation of the parents and the students. Their viewpoints are equally important to those of the Heads of School and the teachers, arguably more so. Therefore, it would be valuable to investigate what are their views with regards to the inclusion programme in their school, whether they perceive the staff as being inclusive, how they respond to school leadership decisions and class experiences, and their recommendations for the development of more inclusive schools.

In the final section, the implications for improvement will be elicited from the summary of the findings.

6.6 Implications for improvement

In the second chapter of this thesis, an overview of the current Maltese policies was presented together with the inclusion programmes that are being applied in Maltese schools. Chapter 2 shows that Maltese state policy promotes inclusive education, and a considerable amount of work is being carried out effectively in our schools. The majority of all the stakeholders say that they do their best to include each and every learner. However, as seen from this study, there exist feelings of frustration, helplessness and even anger at times because inclusion is posing particular tensions in the work of the Heads of School, teachers and Inclusion Coordinators. It appears to need stronger leadership in some schools, and more flexibility in curriculum along with better resourcing and training.

Whilst the participating **Heads of School** agreed with inclusion in principle, all expressed concerns about operationalising inclusion for some categories of students. This led to the suggestion that there was a need to redefine and narrow the concept of inclusion which is presently deemed generally to be too broad to be realisable. Heads also felt that professionals should be key in the decision making of students' placement in their schools. A varied curriculum, enhanced teaching resources and staffing, and more relevant training, were needed to better accommodate students of all abilities.

The team of **Inclusion Coordinators** in the Maltese secondary schools identified good inclusive practices alongside several challenges to be overcome and strategies to enhance inclusive education. They discussed: the good practices they observed in their schools, identified the difficulties and challenges, both attitudinal and practical, that they encountered within their schools and made recommendations for the teachers and the Heads of School. Primarily INCOs' recommendations for change centred around on strong inclusive leadership which facilitated staff coordination and collaboration. This would in turn lead to physical adaptations to school environments, support attitudinal change and aid staff participation in training, curriculum, resourcing and adaptation.

Whilst the majority of the participating **teachers** agreed with the principle of inclusion and declared that the teacher should meet all the students' needs, most went on to say that they felt confused and frustrated when dealing with mixed ability classes and with students with complex needs. Moving from the principle of inclusion to the realisation of fully inclusive practices will require movement in national policy and school ethos, this will necessitate shifts in initial teacher education, enhanced CPD and resourcing according to pupil need. Schools might do more to encourage the sharing of resources and ideas between long-serving teachers and early career teachers, however, it is noted that there was a more positive intent towards inclusion amongst early career teachers than expressed by long-serving teachers, the reason for this is not clear however the early career teachers might be more motivated to try out new teaching methodologies since they would still be in the early years of their career. Further, collaboration around effective teaching could also be

facilitated across schools so that successful ways of working can be more widespread, and general review of initial teacher education and CPD with regards to preparedness for and attitudes to inclusive education seems to be needed.

In summary, the national policies and strategies needed to develop more inclusive schools in Malta are the following:

- A re-evaluation of the inclusion policy, examining its breadth and developing agreement on what inclusion means in Maltese schools.
- Compulsory effective training should be given to the Heads of School and teachers especially with regards to students with social and behavioural issues, learning difficulties and those with special needs.
- Curricula and syllabi need to be flexible especially in terms of the principle of inclusion.
- Gifted students need to be given fair access to teaching and a strategic plan is needed to accommodate them so as to help them reach their full potential.
- More human resources are continuously required to enable all students to reach their potential.
- Good practices need to be shared between schools.
- Professional Learning Communities should be promoted for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Further recommendations to practictioners and policy makers are found in Appendix 5 (p. 278).

6.7 The last word

As this study indicated, inclusive schools provide continuous challenges for all stakeholders in the school, and where inclusion works, this is to the benefit of all and to wider society. Learners come to school with a variety of needs and abilities and they depend on the educators to be included in school and in class. However, for a number of reasons, teachers are at times struggling to provide the best accommodation of every learner's needs. Therefore, they

need to research continuously in order to develop inclusive practices and innovative teaching methodologies. Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton (2013) said that "inclusion is always in a 'state of becoming' … for new challenges and new exclusionary factors can confront setting at any point" (pp.3-4). Therefore, change is continuous and this matter entails the importance of providing valuable training for teachers as a means to help them develop more positive attitudes towards inclusion. However, the students in the system now cannot wait for important changes to the education they experience, some action is urgent. This study has shown that the majority of the teachers seek to accommodate their learners, but often find that inclusion is posing a challenge in their teaching. Other teachers declared themselves to be totally against the concept of inclusion because of their frustration at being unable to teach all the students in their classes appropriately. These teachers need more support and training, for some who cannot make the attitudinal shift, it could be the case that teaching in inclusive schools is not for them.

Some Heads of School in this study remarked that they wished to be more listened to by the higher authorities with regards to their challenges in their schools. This means that policy makers need to heed the messages from Heads of School about what is needed to make inclusion for all; it is these school stakeholders who implement the policies, therefore, it is essential to listen to them and ensure they have what is needed to do the work. Furthermore, in order to further bridge the gap between the policy and the lived experiences of the participants, policy makers "must heed the opinions of all education stakeholders in order to detect areas of improvement to render schools more inclusive" (Lopez-Azuaga and Suarez Riveiro, 2018, p. 10). This may lead to the reconciliation of the policy and the implementers.

What will be important, in my view, is for policy to retain a broad definition of what inclusion is. The core of an inclusive school is about accepting and loving students with all their differences, talents, strengths and weaknesses and furthermore, they should not be perceived as a problem to be fixed, but rather as children and young people with equal right to education and services (UNCRC, 1989; Salamanca Statement, 1994; Anati, 2013; OECD 2014; Plan International, 2015; UNESCO, 2015; Malta Framework for the Education

Strategy 2014-2024). I would like to conclude with Ainscow's (2007) words which link to the need for attitudinal change to make all Malta's schools truly inclusive:

"We can make all of this sound very complicated, we can make it sound as if it's an enormous challenge, too much, too big a burden … we know enough to teach every one of our children effectively. We don't need new techniques, new skills, new technology … We know enough; knowledge is not a problem. The big challenge is our will. Have we got the will to make it happen?"

(Ainscow, 2007, p.21)

References:

Achievement for All, (2014). *21st Century Education: a call for inclusive leadership*. United Kingdom: 3As, Ltd.

Ainscow, M. (2007). *Teacher development in responding to student diversity: the way ahead.*

Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2006). *Improving schools developing inclusion.* Canada: Routledge.

Ainscow, M., & Miles, S. (2009). *Developing inclusive education systems: How can we move policies forward?* Manchester: University of Manchester.

Albus, D., Thurlow, M., & Clapper, A. (2006). State level standards based instructional strategies for ELLs with disabilities. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 19(1), 11-18.

Anati, N. (2013). The pros and cons of inclusive education from the perceptions of teachers in the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education,* 2(1), 55-66.

Aronson, J. (1994). A pragmatic view of thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 2(1), 1-3. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol2/iss1/3

Artan, I., & Balat, G. U. (2003). Okul oncesi egitimcilerinin entegrasyona iliskin bilgi ve dusuncelerinin incelenmesi. In: Secer, Z. (2010). An analysis of the effects of in-service teacher training on Turkish preschool teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *International Journal of Early Years* Education, 18(1), 43-53.

Arthur-Kelly, M., Sutherland, D., Lyons, G., Macfarlane, S., & Foreman, P. (2013). Reflections on enhancing pre-service teacher education programmes to support inclusion: Perspectives from New Zealand and Australia. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 28(2), 217-233.

Attard Tonna, M., & Shanks, R. (2017). The importance of environment for teacher professional learning in Malta and Scotland. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(1), 91-109.

Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 17(2), 129-147.

Avramidis, E., & Kalyva, E. (2007). The influence of teaching experience and professional development on Greek teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 22(4), 367-389.

Ball, S. J. (1990). *Politics and Policy Making in Education.* London: Routledge.

Bailey, K. D. (1994). *Methods of Social Research.* New York: The Free Press.

Bartholomew, S. S., & Sandholtz, J. H. (2009). Competing view of teaching in a school-university partnership. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(1), 155-165.

Bartolo, P. A. & Borg, G. (2008). *The development of inclusive education in Malta*.

Bartolo, P. A., Lous, A. M., & Hofsass, T. (2007). *Responding to student diversity, teacher education and classroom practice: proceedings of the international conference on teacher education for responding to student diversity, Malta 14-16, June 2007.* Malta: University of Malta.

Bartolo, P. A., Janik, I., Janikova, V., Hofsäss, T., Koinzer, P., Vilkiene, V., ... & Humphrey, N. (2007). *Responding to student diversity teacher´s handbook*. Malta: University of Malta. Faculty of Education.

Bates, C. L., Huber, R., & McClure, E. (2016). Stay connected: Using technology to enhance professional learning communities. *The Reading Teacher*, 70(1), 99-102.

Batsiou, S., Bebetsos, E., Panteli, P., & Antoniou, P. (2008). Attitudes and intentions of Greek and Cypriot primary education teachers towards teaching pupils with special education needs in mainstream schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12(2), 201-219.

Beany, J. (2006). *Reaching out, reaching in.* Nottingham: NCSL.

Belson, W. A. (1986). *Validity in survey research.* Aldershot: Gower.

Berk, E., & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and early childhood.* Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Bhopal, K., & Rhamie, J. (2013). Initial teacher training: understanding 'race', diversity and inclusion. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 17(3), 304-325.

Birman, B., Desimone, L. M., Garet, M., & Porter, A. (2000). Designing professional development that works. *Educational Leadership*, 57(8), 28-33.

Blandford, S. (2012). The impact of 'Achievement for All' on school leadership. *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, 41(1), 45-62.

Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., Wallace, M., Greenwood, A., Hawkey, K., Ingram, M., Atkinson, A., & Smith, M. (2005). *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities.* Research report 637. London: DfES and University of Bristol.

Booth, T., & Ainscow, M (2002). *Index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools.* UK: Bristol.

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bransford, J., Darling-Hammond, L., & LePage, P. (2005). Introduction. In: L. Darling-Hammond et al. (Eds.). *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do*, pp. 1-39. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research, a practical guide for beginners*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Bristol, L. (2014). Leading for inclusion: transforming action through teacher talk. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(8), 1-19.

Brunero, S., Lamont, S., & Coates, M. (2010). A review of empathy education in nursing. *Nursing Inquiry*, 17(1), 64-73.

Burch, P., Theoharis, G., & Rauscher, E. (2010). Class size reduction in practice: Investigating the influence of the elementary school principal. *Educational Policy*, 24(2), 330-358.

Burstein, N., Sears, S, Wilcoxen, A., Cabello, B., & Spagna, M. (2004). Moving toward inclusive practices. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25, 104-116.

Cagran, B., & Schmidt, M. (2011). Attitudes of Slovene teachers towards the inclusion of pupils with different types of special needs in primary school. *Educational Studies*, 37(2), 171-195.

Calleja, J., & Bezzina, C. (2017, March 19). Teachers supporting teachers. *The Sunday Times of Malta*, pp. 52.

Calleja, J., & Bezzina, C. (2017, March 26). Teachers learning together. *The Sunday Times of Malta*, pp. 51.

Camilleri, I. (2015, October 6). 25% of fifth formers quitting. Retrieved from URL http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20151006/local/25-of-fifth-former-quitting.587095

Campbell, D. T., & Fiske, D. W. (1959). Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod matrix. *Psychological Bulletin*, 56 (2), 81-105.

CAST (2012). Retrieved from http://www.cast.org/udl/

Carpenter, D. (2014). School culture and leadership of professional learning communities. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(5), 682-694.

Causton-Theoharis, J., & Theoharis, G. (2009). Creating inclusive schools for all students. *The Education Digest*, 74(6), 43-47.

Cawley, J., Hayden, S., Cade, E., & Baker-Kroczynski, S. (2002). Including students with disabilities into the general education science classroom. *Exceptional Children*, 68(4), 423-435.

Cefai, C., Fenech, L., & Galea, E. (2007). Initial teacher education for individual educational needs: Newly qualified Maltese teachers' views. In: P. Bartolo et al. (Eds). *Responding to student diversity: Teacher education and classroom practice.* (pp. 63-75). Malta: University of Malta.

Centre for Universal Design (1997). *The principles of universal design.* NC State University.

Chandramuki, I., Shastry, V. K., & Vranda, M. N. (2012). Attitudes of parents towards children with specific learning disabilities. *Disability, CBR and Inclusive Development,* 23(1), 63-69.

Clough, P., & Nutbrown, C. (2012). *A student's guide to methodology*. London: Sage.

Cobb, C. (2014). Principals play many parts: a review of the research on school principals as special education leaders 2001-2011. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(3), 1-22.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.) London: Routledge.

Correa, V.I., & Wagner, J.Y. (2011). Principals' roles in supporting the induction of special education teachers. *Journal of special education leadership*, 24(1). 17-25.

Cote, L., & Turgeon, J. (2005). Appraising qualitative research articles in medicine and medical education. *Medical Teacher*, 27, 71-75.

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design.* London: Sage.

Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crow, K. (2018). *The tendency to overprotect our special needs kids – Families.com.* (Viewed 30 November 2018). Available from: http://www.families.com

Curcic, S., Gabel, S. L., Zeitlin, V., Cribaro-DiFatta, S., & Glarner, C. (2011). Policy and challenges of building schools as inclusive communities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(1), 117-133.

Darmanin, M. (2017). *Reading and writing in the digital age: Exploring two classes in a Maltese primary school.* Ph. D. Thesis. University of Sheffield.

Denscombe, M. (2008). Communities of practice: a research paradigm for the mixed-methods approach. *Journal of mixed-methods research*, 2(3), 270-283.

Dore, R., Dion, E., Wagner, E., & Brunet, J. P. (2002). High school inclusion of adolescents with mental retardation: A multiple case study. *Education and training in mental retardation and developmental disabilities*, 37(3), 253-261.

De Boer, A., Pijl, S. J., & Minnaert, A. (2010). Regular primary schoolteachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 1(1), 1-24.

De Leeuw, E. D., & Hox., J. J. (1988). The effects of response stimulating factors on response rates and data quality in mail surveys. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 4, 241-249.

De Leeuw, E. D. (2005). To mix or not to mix data collection modes in surveys. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 21, 233-255.

De Leeuw, E. D., Hox, J. J., & Dillman, D. A. (Eds.) (2008). *International handbook of survey methodology*.

Denzin, N. K. (1970). *The research act in sociology: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. London: Butterworths.

Department of Education (2014). *Inclusive schools are effective schools*. Victoria State Government.

DeSimone, J. R., & Parmar, R. S. (2006). Middle school mathematics teachers' beliefs about inclusion of students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities, Research and Practice*, 21(2), 98-110.

Desimone, L. M. (2009) Improving impact studies of teachers' professional development: Toward better conceptualizations and measures, *Educational Researcher*, 38(3), 181–199.

Dooly, M., & Vallejo, C. (2008). Educational policies that address social inequality. *Malta case study report 4: Changing inclusive and special education*. London: Institute for Policy Studies in Education.

Dovigo, F. (Ed.). (2017). *Special educational needs and inclusive practices: An international perspective*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Draper, J., & O'Brien, J. (2006). *Induction: Fostering career development at all stages*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.

Drew, C. J., Hardman, M. L., & Hosp, J. L. (2008). *Designing and conducting research in education*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd.

Duchaine, E. L. (2011). The effect of teacher coaching with performance feedback on behaviour-specific praise in inclusion classrooms. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 34(2), 209-227.

Edwards, C. J., Carr, S., & Siegel, W. (2006). Influences of experiences and training on effective teaching practices to meet the needs of diverse learners in school. *Education*, 126(3), 580-592.

Edyburn, D. L. (2005). Universal Design for Learning. *Special Education Technology Practice*, 7(5), 16-22.

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014). *Special needs and inclusive education in Malta – external audit report.* Brussels: European Agency.

Ferguson, G. (2014). *Including children with disabilities in mainstream education: An exploration of the challenges and considerations for parents and primary school teachers.* M. A. Dissertation, Dublin Institute of Technology.

Fixsen, D., Blasé, K., Metz, A., & Van Dyke, M. (2013). Statewide implementation of evidence-based programes. *Exceptional Children*, 79(2), 213-230.

Florian, L. (2009). Preparing teachers to work in 'Schools for All'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 533-534.

Florian, L. (2011, September, 9th). Inclusion is still a novelty for teacher trainers. *The Times Educational Supplement.* Retrieved 20 November 2011 from: https://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6111401

Florian, L., & Rouse, M. (2009). The inclusive practice project in Scotland: teacher education for inclusive education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 594-601.

Florian, L., & Linklater, H. (2010) Preparing teachers for inclusive education: Using inclusive pedagogy to enhance teaching and learning for all, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 40(4), 369-386.

Forlin, C. (2001). Inclusion: Identifying potential stressors for regular class teachers. *Educational Research, 43(*3), 235-245.

Frankfort-Nachmias, C., & Nachmias, D. (1992). *Research methods in the social sciences.* London: Edward Arnold.

Furney, K.S., Aiken, J. Hasazi, S., & Clark, K. (2005). Meeting the needs of all students: Contributions of effective school leaders. *Journal of school leadership,* 15(5), 546-570.

Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L. M., Birman, B., & Yoon, K. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Analysis of a national sample of teachers. *American Education Research Journal*, 38(4), 915-945.

Gibbs, G.R. (2007). *Analyzing qualitative data.* London: Sage.

Glasow, P. A. (2005). *Fundamentals of survey research methodology.* Virginia: Mitre.

Griffiths, D. (Ed.). *Principles of inclusion: Practical strategies to grow inclusion in urban schools.* Canada: Word & Deed Publishing Incorporated.

Grubb, W. N., & Lazerson, M. (2004). *The education gospel: The economic power of schooling.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hall, T. E., Meyer, A., & Rose, D. H. (2012). *Universal Design for Learning in the classroom: Practical applications.* New York: Guilford Press.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1983). *Ethnography: Principles in practice.* London: Routledge.

Harriott, W. A. (2004). Inclusion in-service: Content and training procedures across the United States. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 17(2), 91-102.

Harvey, M.W., Yssel, N., Bauserman, A. D., & Merbler, J. B. (2010). Pre-service teacher preparation for inclusion. *Remedial and Special Education*, 31(1), 24-33.

Hasselbring, T. S., & Bausch, M. E. (2005). Assistive technologies for reading. *Educational Leadership*, 63(4), 72-75.

Hehir, T., & Katzman, L. (2012). *Effective Inclusive Schools: designing successful schoolwide programs.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hettiarachchi, S., & Das, A. (2014). Perceptions of 'inclusion' and perceived preparedness among school teacher in Sri Lanka. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 43, 143-153.

Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) (2008). United States: Department of Education.

Hitchock, C., Meyer, A., Rose, D. H., & Jackson, R. (2002). Providing new access to the general curriculum: Universal Design for Learning. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 35(2), 8-17.

Holloway, I., & Todres, L. (2003). The status of method: Flexibility, consistency and coherence. *Qualitative Research*, 3, 345-357.

Humphreys, K. A. (2008). *The challenge of raising student levels of achievement in an inclusive national curriculum.*

Idol, L. (2006). Toward inclusion of special education students in general education: A programme evaluation of eight schools. *Remedial and Special Education*, 27(2), 77-94.

Imrak, H. C. (2009). Okuloncesi donemde kaynastirma egitimine iliskin ogretmen ve ebeveyn tutmlari ile kaynastirma egitimi ugulanan siniflarda akran iliskilerinin incelenmesi. In: Secer, Z. (2010). An analysis of the effects of in-service teacher training on Turkish preschool teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *International Journal of Early Years* Education, 18(1), 43-53.

Inclusion International (2009). *Better education for all: When we're included too. A global report.* Spain: Salamanca.

International Bureau of Education – UNESCO (2016). *Training tools for curriculum department – Reaching out to all learners: A resource pack for supporting inclusive education.* Switzerland: Geneva.

Irvine, A., Lupar, J.L., Loreman, T., & McGhie-Richmond, D. (2010). Education leadership to create authentic inclusive schools: The experiences of principals in a Canadian rural school district. *Exceptionality Education International*, 20(2), 70-88.

Jerlinder, K., Danermark, B., & Gill, P. (2010). Swedish primary school teachers' attitudes to inclusion – The case of PE and pupils with physical disabilities. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25(1), 45-57.

Jordan, A., Schwartz, E., & McGhie-Richmond, D. (2009). Preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 535-542.

Jung, W. S. (2007). Pre-service teacher training for successful inclusion. *Education*, 128(1), 106-113.

Jurasaite-Harbison, E. (2009). Teachers' workplace learning within informal contexts of school cultures in the United States and Lithuania. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 21(4), 299-321.

Kaplan, M. (2003). Tailor-made support. *Principal Leadership*, 4, 60-64.

Katz, J. (2013). The three-block model of Universal Design for Learning: Engaging students in inclusive education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36(1), 153-194.

Kim, J. (2011). Influence of teacher preparation programmes on pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(3), 355-377.

King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of texts. In: C. Cassell and G. Symon (Eds.). *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organisational research*. (pp. 257-270). London: Sage.

Koch, T. (1994). Establishing rigour in qualitative research: The decision trail. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 19, 976-986.

Kools, M. & Stoll, L. (2016). What makes a school a learning organisation? *OECD Education Working Papers*, No. 137. Paris: OECD.

Kugelmass, J. W. (2001). Collaboration and compromise in creating and sustaining an inclusive school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 5(1), 47-65.

Kugelmass, J. W. (2003). *Inclusive leadership: Leadership for inclusion*. New York: New York State University.

Kobal Grum, D. (2012). *Concept of inclusion on the section of Vygotskian socio-cultural theory and neuropsychology.*

Kurniawati, F., De Boer, A. A., Minnaert, A.E.M.G., & Mangunsong, F. (2014). Characteristics of primary teacher training programmes on inclusion: A Literature Focus. *Educational Research*, 56(3), 310-326.

Leblanc, L., Richardson, W., & Burns, K. A. (2009). Autism spectrum disorder and the inclusive classroom: Effective training to enhance knowledge of ASD and evidence-based practices. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 32(2), 166-179.

LeCompte, M., & Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research*. London: Academic Press.

Liasidou, A. (2015). *Inclusive education and the issue of change*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lieberman, L. J., & Wilson, S. (2005). Effects of a sports camp practicum on attitudes toward children with visual impairments and deaf blindness. *Re: View: Rehabilitation Education for Blindness and Visual Impairment*, 36(4), 141-153.

Lieberman, L. J., Lytle, R. K., & Clarcq, J. A. (2008). Getting it right from the start: Employing the Universal Design for Learning approach to your curriculum. *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance*, 79(2), 32-39.

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences revisited. In: N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. (pp. 97-128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lindquist, G. and Nilhom, C. (2011). Making school inclusive? Educational leaders' views on how to work with children in need of special support. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17(1), 95-110.

Lopez-Azuage, R. and Suarez Riveiro, J. M. (2018). Perceptions of inclusive education in schools delivering teaching through learning communities and service-learning. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.

Lynn, P. (2003). Developing quality standards for cross-national survey research: Five approaches. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6, 323-336.

MacFarlane, K. and Woolfson, L.M. (2013). Teacher attitudes and behaviour toward the inclusion of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools: an application of the theory of planned behaviour. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 29, 46-52.

Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The Lancet*, 358, 483-488.

Matsec Support Unit (2015). *Newsletter number 55*. University of Malta: Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate Examinations Board.

McGuire, J. M., Scott, S. S., & Shaw, S. F. (2006). Universal design and its application in educational environments. *Remedial and Special Education*, 27(3), 166-175.

McLeskey, J., Waldron, N. L., So, T. H., Swanson, K., & Loveland, T. (2001). Perspectives of teachers toward inclusive school programmes. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 24(2), 108-115.

McIntyre, D. (2009). The difficulties of inclusive pedagogy for initial teacher education and some thoughts on the way forward. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 602-608.

McLeod, S. A. (2014). *Lev Vygotsky*. Retrieved from www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html

McLeskey, J. and Waldron, N.L. (2002). School change and inclusive schools: lessons learned from practice. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84(1), 65-72.

Meo, G. (2012). Curriculum planning for all learners: Applying Universal Design for Learning to a high school reading comprehension programme. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 52(2), 21-30.

Mertens, D. M. (2010). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Messinger-Willman, J. and Marino, M.T. (2010). Universal Design for Learning and assistive technology: leadership considerations for promoting inclusive education in today's secondary schools. *National Association of Secondary School Principals. NASSP Bulletin*, 94(1), 5-16.

Ministry for Education and Employment (2012). *National curriculum framework*. Malta: Ministry for Education and Employment.

Ministry for Education and Employment (2014). *Framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-2024*. Malta: Ministry for Education and Employment.

Ministry for Education and Employment (2014). *Respect for all framework*. Malta: Ministry for Education and Employment.

Ministry of Education (2012). *What an inclusive school looks like*. New Zealand: Crown.

Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2005). *Inclusive and special education review*. Malta: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.

Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2002). *Creating inclusive schools*. Malta: Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.

Mintz, J. (2007). Attitudes of primary initial teacher training students to special educational needs and inclusion. *Support for Learning*, 22(1), 3-8.

Moen, T., Nilssen, V., & Weidemann, N. (2007). An aspect of a teacher's inclusive educational practice: Scaffolding pupils through transitions. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 13(3), 269-286.

Moll, L. C. (1990). *Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology*. Cambridge: University Press.

National Centre on Educational Outcomes (2013). *Universally Designed Assessment.* Retrieved from

http://www.cehd.umn.edu/NCEO/TOPICAREAS/UnivDesign/UniverDesignFAQ.htm

National College for School Leadership (2007). *What we know about school leadership*. Nottingham: NCSL.

National College for School Leadership (2009). *How do leaders successfully lead learning?* Nottingham: NCSL.

National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (2010). *Achievement for all: characteristics of effective inclusive leadership*. Nottingham: NCSL.

National Institute for Urban School Improvement (2000). *Improving education: the promise of inclusive schooling*.

Nevin, A. I., Thousand, J. S., & Villa, R. A. (2009). Collaborative teaching for teacher educators? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 569-574.

Ning, H. K., Lee., D., & Lee, W. O. (2016) The relationship between teacher value orientations and engagement in professional learning communities, *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(2), 235-254.

No Child Left Behind Act. (2001). *Elementary and secondary education.* Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1-13.

Nutbrown, C., Clough, P., & Atherton, F. (2013). *Inclusion in the early years*. London, U.K.: Sage.

Odom, S. L., Bratlinger, E., Gersten, R., Horner, R. H., Thompson, B., & Harris, K. R. (2005). Research in special education: Scientific methods and evidence-based practices. *Exceptional Children*, 71(2), 137-148.

Odom, S. L., Cox, A. W., & Brock, M. E. (2013). Implementation science, professional development and autism spectrum disorders. *Exceptional Children*, 79(2), 233-251.

OECD (2003). *Education policy analysis organisation for economic co-operation and development.*

OECD (2009). *The professional development of teachers from creating effective teaching and learning environment.*

OECD (2012). *Equity and quality in education: Supporting disadvantaged students and school.*

OECD (2014). *Equity, excellence and inclusiveness in education: Policy lessons from around the world.*

OECD (2016). *What makes a school a learning organisation? A guide for policy makers, school leaders and teachers.*

Ofsted (2006). *Inclusion: does it matter where pupils are taught?*

Oppenheim, A. N. (1992). *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement.* London: Pinter.

Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

Parette, H. P., & Stone, J. B. (2008). Benefits of assistive technology use groups for early childhood education professionals. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35, 313-319.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peterson, Michael J., & Hittie, Mishael M. (2003). *Inclusive teaching, creating effective schools for all learners.* Boston: Pearson Education Ltd.

PLAN International (2015). *The right to inclusive, quality education – Global education strategy 2015-2020.* United Kingdom: Woking.

Plows, V., & Whitburn, B. (Eds.). (2017). *Inclusive education, Making sense of everyday practice.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Poland, B. D. (2002). Transcription quality. In: J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein (Eds.). *Handbook of interview research: Context and method.* (pp. 629-649). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Polland, R. J. (2005). *Essentials of survey research and analysis.*

Puri, M., & Abraham G. (2004). *Handbook of inclusive education for educators, administrators and planners.* London: Sage Publishers.

Rae, H., Mckenzie, K., & Murray, G. (2011). The impact of training on teacher knowledge about children with an intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 15(1), 21-30.

Reams, P., & Twale, D. (2008). The promise of mixed-methods: discovering conflicting realities in the data. *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 31(2), 133-142.

Rieser, R. (2014). *What's happening with inclusive education around the world*. World of Inclusion Ltd.

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Rose, D. H. (2001). Universal Design for Learning. *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 15(1), 56-70.

Ross, J. A., & Berger, M. (2009). Equity and leadership: Research-based strategies for school leaders. *School Leadership and Management*, 29(5), 463-476.

Rose, D. H., & Meyer, A. (2002). *Teaching every student in the digital age: Universal Design for Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Rose, D. H., & Meyer, A., & Hitchcock, C. (2005). *The universally designed classroom: Accessible curriculum and digital technologies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Rouse, M. (2010). Reforming initial teacher education: A necessary but not sufficient condition for developing inclusive practice. In: C. Forlin (Ed.) *Teacher education for inclusion: Changing paradigms and innovative approaches*. (pp. 47-55). London: Routledge.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Runswick-Cole, K. (2011). Time to end the bias towards inclusive education? *British Journal of Special Education*, 38(3), 112-119.

Salend, S. J. (2008). *Creating inclusive classroom, effective and reflective practices*. 6th edition. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education Ltd.

Salisbury, C., & McGregor, G. (2005). *Principals of inclusive schools*. Arizona: National Institute for Urban School Improvement.

Sari, H. (2007). The influence of an in-service teacher training (INSET) programme on attitudes towards inclusion by regular classroom teachers who teach deaf students in primary schools in Turkey. *Deafness and Education International*, 9(3), 31-46.

Save the Children (2008). *Making schools inclusive*. United Kingdom: Save the Children.

Scheurick, J. J. (1995). A postmodernist critique of research interviewing. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(3), 239-252.

Secer, Z. (2010). An analysis of the effects of in-service teacher training on Turkish preschool teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *International Journal of Early Years* Education, 18(1), 43-53.

Senechal, M. A. (2016). *The implementation of Universal Design for Learning.*

Shepherd, K. (2006). Supporting all students: The role of school principals in expanding general education capacity using resource to intervention teams. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 19(2), 30-38.

Shulman, L. S., & Shulman, J. H. (2004) How and what teachers learn: a shifting perspective, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(2), 257-271.

Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data.* London: Sage.

Silver-Pacuilla, H. (2006). *Moving toward solutions: Assistive and learning technology for all students.* Washington, DC: National Centre for Technology Innovations.

Smagorinsky, P., Jakubiak, C., & Moore, C. (2008). Student teaching in the contact zone: Learning to teach amid multiple interests in a vocational English class. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(5), 442-454.

Smith, R., & Leonard, P. (2005). Collaboration for inclusion: Practitioner Perspectives. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 38(4), 269-279.

Spratt, J. (2017). *Wellbeing, equity and education.* United Kingdom: Aberdeen.

Stanules, R. N., & Burrill, G. (2004). *Preparing highly qualified teachers who keep content and context central: The Mighigan State University induction programme.* San Diego: American Educational Research Assocation.

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Education Change*, 7, 221-258.

Sydney, A. (2010). *A handbook for inclusion managers, steering your school towards inclusion.* London: Routledge.

Symeonidou, S., & Phtiaka, H. (2009). Using teachers' prior knowledge, attitudes and beliefs to develop in-service teacher education courses for inclusion. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(4), 543-550.

Symeonidou, S., & Phtiaka, H. (2014). "My colleagues wear blinkers … If they were trained, they would understand better". Reflections on teacher education on inclusion on Cyprus. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 14(2), 110-119.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2006). *Foundations of mixed-methods research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

The Alliance for Inclusion (2014). *Principles of inclusion.* Retrieved from www.allfie.org.uk

The Centre for Universal Design (1997). United States: North Carolina State University.

The Glossary of Education Reform (2014). Portland: Great Schools Partnerships. Retrieved from http://www/edglossary.org

Thompson, S. J., Johnston, C. J., Anderson, M. E., & Miller, N. A. (2005). *Considerations for the development and review of universally designed assessments.* University of Minnesota: National Centre on Educational Outcomes.

Thorne, S. (2000). Data analysis in qualitative research. *Evidence Based Nursing*, 3, 68-70.

Thousand, J. S., Villa, R. A., & Nevin, A. I. (2007). *Differential instruction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Times of Malta (2014, August 20). Five vocational subjects to be certified at SEC Level. Retrieved from http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20140820/local/five-vocational-subjects-to-be-certified-at-sec-level.532546

Tobin, G. A., & Begley, C. M. (2004). Methodological rigour within a qualitative framework. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48, 388-396.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17, 783-805.

Tuckett, A. (2005). Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: A researcher's experience. *Contemporary Nurse*, 19, 75-87.

Turkoglu, Y. K. (2007). Ilkogretim okulu ogretmenleri ile gerceklestirilen bilgilendirme claismalarinin oncesi ve sonrasinda ogretmenlerin kaynastirmaya iliskin goruslerinin incelenmesi. In: Z. Secer (2010). An analysis of the effects of in-service teacher training on Turkish preschool teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *International Journal of Early Years* Education, 18(1), 43-53.

UNESCO (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and framework for action on special needs education.* UNESCO: Paris.

UNESCO (2009). *Policy guidelines on inclusion in education.*

UNESCO (2015). Draft guidelines for the MOST schools. *In: 12th session of the intergovernmental council of the management of social transformations (MOST) programme*, 1-2 June, 2015.

UNESCO (2015). *World Education Forum 2015. Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. Final Report.* France: Paris.

UNESCO (2016). *Leading better learning: School leadership and quality in the Education 2030 agenda.* Paris: UNESCO.

Valeo, A. (2008). Inclusive education systems: Teacher and administrator views. *International Journal of Special Education*, 23(2), 8-16.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. In M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman (Eds.), *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* (pp. 79-91). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1986). *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Waitoller, F. R., & Kozleski, E. B. (2013). Working in boundary practices: Identity development and learning in partnerships for inclusive education. *Teacher and Teaching Education*, 31, 35-45.

Waitoller, F. R., & Artiles, A. J. (2016). Teacher learning as curating: Becoming inclusive educators in school/university partnerships. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 59, 360-371.

Watson, C. (2014). Effective professional learning communities? The possibilities for teachers as agents of change in schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 40(1), 18-29.

Wayne State University (2000). *Key elements to building an inclusive school.*

Weidner, D. A. (2013). *Self-esteem in special needs children. Building confidence and can-do attitudes.*

Wenger, E. (2006). *Communities of practice.*

White, E. A., Wepner, S. B., & Wetzel, D. C. (2003). Accessible education through assistive technology. *T.H.E. Journal*, 30(7), 24-32.

Wilson, N. & McLean, S. (1994). *Questionnaire design: A practical introduction.* Newtown Abbey, Co. Antrim: University of Ulster Press.

Wisconsin Centre for Education Research (2015). University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Education. Retrieved from http://www.wcer.wisc.edu

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (2012) *Wisconsin's Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning.* Retrieved from URL https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/cal/pdf/guiding-principles.pdf

Wragg, E. C. (2002). Interviewing. In: M. Coleman and A. R. J. Briggs (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership.* (pp. 143-158). London: Paul Chapman.

Yoon, K. S., Duncan, T., Wen-Yu, S., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K. L. (2007). *Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement.*

Appendix 1:

Interview of the Head of School:

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title:

The Inclusive School. A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement.

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The research project aims to investigate what makes an inclusive school. My work experience as a school Assistant Head in charge of inclusion motivated me to embark on this study. Through the last five years, I observed the importance of an inclusive school leader and the significance of the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their teaching strategies.

Three principal themes were identified in my reading of the literature: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. These aspects assist the teacher to adopt an inclusive approach in his/her work and they can be implemented through the Senior Management Team, other teachers and the Learning Support Assistants, so as to develop effective inclusive schools (Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Save the Children, UK, 2008). Therefore, through the field questions in my planned research, I will explore how the inclusion policy is being administered in the Maltese schools, with a view to include sharing of good practices. Furthermore, implications for improvement will be elicited from the investigation with the aim to develop more inclusive schools.

As a Head of School, you have been chosen to participate because your views, opinions and practices will contribute to my study. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will able to keep a copy of the information sheet and you will indicate your agreement by signing the consent form. You can still withdraw at any time and you do not need to give any reasons for doing so.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked for a face-to-face interview or an e-mail interview. If you decide upon a face-to-face interview, I will ask your permission to be recorded. The audio recording of the interview will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of it without your written permission and no one outside the study will be allowed access to the original recordings. However, if you do not wish to be recorded, notes will be taken instead. Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. Neither you, nor your school will be identified in any way. A transcript of this interview will be sent to you to acknowledge it and to make necessary amendments for the purpose of clarity or otherwise. Furthermore, participating in this study will not cause you any physical or psychological harm or distress.

The study has been ethically approved by the Ethical Review Board of the University of Sheffield and by the Department of Education in Malta.

For further information, you may contact me by email. sgalea1@sheffield.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title:

The Inclusive School. A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement.

Name of Researcher:

Ms Sonia Galea

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet, explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. In addition, if I wish not to answer a particular question, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and I give permission to the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified in any way in the result report of the research.

4. I agree that the data collected from me may be used in future research.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____ _____ _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____ _____ _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Interview Schedule for the Head of School:

School Region: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in my study. As you know, I am researching about the development of more inclusive schools and I wish to ask you four questions regarding this aspect in your school. The interview is strictly anonymous and confidential. Therefore, for this reason I wish that you feel safe and comfortable enough to express your sincere views and opinions in your answers.

1) What are your views about inclusion?

2) What are the greatest difficulties that you encounter in this aspect?

3) Do you use any particular strategies to create a more inclusive school?

4) Do you think that there are any developments that are needed to make your school more inclusive?

Do you wish to add anything else?

I really appreciate your help and time to participate in my study. Thank you once again.

Interview of the Inclusion Coordinator

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title:

The Inclusive School. A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement.

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The research project aims to investigate what makes an inclusive school. My work experience as a school Assistant Head in charge of inclusion motivated me to embark on this study. Through the last five years, I observed the importance of an inclusive school leader and the significance of the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their teaching strategies.

Three principal themes were identified in my reading of the literature: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. These aspects assist the teacher to adopt an inclusive approach in his/her work and they can be implemented through the Senior Management Team, other teachers and the Learning Support Assistants, so as to develop effective inclusive schools (Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Save the Children, UK, 2008). Therefore, through the field questions in my planned research, I will explore how the inclusion policy is being administered in the Maltese schools, with a view to include sharing of good practices. Furthermore, implications for improvement will be elicited from the investigation with the aim to develop more inclusive schools.

As an Inclusion Coordinator, you have been chosen to participate because your views, opinions and practices will contribute to my study. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will able to keep a copy of the information sheet and you will indicate your agreement by signing the consent form. You can still withdraw at any time and you do not need to give any reasons for doing so.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked for a face-to-face interview or an e-mail interview. If you decide upon a face-to-face interview, I will ask your permission to be recorded. The audio recording of the interview will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of it without your written permission and no one outside the study will be allowed access to the original recordings. However, if you do not wish to be recorded, notes will be taken instead. Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. Neither you, nor your school will be identified in any way. A transcript of this interview will be sent to you to acknowledge it and to make necessary amendments for the purpose of clarity or otherwise.   Furthermore, participating in this study will not cause you any physical or psychological harm or distress.

The study has been ethically approved by the Ethical Review Board of the University of Sheffield and by the Department of Education in Malta.

For further information, you may contact me by email, sgalea1@sheffield.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title:

The Inclusive School. A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement.

Name of Researcher:

Ms Sonia Galea

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet, explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. In addition, if I wish not to answer a particular question, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and I give permission to the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified in any way in the result report of the research.

4. I agree that the data collected from me may be used in future research.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Interview schedule for Inclusion Coordinators:

Date of Interview: _____

Thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in my study. As you know, I am researching about the development of more inclusive schools and I wish to ask you three questions regarding this aspect in your work. The interview is strictly anonymous and confidential. Therefore, for this reason I wish that you feel safe and comfortable enough to express your sincere views and opinions in your answers.

1) Can you mention any good practices that you encounter in your schools?

2) What type of difficulties/challenges do you encounter in your work?

3) What are your recommendations for teachers and school leaders to develop more inclusive schools?

Do you wish to add anything else?

I really appreciate your help and time to participate in my study. Thank you once again.

Appendix 3:

Interview of the Teacher

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title:

The Inclusive School. A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement.

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The research project aims to investigate what makes an inclusive school. My work experience as a school Assistant Head in charge of inclusion motivated me to embark on this study. Through the last five years, I observed the importance of an inclusive school leader and the significance of the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their teaching strategies.

Three principal themes were identified in my reading of the literature: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. These aspects assist the teacher to adopt an inclusive approach in his/her work and they can be implemented through the Senior Management Team, other teachers and the Learning Support Assistants, so as to develop effective inclusive schools (Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Save the Children, UK, 2008). Therefore, through the field questions in my planned research, I will explore how the inclusion policy is being administered in the Maltese schools, with a view to include sharing of good practices. Furthermore, implications for improvement will be elicited from the investigation with the aim to develop more inclusive schools.

As a Head of School/Inclusion Coordinator/teacher, you have been chosen to participate because your views, opinions and practices will contribute to my study. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will able to keep a copy of the information sheet and you will indicate your agreement by signing the consent form. You can still withdraw at any time and you do not need to give any reasons for doing so.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked for a face-to-face interview or an e-mail interview. If you decide upon a face-to-face interview, I will ask your permission to be recorded. The audio recording of the interview will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of it without your written permission and no one outside the study will be allowed access to the original recordings. However, if you do not wish to be recorded, notes will be taken instead. Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. Neither you, nor your school will be identified in any way. A transcript of this interview will be sent to you to acknowledge it and to make necessary amendments for the purpose of clarity or otherwise. Furthermore, participating in this study will not cause you any physical or psychological harm or distress.

The study has been ethically approved by the Ethical Review Board of the University of Sheffield and by the Department of Education in Malta.

For further information, you may contact me by email, sgalea1@sheffield.ac.uk

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title:

The Inclusive School. A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement.

Name of Researcher:

Ms Sonia Galea

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet, explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. In addition, if I wish not to answer a particular question, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential and I give permission to the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified in any way in the result report of the research.

4. I agree that the data collected from me may be used in future research.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Interview Schedule for the Teacher:

School Region: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Thank you for accepting my invitation to participate in my study. As you know, I am researching about the development of more inclusive schools and I wish to ask you six questions regarding this aspect in your work. The interview is strictly anonymous and confidential. Therefore, for this reason I wish that you feel safe and comfortable enough to express your sincere views and opinions in your answers.

1) For how many years have you been teaching?

2) Do you agree that students with diverse needs are included in class? Why?

3) What type of difficulties do you encounter in the inclusion process?

4) Do you use any particular teaching strategies in class to cater for every learner's needs?

5) Do you share ideas and difficulties with your colleagues? Why?

6) Do you feel that you were prepared for inclusion during your pre-service training?

7) Do you think that you need further training in the field of inclusion?

Do you wish to add anything else?

I really appreciate your help and time to participate in my study. Thank you once again.

Appendix 4:

The teacher's questionnaire

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title:

The Inclusive School. A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement.

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The research project aims to investigate what makes an inclusive school. My work experience as a school Assistant Head in charge of inclusion motivated me to embark on this study. Through the last five years, I observed the importance of an inclusive school leader and the significance of the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their teaching strategies.

Three principal themes were identified in my reading of the literature: inclusive leadership, Universal Design for Learning and professional learning communities for inclusion. These aspects assist the teacher to adopt an inclusive approach in his/her work and they can be implemented through the Senior Management Team, other teachers and the Learning Support Assistants, so as to develop effective inclusive schools (Hehir and Katzman, 2012; Save the Children, UK, 2008). Therefore, through the field questions in my planned research, I will explore how the inclusion policy is being administered in the Maltese schools, with a view to include sharing of good practices. Furthermore, implications for improvement will be elicited from the investigation with the aim to develop more inclusive schools.

Here I am presenting you a very short questionnaire to you as a teacher to get an idea of the teacher's feelings in the classroom. It only takes a couple of minutes to complete the questionnaire. Your sincere views and opinions are highly important to my study, therefore, I guarantee anonymity in this research. I would appreciate if you would answer all the questions and to write any further comments if you wish to do so. For further information you may contact me on the following email address: sgalea1@sheffield.ac.uk

Thanks again for your cooperation.

Sonia Galea

1) As a teacher, I agree that students with diverse needs should be included in class: (Please select one)
   - o Agree
   - o Disagree
   - o Perhaps

2) As a teacher, I find it difficult to include and cater for:
   (You can tick more than one)

   - o Dyslexic students
   - o Students with mild autism
   - o Students with severe autism
   - o Low ability students
   - o Gifted students
   - o Students with physical disabilities
   - o None of the above

3) In order to cater for every learner's needs, I use different strategies in class together with various resources: (Please tick one)

   - o Agree
   - o Disagree
   - o Perhaps

4) I share ideas and difficulties with my colleagues: (Please tick one)

   - o Agree
   - o Disagree
   - o Perhaps

   If you agree, please skip to question number 6.

5) I do not agree to share ideas and difficulties with my colleagues because:

   - o I simply do not want to share my resources and feelings.
   - o I feel afraid to share my ideas and difficulties.

6) When I was a student teacher I had good training in the field of inclusion: (Please tick one)

- o Agree
- o Disagree
- o Perhaps

7) I feel the need of further training in inclusion: (Please tick one)

- o Agree
- o Disagree
- o Perhaps

Please if you wish to add any comments you are welcome to do so.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

It would be helpful if you could return your completed questionnaire to the Assistant Head within two weeks.

Thank you for your time to help me in this study.

Sonia Galea

Appendix 5:

On behalf of school stakeholders, this study urges policy-makers to implement the following recommendations:

- The wide concept of inclusion needs to be re-evaluated together with stakeholders in order to agree on what inclusion truly entails.
- Policy-makers need to be present in the field, to observe and discuss the challenges of the policy implementation.
- Pre-service training must be more pragmatic in order to reduce the gap between training and classroom reality.
- Similarly, in-service training needs to be more valuable and cognisant of the teachers' needs. In-class training is recommended by the teachers.
- In-service training related to inclusion must also be obligatory for all educators in order to enhance their knowledge and self-efficacy.
- Parents' input to teacher training must be considered.
- The curricula and the syllabi need to be flexible and planned according to the students' needs. The increasing number of non-Maltese students must be taken into consideration by policy-makers.
- The curriculum must cater effectively for gifted students. Policy-makers, together with key stakeholders, must analyse various approaches to include these students.
- More resources, both human and material, need to made available, especially technological devices. Students with particular needs, such as, dyslexia, must be given permission to use a laptop to answer the examination paper.
- Consultations between policy-makers and stakeholders must be continuous.
- The inclusion policy must enhance sharing of good practices through Professional Learning Communities and technological platforms.
- Policy-makers must invest in further research about inclusive pedagogies and catering for gifted students.

The University Of Sheffield.

Sonia Galea
Registration number: 140220797
School of Education
Programme: Ph.D. in Education

Dear Sonia

PROJECT TITLE: The Inclusive School. A Study of Education for All in Maltese Secondary Schools. Implications for Improvement.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 011123

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 24/11/2016 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 011123 (dated 26/10/2016).
- Participant information sheet 1024259 version 1 (25/10/2016).
- Participant consent form 1024260 version 1 (25/10/2016).

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education