

Voices to the unheard: Acknowledging the past and  
taking critical action to shape the future.

Classroom ethnography of the past and present school experiences  
of a Level 1 class in a vocational college.

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Thesis submitted in part requirement for the EdD in Literacy and  
Language in Education

School of Education  
University of Sheffield

June 2014

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who helped me throughout my research study especially the Level 1 students who took this study to heart and shared their experiences openly. I will always be very grateful to them for their trust and commitment. I also thank their parents for their support.

Special thanks go to my tutor Professor Kate Pahl B.A., M.A., Cert Ed., Ph.D., for her constant encouragement, guidance and availability, and to all the EdD team from the School of Education.

And finally, but not least important, I would like to thank my family who have been very patient and supportive throughout the study.

Nadia Maria Vassallo

June 2014

To my husband Robert and my children, Rebecca, Roberta and Petra, with all my love and gratitude

... and to all those who were silenced throughout their years of schooling in the hope that this thesis serves to sound their voices too.

## **Abstract**

In this study I set out to give a voice to learners in a Further Education vocational setting, in the context of Malta. I was interested in their life stories, the causes of their disengagement, their different literacy practices and how these could be utilised to improve their engagement in college. In a classroom ethnography spread over one scholastic year, the learners revealed that their disengagement was mainly caused by negative teacher-student relationships, a dissonance between their out of school literacy practices and teacher expectations in the classroom, and the acquired negative schooled identities. Work on life histories, critical literacy and funds of knowledge as part of classroom practice helped to balance teacher-student power relations, build a community of learners and transform the conventional classroom into a third space where college work, social practices and home came together and enhanced the learning experience. This empowered the learners changing their perception of themselves. The overall picture that transpires from this study is that dichotomies such as student-teacher, vernacular-standard, Maltese-English, inside-outside college practices, print-oral should not be seen as opposite ends on separate spectra but differences that can cohabit peacefully in classrooms that celebrate diversity and give learners the confidence and space to show what their strengths are.

Key words: classroom ethnography, negative school experiences, disengagement, identity, classroom community, translanguaging, critical literacy, third space, students' voice

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# Chapter One: Background to the Study

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*“They [students] bring with them, inside of them, in their bodies, in their lives, they bring their hopes, despair, expectations, knowledge, which they got by living, by fighting, by becoming frustrated. Undoubtedly they don’t come here empty.”*

*Freire, 1990, p.157*

*“ kind of... I appeared much less than who I really am... for example if like so many things almost a quarter of my interests were reflected in school.”*

*Learner’s interview translation B\_\_ (8/01/2013)*

## 1.1. Introduction

For the past five years of teaching at a vocational college, my first encounter with the learners has been through class lists with names and statistics which more often than not have portrayed the learners quite negatively. The statistics are often the poor marks obtained by learners on Initial Assessment Tests (IATs) together with information about specific learning difficulties that form part of the learners' profiles which I am expected to open before I actually meet them.

Learners who enter the college at Level 1 (pre-foundation level) are learners who would have gone through all the years of compulsory schooling and reached the end of Form 5, at age 16+, without any qualifications. On applying to join the vocational college, they are assessed in their 'basic skills' (English, Maltese and Maths). The language tests focus mainly on grammar, syntax and punctuation, a close replica of the school content they had failed on. The placement level (Level 1 or Level 2) they are enrolled in depends on their global mark and the cut off point which is established by the registrar. No aptitude test or interview linked to the vocational strand they apply for is undertaken.

Since in Malta education is free and compulsory up to age sixteen, it is believed by society in general, including the learners themselves, that if results, in the form of certificates, are not obtained it is the learners' fault and the system is hardly ever questioned. Unfortunately, this belief may also be reflected in the teachers' perception of the Level 1 learners, who are often considered illiterate, lazy, unmotivated and rude if they misbehave or rebel against a class pedagogy that insists on a high dose of 'academic' (reading and writing) content rather than hands on, practical subjects, as they would have expected to find in a vocational institution.

Due to their low marks on IATs, learners are often considered to be 'clean slates'. On the other hand, in spite of the portrayed 'limitations' they are expected to succeed at all costs and to stay in vocational education at least until Level 3. In case of failure or drop out (which may be simply a personal decision to stop and seek a job) the system is likely to blame the learners' 'academic' limitations or their

social backgrounds. What's worse is that the learners often blame themselves for lack of success because in the eyes of the general public all are receiving equal opportunities. Hence "even the families of the dispossessed accept that their exclusion is socially right and justified" (Grenfell, 2012, p.55). Grenfell states this as he explores what Bourdieu had to say about language and education and how they contribute in the reproduction of a society, where those who fit in and do well continue to thrive while those who do not fit in are marginalised from the onset of their educational experience. Education perpetuates this when valuing only standard language use and a set of behaviours that are established as the 'norm' and are expected of the ideal student (sitting down, taking notes, abiding by school rules, responding only when questioned, doing well on assignments or tests etc). Indeed, at the college where I teach success of the programmes is measured through passes on assignments and high retention rates but what goes on in the lives of the learners, increase in motivation, learners' empowerment and personal interests cannot be measured in numbers, so they cannot be considered or given accreditation.

Yearly publications of numbers and statistics at the vocational college and elsewhere (at national level and at EU level) are not serving to improve student achievement or retention of learners and teachers, but in turn they continue to reduce learners to mere numbers on a sheet of paper (NCFHE 2014). More courses, more paper work to ensure teacher accountability, more assessments and a move towards standardisation, in order to peg vocational education with higher education on the Malta Qualification Framework and the European Qualification Framework (App.1), are all attempts I have witnessed at my college in the past five years to increase learners' retention at the lower levels. However, so far, not much has changed and teacher frustration and disillusionment for learners continue to be strongly felt.

Decisions are taken at the top level of administration (sometimes even outside the college, at national level) but no one goes directly to the major stakeholders, the learners and their families, to ask what their experiences were, what difficulties they were encountering and how their experiences could be improved.

### **Vignette**

**Administrator:** Our vocational college is about to embark on a three year project which will be funded by the European Social Fund. The project ESF3.102 Inclusion for Employment will target Levels 1, 2 and 3 and will include the development of curricula, syllabi, textbooks, a set of resources and lesson plans. We aim to lower the drop-out rate of students by 10%, from 33% to 23%. You shall be involved in this project.

**Lecturer:** How shall we be involved?

**Administrator:** A group of experts will develop a curriculum, the syllabi and the lesson plans and you shall deliver them. They will come to observe and you are expected to give feedback.

**Lecturer:** Who are the experts?

**Administrator:** I don't know.

**Lecturer:** But do they come from education? Are they in vocational education?

**Administrator:** I don't know it could be anyone.

**Lecturer:** Are they local? So that at least they could be familiar with the Maltese context and the particular needs of our students.

**Administrator:** I don't know. It could be anyone and they **could** be foreign because they shall be appointed by tender.

*Highlights of a conversation with an administrator during an end of year staff meeting, when lecturers were informed of a project that was about to start at MCAST. 5/07/2012.*

I have lived through this education system as a student, as a parent and now as a teacher and lecturer. In spite of changes in governments, syllabi, curricula, technology and resources the system seems to remain the same. During my 12 years of teaching I have come across many learners who for various reasons were encountering difficulties with their 'schooled literacy skills' (Street and Street, 1991), those technical skills which are very often linked to schooling and which, according to most, determine whether a person is literate or illiterate. However, throughout my teaching years, and also thanks to my personal experience as a student, I have become more and more convinced that learners' difficulties in literacy were indeed linked to 'schooled literacy' and that learners had adequate literacy skills in other contexts and situations out of school.

Level 1 (Lv1) learners are considered to have inadequate literacy skills because they fail an IAT, yet these learners each own a mobile on which they text their friends continuously, spend their evenings chatting with their friends on Facebook, they are members of social groups and most of them hold a part-time job. This means that in their social environment, out of school, they are literate enough to cope well with their everyday life.

Aware that learners are not numbers but persons with lives, passing through moments and situations of which teachers are often oblivious, I deem it is very important to recognise the individuality of every student, group or school. I believe that the classroom experience should be dialogic - a two way input of information between teacher and learners, where teacher and learners' interests are brought into the classroom to help all those involved fit in and get engaged in the learning process in order to inform and learn from each other (Freire, 1996). Getting to know what learners "bring with them, inside of them, in their bodies, in their lives, [ ] their hopes, despair, expectations, knowledge" (Freire, 1990, p.157) is essential to inform and guide the teaching and enhance the learning experiences.

## 1.2. Aims of Study

The conviction that all learners have a baggage of knowledge and experience is the principle that drove my research study. My aim was to collaborate with my Lv1 learners at the vocational college where I teach, to look into their life stories. I wanted them to talk about their experiences and to work closely with me in an attempt to seek answers for, or understandings of, the following questions:

- What are the learners' literacy practices, family backgrounds and their interests out of school?
- What caused the individual learners to disengage from mainstream schooling?
- How are the learners and teacher affected when their out of school literacy practices, family backgrounds and their interests are brought into the classroom?
- How does the learning community make sense of the past in the present, in an attempt to imagine better futures?

## 1.3. My Ontological and Epistemological Position

It is commonly accepted that our life experiences affect the interpretation we give to whatever we read, hear and see happening around us. Of course new experiences may change our perceptions and positions but “we are always outfitted with some particular lens” (Ferrero, 2005, p.430).

Any issue or topic can be approached from different ontological<sup>1</sup> and epistemological<sup>2</sup> positions therefore the methods of investigation may be subjective to the individual researcher. This means that methods of

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<sup>1</sup> Ontology is our assumptions about how the world is made up and the nature of things.

<sup>2</sup> Epistemology is our beliefs about how one might discover knowledge about the world.

investigation can draw on most of the methodologies available. Sikes (2004) argues that the choice of methodology is influenced by the researchers' perceptions of the social world, their epistemological assumptions and their views about how people interact with their environment.

Over the past decade, "political and scholarly prominence in the field of education" was given to "scientifically based research" which promotes mainly experimental research designs attributed to the positivist paradigm (Blair, 2010, p.417). In this tradition it is believed that research is objective and 'value-free', so once a theory is established, it is prescriptive and could be used to control other similar situations. By implication, teachers become "powerless" because their experience, the environment and the social atmosphere in which they operate cannot be taken into consideration. They cannot "define what is to count as knowledge about their practices" (Elliott, 1991, p.46).

As a critique to this many qualitative researchers, with whom I tend to agree, argue that normative standards leave little room for educational research which has at its heart the processes, structures, cultures and subjectivities of schooling (Luttrell, 2005); and that positivists' "methodological purism" may appear to be concerned with principles and objectivity but in reality it serves "particular interests, albeit in a disguised way" (Hammersely, 2000, p.127).

Hence while the critical approach is committed to bring together theory and practice, the "methodological purists" believe that their sole job is the production of objective knowledge (Hammersley, 2000). However, every individual has a value system that covers moral values, competency, personal and social values and this system determines how a person behaves (Rokeach, 1973). This often gives rise to accusations that educational researchers allow their 'values' to influence their research work, including their choice of research methods and their eventual conclusions about the study (Tooley and Darby, 1998). Yet, drawing on Ramaekers (2006), the researcher's "imprint" does not signify the abandonment of knowledge and truth but that "we should treat 'knowledge' as referring to what we take to be beyond reasonable doubt" (Hammersley, 2004, p.70). Thus there is no one absolute 'truth'. According to Carr (1995) value-



neutral research is not possible and those who believe that it is are only deluding themselves.

Thus it is important that before I go any deeper into the study, I disclose my life journey, that of the learners and the context in which this study takes place.

# Chapter Two: Participants and Context

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*“I was never intelligent enough to go to Junior College or Higher. And I have always liked practical, hands on things, you know... I never liked school.”*

*Learner’s self-perception J\_\_ interview translation  
10/01/2013*

## 2.1. How Did I Get Here?

I was born in Malta in 1970 into a working class family affiliated to the Labour Party which at that time was quite anti-colonial and anti-clerical. I was baptised as a Roman Catholic more than anything else because it is was a custom, since religion is entwined with Maltese culture and politics to an extent that Roman Catholicism is the religion for the Maltese people stipulated in the constitution. My mother used to send me for Sunday mass and for the daily catechism lesson because every child in Malta receives Holy Communion at age seven and Confirmation at age ten (now age thirteen). These events were celebrated in the community and in school so they could not be avoided.

I was the youngest of three siblings, all girls. My father worked as a welder and my mother worked in a factory, as a seamstress and as a house help. Money and reaching the end of the month were always an issue in the household. My father was an Arsenal supporter and I have spent many late evenings awake to watch football matches on our small black and white television with him. My mother was always busy following my sisters' education because they were six and four years respectively ahead of me so their work was always much more important than whatever I was doing.

At the age of ten I had to sit for the Junior Lyceum exam which had just been reintroduced. While it was an important step for me, at home it was no big deal because my eldest sister was doing her GCSEs which were much more important. With every exam they passed, my sisters strengthened their position as the pride and joy of the household. My parents were seeing in them the possibility to move up the social class ladder especially when they went to university, one to become a doctor and the other to become a dentist. By then I was living in their shadow. A weight problem I had did not help at all. When I got to the important stage of subject choice in secondary school, my mother forced me to take up sciences just like my sisters. It was the worst choice possible and I soon started to do very poorly. In no time I was labelled as careless, lazy and eventually stupid. At school, teachers, including the Head of school, used to

compare me and my achievements to those of my sister who had attended the same school and whose results were always far better than mine, so my self-esteem was at rock bottom. On several occasions I was the centre of teachers' ridicule and unfortunately this continued at home too. I soon started to believe that I was unable to achieve good results, lost interest in school, stopped trying and started to skive lessons. In spite of all the odds, I passed six GCSEs (not the sciences) but enough to go to Junior College and study for my 'A' Levels. I don't know why I went there, probably because at the time there wasn't much else to do since jobs were scarce. I passed my 'A' levels in English, Maltese and Religion but I still had very low self-esteem and although I wished to become a teacher, deep down I shied away from going to university because I was quite sure I would fail, so I started working as a clerk. I went through my teenage years as part of a family of five and yet I was alone. No one ever bothered to ask what I wanted or how I was feeling. I was just a number at school and at home!

By the age of twenty-five I was married and had three beautiful girls. My husband was a Customs' Officer and eventually started his business in the media. I had become a full-time 'housewife' and in the eyes of my parents we, my husband and I, were failures because we did not have a tertiary education.

A year after the birth of my youngest daughter, my father died unexpectedly, in his sleep. It was a terrible shock and it changed the rest of my life. I realised how dependent I was on my husband and with three very young children I wanted some security so I plucked up courage and enrolled on the B.Ed course. My husband was very supportive and that same year I got my first 'A' in psychology. At university I received a lot of positive feedback from my tutors and colleagues and day by day I made it through. I couldn't believe it when, after four years of hard work, I saw that I had graduated with a first class degree! And yet that awkward feeling of insecurity was still very much part of whom I had become.

I started work as a primary teacher, teaching a mixed ability class in a church school which belonged to a congregation of teaching nuns. The Mother founder

of the congregation, Maria Theresa Spinelli, who lived in the 1800s worked with the underprivileged, especially women and girls, trying to feed them, give them shelter and teach them how to read and write. When I read her story I felt overwhelmed by her charisma.

By 2005 I had completed an MA in Literacy and Language in Education followed by a Postgraduate Diploma in Dyslexia and Language Specialist Teaching in 2007. Both degrees undertaken were directly linked to the work I was doing at the time so I was happy in my job. I was doing something I believed in and which complemented the ethos of the school and the charisma of the Mother Founder. Unfortunately, a change in administration brought many changes in the school and while I still believed in the ethos of the school, I felt that it was no longer being practised so I had to leave.

This took me to my present job at Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) where I started as a Senior Lecturer within the Learning Support Unit (LSU). I teach English and Maltese to learners aged 16+. It was quite shocking for me to see that after so many years of schooling, learners at MCAST were still showing the same difficulties and disempowerment shown by my Primary School students.

Now, after five years at MCAST I can say that every year, I have experienced the transformation of each group of learners I encountered, the building of mutual respect and trust for and from these learners. I have seen learners improve their attitude, their learning and to slowly start to believe that they can achieve and to aspire for something better than what they already have. Teaching them brought to the surface the feelings of disappointment and shame, the sensations of feeling inadequate and stupid I had felt when I was their age because that is how they describe themselves at our first encounter. That is what brought me to choose this study. I wanted to try and understand why these learners find it hard to integrate in the educational system when a huge portion of the Maltese budget goes on education, and curricula and syllabi are constantly being scrutinised, adapted and changed. Although risky, I was very interested in looking into the learners' lives in the same way that I had looked into mine because if someone

had bothered to look at what I was going through when I was in secondary school, I feel sure that my burdens at that age could have been much lighter and I could have been saved that insecure, 'out of place' feeling which I still feel today in spite of all the qualifications I have obtained. I wanted this study to provide a space where the learners' can voice their experiences so that the college may then take their needs and views into consideration especially in an important moment of change for the college such as this.

## 2.2. The Learners (participants)

### Vignette

**Learner 1:** I'm B\_\_. I'm sixteen and I'm an artist. I don't know why I am here. I applied for the Institute of Art and Design and found myself at Building and Construction.

**Nadia:** I'm sorry to see that you are so disappointed but this course can be quite interesting...I am very interested in your work so I would be very pleased to see your art work if you want.

**Learner 1:** Here Miss, I have a sample of my work right here.....

**Nadia:** Who would like to introduce himself next?

**Learner 2:** I'm J\_\_, I'm sixteen and come from Ħaż-Żabbar. I'm not good at school. I wish to go into restoration, I applied at Building and Construction because I was told that here we would have restoration but on the timetable we don't have any lessons on restoration. Not even one.

**Nadia:** Thank you J\_\_. I'm sorry to see that you are disappointed too but during this course you will be learning about several vocational trades such as sheet metal, bench fitting and woodwork which are all very important subjects. You will learn about the properties and handling of different materials and that might come in useful later on if you continue to be interested in restoration.

**Learner 3:** I wanted restoration too. My name is M\_\_. I come from Ħaż-Żabbar and am sixteen too.

**Nadia:** Why don't you join forces and speak to the director? Maybe he can fit in a couple of lessons about restoration later on in the year.

**Learner 1:** I don't think he would. No one asked us anything we were just told to come here.

**Learner 4:** My name is S\_\_. Don't ask me to read because I can't and I don't like school. I came here because I want a certificate in metal work. I already have a job but everyone wants certificates.

**Nadia:** Ok so I can see that we all have so many things in common. I used to hate school too and my father was a welder just like you S\_\_. I was also forced to study subjects which I didn't like, like you B\_\_. I also had my problems in passing some subjects, but here I am today so let us try to help each other out and try to make the most of this year together.

*First day of college as learners introduce themselves to the class during their first Maltese lesson. Translation 4/10/2012*

The learners in this study add up to seven from a class of 10. Out of the other three learners, two dropped out very early on in the year so they were never really part of the class. Another learner did not participate in the study because he was Egyptian and could not communicate in either Maltese or English, he mainly focused on the trades and attended the basic skills lessons sporadically.

The seven learners that were part of the study were six males and one female. They were all white, Maltese youngsters between sixteen and seventeen years old and they had all completed secondary education but had no certification to enrol at a higher level. On the Initial Assessment Tests set by the college the learners scored within the Level 1 benchmark (0 – 36%) therefore they were automatically placed under the provision of the Learning support Unit (LSU) for their Key Skills lessons (English, Maths, Maltese, PD, IT). The learners came from different parts of the island of Malta so location of residence was not indicative of their attainment in any way. They all lived with their families.

Since this study was all about the experiences of a Level 1 community of learners at a vocational institute, I felt that enough space should be dedicated to

each and so I wrote about each one of them separately. This approach was important because it made it easier for them to understand what was being written about them when I gave them the script back for scrutiny and feedback. The accounts that follow are taken from my reflective journal, conversations held with the learners, their life histories and the interviews I carried out with them. Each of the accounts that follow was read and approved by the individual learners before it was included in the thesis.

This data was collected during the language classes as part of the curriculum as well as during the critical literacy session which was added to have more opportunity to work on the research study. At first curriculum and research work were separate and distinct but complementary because the work done through critical literacy informed my classroom practice. As we got deeper into the research study and the scholastic year, the critical literacy session and the language classes became permeable and what was started in one space continued in the other.

#### Vignette

I told the learners that I had written the introduction, the positionality and the participants' sections and that I needed to give it to them to get feedback before I sent it to my tutor. They read it through ( I left out the ontological and the epistemological position part out because I thought it would be too technical for them and I also left out the positionality – life history bit, because I had already read that in class). I wanted to make sure that they gave their full attention to the bit I wrote about them because I was aware that since it was in English, for most of them reading would be harder. J\_\_ asked me to read it to him so I did. He was surprised with 'My first impressions' part and did not look enthusiastic about it but he did not want me to change it when I asked. He just pointed out that now he is more careful about what he wears for school.

Journal entry 22.2.2013



**B\_\_**

**My first impressions (reflective journal 8/10/2012)**

Dressed in dark 'rocker' clothes, he was not enthusiastic at all to join this institute because he wanted to go to Art and Design (IAD) and because he had hoped to be on a higher Level. He ended up here because IAD did not have enough space for learners and the global mark on the IATs classified him as Level 1. He repeatedly reminded everyone that he is an artist and that what is done in class is not relevant to him. He pointed out that IATs do not measure what they are supposed to measure, that is, the aptitude of learners for the trade they apply for. He was calm and well mannered and carried on with the tasks assigned anyway.

**What B\_\_ revealed about himself in the interview and life history**

B\_\_ is sixteen years old and is part of a family of four. He is three years younger than his sibling. His brother attends Higher Secondary but does not take his studies seriously and often stays at home to play on the computer. His father works as a Security Officer in a bank and his mother holds three jobs to make ends meet. B\_\_ feels an outcast in his own family because he feels that his elder brother often gets the better hand especially because B\_\_'s interests (music style etc) are not what the rest of the family prefer so he often ends up having to go somewhere else on his own.

B\_\_ has always attended government schools. A teacher in Primary School made life at school difficult. At the end of primary school B\_\_'s mother was advised that she should not let her son sit for the end of primary Junior Lyceum exams because he was not able to pass them. After an uphill experience in Secondary school highlighted by a lot of bullying B\_\_ sat for his Sec exams ('O' levels) and admits that he was very disappointed when he got his results especially those for English and Art in which he considers himself to do fairly well. The next shock for him was being placed at Level 1 but then he accepted it, "a bit shocked but.... since I did not do well in my 'O' levels, I said, I should expect to go to level 1.... it is not what I wished but ..." (translation from interview transcript 8/01/2013). Outside the college, B\_\_ is Quarter Master for the Scouts

group in his village and he contributes in the planning of scouts' camps and activities organised on a national level. Making friends was a big issue for B\_\_ up to a few years back and he went through a very negative period of time when he also turned to practices of self-harm. He blames most of this negative attitude on the teacher bullying he suffered at Secondary school. Now he has overcome those bad moments and is looking forward to find 'the right girl' for him (translation informal conversation held on our way to the workshop). Apart from scouts, his other interests are rock music, writing poems and drawing and reading Manga<sup>3</sup> which was introduced to him by a friend and which he practises often.

J\_\_

### **My first impressions (reflective journal 8/10/2012)**

J\_\_ is a rather clumsy and loud student, hitting here and there as he walks into the small classroom. Dressed in huge t-shirt and jeans, gold chain around his neck, he has a shabby look but his lovely smile makes up for that. He jokes around most of the time but I have a gut feeling that it is just a facade he puts up to fit in the group as quickly as possible. He is pretty self-conscious and has a low self-esteem when it comes to school work. He openly declared that his reading and writing are poor and yet he refused any kind of assistance when tasks were assigned.

*On reading my first impressions, J\_\_ said that I had got him spot on. He said that friends are important to him and he wouldn't like to be left out and sometimes he acts in certain ways because he has this on his mind. He also commented about the way he used to dress and emphasised that he has changed since the beginning of the year. He pointed out that now he is more careful in choosing his clothes but insisted that just because he wears a gold*

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<sup>3</sup> Manga: "Japanese genre of cartoons and comic books, having a science-fiction or fantasy theme and sometimes including violent or sexually explicit material. The origin of the word Manga is Japanese, from *man* 'indiscriminate' + *ga* 'picture'."

<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/manga?q=manga>

*chain it doesn't mean anything "wearing a gold chain around the neck doesn't mean anything, it is important to me because it was a gift from my grandma."*

*(translation of oral feedback after reading the above 'first impressions').*

### **What J\_\_ revealed about himself in the interview and life history**

J\_\_ is sixteen years old and is part of a family of four. He has a sister who is three years older and who works as a Carer. His father is a minibus driver and his mother is a housewife but she bakes and sells cakes from home. He is catholic and every Sunday his mother used to insist that he goes for mass. Up to last year he attended M.U.S.E.U.M.<sup>4</sup> According to J\_\_ his mother always pushed him to get an education but he never really worked hard. He always attended government schools and in Grade 4 he was diagnosed with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD).

Before Grade 4, J\_\_ could not get himself organised in class, he was slow to finish his work and he was continuously shouted at by teachers. As a result, he was cast out by peers. At the end of Primary school he sat for the Junior Lyceum exam but failed. Then in Secondary school he always stayed with older learners to avoid being bullied. He admits, however, that this has exposed him to language and behaviour that were not 'quite right'. At the end of Secondary school he sat for the Sec exams in Maths and Graphical Design but a few months before the exams he had found a part-time job and got distracted from his studies so he failed. As a result, according to J\_\_:

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4 MUSEUM: a Society of Christian Doctrine founded by Saint George Preca on the 7th of March, 1907 when he held a first meeting with a group of youths.

As a young priest, Saint George Preca was set in the idea of using lay men and women to serve the Church. These lay people received a strong formation which helped them lead a truly Christian life with a dedication to evangelisation. At the time Saint George Preca was preoccupied with the state of catechism in the local Church because although Malta was practically all Catholic the population knew very little about the truths of Christianity. In general, religion was based on custom and the practice of popular devotions.  
<http://www.sdcmuseum.org/Page.aspx?menu=1&pv=850q89LhwS4=>

*"I always used to say that I would come to MCAST. [] To learn ...and get a job...because, I was never intelligent enough to go to Junior College or Higher. And I have always liked practical, hands on things, you know... I never liked school."*

Interview translation (10/01/2013)

At home he likes to go on Facebook and chat with friends. He likes cars especially because his uncle owns his own business as a panel beater and sprayer and J\_\_ spends a lot of his time with him. For J\_\_ English, Maltese and Maths are not relevant in his work and he only works when he feels up to it.

**G\_\_**

### **My first impressions (reflective journal 8/10/2012)**

A 'petite' blue-eyed youth, clean and well groomed came into the classroom blushing slightly as he walked past me. He comes from a Private School so he is quite confident when he speaks in English although his vocabulary is limited. He is cheerful and constantly jumps in to give answers, solutions or ideas. Yet when I asked him to give himself a score for a task carried out in class he thought he was doing poorly. He finds it hard to find positive aspects in his abilities.

### **What G\_\_ revealed about himself in the interview and life history**

G\_\_ is part of a family of eight and this is hard for him to say especially in front of the others because he feels that everyone teases him about it. He is the third of the siblings. His eldest brother is at University following a degree in accounts and communications. The sibling before him was a girl but died soon after she was born. The other three siblings are younger than him, a brother aged fourteen, another brother aged six and a sister aged three. His father used to work in a hotel but when it closed down he opened his own grocery store. His mother is an LSA. G\_\_ started his Primary years in a government school but at Grade 2 he was sent to a private school where he stayed throughout his school years. At Grade three he repeated a year according to G\_\_:

*"I repeated Grade 3 .... I'm not sure why, maybe to assimilate more English, since I used to speak mainly in Maltese. []"*

*Because you know... there were some things which I did not understand in English so I started to fall behind ...”*

Interview translation (15/01/2013)

Schooling was always important in the family and his parents tried to help although with five children life was not easy. At school he had both positive experiences, especially in sports, and negative experiences of bullying by peers. At Grade 5 he was assigned an LSA because he was diagnosed with SpLD. This helped him progress but when the LSA left the school his marks started to fall again. This made him lose his motivation and although he knew that he had to study he couldn't get himself round to sitting down and actually do the work. At the end of Secondary school (which he terminated earlier since he had repeated Grade 3), he did not sit for any Sec exams because his parents thought that it was hard for him to pass them anyway.

Outside MCAST, G\_\_ spends some time on his college work, and he helps his grandfather in his construction business or in the fields. Sometimes he helps his father at the grocery store or looks after his younger brother and sister. He also practises Karate and is quite keen on it because he is soon going to get his black belt.

**M\_\_**

### **My first impressions (reflective journal 8/10/2012)**

M\_\_, a tall youth, nicely dressed and well groomed walked in politely and settled at a desk straight away. He is quiet and looks down when spoken to, so it was quite a surprise when he blurted out sexist comments to play 'cool'. The comment felt more out of place coming from him but when he saw that I did not make a big deal out of it and that it did not prejudice my reaction towards him his attitude changed and he proved to be very hard working.

**What M\_\_ revealed about himself in the interview and life history?**

M\_\_ comes from a “simple family” (interview translation 16/01/2012) of four. He has a twin brother who was pushed, by his father, into going to work in a factory which produces detergents. M\_\_’s father works as a Security Officer and his mother is a housewife. His parents always thought highly of school but their comments (especially the father’s) were discouraging because they used to compare them (M\_\_ and his brother) to their cousins who used to get good grades. He always attended a government school. When he moved from primary to secondary he was aware that the school he was going to was labelled as “the school for the stupid” (interview translation 16/01/2013). M\_\_ stated that he had always wished to go to MCAST because his interest is restoration so when the time came he asked for information and applied.

Outside MCAST M\_\_ spends a lot of time in his room doing crafts and sometimes he babysits his neighbours’ children. He often looks after younger children in his neighbourhood and teaches them art and crafts. M\_\_ feels very proud of this. Teaching is something he would have liked to do but since he did not get the grades he needed, he settled for something else. This love for teaching was also instilled in him during the years in which he attended M.U.S.E.U.M. As a member of the Christian Doctrine Society, he was given some responsibility which included teaching the younger classes (5/6- year-olds). He stopped attending because as a ‘higher’ member of M.U.S.E.U.M. he would have had to give up helping out in the village band club which organises the village feast. He explained that he had reflected and that it was a very hard decision to take but he came to the conclusion that helping out in the club would have made him miss out on sessions at the society so he would have set a bad example for the younger members. M\_\_ does not like to read or write things other than school stuff, which he is forced to do. For him reading is pointless:

*“because I forget whatever I write and whatever I read straight away....”*

Interview translation 16/02/2013

K\_\_

### **My first impressions (reflective journal 8/10/2012)**

K\_\_ is good looking, well mannered but looked quite shy and held back, probably because she is the only girl in the group. She introduced herself and spoke about her interests but was eager to start working indicating that she was slightly feeling embarrassed. She works very well and was surprised when I assigned a more challenging task to her once she was ready before the rest of the class.

### **What K\_\_ revealed about herself in the interview and life history**

K\_\_ is part of a very united family of four and has a younger brother who is in Secondary school. Her father is a Stevedore and has a share in a family business (a shop which sells lighting and chandeliers). Her mother is a housewife. K\_\_ speaks very well of both her parents and she explains that they enjoy spending time together whenever this is possible. Schooling was always important in the family, even though her parents do not possess a high level of education, and when K\_\_ was diagnosed with SpLD they sought help and paid for home tutors to help her after school. K\_\_ used to attend a Church School before coming to MCAST. Although she speaks well of her teachers she is aware that she did not get the support she needed and peer bullying was a huge setback for her achievement. Getting poor marks in Secondary school made her feel out of place and she had lost faith in herself. She stated:

*"I used to feel like a fish out of water because everyone used to get some good grades except me. I always got 20s, 30s, and sometimes I got even 10s. [] my brain seems to block, it goes blank..."*

Interview translation (21/01/2013)

*"When I used to get full marks the subjects used to be art or religion, things that I could do on my own because I would have seen it myself or heard in stories."*

*(ibid.)*

In class K\_\_ is the only female and this was a problem at first because she felt awkward but soon she gained their respect and now she is very happy.

*“I was a bit shocked on the first day because I was used to being with girls [ ] now I am OK. I feel as if I have known them [boys] for ages.”*

*(ibid.)*

K\_\_ loves art and she got a pass in her Sec exams ('O' level) as well as in IT and Italian in which she states to be good in because “I like to watch seasons of CSI on Italia Uno [Italian channel], it is in Italian.” (ibid.). She chose the institute because she wants to go into restoration and eventually hopes to open her own business or go and work abroad.

Outside MCAST K\_\_ likes to help her mother cook; she also helps her brother with homework and research work when the home tutor is not around. She holds a part-time job in the family shop. K\_\_ often plays cards with her mother or her brother and enjoys watching Italian TV or going on Facebook. She often reads the newspaper in Maltese and she has started to write in her diary, a practice which she hopes to keep up.

*As she read through the transcript and the introduction K\_\_ was the one who got most emotional but I did not speak. I felt that she was almost re-living the experiences she had spoken about in the interview so I respected the moment. At the end she could hardly speak so I felt the need to ask her whether she still wanted me to use the interview but she confirmed.*

**S\_\_**

### **My first impressions (reflective journal 8/10/2012)**

An incredibly tall person for a 16-year-old, not at all groomed with black stained fingernails of which he is proud, as revealed later, since they are evidence of hard work in his brother's engineering workshop. He walked into the small room and settled at the back. He sits there quietly and tries to do all the assigned work. He is very knowledgeable in the vocational area and has a lot of



experience. He communicates well in Maltese but is not confident and does not like reading and writing.

### **What S\_\_ revealed about himself in the interview and life history**

S\_\_ is part of a family of five with two older brothers. His father is a farmer and wanted his children to get an education to avoid his hard work. His mother is a housewife. Both his brothers went through vocational education and the eldest has opened an engineering workshop. S\_\_ has a passion for engineering work that includes bench fitting and sheet metal. He already works in his brother's garage and is fully paid for his work. He saves his money to buy equipment and machines for a garage which he owns and which he is converting into his own engineering workshop. He has also bought a second hand car which he is going to work on to get it ready for the road by when he is eighteen-years-old.

S\_\_ was diagnosed with SpLD when he was younger but he does not like to say this. When we first started the year, S\_\_ declared that he does not like reading and writing and stated that I would probably be shocked when I see his work. At first he was not so consistent in his effort and worked more according to mood but when he decided that he wanted to continue studying on welding or engineering and realised that he needed to get to Level 3 to be able to choose, his work became highly consistent and good. In discussions he is able to give very valid contributions about almost any topic and has very clear ideas and suggestions as to how the Level 1 programme could be improved. However when I asked him to take his suggestions forward, he stressed that he still does not feel up to taking the role of the spokesperson.

*On reading my first impressions, S\_\_ said that it was true that for many years his dyslexia was an issue since he was bullied because of it. He is not as bothered as he was before, because in the classroom and workshop it is no longer an issue. Most of his friends are very similar to him and the teachers don't make an issue of it but encourage him to persevere and help him deal with it.*

Jh\_\_

### **My first impressions (reflective journal 8/10/2012)**

Jh\_\_ is very self conscious. He continuously pulls down on his t-shirt. He sits at the front and constantly measures himself against the others:

*“But how did I do Miss?... Am I the worst in class? ... I know less than the others...they know all the tools and they know how to measure ... I cannot use the ruler well.”*

Transalton of informal conversation, end of first week after a workshop lesson

He constantly puts himself down and feels the odd one out and so he finds it hard to integrate with the rest of the group.

### **What Jh\_\_ revealed about himself in the interview and life history**

Jh\_\_ is an only child and lives with both parents and it is the father who ‘follows’ his education. Jh\_\_’s father is a Porter and his mother is a Cleaner. Jh\_\_ had many issues in Secondary School and was bullied by peers. His attitude towards both academic subjects as well as the vocational ones is very inconsistent. He misses out on lessons and therefore falls behind the rest in practical work. He also misses out on shared classroom jokes, discussions and shared experiences and that makes it hard for him to integrate into the group. I often try to involve him but he is reluctant to work. However, when he does work he can produce good work in the academic subjects. He does less well in the practical mainly because he has got problems of spatial ability, measurements and coordination but also because he misses a lot of the practical sessions. He speaks very little about himself, his interests or his family.

The above mentioned learners are the Level 1 participants in this study and their participation was a very active one because they were consulted throughout the whole research process, they generated most of the data and they were constantly giving feedback about my writing. Together we formed a group of seven 16+ learners and a teacher and we all walked into the classroom with different experiences, different backgrounds and certainly different aspirations.

The learners were put together by fate and they had to embark on a nine month journey together.

Some learners found the journey hard and long, some found the programmes interesting and sought to plan other journeys to follow, while some others found the journey too long and decided to stop and drop out as soon as they found a job. I feel that my role as an educator in this setting is to try and make the experience as interesting and worthwhile as possible but I cannot control everything because I have to follow the rules and regulations of the Institution I teach in.

## **2.3. The Context**

The vocational college where I teach offers programmes from Level 1 up to Level 6. The higher the level is, the more prestige it carries with it. The level of prestige also depends on the particular course and the institute it is offered in so although at the same Level, some courses may be more privileged and more esteemed than others, depending on the institute to which they belong. Then of course there are outside influences that have an impact on the college such as the Education System and Government expectations regarding enrolment and retention which are often imposed by EU and which are often directed towards learners who are at the lowest levels, thus considered by society as the most vulnerable.

So in the next section I define the context by looking at the history of the college's founding and the national and global influences on that process. I then move on to look at its current practice and finally narrow down my focus onto the classroom context.

### **2.31. The History of the Founding of MCAST**

The vocational college in my study had been first established in 1966 under the governance of the Nationalist Party, a few years after the acquisition of Malta's

independence in 1964, after 150 years of British rule. Dr Louis Galea, then Minister for Education (2003), stated in The Times of Malta that at that time MCAST was seen as, “an opportunity to train its [Malta’s] citizens towards a new context, that of transforming Malta’s economy.” Thus the ultimate aim for training was the strengthening of the economy. Twenty-two years later focus on work continued to be evident however the individual was put at the centre of the equation:

*“The 1988 Education Act states that it is the duty and right of the State to:*

*Ensure the existence of a system of schools and institutions accessible to all Maltese citizens for the full development of the whole personality including the ability of every person to work.”*

Cutajar, 2007, p.3

As a result, the 1990s were an important period of change for the Maltese Society which included a substantial evaluation of its Education System which at the time was selective and thus limiting to those learners who did not pass the Junior Lyceum examination at the end of primary. It was further restrictive to learners who did not want to take an academic route to their studies because that was the only type of education available at Secondary level since the vocational and technical track had been lost with the closing down of Trade Schools. Yet, according to a review by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (2008), in spite of the compulsory channelling into an academic route about one third of the 16-year-old cohort either did not register for examinations or failed to obtain a certificate in any subject. This had other implications for the rate of unemployment, job opportunity and in the long run quality of life. Consequently education was the subject of criticism directed at governments at the time, making it an important issue on the agenda of both main political parties on the island.

The local electorate was not the only source of pressure because during that time Malta was preparing for full membership within the EU and that implied

reaching specific goals before the time of accession. In preparation of this, a new National Minimum Curriculum was already underway and the EU was well ingrained in it:

*“The educational system must also address the responsibilities connected with the prospect of European citizenship and the political and economic realities which full EU membership entails.”*

Ministry of Education, 1999, p.16

With the application for membership, the European Commission started to monitor Malta, checking that actions were taken to implement the necessary changes in Maltese legislations including education, so that the latter could match the Community *acquis*<sup>5</sup> within a stipulated time. In its October 1999 Report, the Commission noted that:

*“there were still some problems concerning free movement of persons and non-discrimination, such as access for women to vocational training.”*

*Summary of EU Legislations*

In response to this, to the education act and to local needs, in August 2000 the Deed of Foundation of MCAST was published. The government felt the need to set up “an institution which provides a post-secondary vocational and professional education other than that which is already provided at the University” (Deed of Foundation p.4).

Therefore once again, at a time when Malta was going through an important political change as the country was in the process of accessing the EU, a need was felt to equip the people by “the upgrading of the skills of our workforce” (Galea, 2003). It was believed that the vocational college would “play a leading role in ensuring that our workforce is well prepared, well trained and updated on new developments in given sectors” (ibid.).

With Malta’s accession in the EU, education was seen as the best investment by which to ensure human capital and therefore attached to MCAST was a

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<sup>5</sup>European Union Law to implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States (Article 150, ex-Article 127) and shall aim to facilitate adaptation to industrial changes and increase employability.

'promise' of equal opportunities and a better quality of life for all (especially those who had failed the academic route of education):

*“education will provide us with the tools to achieve higher standards of living, security, well-being and a stronger sense of cultural, national and European Identity. People from all walks of life stand to gain.”*

*Dr Galea (Minister for Education)  
The Times of Malta, 5/04/2003*

Indeed the Mission Statement by which MCAST was set to operate incorporated all the visions quoted above and stated that it aimed to:

*“provide universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with an international dimension, responsive to the needs of the individual and the economy.”*

Thus the setting up of MCAST was a solution to problems which as pointed out earlier were felt in the country and stressed by EU. Indeed the college was a response to the first immediate need which was to create the space for vocational training. This was necessary to be in line with the Education Act of 1988<sup>6</sup> because the phasing out of Trade Schools had created a void in the sector. Also, this new institution was promising more value to vocational education and training which were previously associated with academic failure and truancy from school. MCAST was attempting to remove this label by making “a major move from narrow prescriptive instruction to a more modern and holistic approach to vocational education and training” (Attard and Edwards, 2006). According to the Mission Statement, MCAST was promising “vocational and professional training” thus by implication specialized and expert training. This was necessary to encourage learners and parents to accept and make use of this new facility.

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<sup>6</sup> It is stated in articles 3, 4 and 21 of the Education Act (MALTA) 1988 that the State is to “ensure the existence of educational institutions accessible to all citizens, and to establish such scholastic facilities which the state may deem necessary to provide those citizens with the opportunity to qualify in trades, skills, artisan and technical or commercial activities, and in the professions in order to prepare, instruct and instil discipline in those citizens for work in the community.”

The need for this college with its new approach was driven by other forces including the economy and the political fields. MCAST was seen as an investment that would eventually reap fruits for the Maltese economy because with a skilled workforce, private and foreign investment in our country by major companies at the time (ST Thompson, Lufthansa Technik, Smart City etc.) was more probable. One must not forget that Malta lacks natural resources and its only resource is the people so:

*“the government’s vision is to create the educational structures that will practically cover all areas of vocational education relevant to Malta’s needs and development”*

Dr Galea (Minister for Education)  
The Times of Malta 2003

This was an immediate necessity since as stated in The Copenhagen Declaration 2002, “the acceding member states should be integrated as partners in future cooperation on education and training initiatives at European level from the very beginning”. Therefore Malta had to affect the necessary changes to local policies in line with the EU to be accepted as a member and also to match up with the other member states which were much larger physically and much stronger economically. Although locally there was a significant political divide regarding Malta’s membership in the EU, the majority (as was later stipulated in a referendum) saw this as an opportunity for more investment, better jobs and more economic growth. According to The Copenhagen Declaration 2002, for cooperation to be possible the country had to conform to the ideology of the EU which maintains that:

*“the transition towards a knowledge based economy capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion brings new challenges to the development of human resources<sup>7</sup>.”*

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<sup>7</sup> In March 2000, the Lisbon European Council acknowledged education as an essential part of economic and social policies, as a means for increasing Europe’s competitive power worldwide, and as an assurance for ensuring the unity of our societies and the full development of its citizens. A strategic objective for EU, set by the European Council, is to become the world’s most dynamic knowledge-based economy. Therefore the development of high quality VET is a fundamental part of this strategy, particularly in terms of promoting social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness.

Malta had to promote social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness which were EU objectives and education was the channel through which those objectives were to be met. This reflects neoliberal ideologies, in which increasing social inclusion is about “investing in human capital and improving the skills shortages for the primary purpose of economic growth as part of a nationalist agenda to build the nation’s economy in order to better perform in a competitive global market” (Gidley et al., 2010, p.23). Hence the aim of the government was to attract as many people as possible back into education therefore there had to be another option besides the academic track which required a solid base of qualifications. As things stood at the time, a substantial part of the population was excluded by the education system with repercussions on job opportunities and quality of life. MCAST responded to this need because it is “universally accessible”. However ‘access’ in a neoliberal policy “is about numbers and percentages and does not necessarily reflect student participation or success, nor does it reveal anything about the quality of the education that is accessed” (Gidley et al., 2010, p.23). Therefore everybody could apply at MCAST, irrespective of qualifications, gender, age, race or social class. The only requirement was a wish to continue in education. As a measure of equity and in order to avoid any discrimination the government started to pay MCAST learners a monthly stipend to help them with their expenses making sure that a poor economic family background would not stop anybody interested from applying. Up to then stipends were only issued to learners following an academic route. This, although important, was only a first step and was not a guarantee of student participation or success. Notwithstanding this, a change in government in 2013, confirmed this and reinforced it by securing the stipend for learners, who were repeating a year at MCAST due to failure or change of course, a measure which was not in place before.



The universal accessibility mentioned earlier includes all the local population as well as any other person residing in Malta (who could prove that he/she was financially able to maintain himself/herself) including immigrants who are another reality that Malta is facing today. Given the position of the island in the Mediterranean, Malta is often a refuge to immigrants and this increased after the late unrest in the northern African countries. This is of course one aspect of 'globalisation'<sup>8</sup> whereby what happens in other countries whether positive or negative, social or economic is bound to have a ripple effect on other nations.

Once they settle here, some immigrants seek to learn a trade to increase the chances of finding a job so they enrol at MCAST at Lv1, no qualifications are required, and because the Level 1 is a programme in vocational training but with support from the LSU staff for lessons in the Key skills. These and other foreign learners are normally exempted from Maltese. This is discriminatory and penalising for Maltese learners since, for them, all key skills subjects are compulsory and to progress to Lv2 they have to reach all the criteria set through assignments which are often tests. This also goes against Note 9<sup>9</sup> in the "Notes for Foreign Students who are interested in following full-time courses at MCAST". Since foreign learners are not expected to know Maltese, lessons in which foreign learners are present have to be conducted in English even when that is not the ideal. That is an imposition on lecturers (Key Skills and vocational) as well as on Maltese learners whose understanding may suffer as a consequence. It is important to note that language is a big issue for Maltese Lv1 learners because while they speak Maltese they might have substantial difficulties in reading and writing, especially in English, yet they still have to attend lessons, complete the assignments and sit for all tests in both languages.

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<sup>8</sup> Fazal and Lingard (2010) point out that "globalisation does not represent a spatially and temporally static phenomenon, but it can be transformed as a result of major world events" (p.xi).

<sup>9</sup> "The languages used in the delivery of all lectures are Maltese and English. Both languages are simultaneously used. Applicants **must** have the necessary English and Maltese proficiency level required by the course."

Through experience I have come to see this as one of the major problems in recruitment and retention at MCAST. While as mentioned earlier the need for a vocational college was acknowledged, syllabi and curricula for the key skills are designed on the same level descriptors of the mainstream. This means that after experiencing failure throughout their life in secondary schools, they come to MCAST hoping to embark on something more practical only to find that they have to cover the same stuff they had at school. In reality this is not necessary because to be well prepared for the various vocational careers MCAST proposes, “schooled literacies” (Street and Street, 1991) are not what the learners really need because as argued by Black (2001, p.8) “The literacy and numeracy practices in this line of work [ ] could easily be managed on the job with workers learning from each other, from within their own communities of practice.”

So, in the case of foreign learners an exception is made and MCAST is “responsive to the needs of the individual” but what about the needs of Maltese learners? An argument against this is that, due to ‘globalisation’ and the membership in EU, knowledge of languages works in favour of the learners in terms of job opportunity and mobility between countries. Indeed the Council Resolution of 13/06/2001 stated “improving foreign language learning” as a sub-objective<sup>10</sup> related to “facilitating access to the labour market and to improving adaptability to the workforce” while the UNESCO report (2000) specified “special attention to foreign languages, first and foremost it is English” (p.47-48).

If that is the case isn’t it time then to change the methods of teaching and, especially in a vocational setting, see what the learners need to learn ‘to be successful’ on the course and most importantly on the job (Howard, 2006) rather than give the same prescription to all the learners working on the same level

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<sup>10</sup> The main objectives were those of the Luxembourg process set out in the Report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems: increasing quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union; facilitating the access of all to the education and training systems; opening up education and training systems to the wider world. (UNESCO 2002)

without them having the same needs? For example a student taking a course in agribusiness would have to be familiar with a lot of biological jargon but another student taking ICT wouldn't (Barton, 2006). What the learners need is an approach to learning which is sensitive to their lived experiences and which crosses the boundaries to reach beyond the classroom where bi/multilingual resources and different literacy practices are recognised (Roberts, 2006). This would enhance learners' understanding leading to critical and conceptual learning and the ability to be selective of the 'knowledge' they need, how best to get hold of it and how to apply it and generalise it to new situations if need be. Unfortunately, these principles are often "driven out of schools by our current mania for testing and accountability" (Gee, 2009, p.109) and standardisation.

In an attempt to tackle this issue an embedded programme was introduced at Lv1 where learners have purely vocational sessions in the workshop with the vocational lecturers, as well as other sessions where the key skills lecturers from the LSU join the vocational lecturers and the students in the workshop. Assignments, which are still bound by the Level Descriptors App.2), are mostly embedded and when this is not possible the key skills lecturers try to contextualise assignments according to the particular vocation.

Also, when it first opened, MCAST, with its promise to be "responsive to individual needs", was indeed a new hope for learners with learning and social difficulties who did not manage to obtain qualifications by the end of Secondary School but who wished to continue their studies. Many were those who started to attend MCAST and the Learning Support Unit was set up to assist these learners:

*"MCAST [ ] shall have special programmes to serve as an aid for any person to achieve the required basic education"*

MCAST Deed of Foundation, 2000, p.9

Such provision is also in line with Strategic Objective 3, "Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship" of the framework for European cooperation in

education and training<sup>11</sup> (Council 2009/C 119/02). Services are offered at the first three Levels of MCAST and they include withdrawal from mainstream classes to be placed into small groups for key skills subjects, Learning Support Assistant support in the small group and additional one-to-one sessions for extra support out of class, the allocation of reader, scribe or extra time during assessments, reading groups, dyslexia intervention sessions and study groups. Although learners are invited to make use of these services on the college website, in reality these provisions are well in force only at Lv1. The main reason for this is lack of resources (staff, space and finances).

It is quite obvious that such services cost MCAST a lot of money and the results they return are rarely measurable in qualifications. An improved self-esteem, more motivation and more confidence can hardly be measured by statistics and at the end of the year the college success or failure is measured through statistics of learners who complete the course, progress to another level, get a degree and so on. Measurement and monitoring go part and parcel with membership in EU and member states are expected to be accountable for their expenditure. EU highlights the importance of “comparable statistics and availability of indicators to analyse and monitor the contribution of Member States’ education and training policies” (Council Resolution, 13/07/2011) so “the council and the Commission prepare a joint report<sup>12</sup> every second year” (Council of the European Union 2008).

Another important aspect of MCAST is its “international dimension.” In fact whatever happens in and to MCAST is a constant negotiation across ‘places’

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<sup>11</sup> Council 2009/C 119/02) which stated that, “systems should aim to ensure that all learners — including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with special needs and migrants — complete their education, including, where appropriate, through second-chance education and the provision of more personalised learning.”

<sup>12</sup> The report is based primarily on an analysis of national reports and of performance against a set of indicators and benchmarks. It also draws on the results of the open method of coordination in the area of education and training, notably the use of EU reference tools, and peer learning supporting Member State reforms and on similar exchanges undertaken as part of the Copenhagen and Bologna processes.

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0703:FIN:EN:PDF>

and 'spaces' from the local 'place' of implementation to the international 'space' of policy production. The 'international' dimension of MCAST was an issue 'sold' to the general public as a bonus that would increase possibilities of jobs, investments and funding once Malta joins EU. The Council Resolution on the promotion of enhanced European cooperation in VET of 19 December 2002 stresses that:

*“it is necessary to strengthen and develop closer European cooperation in vocational education and training to support the idea that citizens can move freely between different jobs, regions, sectors and countries in Europe.”*

However, for people to transfer from one place to another to work or study, a set of common standards had to be established. This had its effect at the international level and on MCAST. In Europe common instruments and principles were developed such as the “European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and learning outcomes to assess all levels of education and training to support lifelong learning” (Malta Qualifications Council, 2011, p.4). This approach was expected to facilitate “transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and/or qualifications, between different countries and at different levels,” (European Commission, 2002). In response, the Malta Qualifications Framework was developed with a series of “key competences” which are intended to provide flexibility to move from one occupation to another and across different sectors. Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) argue that this is an example of how educational institutions are expected to adopt the qualities of “fast capitalism” in a world that “celebrates temporary and fast-changing networks” (p.40). The constant changing of the job market entails continuous re-skilling to stay competitive and employable putting more pressure on the individual. Thus ‘lifelong learning’ is not an opportunity to improve but more a necessity to safeguard one’s own quality of life. Keeping a job means constantly updating ourselves; and making ourselves employable has increasingly become our responsibility and not the state’s (Ball, 2010). Recent policy reforms in education around the world have mostly assumed the validity of “market fundamentalism” (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p.196) thus educational values are not measured in their own terms and educational objectives have become closely linked to

economic goals. The purpose of education has become the production of individuals with the knowledge, skills and characteristics that can help them increase their own and national competitiveness within the global economy. This has moved education policy towards “an audit culture that stresses performance contracts and various national and international regimes of testing and accountability” (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p.197). Indeed the state is providing the service and investing in institutions to try to be “responsive to the economy” so like any other ‘market’ the state expects to get its money’s worth. This has led to more talk about accountability, quality assurance, student retention and the like.

In response, MCAST has set up a Quality Assurance Unit and teachers are regularly asked to attend for appraisals whereby Quality Assurance staff observe teachers during lessons. Although this is done with the scope of ‘mentoring’, it has put substantial pressure on teachers and much more time is spent on paperwork which could be better spent on lesson preparation. As a consequence, teachers are beginning to teach to the test thus pedagogies are affected with the result of a “shaving off of higher order and critical thinking” (Luke, 2006, p.123) dispositions much associated with human capital demands of a globalised knowledge economy.

At the same time pressures are felt by MCAST too. A Foundation Courses Moderator was appointed with the sole purpose to monitor and try to improve student retention. This followed EU recommendations to lower the current rate of early school-leavers and increase the rate of people achieving tertiary level of education to reach EU averages by 2020<sup>13</sup>. Gewirtz *et al.* (1995), point out how policy in the market form, is moving colleges and other higher education

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<sup>13</sup> European Commission’s Recommendation 2020: “Education, skills and family-friendly measures: Malta needs to make the best possible use of its greatest asset – human capital. Malta still has a very high number of early school leavers (22.6%), while the number of students attaining tertiary education is relatively low (22.4%).”

[http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/malta/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/malta/index_en.htm)

institutions to seek their own interest and shift away from concern about other social and educational issues. Such a shift of course contradicts the original purpose for the founding of MCAST.

### **2.32. The Institute**

The Institute of Building and Construction Engineering is one of ten institutes within MCAST. It is a Satellite institute because it is not situated on main campus. Very much in line with the general perceptions of the population, institutes at MCAST are perceived according to a particular hierarchy whereby institutes linked to the sciences (Institute of Applied Science and Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering) are on top. The Institute of Information and Communication Technology, Institute of Care services and Institute of Business and Commerce follow in the order. The Institute of Art and Design is in a rank of its own, drawing to its higher Level courses many learners who have attended private schools and by consequence who are English speaking and who come from a particular social background. This leaves the Institute of Mechanical Engineering, the institute of Agribusiness and the Institute of Building and Construction towards the end of that hierarchy. This is not because these institutes do not offer Diploma or Degree courses but mainly because the main trades associated with these three institutes are those of the auto mechanic, farming and masonry. These trades are often incorrectly considered to have very little academic requirements and therefore they are seen as more adequate for the less intelligent, the illiterate and the more labour-intensive oriented individuals. This perception is often lying at the back of the minds of learners who apply on the Foundation courses offered by these institutes. As a consequence, learners who attend the foundation courses within these institutes are often viewed by the general public, families and sometimes even teachers, within this light. It goes without saying that this has a significant impact on how the learners perceive themselves within that context and later it affects how they behave in the classroom.

### **2.33. The Level 1 programme**

The Level 1 programme is an embedded programme that caters for learners who come to MCAST without any qualifications and who obtain a global mark below 36% on Initial Assessment Tests in English, Maltese and Mathematics set by the College. Since all learners on the programme obtain very low marks, the programme is run by the Learning Support Unit (LSU) within the college in collaboration with the different institutes. This collaboration takes the form of allocation of teachers from the LSU at the various institutes who take on the responsibility of teaching the Key Skills (English, Maltese, Mathematics, IT, PD) on the Level 1 programme. Therefore while the Level 1 learners remain under the responsibility of the particular institute which offers the provision of vocational education and training, the students do not go for Key Skills lessons with the institutes' mainstream teachers but with LSU staff. The Level 1 programme is also different from the rest of the programmes because the learners have vocational lessons in the workshop with their vocational teachers, stand alone lessons of Key Skills with LSU staff in the classroom and embedded sessions in the workshops with both the vocational teachers and the Key Skills teachers together. The learners in the study had two hours weekly of embedded sessions for Maltese, English and Maths. During these sessions the vocational teacher led the sessions with interventions and assistance from the Key Skills teachers (including myself as their teacher for Maltese and English) when aspects of the Key Skills subjects were being used (eg. when filling in a tool request form). This gave the Key Skills teachers an opportunity to understand better what was being done in the workshop and what aspects of the key Skill were important for the vocation being taught. It was also an opportunity to see the learners in a different light out of the more formal context of the Key Skill classroom. Therefore as a member of the LSU staff, I had the opportunity to be with the students on my own in the language classroom where I was teaching English as well as Maltese, and in the different workshops during the embedded sessions with the vocational teachers.



## 2.34. The Classroom

Hence as stated above, learners who manage to get through and embark on the new educational experience at MCAST find themselves organised in groups, classes depending on their scores on IATs. This means that they have to live their experience with others, learners and teachers, in specific contexts. Both 'others' and 'contexts' are dropped on the individual learners without them having any say in the matter. According to Fairclough (2010), social relations are intricate and include language, the environment, people, power structures, institutions and other "elements in social activity or praxis" (p.3). Also, every context has "a history of discourse links and practices that are chained together in particular ways" (Rogers, 2008, p.10). An important context of my practice is obviously the classroom and according to Johnson (1980), environments are "not passive wrappings, but active mechanisms for socialization and enculturation" (p.174).

***Vignette:***

*While I reflected about the physical environment of the classroom at the Institute where I teach, I realised that there were times when I actually felt devalued and was terribly frustrated because I was aware that it conflicted with the message I was constantly trying to impart to my learners, that is, that they have value.*

Personal reflection

The position of the classroom, the resources, the size and maintenance send important messages as to how the institution values a particular course or group and this in turn may affect how the learners value themselves within the classroom and within that institution.

Our classroom (App.3) was a small room which used to be the store of a bigger laboratory. This room was reserved for Lv1 learners and Lv2 classes of learners who, due to low marks on the IATs, are withdrawn from the mainstream classes and taught by LSU staff. On entering, the room was very small with two windows that make up the wall facing the main door. In the corner a web of wires hung down making the room look even shabbier. On the left was a communicating door to the bigger laboratory which was being used as another classroom. This meant that when the noise level was higher than usual during group work, discussions or simply when we shared a joke, more often than not, the teacher from the other classroom complained that we were disrupting his/her class.

Our 'classroom' was furnished with a whiteboard, learners' tables, chairs and three computers (without speakers) which I had to mount and connect to the internet. There was hardly any space for movement in the room. What bothered me was the fact that the other classes were equipped with a projector or an interactive whiteboard while we had to crowd around a small computer screen to try to do some work on the computer or the internet. Thus learners in the same institute were discriminated against on the basis of level of course and on whether or not they needed extra support. Ironically those who needed extra support were the ones with fewer resources (smaller room, no interactive whiteboard, older computers etc). So Lv1 learners were not offered the same conditions and resources. Unfortunately this was a spread practice across all institutes.

When I took up the issue of classroom resources with the learners, I was surprised and angry because I thought that at their age they should be able to fight for their rights but they were so set in their idea that they were 'failures' that they did not have any intention of taking the issue further. This attitude also stemmed from the fact that they were used to similar situations in secondary school. So while I took their passive attitude as something to work on, I tried to do the best I could to make up for this debasing aspect of our everyday school experience by using "body talk" (Moje, 2000) and presenting myself in class well

dressed, well prepared and with my own technological resources (speakers and projector) when necessary. In this way I hoped to pass on the message that I valued them and our sessions together.

Given the limited space of the room I had no option but to organise the tables and chairs so we sat close together. I included myself in their group and sat with them. I felt that this helped to build trust amongst the group. I often spoke to them about myself, my family and my experiences at school, how I too had encountered difficulties along the way. This sharing of space, time and experiences, gave the group a sense of community (Larson and Marsh, 2009). Indeed teacher and learners all got to the classroom individually shaped by previous experiences which affected how we positioned ourselves and interacted within that space. Through those interactions we then shaped each other (Bloome, 2012).

### Classroom practice

All the elements which constitute social activity, hence in this case the teaching and learning involved in classroom practice, are different from one another but none of them can stand in isolation. Fairclough (2010) refers to these as 'dialectical relations' which flow into each other; and one important element of classroom practice is without any doubt language.

### Language

Language is a social practice embedded in a historical and social moment. Therefore while language is shaped by the context, it can in turn affect its context. Indeed language used in the classroom was a big issue. Although most learners in the classroom spoke Maltese, some of them spoke a dialect and did not use pitch and tonality adequate to the context (classroom). They often spoke in the same loud voice with the same aggressive tone whether in the classroom, in front of the director's office, on the bus or on the street. In the small classroom, where we were so cramped, this created major problems to

communication. These characteristics are typical to the southern part of Malta, and since I too came from the south, I shared a very similar background to theirs. Hence I was aware that “how people use language is derivative of their culture while simultaneously constituting it, including both their social identities and social relationships” (Bloome, 2012, p.20).

### Curriculum

However while being aware of backgrounds and identities helps, it is not automatically cashed into easy solutions for teaching and learning because every teacher is tied down by commitment to the curriculum. Very often the curriculum gives particular “interpretations and explanations” (Fairclough, 2010, p.9) vis-a-vis syllabi and pedagogy which are used to determine and keep in place particular relations of power. A case in point is the assessment which has become outcome based. As a result outcomes at every level of the curriculum are pegged to the level descriptors of the EQF (App.1). This move within all EU member states was necessary to ensure quality assurance in education in particular to increase transparency, comparability, transferability and recognition of competences and qualifications to enhance mobility and encourage lifelong learning (Council Resolution, 19/12/2002).

This meant that I couldn't move away from the curriculum because that was binding for me, since lecturers were often summoned by Quality Assurance for appraisals. Also, learners had to achieve all outcomes to progress to the next level. Of course I was fully aware that I was risking losing my learners at the very beginning of the year unless I got to know them well, form the classroom community with them and draw on their knowledge and skills when planning in order to make the learning experience appealing to them. So drawing on Tett, Hamilton and Hillier (2006), I embarked on this feat constantly reminding myself that “a policy strategy does not necessarily dictate pedagogy” (p.11). All this was in line with my study in which I set out to get to know the learners well, learn about their background and their past experiences to gain a better understanding

of what could be the reason for their disengagement from school. Hence in that light I tried to draw on the learners' interests and planned my practice in such a way as to engage them in learning and move them towards becoming critical without jeopardizing their successful attainment of the learning outcomes. In order to achieve all that I needed to start collecting data but I did not want to reach any conclusions based on observations which might be misinterpreted, I wanted the learners to get involved and voice their stories, their experiences and their emotions. This entailed the use of a specific methodology and particular methods which I describe in the following chapter.

Also at this point I turned to the literature to gain more insight about what other research studies were saying regarding similar situations. As the data started coming in and the study progressed, the classroom and the learners were continuously evolving so I continued to look at different literature to inform the way forward in my study as issues and themes emerged. Therefore the data collection and the literature review were being done concurrently, however for the benefit of presentation and also because the main driving force of this study were the learners and the issues that emerged from the data collected throughout our shared classroom experiences, I am putting the methodology chapter first.

# Chapter Three: Methodology

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*“it will no longer do to think of [classrooms] as solitary places in which a mainly passive student responds to a teacher and acquires academic knowledge”*

*Robinson, 1987, p.329*

### **3.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapters I have described my positionality; my background and that of my learners; the political contexts which led to the founding of MCAST; the micro context of the classroom and the practices (language and curriculum) within it. In this chapter I start by stating my research questions and then move on to share the messy and scary trail of thought that brought me to choose classroom ethnography as a methodology and life history methods as methods of data collection. Then I go on to describe each method of data collection I used namely, life histories, interviews, focus groups, my journal and written feedback from learners, timelines, Facebook conversations and artefacts. In each case I explain how that particular method was used in this study. I close the chapter by referring to the validity of the study and other ethical issues followed by a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of my chosen methodologies, and what the use of these methodologies has taught me as a researcher.

### **3.2. Formulating my research questions**

After reflecting deeply on my positionality in relation to my lived experiences and current practice, and with the thought of giving agency and voice to the learners, I had to define my research question. I wanted to know what made the learners disengage from schooling, whether their background and experiences were related to that disengagement; whether the learners were indeed 'illiterate' as defined by the system or had unacknowledged literacy practices outside the college; and finally whether a classroom approach of critical literacy would make a difference in the learners' perception of self. Through reflection I decided to keep all the questions and leave them as simple as possible because they were all complementary and I felt it would be much easier for the reader to understand what I was researching. So after a series of muddled thoughts I settled for these research questions:

- What are the learners' literacy practices, family backgrounds and their interests out of school?
- What caused the individual learners to disengage from mainstream schooling?
- How are the learners and teacher affected when their out of school literacy practices, family backgrounds and their interests are brought into the classroom?
- How does the Level 1 learning community at IBCE make sense of their past in the present, in an attempt to imagine better futures?

Once I established my questions I had to decide on which methodology would best fit the purpose of my research study.

### **3.3. My trajectory to choosing the methodology**

During an activity on the EdD programme we had to think about authors we would invite to discuss our study. My choice included authors that had an impact on me and my studies up to then: Bourdieu (1998) for acknowledging that the background of individuals marks their identities and life chances; Fairclough (2010, p.3) for his argument that social relations are all intertwined to include language, the environment, people, power structures, institutions and other "elements"; and Gee (2009, p.117) who states that "if any variety of language is to be learned and used, it has to be situated", thus any effective programme of studies has to draw upon the student's experiences through which the learners may then make sense of new concepts. Studies by Heath (1983), Barton et al. (1998), Rogers (2003), Pahl (2102), Rowsell (2013), Ivanic et al. (2007), Maybin (2007), Hillier (2006) and Hamilton et al. (2010) show the richness of people's literacy practices in everyday life which are seldom valued at school. Often schools value only particular literacy practices and fail to recognise out of school literacies which can make teaching and learning in classrooms richer and more



effective. Moll's (1992) theory of 'funds of knowledge' acknowledges learners' experiences and expertise on particular topics which they acquire through their background, culture and everyday living. Such experience and knowledge can enrich the classroom and engage the learners. Creese et al. (2010), when describing a new approach to learning and teaching used in Chinese and Gujarati community language schools in the UK, embrace the idea of translanguaging to make the "boundaries between languages become permeable" (p.112) thus enabling the learners to use the first language to conceptualise issues before speaking or writing about them in the second language. This is important due to language issues we have in Malta, where Maltese is the first language and English is the second language but both languages are compulsory and English is the main medium of instruction in schools. This creates barriers for groups of learners who speak only Maltese in the family and outside school and consider English as the language of the elite and abhor using it. Thus these learners' choice of Maltese over English is not a matter of 'ability', whether they can speak, write or read the language, but a position they take which reflects their identity. This positioning however does, as stated by Jaffe (2013, p.1) when speaking about her different language uses between French, Corsican and English, limit their "footing and voice" within compulsory schooling in Malta because their participation is limited and because most textbooks and resources used as well as tests and examinations are in English. Then through Ellis (2004) I found that auto-ethnography and reflecting deeply on my past gave me a stronger understanding about who I really am and about where my interests vis-à-vis my study were coming from. So the above mentioned researchers, amongst many others, together with my personal experiences, have affected how I look at education, my learners and my own practice. In previous studies (Mizzi and Vassallo 2001, Vassallo 2005) I have carried out an action research and a case study but what I hoped to look at in my study this time round was something more than just my observations and conclusions. I wanted to get the learners' real feelings and experiences so I had to find the best way to do that.

Later, I reflected about my choice of authors and whether they could be brought together in my methodology. As I mentioned earlier, Malta lacks natural resources and its only resource is the ability of its people to be innovative and skilled to sustain its own economy by drawing investment from industries outside the country. Therefore on a national level, the people's education is seen as the means by which foreign investors can be drawn to us because employees would be skilled and communication would be easy, while on a personal level education is seen as the route by which one can secure a good job, hence a good income and improve his social position. In the eyes of society in general, because education is free, everyone has equal rights to access and success. Education is perceived as a just measure to overcome social and economic differences and offer all the citizens the possibility "to escape one's immediate surrounding" (Grenfell 2008, p.17). Bourdieu (1998) questioned this and argued that schools are not meritocratic but create instead a "state nobility" by "ranking all students in a unique hierarchy of forms of excellence" condemning all those who are excluded "in the name of a collectively recognised and accepted criterion" (p.28). Along my trajectory as a postgraduate student I looked at several studies related to literacy and language in education and in particular disengaged learners, and I was often drawn to New Literacy Studies (Street 1994; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Pahl and Rowsell, 2005). New Literacy Studies often take a Bourdieusian approach which according to Grenfell (2008, p.220) holds three guiding principles:

1. **The construction of the research object** or "thinking relationally" (p.220) about events, which cannot be looked at in a vacuum because they are affected by people, time, the place and organisations around them. Therefore happenings ought to be defined in the light of the social context in which they occur using Bourdieu's 'conceptual tools' of *field*<sup>14</sup>, *habitus*<sup>15</sup> and *capital*<sup>16</sup>. Therefore learners' literacy practices ought to be studied in

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<sup>14</sup> "Field is a structured system of social relations at micro and macro level. Individuals, institutions and groupings, both large and small, all exist in structural relation to each other in some way. These relations determine and reproduce social activity in its multifarious forms" (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.16).

the classroom and out of the classroom, according to their background and their identities in the different contexts they find themselves in.

**2. A three-level approach to studying the field of the object of research**

which includes:

- a) An analysis of the field in relation to the field of power (out of school literacy practices of the learners versus schooled literacies).
- b) Outline the different positions held by the learners/participants within the field of study and how they position themselves in relation to one another.
- c) Analyse the individual learners/participants, their background, trajectory and positioning (Grenfell, 2008, p.223) – their *habitus*. This entails building an ethnography of the learners/participants.

These three levels imply a continuous back and forth movement between the subject being studied and the forces acting upon it; between the *habitus* of the participants and the fields they find themselves in and the effects these have on one another.

- 3. Participant objectivation** implies reflexivity, a self-critical analysis of the whole process of research, an attitude which questions the whole process even that which we often take as natural and normal.

At the end of my reflection I came to the conclusion that the best way to conduct my research study was to draw on a Bourdieusian approach in conducting classroom ethnography. I was part of the classroom and the learners were active participants. My data was not based only on my observations and

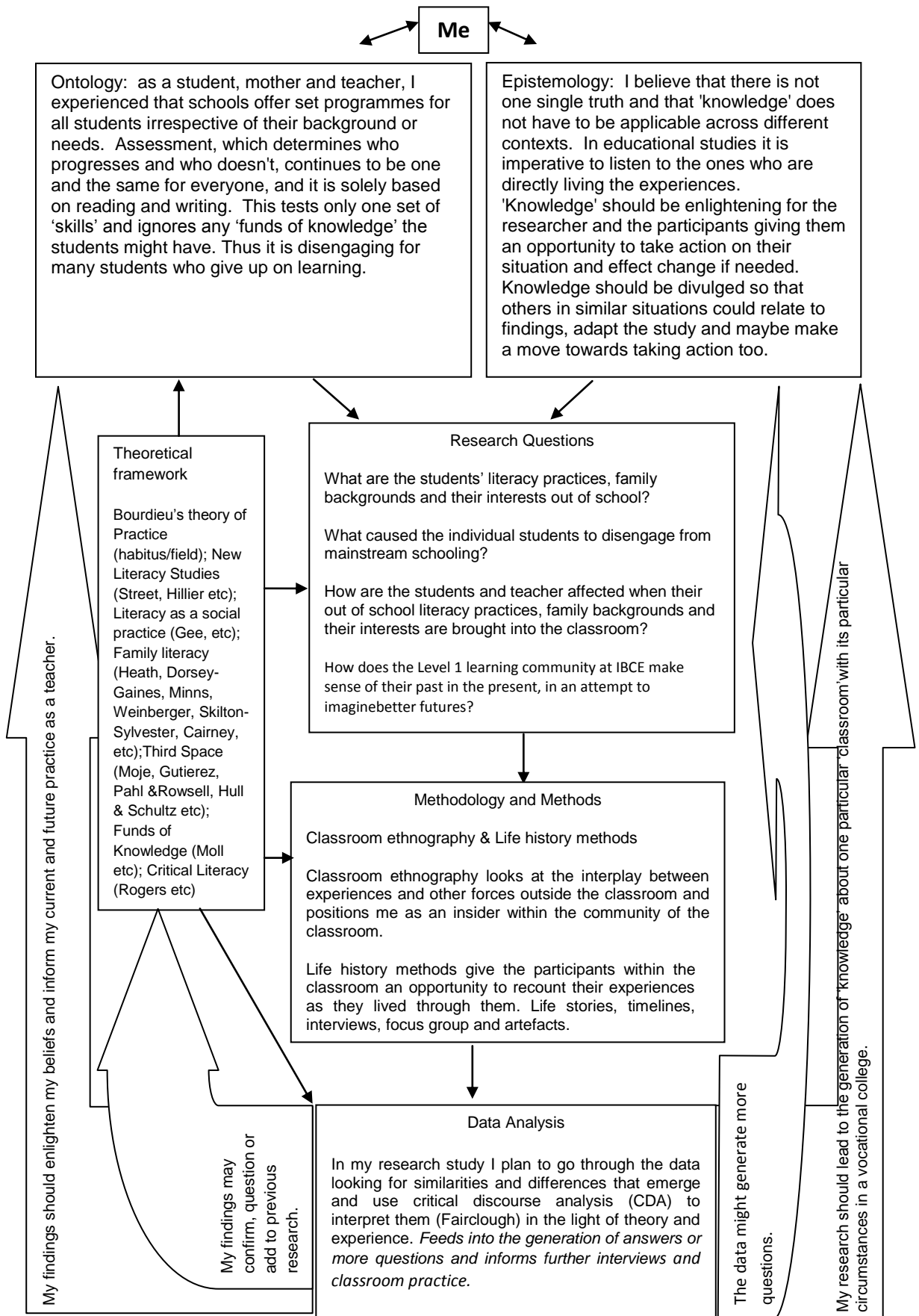
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<sup>15</sup> “Habitus ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms... habitus makes possible the free production of all thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production – and only those” (Bourdieu 1990, p.54-55).

<sup>16</sup> “Capital can be expressed in terms of three forms: economic, social and cultural. These are all important when positioning individuals in the ‘field’. The ‘field’ determines what capital is valued or not within it and of course those who have that capital are privileged” (Grenfell 2008, p. 223).

perceptions but mainly on the learners' past and present stories, feelings and perceptions. Consequently life history methods were used as tools for data collection so that learners were free to present themselves and their own stories, to expose their situated abilities and literacy practices.

This resonates with New Literacy Studies as well as Critical Discourse Analysis, in which language is viewed as a social practice embedded in a historical and social moment therefore the learners in my study, who were given their 'school identities' on the basis of language performance on school tests, could in reality have other identities which were linked to out-of-school literacy practices but which went unacknowledged within the college causing disengagement or rebellion from the learners. Therefore Critical Discourse Analysis was important for "a systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of social process" (Fairclough, 2010, p.10), including analysis of texts which address social wrongs and possible ways of extenuating them.



**Fig.1: The Research Plan**

Having so many important theoretical perspectives feeding into my position was overwhelmingly scary but I feel that my obligation as a researcher is to clearly state my trajectory in the research process to justify the methodology and methods chosen. Hammersley (2000) argues that what makes a difference between approaches is the standpoint they take with regards to the purpose of research. My objective was to have the learners tell their stories, reveal where they came from and how they were affected by the school experiences and school structures; to see how their experiences helped or hindered their progress within the system and the building of the classroom community; to have them expose their literacy practices in out of school contexts, and to see what happens when these practices are drawn into the classroom. Thus as pointed out by Fairlough (2010, p.519) as he draws on Bourdieu, in constructing the object of research:

*“Theories and methods appropriate to the object of research should be progressively constructed out of existing resources of theory and method, which can quite legitimately include theories and methods hitherto used only ‘elsewhere’, be that in different parts of the world, different areas of research, or different disciplines.”*

In conclusion, for my thesis I embraced a Bourdieusian approach to embark on a classroom ethnography which contributed to shed light on what was happening in my classroom and how different aspects of it, in particular the participants, their identity and the pedagogy, affected one another. In addition, the use of a combination of ethnographic and life history methods of data collection, mentioned above, gave the participants within the classroom an opportunity to reflect upon:

- experiences as we (participants) lived through them.
- what we (participants) each took with us to the classroom setting.
- the “social and cultural processes” (Bloome, 2012, p.7) that were at play in the classroom as we (participants) lived together through the daily school experiences.

- how we (participants) were affected by outside influences
- how classroom practice could make a difference in our (participants) life.

While looking at the interplay between these experiences and other forces outside the classroom, classroom ethnography positioned me as an insider within the community of the classroom.

### 3.4. More about classroom ethnography

Bloome (2012, p.9) defines classroom ethnography as:

*“a principled effort to describe the everyday, cultural life of a social group. [ ] It seeks to understand what is happening, what it means, and its significance to the group from an emic (native/insider) perspective.”*

Classroom ethnography emerged as an attempt to address the diversity in classrooms and the inequality of educational achievement and outcomes. It was a way to put forward alternatives to the deficit-theories<sup>17</sup> (Trueba, 1994) and process-product studies which failed to acknowledge the effects of social and cultural processes on classroom life and instead quantified input or classroom factors and statistically related them to outcomes. By building on Vygotskian theories of cultural psychology and cultural historical activity, educational researchers used classroom ethnographies to show that learning cannot be measured on its own because it is a social and cultural process which takes place with others and not in isolation.

Hence classroom ethnography distinguishes itself from qualitative methods because its main focus of study is the culture of a social group. This means that how the ethnographers define culture, influences what is studied and how. Street (1984) views ‘culture’ as the meaningful actions (events and practices)

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<sup>17</sup> “Deficit theories of educational achievement had posited lower intelligence, deficient cultural backgrounds, and impoverished language as explanations for the lower educational achievement of African-American, Latino, Native American and students from low-income backgrounds” (Bloome 2012, p.7-8).

that people embark on while constructing their social lives. However whatever the definition, 'culture' should not be taken as an entity in isolation. Every classroom is a micro context embedded in a much wider macro context which branches out to the institute, college, education system, country and eventually the world. An attempt to isolate the classroom from a broader context would not render a clear and deep description of what goes on in the classroom and how social interactions and power relations influence the people in it. Therefore classroom ethnography is defined as such because it employs an ethnographic perspective where, as stated by Robinson (1987, p.329), "classrooms are locations of [and constituted by] complex human activities taking place in complex human relationships." Questions about "what is a classroom", "who and what are in a classroom" and, "what happens in a classroom" are not to be taken at face value but each one has to be studied within the particularity of the micro context and at the same time within the broader context of the institution, the national education system and other external pressures.

It follows then that classroom ethnography can be seen as a political standpoint that looks at the role of education in the formation of individuals. Hammersley (1990) points out that in the 1970s researchers took three different directions with this approach and these are still valid today. They include:

- Collaborating with teachers who put into practice new educational ideas.
- Attempts to bring about change by looking closely at wider social structures and analysing how these constrain teacher practices.
- Investigating and documenting school life.

Therefore ethnographic descriptions need to capture how people act and react with respect to each other and provide a better understanding of what actions past, present and future set off the particular actions and reactions of the people. Very often how teachers and learners act and react, their attitudes and behaviours as well as the language they use in their interactions, determine what happens next, which on a line of continuum may vary from chaos or complete disengagement to full participation and success. One must however



keep an open mind because particular actions and reactions within the classroom, interpreted by the 'rules' of the classroom (Mehan, 1980) may be the result of previous experiences outside of the classroom not necessarily known by the other participants, and these may have consequences for "social identity, social status, and social position" (Bloome, 2012, p.21).

Classroom ethnography can therefore be an opportunity to expose "cross-cultural miscommunication"<sup>18</sup>. This insight would help in increasing teacher sensitivity to cultural differences. Better teacher awareness may lead to a change in practice where classrooms start to be seen as cultural spaces (Frank and Bird, 2000) that build on the learners' ways of participation and language use in everyday social events outside the classroom.

Acknowledging the possible presence of cross-culture miscommunication would have implications on curriculum development because that would mean that in order to make the curriculum more accessible to everyone the classroom has to become an extension of the learners' family and community cultural practices (Moll et al., 1992). This entails bringing into classroom instruction learners' every day literacy practices, including the ways learners use their language at home and in their communities, and constructing a "third space"<sup>19</sup> "(Moje et al., 2004, p.41) where different cultures come together and give a new meaning to development and learning. As stated by Bloome (2012, p.25):

*"Classroom ethnography is not just a redefinition of classroom processes but the very way to address and redress the inequities, pain, and trauma suffered by many young people."*

This implies that the knowledge generated from classroom ethnography is essentially contextualised and therefore not necessarily or easily generalised

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<sup>18</sup> "Classroom ethnographies and related studies have shown cross-cultural miscommunication in students' ways of signalling coherence in their spoken narratives, in organizing turns to talk, in how to interpret written text and in how to display emotion and attitude" (Bloome, 2012, p. 23).

<sup>19</sup> In Moje et al. (2004), the authors use the concept of "third space" as the "integration of knowledges and Discourses drawn from different spaces [ ] that merges the "first space" of people's home, community, and peer networks with the "second space" of the Discourses they encounter in more formalized institutions such as work, school, or church" (p.41).

but it challenges the 'naturalised' classroom and educational processes that often propagate inequities.

As mentioned earlier, in 'How Did I Get Here?' (chap.2, p.19), through school life as a student I had experienced a continuous sense of exclusion and disempowerment by the system. In secondary school I was evidently encountering difficulties, reflected in the low grades I was obtaining and my change in behaviour, and yet no one asked what was wrong or whether I needed support. Suddenly, in the eyes of the system, I was no longer the successful student who made it through the end of primary exam, but a stupid and lazy teenager, who was underachieving because I just did not want to do my work! The definition of me as an individual was determined by my grades, my whole identity (how people saw me and how I came to see myself) was defined by my grades and by the system and at the time I had no control over the formation of that identity. I felt powerless so I accepted it without considering a possible alternative to it.

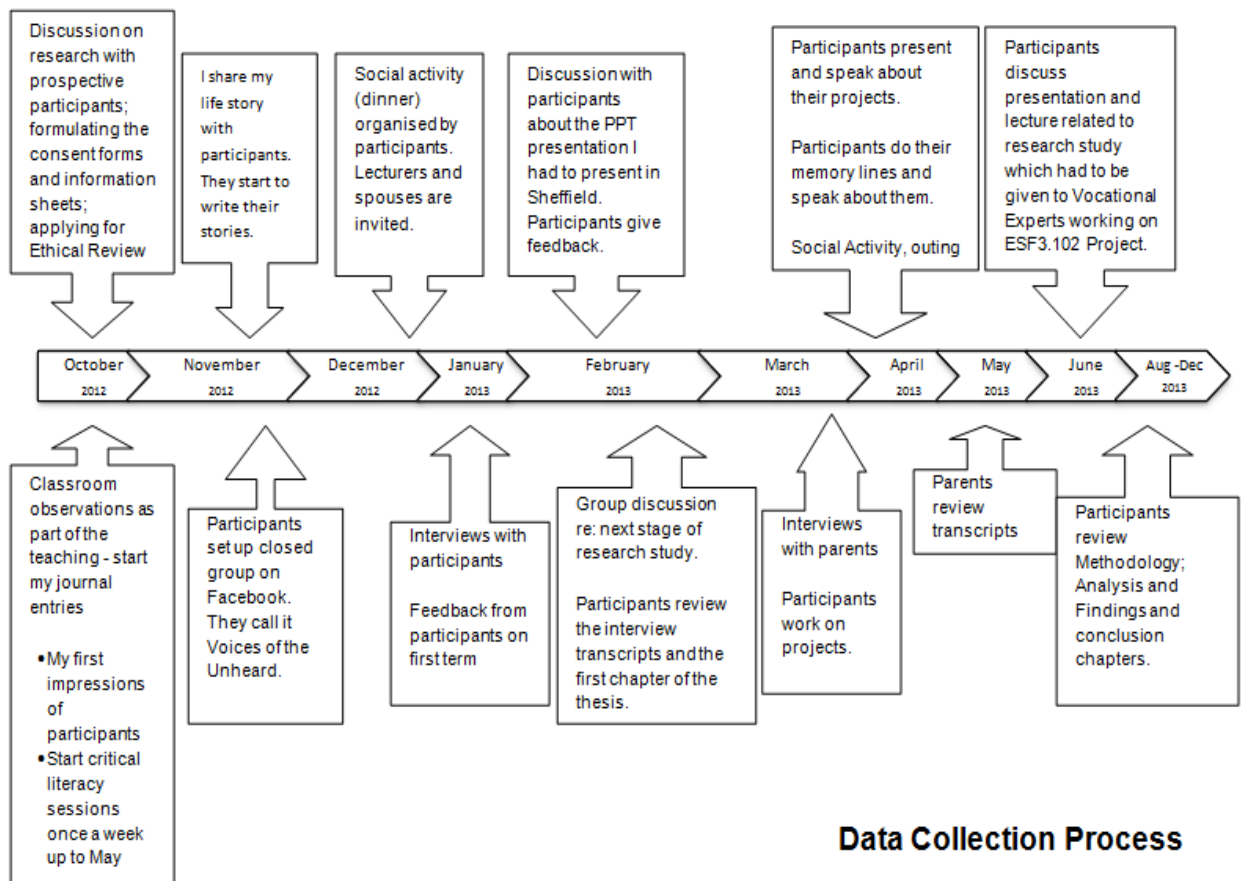
So at the onset of my study I was quite conscious of the risk that unless I was careful, I could easily do the same thing with my learners and take advantage of my power as a teacher to get what I needed from them without them having any control over the situation or without them gaining anything in return. Of course this would have gone against the whole purpose of my study so the approach I adopted in my classroom ethnography was one of collaboration with the learners. Drawing from Lassiter (2005, p.16), in this study, I "deliberately" and "explicitly" sought collaboration throughout the whole process from the initial stages of conceptualizing the research study, to the collection of the data, and, especially through the writing process and dissemination<sup>20</sup> (App.10). My aim throughout the whole process was one of empowerment for the learners, so, at every stage, I tried to make the process as dialogic as possible to avoid

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<sup>20</sup> Although the study was not yet written and published, at the end of the scholastic year 2012/2013, I was asked to deliver a talk to VET experts working on the college project. I had to speak about my experience with Lv1 students and how they were engaged and empowered through my practice. Prior to the talk, I asked the students for feedback about the practices that they deemed most effective and they reviewed the paper and the presentation and approved my choices and how they were represented before I actually made my delivery.

“reading over the shoulders” of my learners and “read alongside” (ibid.) them instead. This entailed discussing with the learners about the research process, my trips to Sheffield and the discussions with my tutor, the data gathered and my observations, as well as the interpretation of the collected data. Therefore I was checking back with them at every step of the way to make sure that they understood the language used and that they approved of what was being written about them. There were instances in fact when learners changed or edited the text or added more information to make their position more clear.

**Fig.2: The Process of Data collection**



## 3.5. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

### 3.51. Why life history methods?

Dollard (1949) argues that an individual's experience might become fragmented and get lost in the eyes of the observer when we focus our observations on the cultural or societal level. Life history methods avoid this by linking together historical past, present and future and acknowledge that while the individual may be influenced by culture and social structure, each individual has the capacity for interpretation and action and thus lives a unique history (Sikes and Goodson, 2010). According to Goodson (2001), life history research helps us to respond to 'why' and 'how' aspects together with the 'what' dimension of empirical data and:

*“it addresses the interactions that ultimately direct the participant's line of thought and subsequent courses of action, enabling the researcher to identify and comment upon the genesis of the directions being reached.”*

Ward, 2003, p.28-29

Thus the life history method gives greater depth to the participants' perspectives (Ward, 2003) and is seen as particularly useful in educational studies which often involve teachers and learners because, as argued by Bullough (1998), individuals carry with them a private and public life that cannot be separated.

So while my lived experiences have left their imprint on who I am today (Bloome, 2012) and on what I believe, I wished to set off on this long road of research work with an open mind and let what emerged from the data, together with information gathered from the literature, lead me to the next step. It was quite scary in a way because it left a lot to the unexpected but I hoped to be as loyal as possible to the classroom experience of the group as lived in that particular context and at the particular moment. I wanted to be as open to

change as my learners and I wanted this to be a learning experience for me as much as for them.

### **3.52. Engaging the participants into the study**

Before the start of an academic year there is no way of knowing to which group I would be assigned, in which institute I will be placed and who the learners will be. Therefore although my choice in this research study was one of convenience because I had access to the learners for one scholastic year, I did not choose the learners nor did they have a choice in deciding who will teach them, but we were assigned to each other following the routine selection process adopted by the MCAST's Registrar's Office and the LSU co-ordinator who assigned me to that particular institute. I feel however that this was a very positive feature which in the long run increases the validity of the study because since my intention was to do classroom ethnography, the fact that I had no involvement in any way in the selection of the learners or the institute, eliminates any doubt that I could have let my personal bias influence the choice.

On the very first day I knew that, if they accepted, the learners I had in front of me would be the learners that I would work with on my research study. I was anxious but hopeful that a good number of the learners in the group would agree to participate because I knew that it would be interesting to see whether shared patterns of experience or interpretation emerge from their life experiences. I also knew that a good number of participants would make a "strong body of evidence" (Bertaux, 1981, p.187) and give more validity to the study.

Since the main objective of the study was to give voice to the learners, my tutor advised me to involve them from the very onset of the study in the ethics review and the preparation of consent forms and information letters (App.6, App.7) that go with it. I was eager to do this but I must admit that I felt quite anxious because I wasn't sure whether or not the learners would consent to participate in the research study and I knew that writing was not something they enjoyed much.

## Vignette

Back in class, following the University Weekend School, I awaited the arrival of the learners with trepidation. I was thinking of possible ways to introduce the subject of the research study. My first session with them was a Maltese lesson and, drawing on the previous lesson which was about language, its origin and its development, I introduced the word 'riċerka' (research), wrote it on the board and asked the learners to say what that word means to them. Their first thoughts about research were quite detached from them. They associated it with experts, books, libraries and the internet. They mentioned the need to discover something. J\_\_ mentioned people as a source of information and M\_\_ suggested the word 'interview'. At that point I encouraged them to think about it a bit more and consider what could be researched. Most learners agreed that everything could be researched and they mentioned histories and the past. Linking the two I then pointed out that if people are sources of information they could speak about their past stories but that would mean becoming part of the research study and that entails some commitment.

Then I prompted them to think about what it would mean for an individual to be part of a research study (interests or concerns). Their first concern was that it might be difficult for the person to handle or that the individual may not know enough about the topic. They understood that a person had to be committed and that considering all these worries it might be hard to find individuals who would want to take part in a study. At that point I told them about my course and the study I was interested to carry out. I explained what I wished to do and how I hoped to collect the data and I expressed my wish to work with them and to make the study a venture of the classroom. All the learners except one (seven in all) showed an interest, and at my more direct invitation to be participants on the study, they accepted.

That is when I asked the learners to write about their views regarding research in general and this study in particular. The next session was an English lesson and ethics were discussed. The learners were asked to work together and make a list of things that they would agree upon to take part in the research. They wrote their ideas (App.6) and after going through the main issues depicted by the learners, the student's information sheet (App.8) was drafted, read by the learners and agreed upon. Then the information sheets and consent forms (App.7) were built, printed, read and signed.

My Reflective Journal 23/10/2012

It was fascinating to see that within the span of two hours, the learners transformed their thoughts from complete detachment from the subject to actually making it their own, thinking and reflecting upon it and making their own suggestions as to topics of research, ways to collect data and measures that should safeguard their interest. The process was one of collaboration where the learners and I shared power and negotiated an agreement that could make our working together possible.

### 3.53. Methods of data collection

| <b>Table 1: Data collected throughout the research</b> |                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| In the field (classroom) with the learners             | 240 hours - 8 one hour lessons weekly (2 independent lessons and two embedded lessons in the workshop for English and the same for Maltese) |
| Critical literacy sessions (App.12)                    | 24 One hour weekly sessions of critical literacy                                                                                            |
| Life histories                                         | Six - five of learners and one of teacher                                                                                                   |
| Interviews with learners                               | Six – one student refused the interview                                                                                                     |
| Interviews with parents                                | Two                                                                                                                                         |
| Focus groups                                           | One                                                                                                                                         |
| Timelines and presentations                            | Five                                                                                                                                        |
| Projects and presentations                             | Six – one student did not feel up to it                                                                                                     |
| Journal and feedback from learners                     | One teacher's journal and seven end of term feedback                                                                                        |
| Facebook                                               | Ongoing November – June (and still held up)                                                                                                 |



### 3.54. Life histories

To start my study I felt that it was very important to form the group/community. I wanted to reduce as much as possible the imbalance of teacher–learners’ power distribution. I felt it was important to place myself on their same level and I attempted to do that by writing and reading out to them a short account of my **life history** with highlights of my life (both negative and positive) to make clear where I came from and who I was. I introduced the reading as a normal piece of text and only at the end did I reveal to them that the reading, ‘How did I Get Here?’ (chap.2 p.19), was about me. Throughout the reading I could see and feel a wave of strong emotions embrace each one of us in the classroom. The learners were visibly moved and a later discussion revealed how different points in my life history touched each one of the learners differently because they could relate their personal lived experiences to similar situations that I had been through. Later, to introduce his life history a student wrote the following:

*“This morning you have really set me thinking and reflecting. Thanks a lot because I had forgotten what it [losing someone] feels like but everyone goes through it even me and you.”*

J\_\_, written life history translation

That was a very strong moment and indeed I could feel that I was no longer perceived as just the teacher, someone who walks in the classroom, delivers a session and walks out, something else had developed in our relationship. The sharing of my experiences with them was to them a show of trust which they appreciated. Before I knew it, and without my asking, the learners were giving me written accounts of their life history. This of course was not only a surprise on a human level because they had opened up to me so quickly but also on an academic level because I knew that writing was not their favourite medium of communication and yet they had found the time and made the effort to go through that exercise voluntarily. Hence my first, very important source of data collection was the learners’ short account of their life history. Five of the participants handed me a written account of their life history and an analysis of

their backgrounds and the key events in their lives gave me an insight on the experiences that could be further explored during the interviews that followed.

### **3.55. Interviews**

One-to-one **interviews-conversations** with the learners were the next method I used to collect data. Goodson (2001) has referred to this interview as “grounded conversation”. Of course, ‘conversation’ implies a positive and trusting relationship between interviewer and participants. Luckily a relationship of trust between me and the learners was established very quickly, nevertheless, interviews were planned for and carried out after the first term. My aim was to let some time pass in order to consolidate the friendly rapport that was budding amongst the members of the classroom. I believed that this would make the learners much more at ease when they had to speak about their life experiences.

I aimed for the interviews to be informal and unstructured because I did not want to influence what the learners had to say and as pointed out by Sikes and Goodson (2010, p.28), I could not possibly “know for certain which experiences have been influential and relevant” in their life. Hence my stance reflected that of Janesick (2010) whereby if interviewees are trying to talk about their past, they try to focus on specific issues and communicate their thoughts freely through responses and questions that emerge during the conversation.

However I was aware that this kind of informal, almost non-directive interview could have its drawbacks because it could generate a substantial amount of data about the learners but not necessarily data relevant to the study. So in an attempt to overcome this I used the learners’ life histories as points of reference to prompt them with specific questions when they seemed to be short for words and did not know how to go on with their accounts. In fact, on looking back at the interviews I feel that they had a huge element of the oral history method in that there was a continuous dialogic, back and forth movement between me

(the interviewer) and the interviewees. I agree with Janesick (2010, p.16) that both “researcher and the researched are active in oral history”. During the interviews the learners and I were engaged with each other’s lived experiences. The positive thing about this method is that it acknowledges subjectivity and validates it. Consequently exposing the stories of those who are at the margins of society or a system is possible, and it is given value. This is important because it can lead to social justice.

After analysing the transcripts, as a follow-up of the first non-directive interview, (conducted with six learners separately), I had planned a more ‘**focused interview**’ (Merton and Kendall, 1946) to target the aspect under study and other relevant themes that emerged from the first interview. However doing this second round of interviews was not possible due to time limitations since the learners had all embarked on part-time jobs and found it hard to find the time. Indeed, to overcome the time issue, I invited them for a focus group during which the main themes that emerged from the interviews were discussed. Before the focus group, the learners had read transcripts of their interviews and approved them. They had also planned, discussed and approved a presentation I did in Sheffield regarding my progress on the research study (App.9). So by now the learners had indeed become active participants and were fully immersed in the research process not only because they had done their individual life histories and sat for the individual interviews but because I was involving them in every decision related to our work and they had already read bits of the thesis I had written.

The focus group was very important because in this sixty minute interaction we tackled topics that had risen during some of the interviews. Discussing in the focus group gave everyone an opportunity to say what they thought and debate the case when there were varying views. I think that it was an important learning experience because learners had to put forward their arguments and defend them by giving reasons and examples. For the first time the learners were discussing personal issues with each other in a more formal context because they knew that they were being recorded. In order to overcome audio

problems during transcription, the learners were asked to take turns when speaking and a recorder was placed in the centre of the group. They were indeed very collaborative throughout the whole exercise.

For the interviews with the parents I used **semi-structured interviews**. This was useful because, while it involved uses of an “interview checklist” (Wellington, 1996, p.27), I still had “flexibility over the range and order of the questions” (Parsons, 1984, p.80). The reason why I opted to use semi-structured interviews with parents was the time factor because I was aware that gaining access might be problematic so I wanted to make sure that if they accept to participate in the study and sit for an interview I would try to limit my intrusion. I was also aware that especially in the case of parents the issue of power relations in the interview context would resurface since I was teaching their children. In order to reduce this imbalance I gave the parents the option to choose the place where they wanted the interview to take place. The two parents in my study chose a territory familiar to them. One parent was interviewed after her shift in the canteen where she works and the second parent invited me to her house. In both interviews I felt that this helped the parents to feel at ease and in fact our conversations continued long after the audio recorders were switched off.

By agreement with the interviewees, and after getting their consent, all interviews were recorded to be reheard as many times as necessary and to facilitate transcription at a later date, since having the written interviews would allow all the interviewees the possibility to calmly read the transcripts and change, edit or delete anything that they wished. Transcribing the interviews was also necessary to facilitate the analysis. Although an argument against the use of tape recorders is the inhibitions it might create to participants, in previous studies I carried out (Mizzi and Vassallo, 2001; Vassallo, 2005), I found that once a relationship is established with the researcher, participants do not object to being recorded and indeed that was the case this time round as well.

Apart from the recordings, I had planned to jot down short notes during and directly after the interview. However the interviews in all their different forms mentioned above were so engaging that very often I forgot to take any notes during the interviews and only added some notes later after the interview. Most of the time, I added these directly to the transcriptions and took note of mood, expression and body language of participants while they spoke. I made it a point to transcribe the interviews as soon as possible after each interview.

Also, since I was part of the classroom, I kept a journal with a record of important classroom interactions. At first I also had the intention to ask my learners to keep a diary and write their thoughts and reactions about anything that happens in class or outside. However this did not work because all the learners pointed out that writing was considered as a classroom activity and that they do no writing outside the college. So at regular intervals I asked for feedback as a writing task in the classroom. This helped me achieve different perspectives of the same classroom interactions and at the same time the feedback of the learners served as a source of themes and issues for discussion, relevant to the learners.

### **3.56. Timelines**

Another method of data collection used was that of timelines drawn by the individual members of the classroom. Bognoli (2009), from the University of Cambridge made use of timelines in two studies<sup>21</sup> claiming that when used in the context of an interview, such methods can open up participants' interpretations of questions giving them more space to express their own meanings and associations. Bognoli argues that interviews rely mainly on language for the communication of language. Indeed I agree and that is why I

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<sup>21</sup> "The Narratives of Identity and Migration project", an autobiographical investigation of young people and identities on a case study of migration carried out in England and Italy. Forty-one young people between 16 and 26 years of age from different backgrounds (Italy or England) took part in this study; "the Young Lives and Times", a qualitative 10 year longitudinal investigation from the University of Leeds about young people's lives, identities, and relationships. The participants drawn from various areas of Yorkshire were 13 years old when first met (Bognoli, 2009).

had chosen to use interviews in my study because I believed that learners would be free to recount their life experiences freely. However, when conducting the interviews, I realized that, when speaking about their life, participants were not as fluent as I had imagined and when they did speak, their recounting was closely related to schooling, maybe because they knew that I was a teacher so they associated my interest to just that part of their life. The use of timelines was an opportunity to see other aspects of the learners' lives which reflect particular trajectories that without being aware of them had a significant impact on their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990). So this "inclusion of non-linguistic dimensions in research, which rely on other expressive possibilities, may allow us to access and represent different levels of experience" (Bognoli, 2009, p.547) as well as, in my case, take on board a data collection method suggested by a student, who had watched YouTuber, Louis Cole, draw his timeline. This was an opportunity to increase the learners' ownership in the research study, while collecting "the most important turning points and biographical events as seen from the participants' own perspectives" (Bognoli 2009, p.561) so I kept the instructions as open as possible to leave the participants freedom of choice in their representations.

This method allowed the participants to use their preferred modalities of expression, taking into account their different needs and expressive styles, thus leading to a more holistic picture of their significant life experiences. It also allowed the participants time to engage in a reflection about their past, in fact the participants were all deeply absorbed in this activity and took it very seriously.

The timelines were important to generate data which highlighted the participants' trajectories and specific moments in their life which had a significant impact on them, significant enough to choose them, represent them in their timeline and speak about them. Timelines were also an opportunity to reflect about personal interests. Therefore they helped to reveal aspects of the participants' lives other than those related to schooling.

### 3.57. Artefacts, Projects and Presentations

On reflecting about the learners' reluctance to write and their limited fluency during interviews when talking about themselves, I thought that I should attempt letting them decide how they wanted to represent themselves after all there are other modes to literacy than just reading and writing:

*“Words are obviously important, vital in fact, but they are by no means the only competence of value and worth and words and language are usually coupled with other modes.”*

Rowsell, 2013, p.146

Pahl and Rowsell (2012, p.49) define an artefact as an object or thing that is formed or found and that has physical features such as texture and colour which make it distinct. Most importantly, in my opinion, they argue that artefacts embody “people, stories, thoughts, communities, identities and experiences” thus they are meaningful for whoever produces or presents them in a specific context. So artefacts can bridge worlds and can bring into the classroom the everyday experiences of learners as they are moved between the out-of-school and the in-school spaces. They open up for learners an opportunity to tell their stories which are often closely linked to a particular space they inhabit, such as the home, their community or a church they frequent (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). Talking about their artefact provides learners with the possibility to talk about aspects of themselves and their lives that are “not accessible in other ways” (Pahl and Rowsell 2012, p.51). It is an opportunity to change the subjects of discussion that commonly take place in classrooms, acknowledge differences and establish respect for diversity thus allowing growth and change in the telling process.

So I attempted another method to collect data and I asked learners to make projects that would reveal who they really are. During informal classroom talk, I could tell that the learners had various interests about which they were very knowledgeable. Some of these interests were linked to their work outside the

college and some others to their hobbies. What was certain is that when they spoke about their interests they were enthusiastic and highly competent so I wanted to draw that knowledge into the classroom and use it as a learning tool to build on. I did not limit the learners in any way, neither in topic choice nor in mode of representation. According to Kress (2010, p.79):

*“Mode is a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning. Image, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack and 3D objects are examples of modes used in representation and communication.”*

I also left them free to use the language they preferred (Maltese or English) in their presentations. So, they were free to work as they felt most comfortable. In agreement with Kress (2010) I believe that the choices themselves carry within them “traces of long histories of practices” (p.69) and the final artefact brings together that particular history and habitus and their present social standing thus making meaning of their lives while communicating that meaning to others and giving a glimpse into their subjectivity (p.77).

However, I strongly agree with Rowsell (2013) that practices must be ‘critically framed’ (p.150) for learners before they are expected to do them themselves, so once again I was the first to do the project and since at that moment studying was taking a huge part of my day, in and out of work, and because I wanted the learners to participate as much as possible in every part of my study, I decided to document my weekend school in Sheffield and share it with them. So during my weekend in Sheffield I took pictures and built a PowerPoint presentation (App.12) which the learners viewed and discussed with me on my return to school. My choice of pictures and mode of presentation were also subjects of the discussion. After the discussion, about ‘My Day as a Student in Sheffield’, learners started to propose what they would like their projects to be about.

The final projects which they produced varied in mode of representation and included pictures; a statue accompanied by pictures documenting the process of its making; PowerPoint presentations, which although they had the same



subject they were totally different in their content varying between personal photographs and posters and sayings found on the internet together with personal thoughts and other material added on. Kress points out that “the maker’s interest cannot ever be known to the recipient” (p.72) and that is why all of these representations were then accompanied by an oral presentation in which the learners spoke about the rationale behind the choices they made in the production of their artefacts. The choices made in the selection of the topics as well as the modes of representation were very significant and indeed strongly revealed the thoughts and interests of the learners outside the college:

*“Signs [are] an indication of the interest of the sign-makers in their relation to the specific bit of the world that is at issue; an indication of their experience of, and interest in, the world. “*

Kress, 2010, p.77

This was an important source of data because it consolidated important themes revealed in the timelines, interviews and informal discussions in class and provided additional information about the lives of the learners.

### **3.58. Informal conversations on Facebook**

Conversations on Facebook as a source of data collection were not planned at all because I am not a very keen user of Facebook and also because our language curriculum is based on an autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1984) where literacy is perceived as a set of skills that are tested in end of term test or assignments, thus leaving very little room for other things which are out of the syllabus. Apart from that, at the initial stages of my research study a new Teachers’ Code of Ethics (App.14) was launched and it specifically stated that:

*“teachers need to keep a ‘professional distance’ from their students and avoid inappropriate communication through social media such as Facebook and Twitter.”*

The Times of Malta, Monday, December 3, 2012, 16:07

However, when after a few weeks into the study and after some sessions of critical literacy one of the learners suggested that we set up a closed group on Facebook I started to consider the option. After giving it some serious thought and agreeing on some boundaries I consented. My change of heart was mainly linked to the fact that, although “sites such as Facebook are banned by schools” (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p.29), if the learners were truly being given a voice in this study, they had the right to share their ideas and stories in any way they wished and not just through the methods I was proposing. So once again I found myself in a very delicate position but I wanted to trust my learners and I explained to them what my position was. This was indeed another huge step forward in the building of a trusting teacher-student relationship. Once it was agreed, they set it up and called the group, ‘Voices of the Unheard’. This space was our space and we did not accept anyone else in the group. It was a space where we could continue discussions started in class or vice versa. The conversations within this space revealed different aspects of those who posted in it. Within that space the learners shared feelings and emotions which often surfaced as a result of reflections about things that had been said in class.

### **3.6. Validation**

By using all the above mentioned methods of data collection, I made use of a triangulation strategy that provides more strength and “increases the chances of accuracy” (Woods, 1986, p.87).

Also, by using different methods of data collection thus balancing between main-researcher-led methods (interviews, focus group, journal) and learners/participants-led methods (life histories, timelines, Facebook, feedback) I managed to limit bias, especially researcher bias which could influence the interpretation of data and eventually the writing up of the whole study.

Another safeguard against this is the use of respondent validation which Woods (1996, p.40) defines as “insiders confirming the correctness of analysis.” To

overcome the problem of access to the learners which was one scholastic year (October 2012–June 2013) I involved the learners throughout the whole process of data collection and throughout the writing process so any transcripts or chapters from my thesis that I wrote were given to them for feedback, clarifications or changes, before I submitted them to my tutor. The learners did give me feedback about my writing and by the end of the scholastic year I had written the introduction, the context and participants' sections. When the school year ended the learners were still very helpful and I stayed in touch with them through our Facebook group and when necessary we set up meetings to discuss my writing.

Another difficulty I was foreseeing at the initial stages of the study was language related because I was aware that the specialist language used in some parts of the thesis, such as the literature review, would be estranged to them. I tried to work around this problem by using simple language as much as possible in parts which were directly related to our classroom practices and experiences, especially the analysis and findings. In fact whenever the learners read parts that concerned them I checked that they had understood and they did not encounter major difficulties. When they encountered parts which they needed to be clarified or explained I was present to offer that clarification.

The length and complexity of the thesis (it being written in a foreign language) were predicted to be another hurdle. I was afraid that it would be too much for them to handle and would probably put them off. Therefore, in order to overcome this I discussed with the participants any analysis or written accounts made and asked them to give feedback in small chunks as the research progressed. When I knew that particular learners would struggle because of reading difficulties I offered to read it to them or to intervene when they felt tired. In this way I made sure that respondent validation was reached while I had access to the learners to secure that their voices were indeed reflected in my writing. I tried to manage time well in order to have a smooth progress in regular small bits to avoid overburdening them with the whole study at the end.

### 3.7. Ethics

A very important aspect of every research study is ethics. Important things that I had to bear in mind throughout the research process were codes of ethics such as honesty, sensitivity and confidentiality towards the participants. As Peach (1995) explains, there is a difference between doing “good research and doing ethical research” (p.13).

Therefore before the study could actually start, I got clearance from the University of Sheffield (App.5). To achieve that clearance, I worked on my ethics form with my learners and before inviting them to take part in the study I discussed with them and involved them from the very start of the project. I debated with them the purpose of the study and what my objectives were, asked their opinions regarding the matter and discussed with them which parameters they would want in place before they consider taking part in the study. The learners developed the consent forms they would be ready to sign and I then reformulated their ideas to give them structure (Appendices 6, 7 & 8).

When the Ethics Review Board gave me their approval my learners and I started our study. Before the data collection started I explained once again in detail the purpose of the study, what their participation would entail, how the data collected would be used and that they would have the possibility to discuss analysis, findings and interpretation before the study would be published.

To ensure confidentiality I reassured everyone that pseudonyms would be used in place of the participants' names. Tact and sensitivity are very important especially in this kind of research work where participants have to disclose a lot about their lives, including some delicate and even painful information. However a few months through the study, the learners insisted on more than one occasion that they wished to have their real names used in the write up. They explained that they saw my involving them in the study as a show of trust in them and in their abilities. They felt that they were valued and through that involvement they grew and felt that they had an opportunity to sound their voice and affect change. Also when the thesis was being reviewed by B\_\_ he

explicitly stated that “*I do not wish to hide between the lines of a page since what I am stating and revealing about myself is the truth!*” (22/01/2014).

However, for the purpose of this thesis I kept to the proposal approved by the Ethics Review Board and as a compromise used the learners’ initial letter of their name as a pseudonym.

### 3.8. Strengths and weaknesses of my chosen methodologies

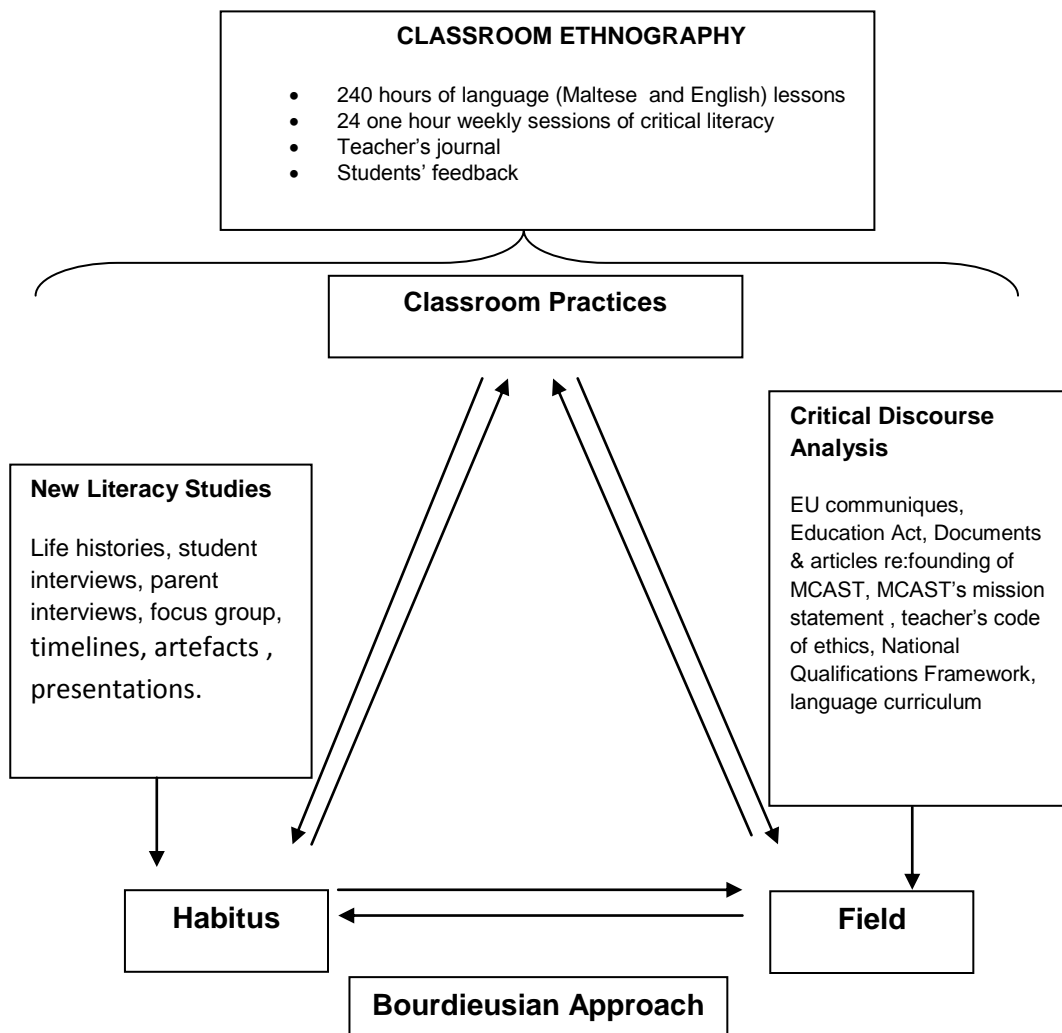


Fig.3: Overview of methodologies and methods

A closer look at my research questions on p.15 reveals that my interest was to gain a holistic picture of the nature of the learners who, so far, were identified by the system as illiterate, unmotivated and low-ability learners. My interest of course lay in the fact that I hold a different opinion but I acknowledge that my opinion was up to that point based on personal experience and perceptions. The methodologies I chose, namely Classroom Ethnography, New literacy Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis helped me to draw the big map of spaces that learners inhabit and to gain a better understanding of how these spaces intersected into and affected each other.

Classroom Ethnography and spending so many hours of formal and informal talk with the learners helped me to get to know them well and therefore understand sets of classroom behaviours which in the eyes of outsiders may look rude, rough and inappropriate but which in reality were historically (bad experiences) or culturally (home background) related. Reading through the life histories they presented helped me to get to know them on an individual level and share experiences that marked their lives in general and more specifically as learners. By following their conversations and discussions throughout the language lessons and critical literacy sessions I could appreciate the good qualities of the learners and their expertise in areas that interested them outside the college. I am however aware of limitations because my time spent with them, except for the two organised social activities (Christmas dinner and Beach day) and Facebook, was class based. The reasons for this were various. First of all when the learners had breaks from lessons I was with other classes so I could not join them. Also the teachers' code of ethics, just launched at the time, made it very clear that "teachers need to keep a "professional distance" from their learners" (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) so I had to be more careful since the participants were mainly male with only one female in the group. Time was also a significant limitation because I was constantly aware that I only had access to the learners for one scholastic year.

To make up for this limitation I tried to collect data by using methods which do not necessitate human contact all the time but which shed light on who the learners really are in the different spaces they inhabit. One such method was the writing up of life histories. The strong aspect of this method was that learners were free to write whatever they deemed important to them and therefore certain themes which could be followed later in interviews started to emerge straight away. However writing is not a medium held in favour by learners and I could not tell whether they had limited their writing to what is of most importance to them or whether, considering that some learners had been diagnosed with dyslexia and/or dyspraxia, they limited their writing because for them it was a struggle so they did not want to write much.

The interviews were the second method used and again these had strengths as well as weaknesses. The learners spoke about their backgrounds and experiences outside and inside school but they were not as fluent as I had expected them to be. This meant that I had to ask and prompt them to go on so I had to be very careful to make sure that I did not influence the interviewees. With parents I used semi-structured interviews but they were more fluent in answering. In both cases of parent interviews, interviews were very time consuming and for all the interview sessions I had to make special appointments with learners and parents after school. Consequently when learners found part-time jobs it became hard for them to agree to more interviews and that is why the second round of interviews was substituted by a focus group.

The focus group was a good method and I found it very useful because on presenting the themes that emerged through the interviews I could observe how the learners interacted with one another as they discussed them. This discussion helped to clarify the positions the learners had taken earlier in their interviews and in some cases learners wavered from their earlier positions because they could see another perspective presented by peers. The only weakness that I could anticipate in a focus group was the speaking on top of each other so I had to ask the learners to take turns in speaking. They all

collaborated and so transcription was not a problem, apart from time consumption which was significant. On a positive note though, having to do the transcriptions gave me an opportunity to familiarise myself with the data collected and while re-listening I found myself already thinking about and linking the data collected through the various methods.

So a good amount of data was collected through speaking and writing which helped me gain some information about the learners' families and their practices and also about the learners' previous school experiences. However I was aware that my learners are more in favour of doing 'stuff' (Kress, 2010). New Literacy Studies opened another path through which I could bring in the past experiences and knowledge into the classroom. Learners had already written and spoken about themselves but, wanting to make sure that they show their real strengths, I wanted to know more about their situated literacy practices so I asked them to do projects about themselves or their interests. I feel that the creation of artefacts was a strong method of data collection because it allowed all the participants freedom to be themselves and make their choices. Those who were not comfortable with the written medium could choose something else and they had an opportunity to show their strengths. This method as well as that of the timelines and presentations evidenced that learners have much to say about themselves and the system and that when given space they are able to choose the best mode that fits them, and the message they want to convey.

Therefore classroom ethnography and elements of a New Literacy Studies approach helped me to establish the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) of the learners, who they are, where they are coming from and what they can bring with them to the classroom. Then I still had to look at the causes of their disengagement from the field of education. I had to start by establishing the *field* (ibid.), the context (chp.2), and I did that by looking at documents through an approach of Critical Discourse Analysis. I looked at forces that were driving the founding of MCAST (EU and local political situation) and then I also looked at the college mission statement followed by an analysis of current practices in the college



(IATs, NQF and language curriculum). By adopting a Bourdieusian approach I moved back and forth on a journey of reflection and comparison between *habitus* and *field* and how match or mismatch between the two affected the learners in the past and could affect learners in the present. But, my research study was a classroom ethnography and I had a whole scholastic year with my learners and I did not want to read over their shoulders, I wanted them to gain from this experience so we used sessions of critical literacy to raise awareness on our current *habitus* and the *field* we were operating in by applying Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse documents such as the Education Act and the mission statement and then turned to New Literacy Studies to inform our teaching and learning practices in the classroom.

Of course methodologies and methods chosen in my study, which are all qualitative in nature, served to look at the lives and experiences of a small group of individuals who happened to find themselves sharing the same classroom and by no means am I suggesting that the findings I will discuss later on the thesis can be generalised. However, I feel that the fact that the research questions were addressed through different methodological approaches and different methods of data collection, strengthens the validity of the research study because it offers participant and methodological triangulation, participants' checking, feedback and approval throughout the study. Most importantly by drawing directly on their words in salient chapters such as the Analysis and Findings (chp.5), my study does what it sets out to do and that is give 'voices to the unheard' learners.

### **3.9. My gains as a researcher**

As a researcher I feel that this experience was beneficial to me on a professional level as well as on a human level. Thinking over in my head and theorising whether or not methodologies go together and match particular methods was overwhelming. It was a troubled journey, I have to admit. The

hardest thing was the conceptualisation of the methodologies that best fit my research questions. I started by looking at the questions. Then I reflected on what I needed to look into them and what authors I would be referring to. The choices I made reflected my ontological assumption, that the social affects us and is affected by us and therefore I was interested in how the spaces inhabited by the learners are experienced and constructed by them; my epistemological assumptions, that there is not one absolute 'truth' and that knowledge is "experiential, personal, subjective and socially constructed" (Wellington et al., p.102) so if I were to build knowledge about the Lv1 learners that came to MCAST I had to hear their voice regarding their lived experiences; and finally my assumptions regarding human nature and agency, that although we may be restricted by fields of power, if we are aware of the rules of the games played within those fields we can have some agency on the end result. So the set of research questions as well as the methodologies and methods chosen reflected my positionality. Concurrently, with every issue, theme or new idea that emerged, I turned to the literature which helped me grow as a researcher and move forward in my study. It was a troubled journey but what reassured me in moments of deep uncertainty are the words of Wellington et al. (2005, p.95):

*"There is no one 'proper' way of doing research and that issues arising in the course of planning and enacting any particular project may be pertinent at different stages and may need to be interpreted differently, for different styles of research."*

# Chapter Four: Literature Review

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*“Students and educators together can generate power that challenges structures of injustice in small but significant ways. The collaborative generation of power in educator-student interactions is ‘small’ insofar as the lives of individual students rather than the futures of entire societies are at stake; it is significant, however, for precisely the same reason. The future of societies depends on the intelligence and identities generated in teacher-student interactions in school.”*

*Cummins, 2002, p.X*

## 4.1. Introduction

This study set out to look into the causes of Lv1 Learners' disengagement from mainstream education, to dwell on their out of school practices and change classroom practice to boost their engagement. The literature was reviewed in parallel with the data collection and the evolution of the study therefore the sections in this chapter mirror the themes and issues that emerged and the processes and practices adopted in the classroom throughout the duration of the study (chp.5). Therefore I start this literature review by looking at the agenda held by EU and the Maltese government in relation to literacy. Then I delve into the literature concerning the dominant power structures in education in relation to literacy by looking at different definitions of literacy in general and schooled literacies in particular. This is then followed by a literature review of practices within New Literacy Studies that acknowledge the diversity of learners' cultures and experiences and draw upon them to enrich the classroom experience. Next I explore out-of-school literacies; multiliteracies and multimodalities; translanguaging; funds of knowledge and critical literacy. I draw on the literature to show how all these approaches can illuminate how learners' identities and perceptions of self are conceptualised; and how such classroom practices can lead to the formation of a third space where learners feel a sense of belonging which positively stimulates their engagement, participation and empowerment.

## 4.2. Literacy in Malta

According to the 2005 Malta Census, literacy in Malta is on the increase. The report shows that 45.3% completed secondary education, 13.8% went on to finish post-secondary education and 9.6% completed tertiary education. Seven years later, in 2012 Commissioner Vassiliou and Princess Laurentien warned that the latest PISA<sup>22</sup> results show that the ratio of low achievers in reading among 15-

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<sup>22</sup> PISA is the Programme for International Student Assessment. This international survey takes place every three years and has the aim to make an evaluation of education systems in the world. 15-year-old

year-olds in Malta is 36.3 per cent, considerably higher than the EU average (19.6% in 2009). On a positive note, the same article points out that the country has registered some success in stemming the flow of early school leavers, and I might add that this happened since the establishment of MCAST which draws learners who were disengaged from mainstream academic education (Lindsay, 2012). However, according to Education Statistics 2006 (2010), MCAST has experienced a student drop-out rate of 30% per academic year irrespective of the implementation of “the Foundation Programmes which were meant to support vulnerable students” (Maltastar, 2012).

Therefore the question that arises naturally is what ‘literacy’ is on the increase and is it the same literacy legitimised and measured through tests in schools? I strongly believe that despite the huge budget invested in education every year, some learners are being marginalised by the system at a very early age. Policymakers are not recognizing that learners coming from different backgrounds may hold different literacies and continue to give them more of the same thing resulting in disengagement and drop-outs. Cummins (2001) argues that while policymakers continue to believe that interventions to improve achievement are a mere exercise of instructional technique which can be prescriptive and scientifically controlled, learners will continue to fail. Many reforms continue to blame problems of underachievement on learners’ ‘deficits’ while ignoring any social and educational inequities. When we, as educators, position ourselves in a discourse of deficits we fail to see the culture, identity, intellect and imagination as part of the child. It is the literacy practice of one small group in society that is dominant within the school context and our focus as educators should be to turn the situation around by focusing on human relationships to check that equal weights are assigned in the negotiation of identities in the interactions between learners and educators. Learners are not ‘clean slates’, they do have their own literacy practices but unfortunately, when these are not acknowledged in school learners get discouraged and give up on education.

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students are tested on skills and knowledge in reading, mathematics and science (with a focus on mathematics). So far more than 70 different economies have participated.

### 4.3. A Definition of Literacy

*“If literacy cannot be defined with certainty, it becomes difficult to draw comparisons between those who are literate and those who are not, and to measure 'literacy standards' and 'literacy levels'. School teachers can no longer chart children's literacy development with absolute confidence; historians cannot unproblematically discuss rates of literacy across different historical periods; suspicion must be cast on definitive statements about literacy 'crises' by policy makers and politicians; and serious questions must be asked about where and how money devoted to adult literacy programmes is being spent. These problems are profoundly unsettling, to say the least, and call into question long held beliefs and deeply ingrained modes of practice. Yet the answer to such difficulties surely does not lie in forcing 'literacy' back into neat theoretical compartments and easy-to-stack practical boxes, when these are clearly no longer philosophically tenable or ethically defensible. Complexity may be uncomfortable, but it ought not to be ignored.”*

Roberts, 1995, p.428

Issues of 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' have been high on the agenda of policy-makers and practitioners since the early 1940s (Roberts, 1995). The struggle about the definitions of the terms, which continues to be unresolved, is mainly a political one which carries with it issues of inclusion and exclusion (Wickert, 1992) since the definition given to literacy determines who is considered as literate and who is not.

For the many 'literacy' is the ability to read and write and if this ability is lacking then individuals are classified as 'illiterate'. However, this definition leaves many questions as to what or how much is to be read and written in order to be considered 'literate'.

There were instances when literacy was defined in terms of the number of school years attended or in terms of the 'reading ages' acquired on standardised tests.

In Britain (Levine, 1986) and elsewhere, including Malta (MATSEC, 2011), literacy has been pegged with a benchmark of a reading age of nine years. This position is still withheld by Malta and England with regards to special access arrangements during tests and examinations. Results obtained on standardised tests, which focus on 'skills' and techniques, are compared to that benchmark which determines whether or not learners are allocated access arrangements such as a reader to assist them during examination. Indeed, tests of 'reading ages' lend themselves well to the categorisation of people so they are often administered in schools with the claim that they help teachers identify learners' needs and measure their progress. Yet, there are many who contend that the damage acquired through standardized systems of measurement are far greater than any benefits especially when one considers the stigma attached to 'illiteracy' in today's world. Literacy today is perceived by society as "something good, valuable, or worthwhile" (Roberts, 1995, p.417), and it continues to be high up on the political agenda of nations due to assumptions regarding causal links between literacy levels and economic growth (Street, 1984). By the general public, literacy is often perceived as an independent variable with consequences on "economic 'take-off' or cognitive skills" (p.2), thus having an 'effect' on employment opportunities, empowerment and political engagement (Bartlett, 2008). No wonder that literacy is often one of the main lobbies during political campaigns leading to promises such as the free tablets to all eight-years-old learners by the Malta Labour Party and the promise of giving out tablets to all learners between five and sixteen by the Malta Nationalist Party (promises which to date – June 2014 - have just materialised in a pilot study).

Within development discourses, literacy is often viewed as a singular phenomenon made up of discrete skills that are acquired in a linear way through development. In the Maltese National Policy and Strategy for the Attainment of Core Competences in Primary Education (2009) literacy is defined as:

*"the ability to express oneself confidently in Maltese and/or English, to read meaningfully and to use the written word for the purposes of communication so as to access the full curriculum and thus lead to the mastery of the key competences for lifelong learning."*

It is worth noting that Maltese and English are taken to be standard (not a variation or dialect) within the Maltese curriculum, and any content is presented to learners mainly in the form of textbooks or written notes and predominantly in English for all subjects at primary and secondary level except Maltese, History and Religion. So the “Maltese and/or English” mentioned in the definition above is strictly more ‘and’ and more ‘English’. Barton (1994, p.6) refers to this as the “globalisation of literacy” whereby the English language and literacy as conceived in Britain and America are exported, naturalized and standardized worldwide. Hence literacy is often seen as detached from its social context and as a result easily measured by standardised tasks which determine whether individuals are ‘literate’ or ‘illiterate’. This ‘autonomous’ model of literacy is dominant in current public discourse as well as in the arena of literacy policy so a lot of investment was and continues to be directed at literacy initiatives and programmes to try and stifle ‘illiteracy’ - a label which is attached to individuals on the basis of tests, that see individuals as statistics, who are all the same, and fails to take into consideration other facets that make up an individual:

*“While tests designed to measure ‘reading ages’ and the like are presumably intended to prevent people growing into ‘illiterate’ adults, they also set limits upon, and play a strong part in shaping views of, what ‘counts’ as ‘literacy’ and ‘illiteracy’. [ ] what kind of ‘literacy’ is being measured when students pass or fail, do well or do poorly, in these tests.”*

Roberts, 1995, p.416

Not reaching the quantifiable targets on large scale literacy programmes, set by various nations has led to the questioning of the notion of ‘literacy’ as a unitary, single thing (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987) and “Multiple modes of literacy”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>The recognition of multiple modes of literacy which include: ‘survival literacy’ (the literacy skills needed in modern technological society); ‘social literacy’ (communication skills, and the capacity for dialogue, critical reflection and informed action); ‘cultural literacy’ (possession of the basic information necessary to succeed in the modern world); ‘basic literacy’ (minimal print-decoding skills); ‘functional literacy’ (‘the ability to interact with political, legal, commercial, occupational and social demands in daily life’); ‘higher-order literacy’ (being able to work out multi-step problems by oneself); and ‘critical literacy’ (transformation through reflection, action and desocialisation). There is a shift from a focus on “literacy itself to literacy as practised, developed, conceived, expressed,



(Roberts, 1995, p.420) started to be considered. Literacies are social, diverse and many (Roberts, 1993) but some literacies are more valued than others. A case in point is the argument, put forward by Snell (2013), that when educators or policies try to remove non-standard usage and replace it with the standard, children's communication skills are limited and not expanded. Meek also argues:

*“The great divide in literacy is not between those who can read and write and those who have not yet learned how to. It is between those who have discovered what kinds of literacy society values and how to demonstrate their competencies in ways that earn recognition.”*

Meek, 1991, p.9

According to Meek, literacies are not 'natural', and although we take them for granted as we go about our daily life, they are results of human activity. They are extensions of older technologies (p.208) which shift with every new generation thus changing with them the notions of literacy and the demands on those who are literate. If this fluidity of literacy is acknowledged, in spite of continuous claims about the decline in standards of reading and writing, it becomes easier to see that there are differences between demands placed on readers and writers of fifty years ago when compared to readers and writers today (Chall, 1983). When I was in primary school (1975-1981) owning a typewriter was a luxury and owning a colour TV was impossible in Malta. The notion of computer was not conceived yet. Meek makes a distinction between “utilitarian” literacy, which is often promoted in schools and is about basic skills and closed tasks, and “powerful” ('supercharged') literacy (p.10), which gives the individual autonomy and control to critically choose and engage with what they read and write.

Langer (1987) considers literacy as a way of thinking which is not tied down to written texts but defined by processes of reflection, analysis and deliberation about any form of discourse from classic texts to television programmes. So in this view it is not the ability to decode words on a page or writing one's name that makes a person literate:

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or manifested in this context, or that discursive setting, or that situation - in these ways, at this time, along these lines, etc.” (Roberts, 1995 p.420).

*“Literacy is an activity, a way of thinking, not a set of skills. And it is a purposeful activity - people read, write, talk and think about real ideas and information in order to ponder and extend what they know, to communicate with others, to present their points of view, and to understand and be understood.”*

Langer, 1987, p.4

With the rapid and continuous developments in new systems of communication and technology we are forced to rethink many familiar concepts and 'literacy', 'reading' and 'writing' are among them. Reconstruction of such concepts is imperative. Books are no longer the dominant or most practical way to organise and store information and as educators and researchers we have to keep in mind that just because a good number of people in teaching positions at the moment are more used to, and comfortable with, pen and paper it does not mean that teaching and learning can only happen or happen most effectively through those media. It is untenable that those who are in positions to define literacy for others assume that their literacy practices are the ones that count, and consider whoever fails to achieve them as less (Meek, 1993). Fundamental changes in this technological age have brought a significant shift in the way people read and write and, by implication, in what it means to be 'literate'. As stated by Roberts (1995, p.428):

*“Literate practices in the age of computing, in shifting from the materiality of print to the floating signifier of the image, transform traditional notions of 'text'.”*

Street (1984), Lankshear and Lawler (1987), Giroux (1987), Gee (1993), and McLaren (1988), among others, argue that 'literacy' is always historically situated and socially formed. This means that how we perceive literacy is affected by social practices and the settings and power structures that surround them. Street (1993) refers to this as an ideological model of literacy and those who subscribe to this model look at reading and writing in particular social and cultural practices:

*“The model [ ] is therefore concerned with the general social institutions through which this process takes place and not just the specific ‘educational’ ones.”*

Street, 1999, p.56

This is very important because when this approach is lacking we miss out on a huge part of what individuals are indeed able to do. Street (1994) argues that very often local and international campaigns fail to realise that the people they are targeting for literacy programmes are not empty vessels but already practise forms of reading and writing in their everyday lives. In his study in Iran, during the 1970s, villagers were referred to by teachers and developers as ‘illiterate’ even though many of them had learned reading and writing through ‘Qoranic classes’. As a result very few people turned up for literacy programmes because for the majority these programmes “denigrated local knowledge and learning and treated people with local literacy as though they were backward and ignorant” (p.10). In a critique to the International Adult Literacy Survey, Veeman (2000) claims that people may feel that they have the skills they need to cope with the demands of their everyday experiences but because of a “positivist epistemology to describe literacy as a technical skill” (p.353), a skill often associated with schooling, many respondents could have been alienated by the whole procedure of answering long and laborious survey questions. This was also evidenced in several studies (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton et al., 2000; Hull and Schultz, 2001) which show that specific contexts such as home, school and religious organizations change what counts as literacy and the practice of it:

*“literacy only has meaning within its particular context of social practice and does not transfer unproblematically across contexts; there are different literacy practices in different domains of social life, such as education [ ] and these different literacies are supported and shaped by the different institutions and social relationships.”*

Hamilton and Barton, 2000, p.379

## 4.4. Schooled literacy

As mentioned earlier, literacy and education are often linked to economic and social improvements thus throughout the years legislation has sought to provide a structure whereby education is available to all. However, despite the fact that education and school attendance became compulsory in many countries, it is common knowledge that not all those who attend make the same gains or indeed there are some who gain nothing at all apart from a blow to the self-esteem. Therefore, borrowing Grenfell's words (2008, p.17), I question "is school a democratising agent – in other words, can everyone succeed in it?" Heath (1983) argues that school is not an unbiased field and that as an institution it has the aim of altering people's "values, skills and knowledge bases" (p.368). This process affects the school population differently and while some benefit and progress, others are completely estranged from it. Learners such as the 'townspeople' in Heath's study feel quite at ease in the school environment because before they go to school, through experiences within the family, they would have already acquired those language practices and cultural capital that the school would expect them to have:

*"By the time individuals enter social fields – for example, school – they are equipped with a whole set of dispositions, expressive of a particular social origin and trajectory."*

Grenfell, 2008, p.165

In other words language use and the way of doing things within the family affect how the children live their experiences in school and beyond. But what happens to the rest of the learners whose family practices don't match the school expectancies? Bourdieu (1977b) claims that "practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that in which they are objectively fitted" (p.78). Hull and Schultz (2002) also explain how discrepancy between home and school practices affected 'Nan' whose home literacy practices including her speaking, drawing and storytelling, were not at all helpful at school where the written word was

predominant and where “accuracy often matters more than meaning” (p.67). Kress (1997), in discussing the logic of writing, argues that it is “one of hierarchy, of compression of meaning, of complex syntactic interrelation” and has ruled over the logic of speech which is “one of sequence, of repetition, restatement, reformulation, of slow development”. He points out that writing still predominates today in the fields of power such as “education, bureaucracies, politics and so on” (ibid. p.123). This of course is discrepant to everyday practices where technologies have made communication so easy and instant, and where writing and speech have become interchangeable in chatting on the network. In “Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling”, Gee (2004), claims that when schools degrade and pay no attention to home-based practices, learners disengage themselves. Furthermore, Maybin (2013) contends that in a world of multimodality and technological practices, such as social networks, the speech versus writing distinction, is not as clear cut as it used to be. While writing has been for many years the medium of communication between distant (temporally and geographically) entities and speech the “medium of proximity” (Kress, 1997, p.124), this is no longer the case today when at the click of a button we correspond, in writing or in speech, with individuals living across the globe. In response to this reality Maybin (2013) calls for a move towards envisaging “writing as a semiotic object” which cannot be “addressed in isolation” (p.552). While studying adolescents’ composing practices in a multimodal storytelling project, Vasudevan et al. (2010) found that by not limiting the composing process to just print modalities learners’ participation and engagement within the classroom curriculum increased significantly and various modes were employed in their compositions thus providing learners “with the opportunity to take on a broader range of available identities as “successful” learners in an academic setting” (p.445). Schultz et al. (2012, p.490) contend that when participation structures in the classroom give space to “verbal and non-verbal interactions, as well as aural, written, and pictorial contributions [ ] students can participate through talk and silence, and also through writing or other modes of expression.”

Unfortunately many processes of instruction in today's schools, including learning to read, continue to be predominantly based on the teaching of de-contextualised skills but learning to read is neither 'natural' nor 'instructed' (Gee, 2004, p.12). In a study conducted by Evans (1993) older learners commented that, in school, they "felt forced to read" (p.325) and thus reading which in other contexts was enjoyable became demotivating and boring (Ivanic et al. 2007). In fact the educational experiences of learners are dominated by "literacies for assessment" (Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), 2008) such as, reading handouts, PowerPoint presentations and textbooks, researching on the internet, writing of essays or reports, and the completion of worksheets, which are by far narrower than learners' everyday practices. Findings from Somerville (Brandau, 1996) indicate that, although literacy practices inside and outside the school can have some common elements, there are significant differences in "knowledge, practice, and preferred habits" (p.4). These are evident in non-school settings when compared to what happens in schools because "real-life purposes, expectations, and strategies for literacy tasks, are very different from those valued in school" (p.4). In this day and age (2014) most of the learners attending MCAST and elsewhere have grown up with and are regular users of the internet, video games and text messaging in which language is used profusely, and learners find that kind of language by far more fascinating than school language. Unfortunately, although being conversant with this variety of language requires particular ways of "thinking, interacting, and valuing" (p.38), these are different from what is needed or acknowledged in schools.

For this reason languages, such as English, can be very complex to teach and to learn because there may be many varieties of one language. Such varieties might include different dialects or different varieties of language used by different socio-cultural groups in everyday conversations within families and communities

(vernacular<sup>24</sup> varieties) or indeed different occupations (specialist varieties) such as those needed for a vocational course, but because the educational system only promotes the standard language learners are at a loss anyway.

Blommaert and Ad Backus (2011) contend that although the globalised world has led to many different levels and forms of language use, dominant discourses that see the development of literacy and language as “linear and uniform” (p.4) are once again attracting a lot of support in fields of employment and education. The authors stress that ‘language’ can never be complete because it is a cumulative process of growth that accompanies individuals as they move through their various life encounters with particular situations that demand “certain styles, genre and linguistic varieties” (p.9). These various elements of language which belong to particular situations, time frames or contexts are “repertoires” which do not develop in a linear way but are “biographically organized [ ] and they follow the rhythms of human lives” (p.9) with development of particular areas in particular phases of one’s life.

In informal settings we often learn bits of a language, and we would make sense of them only as part of another language. In the same way we adopt particular ways of using language which are specific to particular fora such as “cu@4” (ibid. p.15) when texting. Therefore in our everyday practices we are continuously blending the formal with the informal in order to get our message across in the most effective way depending on the context we find ourselves in.

But if it is acknowledged that so many varieties exist and that they all have a functional role in our everyday communicative practices, why is it that “the expansion of the modes of language learning has not resulted in a more

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<sup>24</sup> In the Research Briefing (2008) for the Teaching and learning Research Programme, Vernacular literacy practices refer to literacy practices “learnt through participation in the activities of which they are a part, not through instruction, drills and tests” (Satchwell and Ivanic, 2007, p.304). For Camitta, (1993) ‘vernacular literacy’ is the reading and writing within the same language and writing system which are “closely associated with culture which is neither elite nor institutional, which is traditional and indigenous to the diverse cultural processes of communities as distinguished from the uniform, inflexible standards of institutions” (Camitta, 1993, pp. 228-9). In writing about the ‘*subrosa*’ writing of adolescents in and out of High School, Camitta points out that although students are reluctant to write in school, they were very active and creative writers out of school. This is also called ‘Community Literacy’ (Barton & Ivanic, 1991).

egalitarian field of language learning; it has led (and is leading) to increased stratification?” (p.15). While discussing Blommaert’s own repertoires, the authors point out that:

*“If we apply the Common European Framework levels for language proficiency, our subject would undoubtedly score a C2 – the most advanced level of proficiency – for English, when the language test concentrates on academic genres of text and talk. The same subject, however, would score A2 – the most elementary level of proficiency – if the test were based on how he would interact with a medical doctor, a plumber, an IT helpdesk operative, an insurance broker, and so on. So, ‘how good is his English’ then? Let it be clear that this question can only be appropriately answered with another one: ‘which English?’”*

Blommaert and Ad Backus, 2011, p.24

When looking at three different schools in different geographic locations, Clark (2013, p.72) asserts that while the teaching of Standard English is necessary to ensure that all learners are given the opportunity to pursue education and higher levels, it should not be based upon “deficit, but upon enablement, helping the pupils to realise how important language is to educational success in ways that are positive and encouraging, rather than negative and limited.” This can be done through a lot of talk, by encouraging learners to voice their thoughts and then construct their answers in Standard English, “not because their expression is “wrong”, “illiterate” or spoken in non-standard English, but because the conditions of use underpinning academic success demand that the expression of subject knowledge be expressed through written standard English.” Clark (2013) describes how in High View Academy in Birmingham a language based pedagogy was adopted to focus on language use even when teaching particular subjects such as history but the learners were never humiliated, on the contrary their contributions in discussions were encouraged and built upon.

James Paul Gee, who started his career as a linguist studying the technicalities of the language, in his book ‘Situated Language and Learning’ (2004) puts forward a



strong argument that “people learn new ways with words, in or out of school, only when they find the worlds to which these words apply compelling” (p.3). He points out that all children, whether privileged or not can learn the specialist varieties of a language in their everyday lives through their everyday activities if these are appealing to them and if they have the opportunity.

Heath (1983) in her study of three social groupings, Trackton, Roadville and Maintown points out how although the three communities held abundant language practices and interactions with their children, “it was the *kind of talk*, not the *quantity* of talk that sets townspeople children on their way to school” (p.352). These children developed particular skills within their families which were highly “associated with schools and schooling” (Gee, 2004, p.23) and socialised themselves into a particular identity as part of a particular family which is in turn part of a particular group. These learners take with them to school what Snow et al. (1998) refer to as ‘early language ability.’ On the other hand if the home language and practices are not acknowledged, those who go to school equipped with strong vernacular varieties of language, although owning different linguistic repertoires outside school, they are not rewarded and fail drastically when content starts to become more specialised.

Although most families value education and indeed hold a vast array of literacy practices at home, not all the practices carry the same value in school. This is because particular varieties of language are not accredited by teachers who might hold one particular variety as the standard to be practised in school. As a result, children who do not identify with these practices will perceive teachers and schools as hostile and start to feel that their home-based identities are devalued (Holland and Quinn, 1987).

For some learners academic varieties of language are alienating because they seem “distant, irrelevant and even frightening” (Gee, 2004, p.37). What’s worse is that learners who struggle with these academic varieties are not supported because they are expected to be used to them just like their peers who manage to do very well without any effort at all simply because they had familiarised

themselves with these varieties at home. The consequences are that soon enough learners start to feel that they are excluded from that social group (school) and learning is negatively affected. Indeed literacy, within the various definitions that surround it, has always been linked to “social and political issues of power and participation” (Brandau, 1996, p.2).

As children and youths live through their different experiences, positive or negative as they might be, they are continuously taking on a particular identity defined by those experiences. Through their trajectories they adopt ways of behaving in particular situations. Differences in prior preparation lead to the segregation of learners within classrooms, bands, tracks or schools on the basis of skills, abilities or grades. Learners are measured according to how much and how quickly they fit into the system of prescribed curricula, syllabi and textbooks.

Curricula have been, for some time, loaded with ‘academic language’ which is considered to be an important opening into economic and social success.

Schools have been geared up to pass on to all learners this variety of academic reading and writing but results across different nations show that in reality schools are more likely to succeed in their feat with learners coming from “families with a good deal of mainstream educational and cultural capital” (Gee, 2004, p.91). On the other hand:

*“those without the necessary ways of speaking, thinking and doing accept and even collude in their exclusion. Faced with what might be termed a ‘charismatic ideology’ of talent [], those without it accept their lack of scholastic gifts in similar terms, thus conflating ‘what’ they are with ‘who’ they are.”*

Grenfell, 2012, p.57

Thus success in acquisition of academic literacy is heavily tied up with identity formation of learners (Gee 2004, Grenfell 2008) which can “change according to imagined futures and experienced presents; hence students can adopt institutional literacies as (or if) they identify themselves as members of that institution” (Hamilton et al., 2010, p.1). Bourdieu (2000) points out that in every

individual there is no behaviour which is disinterested because we all seek “recognition” and that “projection, identification, compromise, drives and desires are stimulated, but they are not individualistic or idiosyncratic since they follow patterns conditioned by the social environment” (1977b, p.165). Satchwell and Ivanic (2009) found that a determining factor in literacy practices within different fields of people’s lives was their sense of identity. This affected the kind of reading or writing as well as their sense of belonging in the field of education and/or the field of their future perceived work. Through my own experience I have come to agree with Bourdieu that dissonance between the learners’ background (habitus) and the school (field) results in “hysteresis” (Grenfell 2008, p.134), that is, the effect that continues to be felt even when the particular situation has passed. Indeed learners who come to believe that they are failures continue to do so even when they experience success in other areas or in a different school. Rogers (2003, p.152) states that :

*“Because within the context of the school both June and Vicky have learned to see themselves as not literate and unable, they have acquired sets of assumptions about themselves in relation to this schooled literacy.”*

In Tett, Hamilton and Hillier (2006, p.168), Merrifield (2004) also noted that “people may exclude themselves from an education system that seems alien, unfamiliar, and with no value in the social context they inhabit.” This is because very often it is within the school, through teachers’ feedback and formal assessment systems, that they develop their own identity as ‘literate’ or illiterate’ individuals and they continue to carry with them this perception inside as well as outside the school in spite of their many everyday literacy practices:

*“Reading and writing experiences in a school context wield in determining students’ perceptions and understandings of reading and writing as literate activities and of themselves as readers and writers even outside that context and apart from those school-related experiences.”*

Evans, 1993, p.337

Learners’ self-perception of whether they are literate or illiterate continues to have a ripple effect even after compulsory education. Once they are convinced by the

results obtained throughout mainstream compulsory education that they are poor readers or not 'intelligent' enough to follow the academic route, their choices are affected. In fact, as cited below, it is well acknowledged by the Maltese government and other EU officials that literacy is an important factor in issues of learners' achievement, progression and retention in post-secondary courses. This has an impact on national as well as international agendas because "keeping learners in the system, enabling them to gain qualifications and thereby progress to higher level courses is a key educational goal" (Edwards and Miller, 2008, p.123).

*"While reading and writing are more important and relevant than ever before in the context of our digitised world, our literacy skills are not keeping up. We urgently need to reverse this alarming situation."*

Vassiliou, 2012  
European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism  
and Youth

*"Reading and writing are much more than a technique or a skill. Literacy is about people's self-esteem and ability to function and flourish in society as private individuals, active citizens, employees, or parents."*

Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, 2012  
*UNESCO Special Envoy on Literacy for Development*

*"It is the intention of the Maltese government to do its utmost to ensure that everyone in Malta is provided with the best opportunities to acquire the required literacy skills. [ ] a complementary National Literacy Campaign [ ] will be implemented also in the light of recent results obtained by Malta in the Programme for International Assessment (PISA) 2010 where the percentage (36.3) of 15 year-olds who were low achievers in reading literacy was significantly higher than the EU average (19.7) and in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011 where the mean reading score (477) of Maltese ten year-olds was significantly lower than the international average."*

Bartolo, 2013  
Minister for Education, Malta

One way of dealing with the above goals in the Maltese context today is to persuade all learners who have completed compulsory education without any qualifications to stay in education, and to encourage all those who are out of work and are without qualifications or need to obtain new qualifications to go back to education. This means opening MCAST's doors widely to all because it is the only educational institution which accepts everyone including individuals who hold no qualifications, individuals classified as illiterate, refugees, mature learners, individuals with learning or other disabilities and anyone else who wishes to go back to education. Therefore the number of learners who apply at MCAST continues to increase and learners are more diverse than ever before. However retention and progression of learners are major issues and very often literacy is identified as a determining factor (Edwards, Ivanic and Mannion, 2009). With compulsory key skills, Maltese and English, numeracy, ICT and PD (as well as science as from academic year 2014-2015), learners are encountering the same problems they had at school mainly because "curriculum and content continue to be delivered in predictable ways" (Schultz and Coleman-King, 2012, p.496) and pedagogies of 'autonomous skills' are predominant even within MCAST. Street (1994, p.10) argues that a cause for dropping out is that:

*"people do not see the relevance of the programme for their own lives, [ ] when the literacy being brought in is an alien language or represents a different literacy tradition to that which they have learned and used locally."*

According to the Research Brief for the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) (August 2008, 50), "one way of addressing these issues is to explore ways of integrating learners' prior learning and everyday capabilities into teaching [ ] [and] questions of literacy are pivotal to this integration."

## 4.5. Out of School Literacies

A three-year-project entitled Literacies for Learning in Further Education (LlLFE), a collaboration between two universities and four colleges in England and Scotland focused on literacy practices that facilitated student success in learning across the curriculum (Ivanic et al. 2007). Hence in this project focus was not on basic skills. The study revealed how the learning outcomes of learners in Further Education are frequently shackled by the arduous literacy demands of their courses notwithstanding the wide range of literacy practices they hold in their everyday life, at work, at home, in the community and in leisure activities. LlLFE revealed that learners participate in a rich variety of literacy practices in their everyday lives which move beyond paper based reading and writing and into other media which lend themselves to multiple “possibilities for reading and writing new types of text in new ways for new purposes” (Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), 2008, p.2). These vernacular – everyday literacy practices (see p.104 of this study for detailed definition) did not only include practices related to the learners’ own interests and concerns but also other more formal literacy practices they are faced with every day. However, these often go unrecognised by the system and as a result even the learners fail to consider these ‘vernacular’ practices as literacy (Satchwell and Ivanic, 2007). This meant that such literacies were not utilised within educational settings because they were not given educational value:

*“It became clear while researching students’ literacy practices in and out of college that their practices outside of college had characteristics which were often different from those required for their courses. One of the most obvious differences was the prevalence of students’ digital literacy practices in their everyday lives, and the prevalence of paper-based practices on their courses.”*

Hamilton, Barton, and Satchwell, 2010, p.2

LfLFE also exposed an “ambiguity in purpose on many vocational courses” (TLRP, 2008, p.3) which resonates with current practices at MCAST that attempt to serve the purpose of employment and employability of individuals on the one hand and academic progression to pursue a degree on the other (Edwards and Miller, 2008). However employment and academic progression put different demands on literacy and while the reading and writing practised in the workshop are closely related to ‘vernacular practices’ and what is expected on the job in real life, academic progression calls for the writing of essays or long reports often necessary for the completion of assignments and even dissertations at higher levels. Therefore the assumption that vocational courses have lower and less complex literacy requirements is misplaced to say the least because vocational learners are often faced with complex and diverse literacy practices with constant switching between academic and non-academic varieties depending on the subject they are studying, whether vocational practical (simulation in the engineering workshop) or vocational theory (composition of materials and research); key skills vocational (filling in an accident report) or key skills mainstream (reading comprehension or criticising legislation backed by research). Very often learners do well on vocational subjects that are closer to the vernacular because they are more engaged and their recall and confidence increases, but they grapple with the rest because they are not properly coached to face “the complexities of genre and practices with the production of text” (Edwards and Miller 2008, p.127):

*“Literacies for learning are currently driven to a large extent by the washback effect from assessment regimes. Awarding bodies need to reconsider the reading and writing which is required for their qualifications, and to ensure that they are not demanding unnecessary assessment literacies.”*

(TLRP, 2008 p.3)

## 4.6. Multiliteracies and Multimodality

'Literacy' must not be taken to mean the same in all contexts and societies (Street, 1994) because particular literacy practices, affected by context and purpose, lead to particular skills (Scribner and Cole, 1981). Ivanic (2004) insists that educators must recognise that how and why literacy is used varies between contexts and in turn contexts affect what literacy is like, thus affecting "the texts, the media in which the texts come, the visual characteristics of texts, the material characteristics of texts and all the social interaction that goes on around texts" (p.12). For instance, an educational institution or system that does not take into account the learners':

*"participation in digital culture may fail to recognise the meaning-making practices that are used, and perhaps needed, in everyday life and may well end up inadvertently positioning pupils as failures in tasks that are reductive and orientated towards developing a narrow range of print literacy skills. Underperformance in schooled literacy is likely then to be framed once again in terms of a lack or deficit in the lives of some school children."*

Merchant, 2013, p.157

Merchant also refers to a 'moral panic' surrounding new technology (p.157), which reinforces a deficit view that our youngsters are at risk if exposed to practices such as social networks and gaming. This approach is reflected in the position taken in the new Teachers' Ethics issued in Malta (App.14). Communication through new technology is also often criticised and accused of deteriorating children's literacy skills because proper English is giving way to "text-speak, poor grammar and street patois" (Johns, 2011). Taking such a position, however noble the intentions might be, strengthens the idea that the only way to help learners achieve is through schooled literacy with its promotion of standard language, correct grammar and so on. By implication, the only ways in which learners can possibly succeed is by shedding their own identity and conforming to that which is considered the norm. However, Merchant argues that this approach is not a



guarantee of success because if schools ignore new media they limit the opportunities learners might have to access technology and develop literacies for civic participation and future employment. Kress also contends this especially at a time when to participate fully in society one needs to become multiliterate (Kress, 2003).

Indeed many educational institutions are failing learners because they are set in their traditional ways and continue to “prize kinds of print literacy” (Merchant, 2013, p.145) and rigid standard practices. A major issue in MCAST for instance is certainly that of language. While in everyday situations and real work placements the language used would be Maltese, in college, because the awarding bodies are still foreign (mainly BTEC) and text books available about the subjects are in English, the language used in handouts, notes, presentations, assignments and assessments is English; and because for many years Malta was a British colony English is expected to be standard. This means that while learners may know exactly how to behave and perform at work in the comfort of their mother tongue, they encounter difficulties when it comes to college work and assessments in English, which at the end determine whether or not a qualification is awarded. In situations of dissonance between the expected classroom language and the learners’ everyday language, learners lose confidence and hold back from participating in and contributing to whole class discussion, or worse still this leads often to rampant absenteeism and/or eventually dropping out. Unfortunately, as evidenced in Snell’s study (2013) in Teesside, language discord is often amplified by teachers’ reactions and that is what leads to disengagement. As pointed out by Bélanger (1994, p.89):

*“literacy education conceived and organised as the imposition of a unitary project in a diversified society is bound to have a gatekeeping function for those remote from the privileged code of communication.”*

## 4.7. Translanguaging

As teachers we may be facing learners with a vast array of interests, abilities, educational experiences and differing language abilities. To facilitate communication in such contexts, where participants bring in more than one language, it is very likely that teachers and learners use various linguistic resources (Li Wei, 2013). Sometimes this entails contesting the language policies of the school (at MCAST the use of English language in general and full immersion in the language being taught in the language classroom) and adopting a *translanguaging*<sup>25</sup> (Garcia, 2007, p.xii) approach in order to engage the learners and encourage full participation and critical engagement, which would be very hard to achieve in a foreign language. B elanger (1994) claims that teaching and learning in the language of the community allows the learners to build on their already developing “linguistic experience” as well as gain reinforcement during everyday interactions where they experience “the joy to read and write in one's affective code of communication” (p.89). This positive encounter with learning will facilitate the learning of other languages at later stages. This approach to languaging and education frees us from traditional understandings and moves us towards practices that appreciate diverse learners’ meaning-making systems and subjectivities. It gives voice to learners, enhances the learning context and boosts the social relations and structures that it encompasses (Li Wei, 2011a).

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<sup>25</sup>The term *translanguaging* refers to the dynamic nature of multilingual practices which render boundaries between languages permeable. Such practices include code-switching, code-mixing and language crossing, as well as other signs and forms they could draw upon in order to communicate and create new social spaces for themselves (Li Wei, 2013; Creese and Blackledge, 2010).

## 4.8. Funds of Knowledge

When educators draw on the learners' 'funds of knowledge'<sup>26</sup>, they facilitate the learning process and the construction of linguistic and cultural identities. The acknowledgement and valuing of the life experiences of learners bring into the classroom rich cultural and cognitive resources which are meaningful to them, rendering teaching more effective because when classroom experience is closer to the real-world meaning-making practices and identities of our learners, engagement is more likely to occur (Schultz and Coleman-King, 2012). An example is, "Connected Communities – Language as Talisman", a project in which Pahl et al. (2012) employ the children's everyday language to inform classroom practice which included reading literature situated in the 1920s and 1930s. Hence in this study, although Standard English was mandatory, within the schools participating in the project, the learners employed their repertoire of knowledge of the local dialect in reading the work of author Arthur Eaglestone. By drawing on accommodation theory the children were helped to make sense of "the choices and dilemmas" between dialect and Standard English by linking such choices to different contexts for listening and speaking. This encounter between the history of dialect and the contemporary dialects helped to show the importance of recognising the cultural history of dialect. Consequently dialect was appreciated (Bartlett, 2007) and studied "as part of a cultural recognition of language use across time and space" (p.4). Hence vernacular literacies and formal literacies were brought together to reach the learning outcomes (Mannion et al., 2009). Within this project the researchers looked at the concept of language as material and participants were asked to make 'talismans', in craft based activities, to reflect on how and why they use language, what it means to them and how others respond to their language. The positive achievement, accompanied by the reflection on personal language use, is a way to empower

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<sup>26</sup>"Funds of knowledge – the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for households and individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992: p.133)

learners who through the eyes of the system often come to see themselves as 'illiterate'.

This is the stance taken by researchers within New Literacy Studies such as Barton and Hamilton (1998), Tett et al. (2006), Rogers et al. (2009), Pahl (2012), Street (2012), who look into what people do with literacy in their everyday lives, at home, with friends, at school or at work. This move towards New Literacy Studies was an important one because researchers started to appreciate the diversity of literacy practices across sites in different spaces and not just at school. Scribner and Cole (1981) refer to these different spaces as *domains* in which specific literacy practices tied to the particular domain (church, workshop, home, school) come to the fore. However this does not mean that domains are not permeable, on the contrary practices from one domain may cross into another (experience and literacy practices in the panel beating garage may transfer to the vocational workshop at college). It is during these instances that learners are mostly engaged because this is when they bring into the classroom their different Discourses (hard working, able, tough, rough, loud). Learners locate their discursive identity in many different things apart from language (Gee, 1999b). These do not always reflect the school culture and that is when problems usually arise.

## **4.9. Critical Literacy**

In raising awareness of the learners' cultures and identities, New Literacy Studies acknowledges multiple modes of expression besides writing, such as texting, talking or drawing and opens the classroom to what happens outside in the everyday lives of the learners, in their communities locally and the global world around them. Of course this has important implications for classroom work because:

*“New Literacy Studies research has widened its scope to examine and critically frame the nuances of power within communities, to*

*document ecological aspects of the local and differentials in access to resources in communities, to understand specific sites in the local, such as churches, libraries and malls, and to expand our understanding of texts beyond the written word.”*

Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p.24

Often learners blame themselves for their failures when in reality the injustices of life, society and the education system all leave their mark on their performance. Unfortunately classroom experiences and negative interactions with teachers continue to reinforce negative feelings, taking away from learners any opportunity for success. I feel that an immediate need for learners to move on is to become critical, to understand that some ‘fault’ could be placed someplace else outside of them. As stated by Anderson and Irvine (1993, p.82):

*“Critical Literacy is ‘learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relations [ ] to challenge these unequal power relations.”*

Through critical literacy practices teachers explore issues such as social class, gender, race, human rights, sexuality and the environment. Teachers who take on this approach as a form of praxis create socially just learning spaces in the hope of empowering learners and teachers to eventually build more democratic communities (Rogers, Mosely, Kramer and LSJTRG<sup>27</sup>, 2009). In order to do this effectively, I believe that educators should always keep in mind that what they have in their classrooms are individuals, small communities, with different experiences, needs and aspirations and therefore a one-size-fits-all approach to education will only serve to disengage them.

Therefore educators cannot hope to encourage learners to become critical of what happens in their life and around it unless they get them involved in classroom

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<sup>27</sup> In 2001, in St Louis, Missouri, a city in which public schools have a long history of struggle for racial equity, Kramer and Rogers co-founded the Literacy for Social Justice Teacher Research Group. This grassroots, teacher-led professional development group is dedicated to exploring and acting on the relationships between literacy and social justice (Rogers, Mosely, Kramer & LSJTRG, 2009).

participation first. Unfortunately that is hardly possible if what lecturers and teachers propose is traditional and final and has no meaning to them:

*“If a critical purpose of public education in a democratic society is to provide educational opportunities for all students, it is vital to rethink not only the content of teaching but also pedagogical practices.”*

Schultz and Coleman-King, 2012, p.506

Critical literacy classrooms must make every effort to negotiate the curriculum with learners and integrate questioning and enquiry in the learners’ experiences. This often entails the inclusion of “cultural artefacts<sup>28</sup> that resonate with learners” out of school every day practices (Bartlett, 2005, p.6). Such practices may not be easily accepted because very often learners are so engulfed by the system that they do not consider the possibility of questioning or criticising it but accept the status quo. However, if educators are not aware of the learners’ reactions to cultural artefacts they cannot hope to make the difference and empower the learners to take on the “critical identity work necessary to the authoring of new selves, new figured worlds, and new social relations” (p.6).

In an attempt to engage learners, teachers need to negotiate classroom practices and move them away from passivity by offering them choice because outside the classroom youths are constantly making choices (which brand, website, which link to open, which YouTube video to watch, like, dislike, which video game or avatar, switching channels etc) and moving in and out of texts and contexts at the click of a button, a scroll or a tap on their tablet. The spaces they inhabit are inundated with new technologies, images, sounds, movements and objects. Texts are multimodal. They are designed in ways that reflect the choices made by the producers throughout the process of their making; ‘signs’ which very often have much to tell us about the identities of the ‘sign-makers’ (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012). In the construction of their texts individuals advertently or inadvertently reveal information about themselves and their histories which are not necessarily tied

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<sup>28</sup>Cultural artefacts are objects, symbols, narratives, or images inscribed by the collective attribution of meaning. Examples of cultural artefacts include the Cinderella story, the crucifix adopted by many Catholic faithful, the image of the rainbow, or labels like ‘gifted and talented’ or ‘slow reader’ in classrooms (Holland et al., 1998).

down to that particular moment of doing but which reflect their past experiences and their future aspirations, thus transcending the time and space of the classroom. In fact the way forward and a challenge for teachers is, while working within a rigid curriculum which leaves very limited room for deviations, to provide the opportunities for learners to make a link between experiences lived in the home and those in the school. If educators allow learners to make use of all their strengths, their language, their preferred mode and the knowledge they acquire through their life at home and in the community, they would enhance their potential for meaning-making which is a process inherent to human activity. Drawing on Moll, Gonzalez and their colleagues, Schultz et al. (2012) point out that awareness of the learners' home and community lives helped teachers shift their practices and in result "students changed their participation in instructional events, writing stronger essays that reflected their community funds of knowledge" (p.491).

When, as part of classroom practice, learners are given agency, they learn more because they participate more, they ponder on decisions to be taken and choices to be made, and while they do so they draw on their personality, their ways of being, speaking and behaving in different spaces. Educators can choose to construct knowledge with their learners and make classrooms "interactional spaces where identities are negotiated" (Cummins, 2002, p.X).

## **4.10. Identity**

In the process of communication learners are "mediating [their] identity in practice" (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012, p.114). From a social and cultural perspective, learning entails individuals engaged through relationships of participation and interactions in contexts such as classrooms; and who through such interactions are identified and identify others in various ways such as good/poor reader, careless, clever, bully etc. (Moje et al., 2009):

*“Language learning engages the identities of students because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks.”*

Norton and Toohey, 2002, p.115

Therefore identity is produced unconsciously as we participate in and struggle with structures and fields of power through interactions over time. This implies a certain amount of stability and fluidity at the same time because while strong power structures such as school policy may constrain the individual, different contexts and positive experiences may lead to the acquisition of new social and cultural capital (Moje et al., 2009). Hence identity is not rigid but dynamic and fluid and it is developed over time shaped by “activity and meaning-making across timescales from the events of a minute to those of a day, from those of a day to those of a lifetime” (Lemke, 2002, p.68). Learners develop their identities within particular interactions across a stretch of time (Wortham 2008) so classroom texts such as ‘Special Educational Needs (SEN) student’ or ‘Lv1 Student’ (indicative of low placement on IATs) or ‘IBCE learners’ (often least inclined towards academic work) can consolidate existing issues of power and control as they “transfer meaning across timescales within the process of identity construction” (Burgess, 2010, p.357):

*“Identities develop over long timescales, during which the trajectory of the developing social person takes him or her from classroom to classroom, from school to schoolyard, to street corner, to home, to the shopping mall, to TV worlds.”*

Lemke, 2000, p.284

Very often youths and learners live up to our expectations and if we consider them as ‘able’ to participate in the ‘instructional discourse’ they will see themselves as ‘able’. In a study that sought the engagement of low socio-economic learners



through the connection between multiliteracies and pedagogic discourse<sup>29</sup>Zammit (2011) found that, in their everyday interactions in the classroom learners are affected by the “powerful classroom message systems” (p.207) and the interpretation they give them. This interpretation also shapes the learners’ perception of their abilities at that particular moment as well as their future possibilities. So these classroom messages can be engaging as well as disengaging depending on whether the group they find themselves in is appreciative of their actions and contributions or not. From a social psychological perspective individuals choose social contexts which would give them the opportunity to affect the identity formation of the group. They need to feel that they identify with the group in order to build a sense of belonging and through this negotiation, in the process of fitting in, they start to develop a stable sense of identity. Again this does not necessarily result in a positive thing because in the failure of fitting in a particular group, such as the classroom, individuals might seek fulfilment within deviant groups who resist the system but whose behaviour reinforces marginalisation. In her study of ‘gangsta literacy’ among youth, Moje (2000) showed how youths made use of various practices such as graffiti and poetry to denote their gang membership. However in the eyes of the teachers and the community this behaviour reinforced their negative positioning. So in their search to ‘fit in’ they were positioning themselves further away from society’s norms. Gee (2000/2001, p.99), referred to this positioning as “being recognised as a “certain kind of person.” However Holland et al. (1998) argue that identity is more than this and propose a contrast between positionality, which is attributed to an individual by social structures such as race, class, age etc. and is “inextricably linked to power, status and rank” (p.271), and figured elements which are more related to culture and include symbols and socially shared meanings (artefacts) which are used to overcome negative social positioning they are ascribed. Figured identities are “in a constant state of flux” (Burgess et al., 2010, p.230) thus in communities of practice, over time, individuals may “acquire new figured identities” (Bartlett, 2005, p.3):

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<sup>29</sup> The teachers’ choices of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment determine what counts as knowledge and literate practice in the classroom, therefore through classroom interactions the teacher reinforces who is ‘able’ and who is not (Zammit, 2011).

*“In relation to literacy, then, [ ] students can use cultural artefacts – images, symbols, discourses, etc. – to modulate their behaviour, cognition, and emotion enough to overcome negative social positioning and become what Bourdieu (1991) might call ‘legitimately’ literate.”*

ibid.

This is very much dependant on the curriculum and the opportunities it provides for the social identification of learners. The positioning they are afforded affects what and how much they learn. According to Wortham (2006), academic and non-academic resources depend on each other and are both implicated in academic learning. The learners’ opportunities to learn language, literacy and other subjects on the curriculum are affected by their educational trajectories but negative experiences in particular classroom contexts may be turned around since learners who “may be negatively positioned in certain classroom contexts, [may] leverage their emerging identifications in other classroom contexts to influence their overall educational trajectories” (Bartlett, 2007, p.229). An implication of Bartlett’s study with transnational learners, in particular Maria, is the importance of valuing learners’ resources including their first language:

*“The incorporation and promotion of bilingual instruction and literacies, an institutionally-, peer-, and family-supported opportunity narrative, and supportive relationships between students, teachers, and administrators might be critical to the success of students like Maria, who could otherwise easily slip into a deficit model and school failure.”*

Bartlett, 2007, p.230

Indeed negative positioning of learners could be changed if rather than letting stereotyping and discrimination rule the classroom, educators take on board the learners’ practices and engage with them in sessions of critical literacy. This would bring about change as the learners come to appreciate:

*“how the language and literacy practices they value might be used productively in other contexts to challenge dominant assumptions about literacy and social practice”*

Moje, 2000, p.684

## **4.11. Third Space**

In Schultz et al. (2012), the teacher who came from a similar background to that of her learners, found it much easier to engage the learners by drawing on her own life story. By sharing her own experiences with the learners she not only “indexed” her own membership in the community of the classroom (Gutiérrez, 2008, p.154) but also motivated them to take their education seriously. A new space, a third space was created where the school and the home were brought together to enhance the learning. She was no longer detached from her learners but by changing participation structures the teacher found different and new ways for learners to feel safe and confident enough to share their stories. Ladson-Billings (1995) points out how the use of a culturally relevant pedagogy (p.159) helps to establish a caring attitude and a sense of ‘family’ in the classroom which is further nourished “by the teachers’ insistence on creating a community of students” (p.163). These attitudes together with new ways, which included multimodal methods, created opportunities for the learners to bring their experiences into the curriculum. By giving learners the possibility to represent their ideas in multiple modalities, the learners who were most likely to fall outside the mainstream were able to produce their own ‘multimodal texts’ and overcome the difficulties of expressing themselves in words alone.

Undeniably the attitudes of adults such as teachers have a significant impact on how classrooms are structured and in turn affect which classroom events and practices are valued as literacy (Wells Rowe and Leander, 2005). This has important implications for the responsibility of teachers and their role within the

classroom because before any teaching and learning could take place the right 'space' that welcomes and engages all those involved ought to be created. This is only possible if teachers are critically engaged with all that goes around classrooms and the life within them to become aware of how:

*“spaces for struggling, diverse, or resistant students are bracketed and dominated by school space. [ ] Culturally sensitive observation of embodied and spatial cues may help teachers reflect on the nature of hybrid environments and enable them to expect and value the different practices and forms of knowledge that necessarily result.”*

Wells Rowe and Leander, 2005, p.331

Wells Rowe and Leander (2005) contend that when learners manage to build connections between the different fields they inhabit, the school, their social life with peers and their homes, they “draw on their embodied and spatial ways of making meaning” (p.320). It is within these combined spaces, these third spaces, that mixed productions of learners are generated but these often fall outside the 'norm' of the traditional school practices, and unless teachers are aware of and able to interpret these new productions, they fail to acknowledge and build on them.

On the other hand when the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) of the teacher is close to that of the learners, the teacher has the ability and the power to bring closer the habitus of the learners and the field of education at least within the classroom by creating or facilitating the creation of that third space which allows for the learners to become motivated and participate. The teacher has the capacity to transform learners' every day experiences into “school-based concepts” and normalize them as part of the curriculum (Gutiérrez, 2008, p.152).

Through practices of critical literacy, the teacher has the power to empower the learners by providing the space to discuss their past experiences and how these had helped or hindered them as they were brought to the present situation, and once they take stock of who they are and what they can do, through reflections,

discussions and working on their life histories, they can then plan actions to change their future, even if this entails challenging the traditional practices that promote the status quo.

## **4.12. Conclusion**

Thus teachers have the power and responsibility to mediate classroom experiences for their learners, by drawing on the baggage of experiences that the learners bring with them. They can provide a space in which learners feel that they belong and begin to see that they have much to offer to the learning community. Teachers can bring down inhibitions of language, knowledge and experiences by implementing an approach of translanguaging, funds of knowledge and multimodal literacy. Such an approach helps to meet the learners half-way, with a shared third space in which the home, the social and classroom work are brought together so that all can participate (Pahl and Rowsell, 2012) and enrich themselves with positive empowering experiences, that may change the way in which they see themselves.

That is precisely what this study set out to do. On the onset of the research study, work related to the research was mainly conducted during the critical literacy session. This eventually changed as discussions started there gradually permeated into the language classroom and into the social network (closed group on Facebook); or the other way round discussions or thoughts shared on Facebook were brought into the critical literacy session or into the language classroom. In the next chapter I explain this in more depth as I look at the data collected through the various methods discussed in chapter three. I discuss the analysis and findings which were concurrently being worked upon, along with the literature review and the data collection, as the study evolved throughout the scholastic year.

# Chapter 5: Analysis and Findings

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*“Miss sorry I am going to write in Maltese because I am more comfortable...eem... what I liked most about you is the way you teach, not you the teacher and I the student but you were like a mother/our friend/ elder sister/ and my teacher... how can I say I was really comfortable this year and there’s nothing more to say the lessons were just perfect for me.....BDW MANY MANY THANKS FOR EVERYTHING YOU WERE REALLY PATIENT WITH ME AND I’LL RESPECT YOU FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE “*

*(translation of J\_\_’s end of year feedback given on facebook).*

## 5.1. Introduction

As I explained in the previous chapter, in this particular study the processes of reviewing the literature, data collection, analysis and findings, as well as changes in classroom practice were happening at the same time. In the previous chapters I have addressed the literature review and the data collection, hence in this chapter I now turn to analyse the data collected and report the findings made in relation to the questions set at the beginning of this study, namely:

- What are the learners' literacy practices, family backgrounds and their interests out of school?
- What caused the individual learners to disengage from mainstream schooling?
- How are the learners and teacher affected when their out of school literacy practices, family backgrounds and their interests are brought into the classroom?
- How does the Level 1 learning community at IBCE make sense of their past in the present, in an attempt to imagine better futures?

Since the study followed a classroom ethnography approach, the collection of the different data was an ongoing process (App.4). Methods of data collection were mainly observations, informal conversations, life histories, classroom tasks, learners' feedback, projects, artefacts, Facebook conversations, interviews, presentations and timelines (Table 1, p.72). Many of these were taking place concurrently and my emic position in the study helped me to do the first analysis in real time, as things were happening. Also, since many of the data collected was oral and in Maltese, I had to spend a lot of time on it to transcribe and translate it. This together with the process of going back to the learners with the transcriptions to discuss them helped me to engage more with the information being collected and also to be immediately aware of the themes

that were emerging from that data (p.67). When the scholastic year was over and the data collection (apart from the learners' feedback which continued throughout the writing process) stopped, I went over all the data once again, coding it according to different themes. The coding was carried out on the computer using word (App.18). I used a different colour highlight or coloured fonts for each theme and made a list of the themes for quick reference. Referring back to the four research questions I then went over the list of themes and coded each theme one to four according to which research question they addressed (App.19). At that point I noticed that although in reality it is very hard to give a time and date as to when changes were actually happening within the classroom and within each individual, the grouping of the themes reflected the dynamics and main focus of the classroom at particular moments in the scholastic year.

Therefore I decided to write the analysis and findings chapter by taking the reader along the journey of this classroom ethnography as the learners and I lived through it, while revealing in the process what the data collection exposed with regards to the research questions above and how these revelations affected the members in the classroom and informed the next stage of the study. In order to make it easier for the learners to review the writing of this chapter I decided to present the analysis and findings in four sections, each reflecting particular periods in the scholastic year as well as one of the dissertation questions. The sections are the following:

1. Getting to know each other and starting to build the classroom community.
2. Working on our individual positionality and different identities.
3. Changing the classroom practice to enhance the learners' engagement.
4. Newly formed identities and perceptions of self.

Also to give more space to the voices of the learners, in the writing of this chapter, I chose to limit my interpretation as much as possible and to use the learners' own words instead.



## **5.2. Getting to know each other and starting to build the classroom community...*What are the learners' family backgrounds, literacy practices and interests out of school?***

On that first day of the new scholastic year I drove past the institute's gates early and, full of anticipation, trying to prepare myself psychologically for what was to come. I already had a class list, I knew the learners' results on the IATs, and I was also informed by the Inclusive Education Unit that some of my learners had learning difficulties. Therefore, what I knew at the time were results and labels that the learners had been attributed throughout their school experience which, by the standards set within the world of mainstream education, were not very positive. All my learners had no or limited qualifications; had done poorly on the IATs and some were ADD, ADHD, SpLD...

But me being me, I was not at all influenced by any results or labels and was looking forward to see who my learners would be.

### **5.21. First shared characteristics identified in learners**

On the onset of the scholastic year my study hadn't started yet so the data collected at the time were my observations during my language lessons with them, informal conversations before and after lessons and entries in my teaching journal about my first encounters with the learners at the beginning of the scholastic year (fig.2 pg.67). However, from our first introductions (chp.2), it was already clear that most of the learners shared at least one common characteristic, a declared loathing for reading and writing. This remerged later on in the data collected:

*S\_\_:* she [teacher] used to fill all the board with writing, [] I used to write the first couple of words and tell her that I was ready.

Nadia: *why is that?*

S\_\_: *I used to take pains to write because it used to take me ages and I was like... bored of writing. [ ] I hated school. [ ] It's that I hate reading, I hate writing ... mostly*

interview translation 30/04/2013

J\_\_: *as soon as I am out of school I wouldn't touch a book or anything because for me that is school*

B\_\_: *They do not give you a choice. Even in reading...it's not the book that you want but the compulsory one which they choose... They **so** (emphasis) not leave a choice... you are forced to read that... it is only what they say...*

Focus group translation 26/02/2013

B\_\_'s mother: *He does not like writing much....*

Interview translation 18/03/2013

Their continuous struggle with reading and writing affected all the subjects and leaving compulsory education without qualifications restricted many of the learners' options because they did not qualify for any of the colleges which focus on an academic route; and sitting for the IATs set by MCAST to be then assigned to Level 1 made the learners more conscious that they had made it only to the lowest level (App.1). One must bear in mind that learners in their same secondary classes might have made it to other institutions or to higher levels at MCAST and therefore, often enough, Lv1 learners perceived themselves as unsuccessful, poor learners, a perception which was also upheld by some of their parents. When asked about the decision to come to MCAST and their feelings about being placed on Level 1 the learners answered as follows:

J\_\_: *I always used to say that I would come to MCAST [ ] because I was never intelligent enough to go to Junior*

*College<sup>30</sup> or Higher Secondary.<sup>31</sup> And I have always liked practical, hands on things you know... I never liked school.*

interview translation 10/01/2013

*G\_\_ : I have always liked to do practical, hands on activities and help my father at the shop or my grandfather... MCAST then ... my father suggested it because it is based on trades...*

*Nadia: How did you feel when you learned that you were accepted at Level 1?*

*G\_\_ : Maybe I did not do so well in the exams (IATs) they gave us...I would have liked to do a bit better...*

interview translation 11/01/2013

*K\_\_'s mother: \*long pause\* she didn't have any other option did she? ...she would have liked to go somewhere else and she tried to get her qualifications. [] I would have liked her to go somewhere else...*

interview translation 27/03/2013

One other factor that all of the Lv1 learners (except one who wished to go to Art and Design but was not accepted) shared from the start of the programme was their chosen course which reflected a shared interest in the building and construction trades. As for hobbies, they varied. Cars, art, music, travelling, martial arts, camping, gaming, the village feast and Facebook were the most popular activities.

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<sup>30</sup> Junior college, under the University of Malta offers courses in subjects at 'A' level and Intermediate level. The entry requirements for this college are SEC levels/'O' levels in Maths, English, Maltese, biology or chemistry or physics and two other subjects. On completion of the two year course, students have to pass two 'A' level subjects, three Intermediate subjects and Systems of Knowledge to gain access to university.

<sup>31</sup> Higher Secondary is a State College which accepts students who have obtained all or part of the entry requirements expected for Junior College. The system employed there is more similar to a secondary school but students can be working on 'A' level subjects as well as those subjects at 'SEC' level which they still have to pass.

Once introductions were made, we were ready to start our lessons and since they had declared their lack of interest in reading and writing, practices which according to them they never did outside the college, I set myself the task to start by trying to make them aware of literacy practices they carry out during their normal day. I knew that unless they see the relevance of my subjects it would be very hard to get them engaged. So I asked the learners to make a list of all the things they do throughout the day. They listed activities which included preparing breakfast, going on Facebook, checking the weather forecast on the mobile phone, going to the bus stop, texting a friend to meet up, going to school, doing lessons, going to the workshop, writing and reading in class, sorting notes, returning home, downloading music or films, gaming, reading magazines or comics, going out with friends, chatting, skypeing, searching the web, watching movies, listening to music, going to work as well as attending committee meetings as part of groups or clubs.

### **Vignette**

As I was writing this in retrospect, I got curious about what the students might be doing while I was writing so, logging onto facebook, I asked the learners what they had done that day, fifteen months later. Two answered immediately and amongst other things one of them wrote, *'I was drawing a mural on my wall and painting...part of it was a quote so I had to write that and research some of the words because I didn't know exactly how to spell ... [and] I read a letter that I got from MCAST about the certificate presentation sooooo that's something!'*

B\_\_ Facebook chat 6/02/2014

*That was yet another confirmation that the students do many outstanding practices which include literacy but not so much the expected conventional literacy practices associated with school.*

During that first lesson I had pointed out to my learners that they were continuously reading and writing as they went about their daily chores but they were not aware of it. I also stressed the fact that there are different varieties of reading and writing and school literacy is only one of those varieties but it doesn't mean that the other practices are not to be valued. However, convincing the learners was not easy because, as revealed later in the individual interviews, for the learners, literacy meant:

*'school'* (J\_\_ interview translation 10/01/2013)

*'...reading and writing things...to learn from them ... Like school'*  
(K\_\_ interview translation 16/01/2013)

*'stories, books or comprehensions and writing'* (G\_\_ interview translation 11/01/2013)

*'sadness...because I forget whatever I read straight away... by the time I walk out the door I forget everything'* (M\_\_ interview translation 11/01/2013).

In fact their immediate reaction to my response was:

*'but that is not literacy, when I read a manga comic, when I write on Facebook or text a message I don't care about spelling'*

Journal entry, translation of comments 4/10/2012

This should not be surprising because for them too like 'Kelly' in Evans (1993), that is not "real" (p.322) reading and writing because it is not school stuff.

## **5.22. First steps towards building the classroom community**

The task assigned that day was a surprise to the learners as were the statements I made at the end of the task. They were not used to hearing such things from their language teachers, and that helped us all to start off on the right foot. It was the first sign that, that year, things were going to be different,

and the first move towards creating a space where home, social and school can come together to enhance the learning experience.

The next lesson was in the bench fitting workshop and there the learners had an opportunity to speak and move around as they worked. It was immediately obvious that some learners had previous experience in working on metal so they instantly felt confident and helped the others for whom the task assigned was a novelty. The same thing happened in the woodwork workshop. The vocational lecturers and I were helping too and the teamwork and collegiality that continued throughout the whole scholastic year was something that all the learners appreciated, and it helped immensely in the building of the classroom community:

*Nadia: what was the thing that helped you all to bond so well and so quickly as a class?*

*B\_\_ : the workshops because we all work together and help each other even with the tools and so on. During assignments we all help one another, not like secondary everybody focused on his paper and when you finish you have to stay silent. Now you are more free, you can speak, you have more liberty kind of...*

Interview translation 8/01/2013

During that first week I noticed straightaway that learners were working at building friendships and some learners were becoming more popular than others. I could observe this from the seating positions and working stations they were taking in class and in the workshop. Through my observations I guessed that their choices were related mainly to interests and attitudes. For instance although M\_\_ and J\_\_ came from the same village and knew each other they did not sit together but instead J\_\_ sat next to S\_\_. These two learners shared a passion for cars and both worked in the field one as a panel beater and the other in engine modifications. M\_\_ on the other hand was often with G\_\_. They were both quite shy and quiet. They always arrived in class on time, well groomed and got on with their work. B\_\_ got on well with all the others probably because he had something in common with all of them. He enjoyed a joke so got on well with J\_\_ and S\_\_; loved art so he could speak on

common ground with M\_\_ and K\_\_; loved music and often discussed songs and singers with J\_\_; was quite shy so could empathise with G\_\_ and loved online gaming so he had something in common with Jh\_\_ as well. K\_\_ on the other hand was the only girl but although she was obviously feeling very awkward on the first day she was soon accepted by the others, she was cheerful, well organised and worked diligently so while the boys sustained her in the workshop, she helped them in the academic subjects. As for myself I immediately felt at ease with the learners. I had so many things in common with them. I myself used to hate reading and writing, I love a good joke, was often up to mischief at school so did not make a fuss about the learners' pranks, love music and cars, appreciate art and find work in the trades quite interesting probably because as a child I used to enjoy accompanying my dad, who was a welder, at work. Of course I was aware that this is how I felt about them and I had no way of knowing how they felt about each other or about me unless I asked and I did that in the interviews and the focus group. This of course was necessary to make sure that what I write about them is a true reflection of their thoughts and feelings so to my question 'In your opinion what is that thing that made you bond so well?' the learners answered the following:

*K\_\_: In my class there are all boys but they drive me crazy sometimes ... but I don't regret it... [ ] because we agree a lot in things. (student's written end of term feedback 8/01/2013)*

*G\_\_: The fun I guess, the way we interact with each other, perhaps since we are competent in the trades we get on well. Also the locality we come from. I take the same bus as S\_\_ every day... and the kind of language (discourse) we use, even though I don't use it much... (smiles) (interview translation 11/01/2013)*

*J\_\_: They all take a joke. .... we have the same course, that is the main thing. ... I get on best with S\_\_, because kind of he's my type. ... the way he speaks and the things he does you know and how he says jokes. (interview translation 10/01/2013)*

*S\_\_: it's like we all like the same things. We like cars and so on... they all have a character similar to mine...that in Maltese and English none of us was so good and in class we collaborate a lot. (interview translation 30/04/2013)*

M\_\_ : *Friendship. What one does the other follows so you get to know each other closely. Maybe something we have in common is Maltese and English...* (interview translation 11/01/2013)

G\_\_ : *Now we are a good group of seven and we are good friends even with our teachers especially with the Maltese/English teacher. I'm having fun.* (written end of term feedback 08/01/2013)

### **Vignette**

Nadia: In order to make your voices heard I need you to give me feedback about my lessons and the stuff we did. Your feedback is very important.

B\_\_ from my side it was important to make the lessons fun and to become more like a family and less like just students and a teacher and I love the way that we all bonded and helped along the way of your study

J\_\_ *Aw miss sorry I am going to write in Maltese because I am more comfortable...eem... what I liked most about you is the way you teach, not you the teacher and I the student but you were like a mother/our friend/ elder sister/ and my teacher... how can I say I was really comfortable this year and there's nothing more to say the lessons were just perfect for me.....BDW MANY MANYMANYMANYMANY THANKS FOR EVERYTHING YOU WERE REALLY PATIENT WITH ME AND I'LL RESPECT YOU FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE XX (translation).*

19 June 2013 at 20:26

Facebook conversation asking for feedback in view of a seminar in which I was asked to present a paper about engaging the Level 1 learners.

Before the year started I knew what I wished to research in my thesis but two weeks into the scholastic year, on meeting this cohort of learners I was more



convinced than ever before. I wished to know more about them and I wished to make a difference in their life but most of all I wanted them to actively participate in making that difference in their own lives. For this to be possible I felt that the ground between the learners and I had to be levelled and issues of power relations had to be addressed. I wanted my learners to have voice so it was imperative that they feel at ease. I had to try and reduce inhibitions they might have and create the right conditions for a sense of trust to start growing between us all. In agreement with the learners we decided to add an extra hour a week on our timetable during which we could discuss, share and have sessions of critical literacy. At first this was a space dedicated to work linked to the research study whereby we worked on our life histories and identities and did critical analysis of education documents such as parts of the education act and the College Mission Statement. As the study progressed however this space became a third space where home, social and school came together and discussions started during the critical literacy session continued in the language classroom and on Facebook or the other way round, thus bringing together research work and curriculum content.

### **5.23. Family backgrounds and out of school practices.**

Hence while planning for one of the critical literacy sessions, aware that by then the learners had come to know each other better because they were spending a lot of time together including their free time, I wished to give them an opportunity to get to know me. I was conscious that there were some things that they would never dare to ask their teacher so I decided to share my life history with them. This not only took our relationship on a new level and helped the learners to see me in a new light, strengthening further my positioning inside the group, but it also triggered the development of five other life histories which were important for me to get to know more about their backgrounds, interests and literacy practices. The data gathered through the life histories

also helped to guide the interviews with learners and parents held later on in the year.

### **5.231. Family Backgrounds**

As explained in chp.2, all the learners came from working class families. This however did not mean that they came from a low economic background, because all parents worked hard to make a decent living. All parents, except one who was an LSA, had manual or low skilled jobs. Coming from a working class background may have had an impact on the learners' education, not because the families did not give enough importance to it, but because there was a discrepancy between the world of home and that of school and therefore, for various reasons, the learners encountered difficulties when trying to fit into the system.

### **5.232. Family identity**

The life histories of the learners, and later on the timelines too, reveal a discrepancy between this troubled experience of fitting in school and their happy early years, prior to school, highlighted by the significant closeness they experienced in their childhood with their immediate and extended family. At an early age, within the world of home learners were the centre of attention and importance. They all had experiences of fun, play, running about, going places, involvement with others and action:

*J\_\_:* *When I was still a child, I was everyone's pet. Everyone in my family wanted me with them and most of the time I was at my grandma's ... and my grandpa used to take me shopping with him to the grocer, to the butcher and to church. (Life history)*

K\_\_ : *I used to spend most of my time up to the age of three with my grandparents ... I used to enjoy myself a great deal. (presentation of timeline, translation 29/04/2013)*

G\_\_ : *Till two years old I used to stay with grandma [while parents were at work] and she used to go watch my grandpa building or else we would go to the fields so she help him and used to play a lot at the field. (Life history, student's own words)*

S\_\_ : *When I was a child I was hardly ever at home, I used to spend my time on the farm playing [with brothers] imagining to be working. (Interview, translation 30/04/2013)*

B\_\_ : *The first memory I have is at home with my aunty having fun as we do things that my mum did not usually allow such as running about in the house. (Presentation of timeline, student's own words 16/04/2013)*

### **5.233. School identity**

Before they started school all the learners were admired by parents and relatives and felt happy, secure and loved. School was different. In school they had to work individually, sit quietly for long hours and work at the same thing, mostly reading and writing. When the speed or performance did not match up to the school expectations the learners were no longer admired but criticised and punished. Parents were called in to be told that their children were failing, misbehaving etc. and in all the cases except one the parents were told that their children had something wrong, they had problems so they had to be assessed:

G\_\_ : *I repeated a year in Grade three because I did not know a lot of English. (Life history, student's own words)*

K\_\_ : *my teacher pointed out that I was dyslexic. My parents did not know what that was and they were told that I had problems.... The problem was that I take a long time to understand and forget easily. (Life history, translation)*

J\_\_ : *In Grade two (6-year-old) I was careless and my teacher used to tell my mother, "Your son has got something wrong." From then on we started to go for visits at CDAU (Child Development Assessment Unit) ... I was having difficulties to keep up with the writing and all and there was the Headmaster and he told me to take out my HW. As usual I hadn't managed*

*to copy it in time so he kept me after school. (Life history, translation)*

*B\_\_'s mum: \*crying\* ... in primary, this particular teacher, I know through other parents, used to tell him repeatedly that he would never get anywhere, that he was poor, that he was stupid, so ... B\_\_ started to give up... throughout that year he convinced him that he was not good. (Interview, translation 18/03/2013)*

#### **5.234. Parental involvement in children's education**

When parents did comply and faced all the hurdles, closed doors and agonies of years of waiting and going from place to place to take their children for assessment, on the issue of results, reports and labels attributed to the children, nothing much changed in class so the learners, who by now were no longer little children, continued to fail and started to be bullied by peers and teachers alike:

*K\_\_'s mum: I was always arguing with the Headmistress and she was always asking for more papers and I was always going round for more papers... going from one place to another... I made the updates (reassessments) which cost a fortune but it was useless... .. I never received help. (interview, translation 27/03/2014)*

*K\_\_: In secondary there was this girl who was always trying to put me in bad light with the rest of the class...during break I used to go to the library or the bathroom and cry. (Life history, translation)*

*G\_\_: For two years I had an LSA... I passed the exams... the LSA left the school and I went down the hill. I failed the exams...the students will laugh... they call me names or stupid... I feel angry. (Life history, student's own words)*

Nothing much could be done from the learners' and their parents' end at this point. Parents were no longer involved in their children's education nor were they consulted. They simply had to accept their fate and the fact that according to the system their children were not as clever as the others:

K\_\_'s mum: *On Parents' Day I used to know what was coming...the same story... 'if she does a bit of effort'...what is the effort she can make if others understand the first time and achieve and my daughter doesn't?... I used to go because I am a mother and take interest in my daughter ... I was never called to school to tell me that they were making any plans for my daughter... (Interview, translation 27/03/2013)*

### **5.235. Living the label**

On the other hand learners simply accepted their labels and often lived up to them, ignoring school completely and ganging up with deviant groups to try to avoid becoming victims when possible:

G\_\_: *From Form one to Form four I didn't care about school a lot. (Life history, student's own words)*

B\_\_: *the same teacher was still bullying me ... calling me names like loser and failure and so he is a big part of why I am a failure in real life today. (Life history, student's own words)*

J\_\_: *to keep safe from bullying, you know, I started to stay with older boys... from there I got my swearing and my rudeness... always at the back of the school bus. (Life history, translation)*

Those who became victims of bullying turned to self-harm in an attempt to amplify the physical pain rather than feel the emotional one which they couldn't control:

B\_\_: *so this teacher continued all this throughout form 4 and the bullying from students didn't stop either, this hurts me even remembering as I am writing this. I used to cut my arm as in I used to cut myself and hurt myself in many ways. (Life history, student's own words)*

### **5.236. Education in the family**

On reading these life histories I was shocked to say the least. The learners had cried while they heard my story but I cannot describe what I felt when I read theirs. I cried out of sadness and frustration, got angry at the system which was still marginalising so many learners and felt ashamed to be part of a system that did so much harm to learners and families who believed in education and saw in it the possibility of a better future for their children.

*K\_\_'s mum: I got her a teacher here at home, I mean... not to teach her but to help her with revision and she stayed on till the very end (form 5)...I used to attend for talks and meetings and ... then come and teach my husband. (interview, translation 27/03/2013)*

*G\_\_ : father used to help me in maths... with my mother I do my English and Maltese. (Life history, student's own words)*

### **5.237. Out of school practices**

Unfortunately family backgrounds and practices, rich though they were, were not in line with what was expected by the system. Learners may have had various successful experiences in their social life out of school but the system did not acknowledge these at all:

*J\_\_ : I attended [Scouts] for about two years. (Life history, translation)*

*G\_\_ : Every day when I come from school I would go to help my grandpa build this flat or ... in the fields growing potatoes, onions, grapes and beans... or help my grandma make flower arrangements for the church. (Life history, student's own words)*

*M\_\_ : I attended MUSEUM until I was sixteen. ... I used to do all sorts of jobs, make the cribs, paint the statues, and prepare decorations. Sometimes I also used to teach the younger children... (Life History, translation)*

B\_\_ : *I'm involved in Scouts, Quarter Master and Venture. I [help] plan the yearly programme... the activities for children and things like that...* (Interview, translation 8/01/2013)

What really upset me at the time on reading the life histories was that at MCAST, unless I did something about it we were going to replicate what compulsory education had just done to the learners in the previous eleven years. Yes we are a vocational college but strictly and truly nothing was so different from the mainstream apart from a few hours of weekly lessons in the workshop. Up to then, since they first applied to enrol at the college, we had judged the learners through IATs, and streamed them according to the global mark they achieved, reconfirmed the label of learning difficulties they had brought along with them, had no contact with the parents whatsoever and were proposing key skills syllabi which had some content related to vocational but in the mains still revolved around grammar, spelling and syntax and were taught and assessed mainly through the conventional modes of reading and writing on paper. So I decided to act through sensitising the learners about who they really were; their different identities and where they got them; the education system and MCAST.

### **5.3. Working on our individual positionality and different identities... *What caused the individual learners to disengage from mainstream schooling?***

On realising that the learners' perception of themselves as learners was one of failure and that they often blamed their personal abilities for that failure I decided to engage them in a critical discussion about parts of the Maltese Education Act (1988). All learners were given a copy of CAP. 327. P.4-5. The learners did not know that such an Act existed so we read through the two parts and learners were allowed time to go over them again, think about them and jot down points if they wished. A discussion followed.

### 5.31. Learners' rights and obligations... were they being met?

In Part 1, under the heading of "General Provisions" and the subheading 'right to education and instruction', the Education Act (1988, p.4) states:

*"It is the right of every citizen of the Republic of Malta to receive education and instruction without any distinction of age, sex, belief or economic means."*

The learners had a lot to say about this because while they agreed that it should be so, they were not happy about how that was being implemented in their group. A week previous to that particular session and two weeks into the scholastic year, a new student joined the group. This student was forty-two years old, so twenty-six years their senior. He showed up in the classroom and no one knew who he was. To make things worse what he said about himself revealed a very unsettling background and he said and did things throughout the day that upset us all. He couldn't participate in any workshop work because he had a plastered arm so he couldn't write or do practical work. Learners felt insecure and uneasy in his presence and there was an evident conflict between their *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1990) and his. It is interesting to note that while they too often rebelled against the conventions of the college system such as arriving on time, drinking and eating in class, talking out loud, the use of the mobile phone and so on, they pointed out how he was not fitting in the system because he was louder, impulsive, answered the phone without walking out of the room, showed no respect to the teachers etc:

J\_\_: *when he is here, it [the lesson] is total confusion.*

M\_\_: *we cannot talk when he is around, we feel uneasy. Although he is like us, he cannot read and write, he should not be with us. He is too old. He is as old as my father.*

S\_\_: *He should be with people of his own age.*

Class conversation, translation 1/11/2013



### **5.311. Inclusion to all but exclusion to more...?**

The learners pointed out that, while the Education Act was defending the rights of every citizen to have access to education, their rights were not being respected because they were placed in a very uncomfortable situation which could negatively affect their learning. Following this conversation in class, a particular incident, where this student terrorised everyone as he took out a sword in class which he said he wanted to whet in the workshop, escalated the already unnerving situation. Learners were very upset that day and a couple of them were also toying with the idea of dropping out. I was pretty worried myself so the learners' feelings were brought to the attention of my director and he immediately discussed the situation with the Principal. They took action straightaway and found a happy solution by redirecting the forty-two year old student to a welding course for adults in the evening. This of course was a very important incident and although action was taken at the time, to date, still anyone can enrol on a Level 1 or Level 2 course at MCAST. No distinction is made by age and whenever such incidence occurs the younger learners are often uncomfortable with the age gap, even if the older student is not as bizarre as the one who showed up in our group, while on the other hand it is quite demeaning for older learners to be placed with sixteen-year-olds making it very hard for them to fit in. It is also taxing on the teachers to address the class in a way that appeals to both generations. However lecturers and learners who find themselves in that situation often believe that there is nothing they can do so they either passively live the status quo or, in the case of learners, drop out. Nothing is ever questioned and certainly learners (unlike the ones in this study) are hardly ever given the opportunity to say how they feel. Therefore I believe it is the responsibility of the college, or the State, to make the necessary provision and if the idea of promoting lifelong learning is to be taken seriously, the right set up for adult learners should be created without disrupting the younger learners. This would be partly answering to the next subheading of part 1 in the Education Act (1988), which states that:

*“It is the duty of the State –*

- a) To promote education and instruction;*
- b) To ensure the existence of a system of schools and institutions accessible to all Maltese citizens catering for the full development of the whole personality including the ability of every person to work; and*
- c) To provide for such schools and institutions where these do not exist.”*

The learners' comments about this revealed that they were not very satisfied with what the education system had offered them so far. They had to live through all the years of compulsory schooling with subjects that were not appealing to them at all. MCAST was a second chance and indeed it too came along with the strong promise:

*“To provide universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with an international dimension, responsive to the needs of the individual and the economy”*

Mission Statement

### **5.312. MCAST... another disillusion?**

For the learners, coming to MCAST was a second opportunity for “a programme that would teach you work, different trades, a school which is much, much better than secondary school” (B\_\_ interview, translation 8/01/2013), but unfortunately, there too, the learners had to settle for what was being offered and not for what they really wanted or hoped to find. While they acknowledged that the vocational workshops were very well equipped and that they enjoyed the practical sessions, their other comments which were directed towards the lack of classroom resources and the shabby environment of the classroom; the lack of vocational units related to what they really wished to do; and the too many key skills on their timetable were less positive. What really struck me were the hidden messages they were getting through all this. Indirectly the learners were getting a reconfirmation of a feeling that as learners they are not really valued:

J\_\_: *Lv1 should get the best service to encourage the students. We need more help and resources...but because we are unable students we are not listened to... we are not given the options we want.*

Lesson discussion, translation

B\_\_: *biggest lie ever... I applied for Art and Design and ended up in Building and Construction Engineering ... if the motto states that it has a good response to the needs of students, they have to follow it no matter what.*

Learner's notes written during thinking time, own words  
(1/11/2012)

M\_\_: *The course I wanted [restoration] was not available and we do not have a unit of it as taster to make sure that that is what I really want to do... I would have liked to have at least one unit about restoration.*

Learner's notes written during thinking time, translation  
(1/11/2012)

### **5.313. Teachers... educators or oppressors?**

As we read on to "Duties of parents", section C which read, "to attend school regularly on each scholastic day, unless the minor has a good and sufficient cause to be absent from school", B\_\_ got very upset and wrote at the margins of the sheet:

*'there may be a problem in school but the student does not/or is afraid to tell others for help'*

Also, on his notes he wrote:

*'Sometimes parents go up to the school Head but he is too hard headed that he will not do anything and/or [ ] he is good where he is so it would not make a difference to him.'*

(Learner's own words)

B\_\_: *'Bullying started to come in from older students ... and in form 5 bullying escalated and I ended up being constantly on my own... during lessons I couldn't care less... and there was a teacher who was always picking on me... \*shaken voice and in tears\**

Nadia: *at home did they know about this situation?*

B\_\_ : Yes *\* finding it hard to speak\**  
Nadia: *Have they ever come to school?*  
B\_\_ : Yes, twice *\*tears rolling down his cheeks\**  
Nadia: *Was there any kind of reaction from the school's end?*  
B\_\_ : No, nothing *\*student needed time to recompose himself\**  
(interview, translation 8/01/2013)

B\_\_'s frustration is evident in his first two comments. The interview reveals that he had suffered tremendously because of teacher and peer bullying throughout his school experience, to an extent that his learning suffered. What's worse is that for so many years his parents sided with the school. In tears throughout the interview, the mother explained how she was not aware of what was happening at school and when B\_\_ tried to tell her something she often told him that a teacher would not punish a student without a reason. She trusted the teachers and the system and it was years later, through other parents and learners that she found out the terrible truth about B\_\_'s experiences:

*'my teacher used to bully me a lot ... call me names and sometimes even hit me ☹ ...he was calling home, making up things to my mum so I would look bad with my parents'*  
(B\_\_'s Life History, own words)

Nadia: *how did your mother react to this?*  
B\_\_ : *she said that the teacher knew what he was doing...*  
( interview, translation 8/01/2013)

B\_\_'s mum: *when B\_\_ went to school he used to cry all the time and he used to say that the Sir had sent him out... and I used to tell him that he must have done something \*emotional with tears in her eyes\* very wrong then... He had a lot of bullying coming from his teacher but I did not know about it. I found this out much later, quite recently in fact and from other parents... and then I heard from other boys because boys were the main victims*  
(interview, translation 18/03/2013)

### **5.314. I am ashamed of me! Coping strategies to hide who I am...**

The attitude of this teacher in particular led B\_\_ to believe that he couldn't pass the Junior Lyceum therefore B\_\_ went to an area secondary school where, for various reasons, many learners are disengaged and there too he suffered

teacher bullying, therefore his situation only got worse. In the long run the perception he built of himself as a student continued to become more negative. He felt humiliated to the extent where he tried to hide which school he attended. B\_\_ was living different identities in different spaces, and so were the other learners. School identity was not something the Lv1 learners took pride in because it was linked to very negative experiences:

*B\_\_'s mum: when B\_\_ went to secondary school he went to this school which was known as a school for low achievers...whenever he was asked about his school, I used to see him withdraw and he never used to say the name...because everyone knew that school had a label that it catered for students who did not want to know about schooling.*

(interview, translation 18/03/2013)

*M\_\_: I used to attend a State School at Zabbar. Then we were moved ... people think of it as a bad school, a school for the stupid...*

(interview, translation 11/01/2013)

*J\_\_: throughout Form 1 ... kind of since I was the youngest, I used to stay with him [a form 5 student] so that he would kind of protect me and you know at school I don't look like the nerd so that I won't get bullied, because where I used to attend, that's how things were. If you are too quiet they would make you a target.*

(interview, translation 10/01/2013)

*G\_\_: when I came to do tests or exams I fail...and I fail... and they used to call me names or ... the teacher would tell me let me check (the mark on the paper) and he would give out the papers in front of the others. Kind of they would call me stupid or whatever. [ ] Today, I can still feel that feeling sometimes.*

(Focus group, translation 26/02/2103)

### **5.315. Maybe it is not all my fault...**

The critical analysis of the Education Act and the mission statement of MCAST helped the learners to actually reflect upon their school experiences, the rights they had and whether these were actually met. This process of reading,

reflecting, discussing and writing helped them to become more aware of what was really happening around them and for the first time they were looking at their 'failure' in a different light. It was a realisation that the system had flaws in it and that their identity as 'failing learners' could be attributed to a conglomeration of factors within the system which worked against them and which were strong to an extent that they not only affected their learning but they spilled over to influence how society perceives the learners who enrol at MCAST at Level 1. These messages were strong, continuous and out of the learners' control but through this activity the learners were given the opportunity to start seeing how the field of education was moulding their school identity:

*B\_\_:* and that (teacher bullying) is why, probably, I do so poorly in Maltese at the moment, I was really sad, obviously... but imma (however) \*shaken voice and in tears\*

(interview, translation 8/01/2013)

*B\_\_:* teachers used to agree with peers who went on and on with comments like 'you aren't good at anything' and so on and they kind of... affected me... you cannot be attracted to school because of this thing. [ ] They (society) kind of say that MCAST students are lazy and then they tell you 'had you gone to Junior college... you would know how hard you had to study there and those know what they are doing...as if they imply that only the stupid enrol at MCAST.

*M\_\_:* They think that we are here for the stipend.

*K\_\_:* society got to the young's mind and told us that if we're to have great jobs we have to go to Junior college.

(Focus Group, translation 26/02/2013)

Getting this discussion started was very important for me and I believe for my learners as well. It was a first step towards raising their awareness about their positionality, where they were coming from, and what influenced who they were. However, having lived through similar experiences myself as a student, I was conscious that up to the age of sixteen the life of the Maltese learners, thus my participants, revolves mainly around school and as a result the identity acquired within that field may predominate over any other experiences we live through irrespective of how positive these may be.

### **5.316. What makes me, me?**

Therefore, in an attempt to start turning negative perceptions around, I thought that the next step forward for the group was to reflect upon the different identities we hold within different contexts. I introduced the next session by asking a direct question, 'Why is identity important?' Learners immediately agreed that identity is important because:

*G\_\_ : It tells you some information like your name, age, address, nationality, birth place and gender.*

*B\_\_ : It is important for all the people around you to know who you are.*

*M\_\_ : it is important to know what you are in real life.*

*(learners' work, learners' own words 22/11/2012)*

Although they all agreed, the learners' interpretation of 'identity' was different. G\_\_ saw identity as the identity card we all possess, a formality with personal information. On the other hand B\_\_ saw identity as a means for others to interpret who we are, therefore his identity was affected by what others thought of him. M\_\_ defined identity as something personal, knowing one's self really well.

These answers may appear quite insignificant to an outsider, however in hindsight, after getting to know the learners better, their prompt answers, did in actual fact reflect the marks and scars of their lived experiences. G\_\_ who was one of five siblings found it hard to come to terms with being one of so many, so even the little details such as name and age were considerably important to find his position within the family. B\_\_ on the other hand, who had suffered so much had been marked and formed by what others had thought and said about him. While M\_\_ had to stand up to his own father to get to college so identity for him meant getting control over one's own wishes and objectives in life and strive to achieve them against all odds.

The next question took them a bit by surprise, 'Do I have different identities?'

Many were silent for a while and reflected:

M\_\_: *I think that everyone has different identity because my reaction with other people and parents can be different.*

B\_\_: *I have different identities in different places.*

(Learners' work 22/11/2012)

Next I pointed out that if we are agreeing that we behave differently in different spaces, then we should reflect on a set of other questions. Are we aware of how we are being shaped? Should we be conditioned by what goes on around us? Can we stop that and be ourselves? Are we able to change or does change scare us?

The learners were given a set of five simple questions and I asked them to think about them. For a long while there was silence in the room and they took up their pens and drew, and scribbled.

1. Is my identity formed?
2. How is it formed?
3. How important is it for me to be me?
4. Can we be different?
5. Does difference scare me?

The learners agreed that identity is formed,

B\_\_: *over the years because of friends, family and all the other different experiences.*

G\_\_: *from my hobbies, sports, dreams, friendship even at school or somewhere else.*

M\_\_: *with the life that I have when I was a child to the day that I am living.*

(learners' written work 22/11/2012)

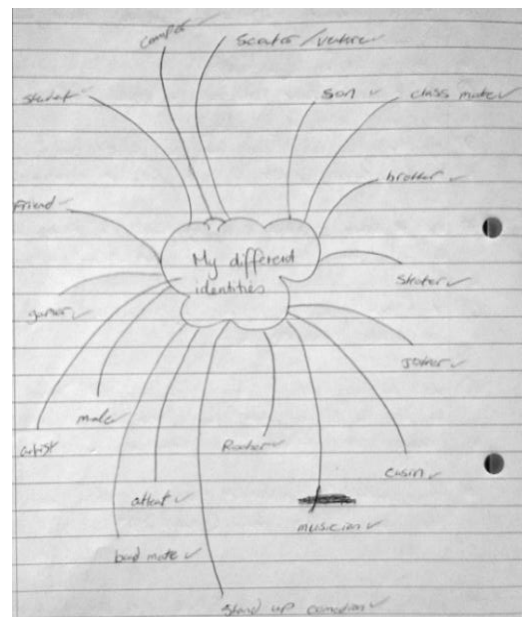


Fig.4: B\_\_'s Mind map



Their reflection on the questions set them in a position where they had to think about the different facets their lives have and how these vary according to the activities they do and the space they inhabit at a particular time. B\_\_ made a mind map listing all the different activities he does in his everyday life and also provided an explanation for some of them, pointing out the difference between who he really was and how society sees him within that space. He wrote,

*Friend: I am a friend to all but society sees me as an outcast so they don't know the friend side of me.*

*Student: Level 1 student and people say that I'm stupid but in fact I'm quite intelligent.*

*Scouter: a part of society that people look at as voluntary workers.*

*Musician: society sees me as sad or lonely but in reality I just love making music.*

(B\_\_ written work 22/11/2012)

The other learners did the same exercise and we all discussed the stuff we do in our everyday lives out of school. So through the various sessions of that past month and a half we had looked at our positionality, where we were coming from, the positive and negative experiences that we had lived through, the different spaces we inhabit in our everyday lives and the identities we hold within each of those spaces. Once awareness, that the education system and sometimes life in general did not always help us to form positive perceptions about ourselves, was raised, we agreed as a group to try to affect change in our lives and in the college, and make our voices heard.

*M\_\_: Yes we can be different because we can be happy with others and ourselves.*

(learners' work 22/11/2012)

### 5.317. A first glimpse ahead...

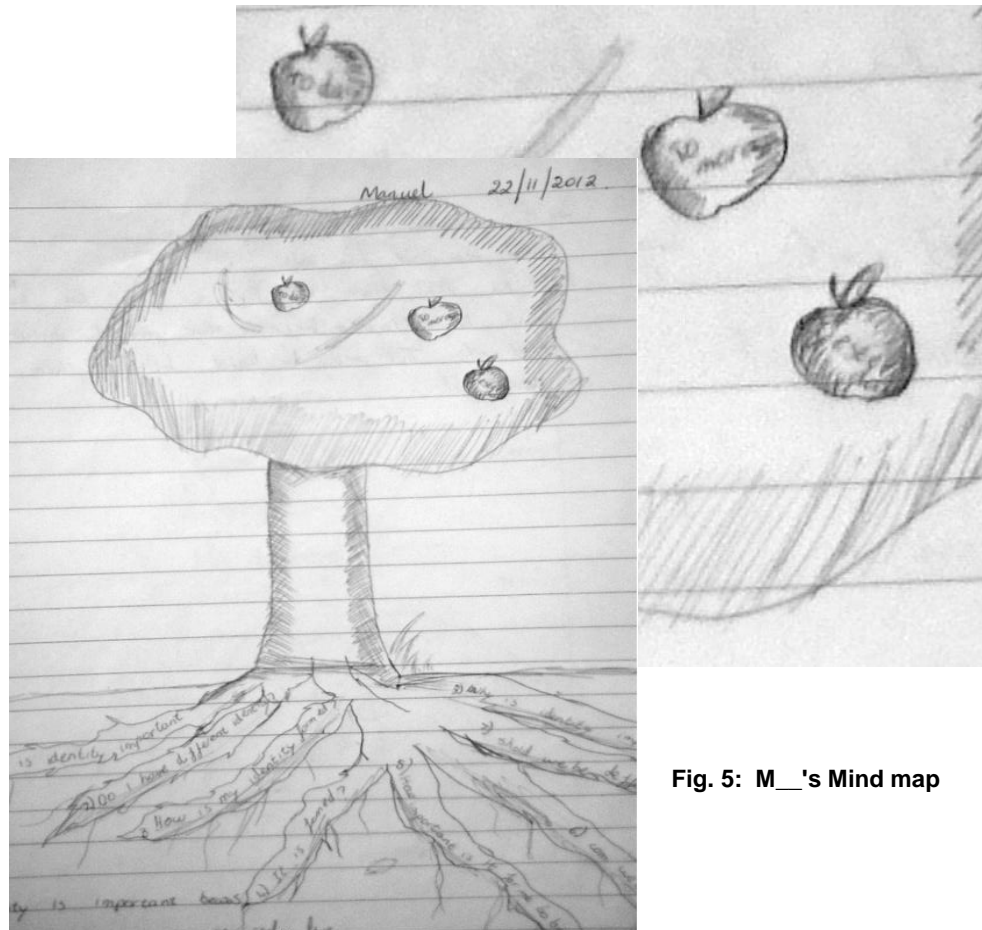


Fig. 5: M\_\_'s Mind map

In his drawing M\_\_ represented his identity by a tree whose roots were the questions we had discussed in class. Each one was feeding into the tree which had three fruit, 'yesterday', 'today' and 'tomorrow'. This, I think, was an important message for all because yes we may be the result of 'yesterday' but we are living 'today' and by the actions we take 'today' we can change what happens 'tomorrow'.

This had become something we all wanted to do. The learners had accepted to be my participants earlier on in the year but the critical literacy sessions helped to bring us all closer and consolidated the classroom community further. And this is what continued to move us forward in the days that followed, influencing

the decisions I took as a teacher vis-à-vis classroom pedagogy, and the whole group with regards to motivation and classroom engagement.

## **5.4. Changing the classroom practice to enhance the learners' engagement ... How are the learners and teacher affected when their out of school literacy practices, family backgrounds and interests are brought into the classroom?**

The Lv1 programmes within every institute at MCAST are embedded, Introductory Courses. On these courses, apart from their vocational units, learners are expected to do ten hours (two hours each) of standalone sessions of key skills (Maths, English, Maltese, Personal Development and Information Technology) with LSU lecturers, and six hours of embedded sessions (two vocational with English, two vocational with Maltese and another two vocational with maths) with both vocational and Key skills lecturers present in the workshop. At the Institute of Building and Construction the vocational units were, woodwork, sheet metal, bench fitting and plumbing and electrical installations. During the embedded sessions, as their Key Skill lecturer for Maltese and English, I used to join the learners in the workshop and collaborate with the vocational lecturer to address the language skills, knowledge and competences necessary to function within that trade.

### **5.41. Classroom Pedagogy**

#### ***5.411. Making the Languages relevant for the learners' needs***

Working alongside the learners in the workshop helped me understand better the world of employment the learners were aiming for. This was very important to make my language sessions more relevant to their vocational routes and consequently more appealing to them:

Nadia: *How are you feeling about English and Maltese?*

S\_\_ : *I have improved a lot because in secondary I hated them and most of the time I did not bother to go in for the lesson but now I feel that I have improved.*

Nadia: *Do you find the topics we choose for English and Maltese interesting?*

S\_\_ : *Yes because they are related to work and so on, because the fact that you speak about tools and so on... that helps a lot.*

(S\_\_ Interview, translation 16/04/2013)

J\_\_ : *The fact that the content of the language lessons was related to the vocational made them more engaging. This year, the teacher follows a book and therefore this does not help me in any way with my vocational assignments.*

(J\_\_'s feedback on reading the chapter, translation 24/02/2014)

B\_\_ : *use of videos in some sessions used to bridge the language barrier and we used to understand more. The name of tools etc, were consolidated and we used to have another opportunity to discuss the process.*

(B\_\_'s feedback on reading this section, translation 24/02/2014)

#### **5.412. Translanguaging...using language in a way that is closer to the learners' comfort zone.**

Another important factor was that during the sessions in the workshop learners worked in a very informal environment where they could move around, help each other and chat (using both languages contemporarily) as they worked on their projects. This reflected very much the real life situation in Malta, where people continuously mix the two languages as we speak throughout the day. This is also especially true within the practical vocational field where most technical words are adopted from English and simply given a Maltese interpretation by changing the phoneme structure ('a' in Maltese sounds like /u/ in up and 'u' sounds like /oo/ in moon), intonation and spelling and by conjugating verbs following Maltese rules (spanner - 'spaner', wires-wajers, I weld – niwweldja). Therefore this workshop environment was closer to their vernacular because, in there, language was not an issue and although the notes and theories were given in English the learners felt at ease because they

could discuss them and ask about them in Maltese rendering assimilation of concepts much easier:

Nadia: *why is it, that before you used to do poorly and now you are doing better?*

K\_\_\_: *... before we used to be a lot in class and we did not get the one-to-one attention and I think that teachers at ST. D\_\_\_ [spoke] mainly in English and were very strict and they expected us to know everything ...here they don't expect too much from you and they help you.*

Nadia: *Do you think that language at St. D\_\_\_ was a barrier for you?*

K\_\_\_: *there it was mainly English and that was a problem because at home we speak only Maltese so sometimes I don't know how to express myself and mix between the two languages.*

(interview, translation 16/01/2013)

Unfortunately this feeling of ease which gave the learners control over their learning and a sense of achievement and success in the workshop vanished when they had to work on their vocational assignments which are expected to be written in English. Within the political arena however, the importance of English in education is presented to the general public as the only way to secure the ability “to navigate successfully in the world at large” because this can only happen if we are “fluent and proficient in English, the global language” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014). While I agree that being able to communicate in English broadens the horizons of Maltese citizens, I feel that it does not necessarily lead to improved employment chances because in so many European countries, English is not the first language. In fact to go and do an internship in Germany, for instance, applicants are often required to be able to communicate in German and in countries such as Austria, in vocational colleges for adult or disengaged learners, teaching and learning are not done in a foreign language.

### **5.413. Assessment... functional language versus focus on spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax**

So where does this put our learners? My concern is that our learners are presented with a sink or swim situation where unless one is able to swim in deep water, one has no option except that of drowning (failing) or staying away from the water altogether (stay away from education and learning). As things stand at the moment swimming in shallow waters to gain confidence and show the skills one already has is not considered. This is a pity and a huge motive for disengagement because many learners are already practising the vocational skills they are expected to learn on the courses we offer, while working in the field of their choice to help in the family business or as a part-time job. They know what language is needed in their real world of work and very often what we are offering, which is a standard version of the Maltese and English languages with a huge emphasis on spelling and grammar, is not relevant at all within that world.

The use of standard Maltese and English presents another dilemma for the learners because while they are certainly more fluent when speaking and arguing in Maltese, Maltese spelling and grammar (App.16) are far more complicated than English which follows particular spelling and grammar rules. As a consequence, often, learners prefer to write in English because they feel that the spelling is easier (although spelling mistakes are still abundant) but, since they are less fluent, they find it hard to express their ideas clearly enough to be followed and understood by the reader/examiner:

G\_\_ : *I prefer to write in English because I am kind of more used to it and do less mistakes. In Maltese I make many more mistakes.*

Nadia: *Are you saying that you prefer to express yourself in Maltese or in English?*

G\_\_ : *both of them*

B\_\_ : *I prefer English*

J\_\_ : *it depends on what [writing] ... in English because of tools... to express myself in words then I prefer in Maltese...*

Nadia: *Do you think you should be given the choice to decide which language you want to use to write your assignments?*

J\_\_ : *I would write in Maltese.*

(Focus Group, translation 26/02/2013)

So the confidence gained in the workshop is often lost again when they come to tackle assignments and unless this issue is taken into consideration and learners are given the support they need, that is when most learners get discouraged and drop out:

Nadia: *How do you feel when you have to speak or write in English during the English lesson or for an assignment?*

J\_\_ : *Awkward... kind of... I know what I want to say but I don't know how to translate it from Maltese into English... If I translate wrongly I would feel annoyed... I find it hard to translate certain words accurately.*

Nadia: *Why does it bother you if you make mistakes in translation?*

J\_\_ : *Kind of I would be in the ridicule.*

Nadia: *How often do you come across English out of school?*

J\_\_ : *Very little. A bit on Facebook but very little because they mainly speak in Maltese, a bit on my mobile phone. But I rarely speak in English, only if I am stopped by a tourist...*

(interview, translation 10/01/2013)

Knowing all this and being with the learners in the workshop not only gave me the opportunity to learn techniques and vocabulary linked to the trade and to observe the learners, but also to take note of their needs and then offer the appropriate support where necessary. This of course enhanced our relationship. I helped the learners with the language, by simplifying instructions or by repeating an explanation given earlier and they in turn would explain to me what they were doing, why they were doing it and why the process being done was necessary. I acknowledged that they were far more knowledgeable in that vocational field than I was. Within that field we shared a very good balance of power relations, because while they respected me as their teacher they knew that they had all my respect for their skills, knowledge and the diligence they showed in the vocational work they were undertaking. The workshop was a very good incubator of community building and for bringing

down inhibitions about learning. Quite often the chats that accompanied our work were not limited to the work being done but tackled also out of college situations that we were living through, thus allowing us to get to know one another better:

Nadia: *Good morning boys. How was your weekend?*

J\_\_: *So and so*

Nadia: *Why dear?*

M\_\_: *He cannot hook a girl... \*laughs\**

J\_\_: *Because I cannot find one [a girl]. No one wants to go out with me*

Nadia: *J\_\_ first of all you have to be positive, [ ] I'm sure that you will find a girlfriend*

J\_\_: *No use*

Vocational lecturer: *come J\_\_ get hold of yourself... get on with your work*

J\_\_: *I'm not in the mood to do anything*

Informal conversation Woodwork Workshop, translation  
5/11/2012

#### **5.414. Bringing together our backgrounds, interests and social life...**

Every scholastic year, I strive to enhance my learners' self-esteem, to help them become critical and give them voice; and to reach the end of the course successfully (all that I lacked when I was their age). Therefore from the onset of the scholastic year I make sure to contextualise language lessons and move in parallel with what they do in the workshop. This year as we embarked on classroom ethnography, I was more conscious than ever before of the classroom dynamics, the power balance we had established in the workshop, and how this was transferred into the classroom in contextualised sessions. However nagging at the back of my mind was the thought that my learners' lives were not merely made up of home and school but like every teenager, they had a social life which was very important to them. This social life was continuously cropping up in the informal conversations we had and also in the data collection. The interview with each student, which was the first method used, consolidated this feeling because the more I learned about them the more



surprised I was by the number of interests and practices they had outside school. Therefore I wanted to include in my lessons their other interests too, not just their vocational subjects.

So while on the one hand I had to address the knowledge, skills and competences in listening, speaking, reading and writing according to the Level 1 descriptors on the NQF (App.2) to help the learners reach the outcomes set and pass the assessment criteria, on the other hand I set myself the task to reinforce this by creating a space where the learners could bring in their out of school knowledge, skills and competences and be appreciated. This was not easy at all because with only two standalone sessions to go through the whole syllabus, thinking of additional work was impossible. However when an extra lesson was added, on agreement with the learners, that extra lesson which we dedicated to critical literacy (Anderson and Irvine, 1993) turned out to be very important. It opened a window onto the learners' personal lives so contextualisation in the language lessons happened not only with the vocational units but also with their personal interests. This overlap between spaces allowed for the confidence gained within the critical literacy space and the workshop to overspill into the other space of the language classroom. Activities within the different spaces (App.15) complemented each other and as a result engagement was enhanced:

|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nadia                            | Hello boys I am so proud of you.today you have really worked hard at that benchfitting assignment. I was really pleased with your effort especially when considering that it was in English. Keep it up. |
| J__                              | Heyy wot I misd???                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| B__                              | We started writing the assinmant for benchfitting class                                                                                                                                                  |
| J__                              | ☺                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| B__                              | Assignment *benchfitting*                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Facebook conversation 29/11/2012 |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

The critical literacy session was managed by the learners and me on equal terms. I took into the session as much as them, especially where ideas and

topics of interest were concerned. As mentioned earlier, the first sessions were dedicated to raising awareness about learners' rights and obligations and identity work. This latter work got us to the point where first of all the learners were feeling closer to each other and therefore stronger as a group, and secondly they were beginning to acknowledge that the system had given them a negative schooled identity which did not reflect who they really were. Also during this period the learners were beginning to get hooked up by the idea of the research study and B\_\_ came up with the idea to set up a closed group on Facebook. After some reflection from my part (as mentioned in Chp.3) we agreed to do it and the learners decided to name it 'Voices of the unheard':

|                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__                              | Can someone please add each other because I don't have everyone added<br>Thanks                                                                                                        |
| Seen by everyone                 |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Nadia                            | Hello boys – feel that last week was very important to give our group a sense of community. We did some very strong and personal sharing and I feel that now we trust each other more. |
| J__                              | I like this                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Seen by everyone                 |                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| B__                              | I..... created the group.                                                                                                                                                              |
| Facebook conversation 12/11/2012 |                                                                                                                                                                                        |

#### **5.415. Fighting on...**

That group was meant to be an extension of the classroom where we could continue our discussions started at school. In fact the first entries were videos and links related to social injustice and the courage showed by particular individuals to overcome life's hurdles.

|     |                        |
|-----|------------------------|
| B__ | Pleas watch this video |
|-----|------------------------|

|                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                     | It is about a man that just simple did not give up even after everyone told him to....                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| You.... and ..... like this.                      Seen by everyone. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Nadia                                                               | That is a great video and that is exactly what I want to achieve with you this year. I want you all to believe in yourself and to believe that it is possible that you can change your future. It won't be easy but if you work hard you can succeed!! I BELIEVE IN YOU ALL |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 28/11/2012                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |


|                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__                                           | If you believe in something.... make it happen no one can stop you. Sure you are flash and bone but when you have an idea no one can stop you because.....<br><br>IDEAS ARE BULLETPROOF                                                                                                                               |
| Seen by everyone                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| B__                                           | Never give up (picture added of paraolympics bike race finish line)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 7/12/2012 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| B__                                           | I will not let an exam result decide my fate....<br><br>Video posted (Why I Hate School But Love Education    Spoken Word<br><br>As the cyclical and seemingly never ending debate about education rages on, the topic – somewhat ironically, often poses more questions than it provides answ....<br><br>YOUTUBE.COM |
| Seen by everyone                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| J__                                           | You gave me shivers (translation)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| B__                                           | Why? (translation)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| J__                                           | How should I know (translation)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Nadia                                         | I read this today and I strongly believe it too. "I always believed that I can make a difference. I can change things. My students                                                                                                                                                                                    |

|                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                       | learn the skills that it takes to transform society's mind" that is what I hope we will do together!! Literacy is strongly related to social justice so let us do our best guys! |
| J__                                                                                   | Don't think about yesterday think about tomorrow ☺                                                                                                                               |
| Facebook conversation 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> December 2012, actual words |                                                                                                                                                                                  |

At that time as well I was constantly encouraging the learners to stand up against the injustices they suffered and start by working on their passive attitudes in relation to their acquired identity, and take action.

My learners were beginning to believe that they were better than the marks and the acquired labels had made them appear. They were encouraging one another and indeed B\_\_, the venture and scout leader in his out of school life, took the lead in this research group and was taking initiatives to drive the others and instigate further reflection and change. Since he was such a keen user of Facebook he asked the others to search for a video that they can identify with. He was the first to post. J\_\_ followed suit and found a video about a car which is his passion and then M\_\_ posted a crib he had just finished doing:

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__              | Who are you...pleas leave a video in the comments about you and who you are... this is me<br>(Posted video: The secret to you HD...<br>Today is the beginning of my new life...All good things are coming to me...I live with passion and purpose...I am awake, energised and alive...I am free to be myself...I am so grateful to be me. |
| Seen by everyone |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| J__              | This is my whole drem in the world... I am not joking, as I watched it I started to cry... and make your own dream (translation)<br>(posted a video of his favourite car: ProPer's Daily Driven s2K Pt2                                                                                                                                   |
| Seen by everyone |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

|                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| M__                                                                                   | Posted a picture of crib he had just finished.<br> |
| Seen by everyone                                                                      |                                                                                                                                     |
| B__                                                                                   | Well done, man (translation)                                                                                                        |
| Nadia                                                                                 | This is really nice, is it your work M__                                                                                            |
| Facebook conversation 3 <sup>rd</sup> to 5 <sup>th</sup> Decemeber 2012, actual words |                                                                                                                                     |

At the college it was assignment time so most of the language sessions were geared towards assignment planning, drafting, editing and writing but within our Facebook space we shared other stuff and even made plans for a social activity. Once again my learners surprised me when they came up with the idea of organising a dinner. It was all their initiative from the guests (all lecturers), to the reservations at the restaurant and organising transport, to the finest detail of ordering a cake which J\_\_'s mum gently did for them and which they presented as a surprise for me (as the only female lecturer) to cut. All the lecturers accepted the invitation to attend and it was indeed a pleasant evening and most certainly a learning experience. The students showed up all very well and smartly dressed, their behaviour and manners were excellent and they were in control of everything up to the division of the bill and leaving the tip at the end of the evening:

|     |                                                                                 |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__ | Attantion: dinner reservation set for Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> 8 pm sharp razzet |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                               |                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
|                                               | lahmar                                |
| Seen by everyone                              |                                       |
| Nadia                                         | OK noted thanks                       |
| J__                                           | I will book the minibus (translation) |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 6/12/2012 |                                       |

**Vignette**

As I was analysing this facebook data, and writing today, I was in facebook chat with B\_\_ and J\_\_ who happened to be online and I told them what I was doing without disclosing what I was writing and asked whether they wanted to add some comments and J\_\_ said,

|                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>“ ..bidiltnihafna al lahjar u bilhijlatijaksirtnafkifandiimur manis. u hat gostnejnekhafnaalimtninarafilhaja u ilhbib .”</i></p> | <p>You have changed me for the better and with your help I have learnt how to behave in public. And I enjoyed helping you, a lot, you taught me how to reflect on life and friends.</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

I was touched by his comment because I feel that I owe them a lot. This whole research study was possible thanks to their collaboration and yet J\_\_ here is grateful for what I did, when I honestly feel that I did nothing special apart from involving them in the study and treat them all with high respect. To my mind that is a strong message to all teachers.

Indeed, a demonstration of my respect toward the learners was by taking on board their suggestions, needs and issues, and tackling them in the sessions:

|     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__ | <p>Listen well to the words Nadia Vassallo so that we will do a lesson about this please.</p> <p>(Posted video: What If Money didn't Matter</p> <p>How do you like to spend your life? What do you desire? What if money didn't matter? What id money was no object? What would</p> |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                                                |                                             |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
|                                                | you like to do if money were no.....)       |
| Seen by everyone                               |                                             |
| Nadia                                          | Yes I will that's for tomorrow then agreed? |
| B__                                            | OK                                          |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 16/01/2013 |                                             |

**5.416. Voicing our thoughts...**

A case in point was this communication with B\_\_ which I did follow through and during the next session we watched the video, discussed it and did a brain storming session. We covered reading, listening and speaking

(translanguaging was used during discussion) and writing.

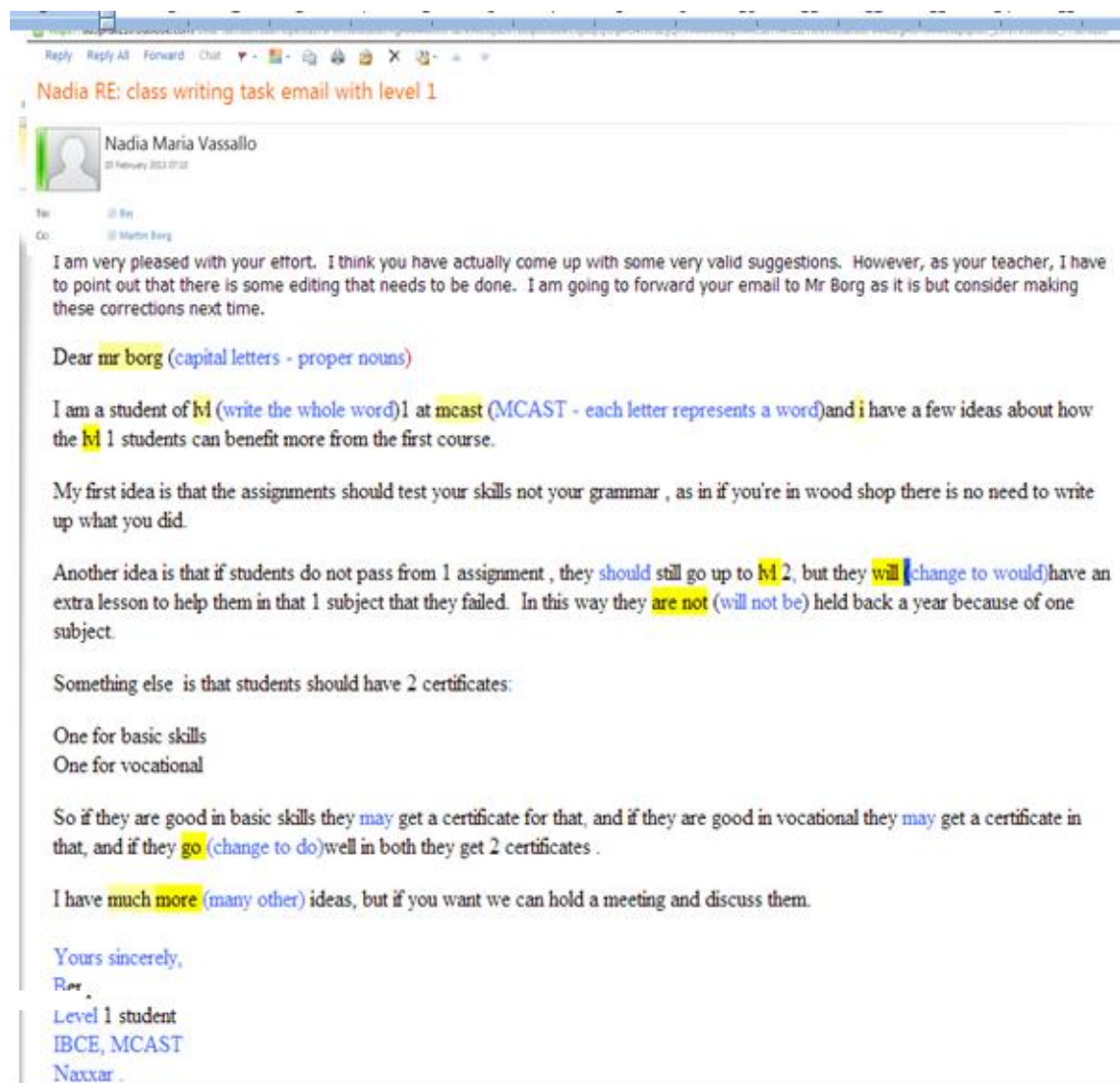


Fig.6: Snapshots of critical literacy session

The learners reflected on and shared their various dreams for the future, most of which were linked with their vocational choices (to become a professional welder, restorer, mechanic, musician). Then there was a turning point and

eventually the focus of the discussion moved onto the Level 1 course and what they thought about it.

The session had started off from a video B\_\_ shared on Facebook but changed into an empowering language exercise closely related to their vocational programme because at the end of that session the learners wrote emails to the Institute's deputy director to give their suggestions about how the Level 1 programme could be improved. Some suggested a canteen with a billiard or table soccer or a gym to have better socialisation opportunities and more sports. Others suggested more practical sessions in the workshop. And others gave strong suggestions as to how the certification on the Level 1 programme could be structured:



Reply Reply All Forward Chat

Nadia RE: class writing task email with level 1

Nadia Maria Vassallo  
22 February 2023 07:28

To: @ Naxxar  
Cc: @ Martin Borg

I am very pleased with your effort. I think you have actually come up with some very valid suggestions. However, as your teacher, I have to point out that there is some editing that needs to be done. I am going to forward your email to Mr Borg as it is but consider making these corrections next time.

Dear mr borg (capital letters - proper nouns)

I am a student of lv1 (write the whole word)1 at mcast (MCAST - each letter represents a word)and i have a few ideas about how the lv1 students can benefit more from the first course.

My first idea is that the assignments should test your skills not your grammar , as in if you're in wood shop there is no need to write up what you did.

Another idea is that if students do not pass from 1 assignment , they should still go up to lv2, but they will (change to would)have an extra lesson to help them in that 1 subject that they failed. In this way they are not (will not be) held back a year because of one subject.

Something else is that students should have 2 certificates:

- One for basic skills
- One for vocational

So if they are good in basic skills they may get a certificate for that, and if they are good in vocational they may get a certificate in that, and if they go (change to do)well in both they get 2 certificates .

I have much more (many other) ideas, but if you want we can hold a meeting and discuss them.

Yours sincerely,  
Naxxar  
Level 1 student  
IBCE, MCAST  
Naxxar .



The email above was truly sent to the Institute's Deputy Director and I am very proud today as I write this because all the three suggestions put forward by B\_\_\_, a Level 1 student, are now being considered by the college and some new practices may be coming into effect as from next scholastic year in 2014-2015!

Taking up B\_\_\_'s earlier suggestion, for videos to identify with, which was further encouraged by my tutor, Kate Pahl, I then proposed that the learners work on an individual project by which they could present who they really were to the others. This was an opportunity to move them away from the issues of education and how they viewed themselves within that field. We discussed their ideas which varied in subject as well as mode. However, since these were meant to reflect who they were, no restrictions were made from my end and they could do their projects on any topic and in any mode they preferred.

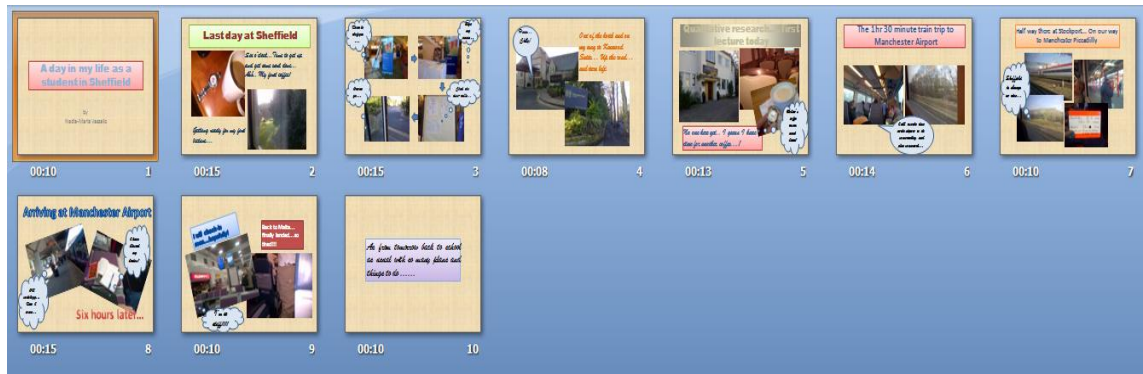
**5.417. Let's define ourselves...**

I was the first to start and documented my weekend school in Sheffield with photos and presented them with added captions in the form of a PowerPoint (App.12). My choice was driven by my wish to render the learners participative in that experience as well in order to further emphasise that the study we were doing was **our** study and that if/when I spoke about it I was voicing **them**. This was important following the interest B\_\_\_ and the others had shown while I was abroad:

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B___            | Hows sheffield miss ☺ hope you had a good trip Nadia Vassallo                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| J___ likes this | seen by everyone                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Nadia           | The trip was fine. I have presented what we have done so far, the discussions we have and so on and I was so proud of you guys. I honestly hope that something good comes out of this and that it helps to change what people think of level 1 students!! Take care I |

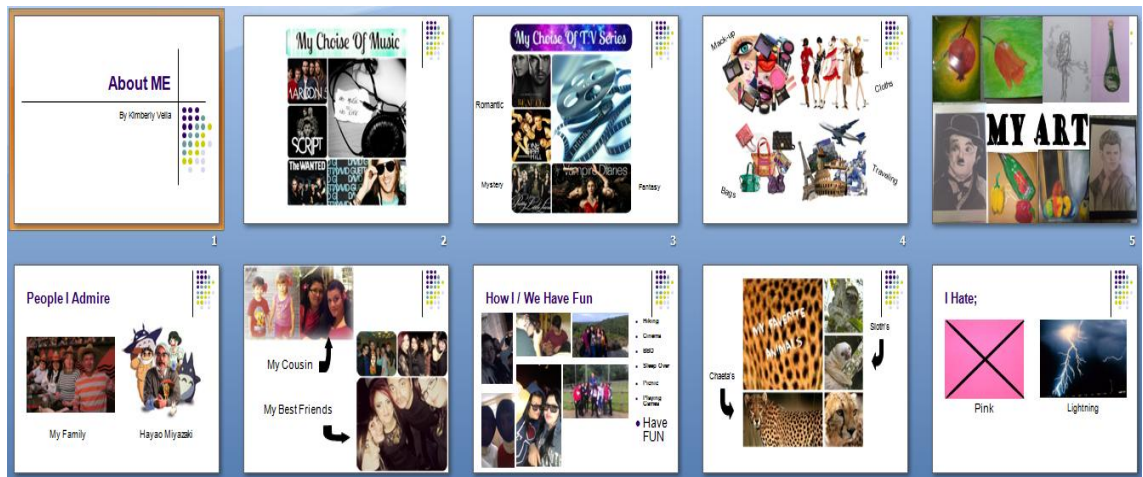
|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                | going to my tutorial now see you all on Tuesday.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| B__                                            | Ok hope the people there were interested in our stories ☺                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Nadia                                          | I spoke about the common themes that came out of your stories and yes they were very interested and are eager to see how this project will evolve. Now I am so excited and I think you will love this... My tutor asked me to give you more voice and get you choosing a mode other than language in which you can make yourselves heard. So she said you should represent your ideas about change and about who you really are in different modes such as songs, music, drawings, photos you take, videos you make, anything that you feel is your world. |
| B__                                            | Mm so you mean that we can write songs record things give them to you and show them what we are capable of. Is that what you're saying                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Nadia                                          | Yeah you can even make drawings if you like and through what you do you should pass on the message of how you wish to change things or a message about who you really are... the you that the education system has ignored                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| B__                                            | Hmm ok                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Nadia                                          | I think I will try to do a video about my day back from Sheffield, if I manage because I'm not the tech type. We'll see.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| B__                                            | Mm its pretty easy to push a button XD                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 16/02/2013 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

Also my other objectives were to put a spotlight on my identity as a learner, because that brought me closer to their actual situation as learners, and to convey the message that where there is a will there is a way and perseverance is the secret. The learners appreciated this and after my presentation they were full of enthusiasm and eager to start their projects.



The learners' projects revealed so much of them. They not only exposed their interests but also their outlook on life and their positionality with regards to their future and important values such as family and religion.

K\_\_ presented a PowerPoint with a selection of photographs, scans of her own work and pictures which revealed her interests, important people in her life, likes and dislikes. She spoke about each and made it very clear that relationships at all levels (family and friends) are so important to her. She only used single words to consolidate her visual prompts and put across a clearer message.



J\_\_ and Sh\_\_ made an oral presentation about how they spend their days out of college. These were closely linked to their vocational trade and both focused on cars. J\_\_'s was about panel beating and spraying, and described the whole process while Sh\_\_ spoke about modifying cars for drifting. In both cases their passion was not only tied to the job per se but it had family links which gave it

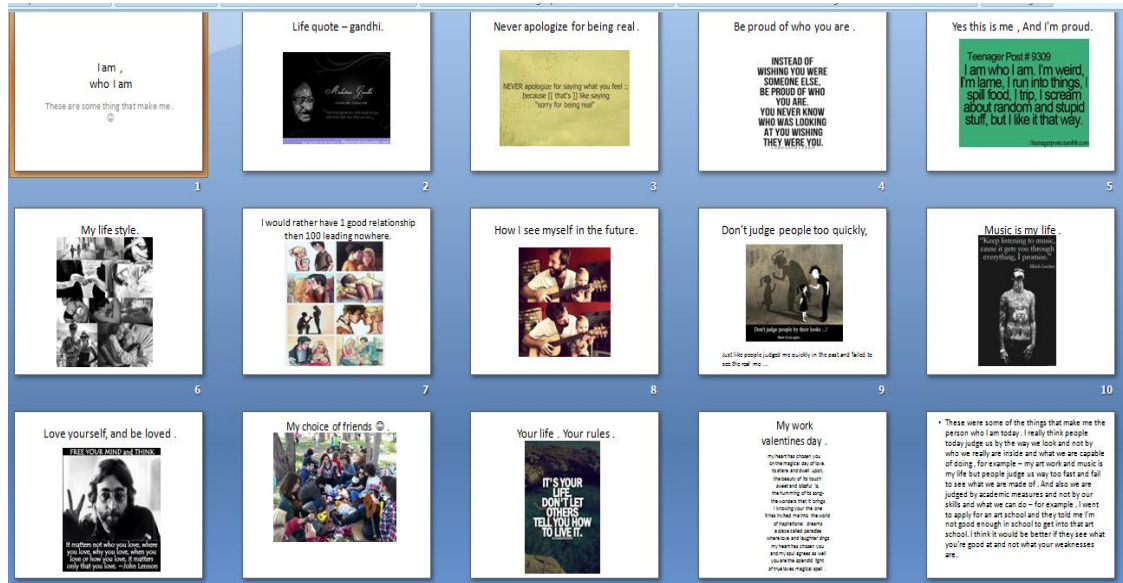
more weight. “At about 7 I had started to go with iz-Ziffa” (J\_\_ oral presentation, translation 12/06/2013), his uncle’s panel beating garage, he grew up in that world. His presentation was in Maltese and pictures that he had taken in the workshop were accompanied by short explanations of the process. As he did his presentation, pride was evident in his voice.



Sh\_\_’s presentation was all oral. He explained what drifting was and the rules of the competition. He explained that his work with his brothers in the engineering workshop carried with it a lot of responsibility because the safety of the drivers was in their hands. He also spoke about the confidentiality that they were bound with because they offered their services to different teams. He was very proud of his work and spoke with a lot of passion as he ventured to give an explanation about the alterations that are made to engines, which all the other learners followed with awe.

B\_\_ also decided to do a PowerPoint presentation built with posters, slogans and images he found on the web. In each case, he personalised the chosen image by adding a caption with his thought making it relevant to him. As I viewed and listened to what he had to say I could feel the weave of the themes and issues we had discussed, identities, relationships, family and future. He did

not hold back from stating his positionality about issues that at his age are often ridiculed such as “I would rather have 1 good relationship than 100 leading nowhere”.



He then concluded with the lyrics of a song he was writing in class and a very strong final statement about judgements and in particular the judgements made by the education system.

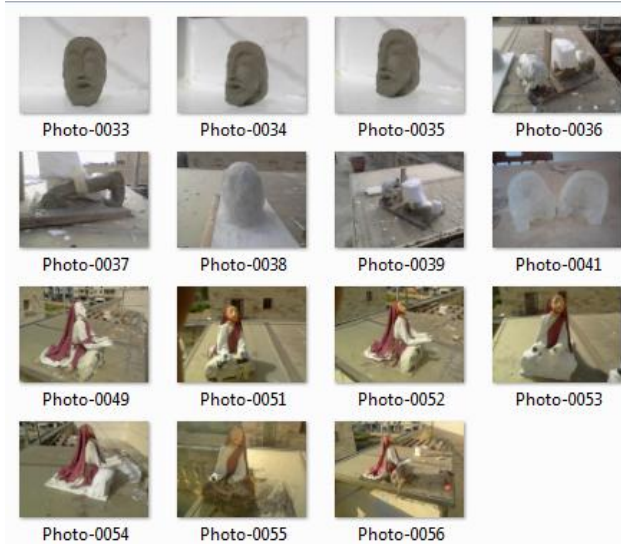
**My work Valentine’s Day**

my heart has chosen you  
on the magical day of love.  
to share and dwell upon,  
the beauty of its touch  
sweet and blissful is,  
the humming of its song-  
the wonders that it brings  
I knowing your the one  
it has invited me into the world  
of inspirational dreams  
a place called paradise  
where love and laughter sings  
my heart has chosen you  
and my soul agrees as well  
you are the splendid light  
of true loves magical spell . B\_\_ slide 14

These were some of the things  
that make me the person who I  
am today. I really think people  
today judge us by the way we  
look and not by who we really  
are inside and what we are  
capable of doing...

B\_\_ slide 15

M\_\_ had a very original and courageous presentation. He presented a religious statue he had done and spoke about the whole process of doing it, documenting each step with pictures and explaining each step to the tiniest detail.



I had never done one before.... I tried to do a statue related to Good Friday so I did Jesus in the Olive Garden. [ ]

It reflects who M\_\_ is [ ] it is my hobby and I like manual work... and that particular statue... because Good Friday was approaching.

First I did a face with clay [ ] I have spent two weeks working on it. I used to place the pieces in the sun to get them to dry slowly [ ] I tried to find cloth with colours which reflected the particular moment (lent) [ ].

M\_\_ presentation, translation  
12/06/2013

His choice revealed M\_\_'s brave nature because he had never done a statue before and also because teenagers who speak about religion are often ridiculed. "I never told them that I attended MUSEUM... because it is kind of silly you know, I used to feel silly" (J\_\_ presenting his timeline, translation (29/04/2013), but M\_\_ didn't and he found the strength to be who he really was.

In a similar way, G\_\_ who did an oral presentation spoke about his new part-time job and how this gave him more independence. For the first time G\_\_, who was part of a large family, could buy his own things and this was helping him to build confidence. He immediately bought a mobile phone and a small tablet so he started to feel at par with his friends:



*I have never worked like this, I am making new friends, and it is also a new experience and I am enjoying myself.*

*I buy most of the things... almost. [ ] My mother is now letting me pay what I buy....*

G\_\_ presentation, translation 12/06/2013

#### **5.418. Proud to be me...**

Also, that year I decided to introduce a Maltese book which speaks about a group of teenagers in college. I never imposed the reading during the sessions but surprisingly enough after the first week the learners started to volunteer to do the reading. While working on different identities, interests and personalities I asked the learners to identify which of the characters was most similar to them and write a reason for their choice.

*“Thomas because he is independent and is not influenced by the others around him.”*

M\_\_ translation of written work 30/11/2012

*“Cheryl because I lead a simple life, there is an age gap between my brother and me...we fight all the time. Sometimes I feel lonely”*

B\_\_'s own words 30/11/2012

Then we discussed our choices and the conversations turned to memories and how everyday experiences affect us. After the discussion we all had to reflect on important events, positive and negative, in our life. B\_\_ who was the most enthusiastic about Facebook, spoke about how timelines were becoming significantly important on the social network. He had seen several examples of timelines on YouTube as well, and he was particularly struck by one which was drawn by YouTuber Louis Cole (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vHaENsYR8g>), who determined to do what mostly gave him satisfaction in life and make a better life for himself and others, managed to become a successful YouTube artist. So we all went online and B\_\_ showed us what he was talking about. As a result we all agreed to draw individual

timelines, starting from the earliest memory we could remember and building up to the present, indicating the most important events that had happened in our lives.

Different participants chose different ways of representing their lifetimes in a timeline and this in itself carried meaning and was discussed when they presented their timelines to the rest of the group. M\_\_ commented that he used drawings to make his timeline more interesting and because he loves drawing, while K\_\_ pointed out that she “made it with pictures to get you more into my story” (translation). She wanted the rest of us to share her experiences. When the timelines were complete each member of the classroom presented his timeline explaining to the rest of the class how the particular events impacted our lives. I was the first to start. I had drafted my timeline on a sheet of paper and then, I drew my timeline on the board (Fig.7) and shared it with my learners discussing the different events and why they were important to me. They asked questions and I was open to answer. This sharing of experiences gave us another opportunity to consolidate our group relations.

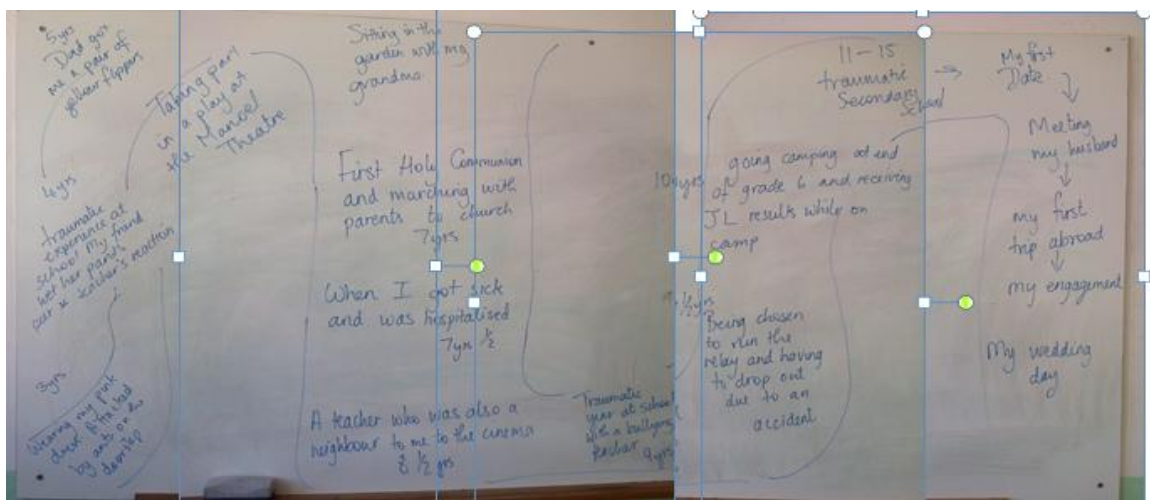


Fig.7: My timeline on the board



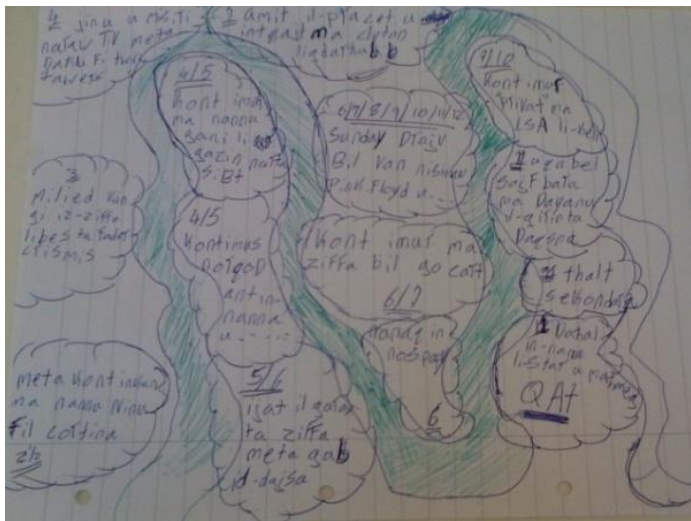


Fig.8: J\_\_'s timeline



Fig.9: J\_\_ at work on his timeline

Most of us represented their timeline through a wavy line with short points or phrases and some of us included illustrations or pictures. Some of us wrote their thoughts in English while others preferred to write in Maltese. Timelines revealed significant themes that highlight the family, social, religious and cultural influences in the lives of all the participants and most importantly they revealed that my learners led a full and very interesting life outside the college.

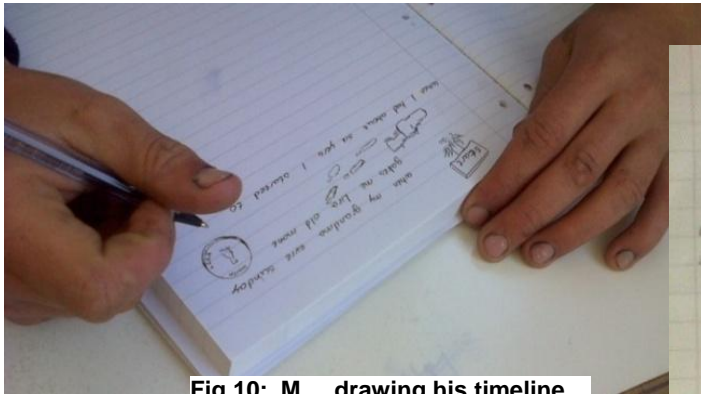


Fig.10: M\_\_ drawing his timeline



Fig.11: M\_\_'s timeline

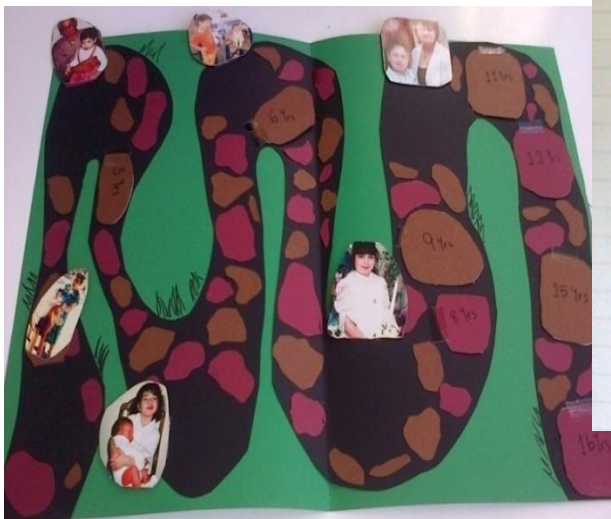


Fig.12: K\_\_'s timeline

*“At age 6 I had my lucky birthday ... I received my first art set ... It had a big file full of markers, colours, paint...”*

*at age 8 ... they had given me a keyboard...piano... The first instrument I had ... Always in my room trying to play.”*

B\_\_ timeline presentation, translation 16/04/2013

*“At age 13 and 14 I couldn’t remember anything, neither my mum could, because mum got herself involved in this project, because she doesn’t like us to mess with her photos especially my brother who often has dirty hands. My mum loves photos and we have a huge wardrobe full of photographs.*

*I have been to Portugal, Spain, twice in Tunisia, twice in Greece, and many times in Italy because we often go there, Cyprus, London and Switzerland....*

*At age seven I received my first Holy Communion and mum organised a big party.*

*At age 10 my Confirmation and my godmother was my aunty.*

*There was this camp for adventurous art learners ... it was in the forest there were a lot of things one could draw, rocks, leaves of all kinds of trees...”*

K\_\_ timeline presentation, translation 30/04/2013

*“I remember when the towers had been attacked. My parents were watching them [on TV]. I was still young but I remember I was with my father.*

*I used to go to the Malta Labour Party club with my grandfather... and have a chat with people there.*

*then I received my First Holy Communion.*

*My grandfather died when I was 14, but it’s better if I skip that part. [emotional]*

*I used to go to MUSEUM... and then I also started to attend scouts and took Manuel with me ... we used to go together. And then I had started to work ... then I stopped (MUSEUM). Sometimes I wish I had stayed...”*

J\_\_ timeline presentation, translation 23/04/2013

*“When at the age of about 5 I started to dress up and participate in the Good Friday Procession. []*

*When I went for a holiday in Australia, as a present for My First Holy Communion.*

*When I started to make cribs.*

*My life is not finished, there is the future.”*

M\_\_ timeline presentation, translation 29/04/2013

Embedded in the learners' timelines are pieces of their habitus. The closely knit family relations between the immediate family and that extend to cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents, which is so typical in Malta. The attendance to Catechism lessons (MUSEUM) from a very early age which although religious in practice, in reality it is intertwined with the cultural and the social because it is a custom as much as it is spiritual. This religious/cultural/social web marks all Maltese citizens at regular intervals, in baptism soon after birth, at age seven with the First Holy communion and at age thirteen with the Confirmation; the religious calendar that marks feasts and public holidays on the island which are also reflected in school; the strong political affiliation with either one of the two major political parties in an island which has an over 90% voter turn-out in the general elections; travelling abroad, which highlights Malta's position in the Mediterranean. The latter emphasises the fact that in Malta going abroad is a feat because one has to travel by plane or boat and not everyone can afford that. This explains the need to document everything with pictures and photos so precious that the mother keeps them safely stored away and she is the one to handle them and make copies to make sure that they are safely guarded. Also, visiting Australia where so many Maltese had emigrated in the 50s and 60s and where many families still have relatives that are so hard to visit. The passion for manual jobs, welding and the mechanical trades because Malta has always been renowned for its people's tradesman skills with regards to ship building and repair; manual trades which have, in the past thirty years, come to be associated with academic failure thus negatively labelling all those who are interested in that route.

## 5.5. Newly formed identities and perceptions of self... How does the level 1 learning community at IBCE make sense of their past in the present, in an attempt to imagine better futures?

### 5.51. Transformation

The work about past experiences, whether positive or negative, helped us all to take stock of our life and move on. We all felt transformed and empowered and the learners in particular were looking ahead in a positive way:

*“Now I am 16 and I am living the moment and trying to enjoy myself while I am still young... I can say that I am a musician and an artist, kind of, works in progress and proud to be me.”*

B\_\_ timeline presentation, translation 16/04/2013

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__                                            | Hmm trying to decide miss... me and 2 others are planning for this what do you think?<br>(Posted a link to Tech MUSIC SCHOOL London)              |
| Nadia                                          | If it is something that you want look into it well. Why don't you send for a prospectus?                                                          |
| B__                                            | We did already. There are some amazing lessons and the idea of school that I have been talking out with you in class...it basicly my dream school |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 26/02/2013 |                                                                                                                                                   |
| B__                                            | MISSSS I GOT THE JOB!!! 😊                                                                                                                         |
| Seen by everyone                               |                                                                                                                                                   |
| Nadia                                          | All the staff at LSU is cheering for you!!! I am very proud of you!                                                                               |
| B__                                            | 😊 thank you                                                                                                                                       |
| B__                                            | You are now talking with the new barman at hard rock caffee 😊                                                                                     |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 5/06/2013  |                                                                                                                                                   |

Nadia: *How do you imagine K\_\_\_ 5 years from now?*

K\_\_\_: *I'd either continue to study or I wish to open my own restoration workshop ... or go abroad and practise restoration there... I'm not discouraged to continue studying.*

Nadia: *Is there a difference in the way you are looking at yourself now when compared to how you felt at the beginning of the year?*

K\_\_\_: *Yes... at first my road seemed to be a dead end. I did not know what I wanted to do. I had not decided what I wanted yet. Now it is all clear, I know what I want, I know where my road is going.*

Nadia: *Did you believe this, two years ago?*

K: *I did not believe it much. ... But now I know what is involved, I know what to expect.*

Interview, translation 21/05/2013

By the end of the year the learners believed in themselves more and were more proactive. They passed all their assignments and they were all decided to apply for level 2 the following year and the courses they were going to take. They acknowledged that the work we did as part of the research study has helped them to move on, to feel that they can act and to feel that they did have a voice.

Nadia: *I have involved you in this study and I have introduced you as active participants, that means we are partners in this study. How much do you feel that this is true? And the most important thing do you think that you are taking anything out of this?*

G\_\_\_: *I feel that I am because you are listening to everyone; everyone's opinion... kind of everyone is sharing his life experience.*

Nadia: *Do you feel that this has given you more strength as a person? The fact that you have this opportunity to make your voice heard?*

G\_\_\_: *Yes.*

*B\_\_*: Yes, a lot, because [ ], if you change something now, [ ] when you have your own children, they will not go through the same things we went through. So maybe it will not affect us directly but it will change the future.

*J\_\_*: Kind of I have shared my life and you have learned what I had been through and so on... and to kind of ... stop doing the mistake that the only way to show whether you are clever or not, you have to do an exam, you are forced to do like 'o' levels or the Junior Lyceum and so on.... and if you fail they consider you as stupid or garbage..... This was an opportunity for me to sound my voice.

*Nadia*: Do you regret the fact that at the beginning of the year you have accepted to take part in the research?

*J\_\_*: No... on the contrary

*G\_\_*: Not at all.

*Nadia*: Do you think that as a teacher it has helped me to get to know you better and that it affected how I relate with you?

*G\_\_*: Yes.

*B\_\_*: Ooohhhh [meaning a lot]

*Nadia*: Do you think that it is important that students and teachers share their experiences to get to know each other better and form a group?

*J\_\_*: Yes a lot, because you... if it was like secondary, the teacher did not know what we had been through... like we did with you.... and we did not know what the teacher had been through and so it's like... the teacher is like... she's behind a glass wall and we are behind another glass wall and we don't know what is going on.

*G\_\_*: Yes and I... my fear is... in fact... next year I know that it would be different

Focus Group, translation 26/02/2013

Over the summer holidays learners kept in touch. They agreed to keep the space alive by posting their whereabouts regularly. This helped us all to keep our reciprocal support going. It was a good way to stay informed about applications and about the study and every now and then we gave each other the encouragement necessary to move on:

|                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__                                                                      | Lets try to do something here. Lets try to everyday post a paragraph or a sentence of what we did that day. Sort of like an online diary agree                                                                                                                                      |
| Seen by everyone <span style="float: right;">view 9 more comments</span> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| G__                                                                      | I wish you all a nice summer and let's hope we meet a couple of times this summer, people. (translation)                                                                                                                                                                            |
| J__                                                                      | Yes sure (translation)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Nadia                                                                    | Wow boys, that is lovely. What a long and busy day you all had!!! Well done to you too Gabriel and I do not mind your long writing, on the contrary I enjoyed it!!! Keep it up boys it is wonderful to keep in touch in this way! And this is all fantastic literacy practice!!! :P |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 21/06/2013                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                                               |                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__                                           | Miss when will we know if we got into mcast or not and when will the exems be?                                                 |
| Seen by everyone                              |                                                                                                                                |
| Nadia                                         | You are progressing students so your admission should not be a problem!!! So probably by mid September you should be informed. |
| B__                                           | ill that late mm ok and when will the exems be                                                                                 |
| B__                                           | The ones we normally have in august?                                                                                           |
| Nadia                                         | As far as I know progressing students do not have to do the exams                                                              |
| B__                                           | I wasn't told anything I'm just curios :P                                                                                      |
| J__                                           | Next wejik i think tai ask my frend                                                                                            |
| Nadia                                         | Exams are next week but I don't think they are for you J__ have you checked?                                                   |
| J__                                           | No they didnt telme noting                                                                                                     |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 4/08/2013 |                                                                                                                                |

|                  |                                                                    |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__              | Nadia Vassallo is this page dead                                   |
| Seen by everyone |                                                                    |
| Nadia            | Hello guys no this page is not dead but I was away for a couple of |



|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                | days. I have just received feedback from my tutor and I am scared stiff I can't make myself read!!! Please pray for me!!!                                                                                                                                      |
| B__                                            | Miss I honestly thing that the feedback is all good considering our story and all the work we did as a team ☺                                                                                                                                                  |
| B__                                            | Nadia Vassallo well dont keep us waiting, what did she say?                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 30/08/2013 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Nadia                                          | Well this summer I have written 15000 words on the methodology chapter, the interviews, life histories, timelines, projects, focus group etc. Feedback was very positive but she said I have to cut down on words. I have spent the past 24 hrs working on it. |
| Nadia                                          | Sorry for not answering so often lately but I have been really working hard on my writing and I had all distractions switched off ☺                                                                                                                            |
| B__                                            | Its ok i don't blame you at all                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 31/08/2013 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                                                |                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__                                            | After Monday's graduation we'll meet our Miss about the study we were doing. (translation) |
| J__                                            | OK I am going to be marked present all day. (translation)                                  |
| B__                                            | HaHa ok, we are going to be excused from school. (translation)                             |
| G__                                            | OK                                                                                         |
| Nadia                                          | You make me really happy boys, I am so proud of you.                                       |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 20/02/2014 |                                                                                            |

Still today contact between us continues to be constant and that in itself is a proof of the friendship that has developed, a friendship that goes beyond the study and we keep in touch even though some of the learners have moved to different institutes. The space we have created continues to hold our bond and although the school experience is now different because we are no longer together, within that space we still continue to discuss about education and other social issues.

|                                                |                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B__                                            | Nadia Vassallo maths re-sit nailed it! ☺                                                                                                  |
| Seen by everyone                               |                                                                                                                                           |
| Nadia                                          | Well done ☺                                                                                                                               |
| J__                                            | Well done B__ I do not know yet, still waiting for mine                                                                                   |
| G__                                            | Well done B__ stay focused during lessons because we still have another 4 maths exams and if you miss one it would be enough to fail you. |
| Facebook conversation, actual words 27/02/2014 |                                                                                                                                           |

## 5.6. Conclusion

The analysis and findings described above, through the voices of the learners, purposefully left as clean as possible from literature, reveal the journey undertaken by me together with a group of Lv1 learners as we shared our life experiences as well as the teaching and learning experiences while following the Lv1 embedded programme in the institute of Building and Construction Engineering. The classroom lived experiences were not as linear as it might appear above, but for ease of writing and reading, and with agreement with the learners, I have marked the college year with four milestones, which I have presented in four sections:

1. Getting to know each other and starting to build the classroom community.
2. Working on our individual positionality and different identities.
3. Changing the classroom practice to enhance the learners' engagement.
4. Newly formed identities and perceptions of self.

The four sections, also answer the set research questions by highlighting the learners' family backgrounds and everyday literacy practices; the reasons for their disengagement from schooling and how this has affected their school identity and perception of selves; the change in classroom pedagogy and how this impacted the learners; and the positionality of the learners and the newly acquired identity at the end of the study.

The first two sections focus mainly on getting to know ourselves and each other through reflections and sharing of personal experiences inside and outside

school and reveal a lot about the learners' disengagement from school. The main theme that emerges from these two sections was mainly the negative school experiences lived by all the learners in the group mostly caused by a 'deficit' approach of schooling highlighting the failures of their academic endeavours; the effects of unsympathetic teachers; and the development of negative learner identities and perceptions of self.

The last two sections of the analysis and findings focused more on the actions taken in the classroom to change those negative identities and the themes that emerged most strongly were the importance of building a sense of community, changing the pedagogy to build on the learners' strengths and the construction of a third space.

Hence, two sets of major themes emerged, those linked to the learners' disengagement and those linked to their engagement (table 2).

| Table 2: Major Themes                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Disengagement                                                                                                                                     | Engagement                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. a negative school experience</li> <li>2. negative learner identities and perceptions of self</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. developing a sense of community by adopting a new pedagogy: critical literacy, translanguaging and funds of knowledge</li> <li>4. creating a third space.</li> </ol> |

In chp.4 I have already taken a look at what the literature has to say about these themes because I needed that understanding to inform my practice in the classroom as the research study was still in progress. However in the next chapter I return to the literature to relate it to the findings of this particular study with its particular context.

## Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

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*“Children appropriate and reproduce the authoritative voices of education, popular culture and parents in the course of their induction into social practices. At the same time, they also express varying degrees of commitment to these voices and orchestrate their own and other people’s voices within accounts and anecdotes, making voice appropriation an uneven, accumulative process shot through with the dynamics of personal and peer-group experience.”*

*Maybin, 2013, p.383*

## 6.1. Introduction

A common thread throughout the study is the transformation that the learners and I undergo as we journey through the research process. This transformation is highlighted by various themes as disclosed in the previous chapter but in the section that follows I discuss, in the light of the literature, four main themes that feature strongly in the study namely:

1. the negative school experience
2. negative learner identities and perceptions of self
3. the importance of building the classroom community by adopting a new pedagogy of critical literacy, translanguaging and funds of knowledge
4. the construction of a third space

This discussion serves to position the study within the literature and to inform recommendations that I will put forward to my college as a result of this study.

## 6.2. A negative school experience

From the data collected in this classroom ethnography, as revealed in chap.4, it transpires that the Lv1 learners in this study came from stable working class families who valued education and did everything in their power to try and give their children a sound education. Such help was not only given in the form of encouragement but also in investments of “time, in help of all kinds, and [ ] money”(Bourdieu, 1998, p.19) which included buying books, sitting with their children to do their homework, sending children for private lessons and employing home tutors for further study support. Parents believed that by investing in education they were securing a better future for their children. They trusted the education system, which in Malta continues to position itself within a discourse of ‘deficits’ thus holding a vision of literacy as “autonomous” (Street, 2011, p.581), limited to one particular way of doing things mainly, a set of

independent skills which can be measured through standardised tests. Since tests are standardised it is easier to classify individuals thus blaming those who find it difficult to fit in as “lacking it” (ibid). From an earlier stage, right from Grade one, the dominant forms of literacy experienced by learners in school were reading and writing. These were causes of difficulties for the learners because as evidenced in the data, outside school the learners were used to literacy practices such as going to the club and “have a chat with people there” (J\_\_ timeline 23/04/2013) or “go out on the street and play with the neighbours’ kids” (M\_\_ life history), in which speaking and listening in their home language (Maltese) prevailed. Once in school this changed completely and classroom practices were mainly reading and writing and English was the language used in most subjects. As revealed by S\_\_, lessons were traditional and from an early age learners were expected to copy from the board and spend a lot of time writing whilst before they used to enjoy “running around in the fields” or “at the swings”; and if students did not conform or were observed to be falling behind or showing behaviours discrepant to what their peers were able to do, parents were called by schools and informed that their children had something wrong. So rather than celebrating differences in language use and literacy practices as “creative resources that students can draw on” (Janks, 2000, p.176), from an early age, classrooms turned into spaces of oppression where the learners were singled out and labelled according to results obtained on tests and exams.

In preparation of the end of primary Junior Lyceum exam, the Lv1 learners together with all the other students were stratified into the various groups (A, B, C) according to their abilities, “At school there was a clique of parents who had their children in the A class... A and B classes. The students who were in class C were not considered much” (B\_\_’s mum 18/03/2013). So even at the early stage of primary, students were already being labelled according to their performance on tests. Parents’ faith in the system and in teachers was total to an extent that they believed what teachers said about their children’s behaviours and ‘deficits’ and followed the directives given by schools to try and

find the 'fault' in their children when these were classified as having difficulties, "the headmistress [ ] wanted papers (psychological reports) and papers were not always at your disposal straight away, I used to take her privately (psychologists outside the free National Health Service) to try and speed up the process" (K\_\_'s mum interview 27/3/2013). This usually entailed having the children undergo various tests and when eventually that 'fault' was established, the label of learning difficulty assigned, and the schools failed to offer adequate support, parents as well as learners often came to believe what the system was saying, that is, that the deficit was in the learners. This is reflected in what parents say in the interviews, "for these children it is a blessing that there is MCAST". The term "these children", which indicates a distinction between "these" who are not doing well and the "others" who do well, is used frequently by both parents in their interviews. Their trust was such that they believed that their children's lack of success was the result of the children's deficits thus "mothers reaffirm failure when they say of their sons" (Grenfell, 2012, p.57) "I wouldn't say that he is that stupid but [ ] not all the students are the same" (B\_\_'s mum interview 18/03/2013).

Within their families learners were surrounded by strong family ties and values, and as a result they valued relationships, trust and respect. Reflecting the students in Evans (1993), in their early years my learners were used to being appreciated and encouraged by their families but lived much "less positive experiences in a school context" (p.330). When, at school, their reading and writing became causes for teacher and peer bullying, their world crumbled and they shut themselves out by disengaging and giving up. Muldoon and Catts (2012),<sup>32</sup> in a case study of six youths enrolled on a 12-week course intended to

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<sup>32</sup> The study aimed to identify the social capital of participants at the beginning of the course on the 'Get Ready for Work Programme' and to observe whether being on the course causes any changes to their social capital, or any other related effects might occur. The findings on the course reveal that the 12-week course was not enough to secure employment or get the participants into further education and training but it positively affected their emotional wellbeing. The researchers stress and I agree, on the basis of my findings, that to support youths in further education, employment or training, educators must first gain an understanding of each youngster's self-perception to rid them of "self-imposed restrictions on their prospects for further education and employment" (Muldoon and Catts, 2012, p.133).

get them into “employment, further education or training” (p.115) as part of the “Get Ready for Work programme in Scotland”, report that the youngsters experienced anxiety when faced with the formal aspects of the course such as basic skills and multimedia. These youngsters were often observed to refuse to participate but when interviewed they explained that their aloofness was mainly due to “negative self-perceptions” (p.123), resulting from negative past experiences. This resonates with my findings and reflects Bourdieu’s concept of ‘hysteresis’ (Grenfell, 2008) that once the learners experience failure they carry that perception with them into other situations. This perception however may change if educators create “safe spaces” (Muldoon and Catts, 2012, p.123) in which learners feel comfortable enough to express themselves.

Also in another research study, consisting of two case studies investigating the home literacy practices of one Lebanese family and one Chinese family who had migrated to Australia, Markose and Hellsten (2009), show how when parents’ socialization practices outside school, such as that of Aziza, were in conflict with the pedagogical attitudes that were to be expected in the classroom, children like Aziza’s daughter will not experience any ‘safe spaces’ within the classroom and experience constant conflict with their teacher. Similarly the Lv1 learners and their families felt powerless in a system which hardly ever involved the parents and which blamed learners, parents and family background for the inability to ‘fit in’. Grenfell and James (1998) maintain that the teachers’ perception of what is the ‘norm’ creates a particular classroom Discourse. According to Gee (1990, p.142) this ‘Discourse’ is a sort of ‘identity kit’ which incorporates a particular dress code as well as a distinct way of acting, talking and often writing that position the individual in a “particular social role that others will recognize.”

Lv1 learners in this study describe an everyday life rich with interests where literacy practices involve both Maltese and English. However these practices were not acknowledged by the compulsory schools they attended because they were mainly vernacular practices occurring mostly within the family, on the job



or with friends on the social network, places where the standard languages were not expected. On the contrary, in school, it was expected that the learners make use of standard languages and the written form dominated thus marginalising a good number of learners (Snell, 2013) especially when half yearly and end of year exams measured the students' achievement in English, Maltese and Mathematics and streamed the learners into separate classes according to their presumed ability. What is worrying is that while streaming was finally abolished from primary schools three years ago, a change in government has led to a proposal for its reintroduction.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the learners' interests were not acknowledged because they were far off from any interests held by their middle class teachers. In our local context of Malta, "80% of secondary school teachers said they were unprepared, 63% of secondary school teachers said they were not in favour of mixed ability classes" (Barry, 2014). These teachers continue to hold on tightly to the traditional print literacy with its perfect grammar, syntax and spelling and written in standard form. Such literacy practices are, according to Janks (2013, p.237), "decontextualised, repetitive and often serve as a demonstration of what skills one has learned" and they serve the belief that children should be classified according to their performance on such skills.

In the meantime many teachers are not aware that through such practices we run the risk of disregarding "the vitality of their literate lives and the needs they will have for their literate and social futures at home, at work, and in their communities" (Lewis and Fabos, 2005, p.498). As pointed out by Hall et al. (2010), through language teachers can, intentionally or unintentionally, project an understanding about possessing a particular identity and the status and

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<sup>33</sup> The Department of Curriculum Management issued a Letter Circular DCM 75/2014 (App.17) which demands that all State primary schools group pupils according to their month of birth from Kindergarten 1 to Year 4. Schools are also to classify and assign to classes, "pupils in Year 5 and 6 according to 'banding', a well-known form of streaming procedure on the basis of their standardized results in Maltese, English and Mathematics" (UOM, faculty of education 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2014, p.1) (<http://3c3dbeaf6f6c49f4b9f4-a655c0f6dcd98e765a68760c407565ae.r86.cf3.rackcdn.com/73b3dec934ab7f4a408f535d2540ce6e3503748383.pdf>).

power it carries with it, making implications about a certain identity, those who have it and those who don't.

Unfortunately the same practices are very much reflected at college where although in some lectures there is a move towards utilising technology (PPTs and interactive whiteboards as well as machinery in the workshops) in the hope of making sessions more appealing, to the disappointment of learners, tasks that follow including assignments and assessments are often still very traditional and demand that learners interpret the practical work through standardised forms such as essays or reports (Satchwell and Ivanic, 2007).

Worse still, in Malta, any lecturers' initiative to make a move towards learners' everyday practices was discouraged following the publishing of the Teachers' code of Ethics (2012) (App.14), which according to its directives, bans the social network from schools, because it is 'unsafe' and can lend itself to inappropriate teacher-student relationships and also because within that space, learners do not follow the appropriate conventions of spelling, grammar and punctuation. This position is a weakness in the current system, which focuses mainly on literacy as a fixed set of skills, because as pointed out by Ivanic et al. (2007), the different "text and screen literacies and multimodal minglings" (p.704) present in the learners' everyday practices cannot be "reduced to a single standard against which all else is measured." If schools continue to propose print literacy as the main medium of instruction drawing "on individualistic psychological frameworks to conceptualise language and literacy proficiency in terms of narrowly defined skills and competencies" (Maybin, 2009, p.70) and, as argued by Merchant (2013) fail to reject the stigma that surrounds new media to start building upon the informal skills of young learners in the classrooms, schools will be failing "the world that pupils inhabit and the future that awaits them" (p.157).

The learners in this study reported how the way their abilities were perceived in the classroom left a mark on how they perceived themselves. Therefore I agree

with Street (2011) that learners ought to be heard because “if they feel that their literacy practices are unequal to the formal literacy practices, – if they have internalised outside views of what is literacy, then outsiders have not just defined ‘literacy’ but also have imposed inequality on them” (p.581). Negative school experiences positioned the learners at a loss, because whatever they had to offer was inappropriate and marked them as underachieving. As a result, oftentimes they preferred to accept the ‘deficit’ label and stay silent rather than be ridiculed by teachers and peers.

### **6.3. Negative learner identities and perceptions of self**

Indeed the repeated negative experiences the learners experienced throughout the period of time (Lemke, 2002; Wortham, 2008) spent at school had an impact on their identity and after eleven years of schooling they had actually come to believe that they were “incompetent academically” (Muldoon and Catts, 2012, p.122), lacked the abilities necessary to stay in education, lacked the language skills necessary to participate in the language classroom or follow the academic route and that they should learn a trade just enough to get a job. The result of this is their total disengagement and oftentimes the adoption of disruptive attitudes, which continued to position them in a particular negative light, in a similar way to the youths in Moje’s (2000) study of “gangsta literacy”, and to blame them for their own failure. However this “hysteresis” (Grenfell, 2008), resulting from a discrepancy between the learners’ and the teachers’ habitus which was further reinforced by the field of education, could be turned around if the field (the classroom) and the teacher adapt to the needs of the learners. As contended by Zammit (2011), Bartlett (2005; 2007) and Moje (2000) that means that before any learning could actually take place, the learners, individually and as a classroom community, needed to regain self-confidence. In their data the Lv1 learners described many negative incidents for which teachers were responsible. This is very much in line with the study by Brown et al. (2014), in which adolescents in Shepherd Middle School (SMS),

“noted that motivating comments, such as “you can do it” or “keep up the good work,” were a rarity in their former school context” but they acknowledged that in SMS, when this changed and they found teachers who encouraged them, their self-confidence and esteem were raised. The same finding emerged in a study Knesting-Lund (2008) conducted with a group of high school learners at-risk for dropping out. The learners identified having caring teachers as one of the major factors which helped them to persist in school. Hence, positive teacher-student relationships helped them to improve their academic performance and develop positive academic identities.

#### **6.4. Building the classroom community through a pedagogy of critical literacy, translanguaging, funds of knowledge**

Throughout this classroom ethnography, a change in practice that embraced the learners’ strengths, in language practices and funds of knowledge, did indeed reveal different learners. By using “translanguaging” (Creese et al., 2010) as a language approach, in classroom as well as embedded workshop activities, learners were able to use their home language to deal with particular issues and themes and then build enough confidence to increase their production in the foreign language as they dealt with the same issues and themes. Hence in line with Li Wei (2013, p.4) the learners could make use of their “subjectivities” to make sense of new concepts in language use and education which served to empower them, give them voice and help them grow not only as learners but also as individuals who could critically engage with the social structures that surrounded them. Creese and Blackledge (2011) contend the importance of placing the learner at the centre of the interactions and not the language because language ought not be viewed as “unitary or fixed”(p.1206) but it should include the possibility of using “two ‘languages’ in a single word (e.g. ‘junglema’); the movement between different ‘languages’ in moving from formal to informal (or public to private) talk, as well as the

appropriation of voices from the worlds of multimedia and digital communication” (ibid.). Garcia and Sylvan (2011) claim, and I agree on the basis of my study, that through “plurilingual”<sup>34</sup> (p.391) instruction, pedagogy is built around the individual experiences of the learners and it allows the learners and the teacher to learn from each other in a meaningful dialogic – two way process. The aim of this approach is to help learners become aware of their language practices as they are engaged in their own learning and help them adjust to the “pluralities of a multilingual classroom and society” (ibid. p.398).

This approach of translanguaging was significantly important, embedded in a stance of critical literacy at the centre of the learners’ transformation. Critical literacy (Fairclough, 2010) made it possible for learners to reflect deeply on their identity as they reflected on their background, their past experiences and criticised The Education Act (1988) and the College Mission Statement. In this process they began to reflect on particular practices in the system that were putting obstacles in their way and hindering their education. It created a shift in the learners’ understanding (Janks, 2010) and power structures in the classroom placing the learners in a proactive position where they could propose changes that could make a difference in their learning. This newly experienced empowerment enabled the learners to “to *read* both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources” (Janks, 2013, p.225). Once they did this they started to see a possible change in their identity as learners and consider options for their future.

When a teacher-student relationship of trust was established and learners had started to reconsider their identities as learners, their engagement was

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<sup>34</sup> “The plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact. In different situations, a person can call flexibly upon different parts of this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular interlocutor” (Council of Europe, 2001).

enhanced and therefore a further change in practice ensured that their newly found interest in college work is maintained. This was mainly achieved through an acknowledgement of their funds of knowledge hence the learners felt that they had much to offer. They were put in a position to take control of their learning and suggest topics and issues for discussion; to build a community of practice where students worked and supported one another; and to acknowledge their abilities which eventually led to a change in their perception of self and a move towards aiming for a better future. Therefore throughout the college year, as the learners and I transformed our teaching and learning experiences, we also transformed our positionality and realised, like 'Lee' in Leander and Boldt (2013), that while the structures around us set out to give us labels and position us within particular identities, it is up to us to accept or fight those labels. We are not passive victims and we can fight injustices and control what happens around us. We have a voice and it is up to us to reveal who we really are.

One way of putting this concretely into practice was in the learners' individual projects through which they were meant to show who they really were. These were multimodal in nature and reflected their identities. The presentation of their projects helped the learners to deal with previous negative experiences and to establish themselves and their identities in a new positive light, which in turn provided "a platform from which students can access literate identities" (Pahl and Rowsell, 2011, p.136). This was possible because within this new space, the learners could make their private texts and artefacts public by bringing them into the classroom and presenting them as part of their college work.

## **6.5. The creation of a Third Space**

My pedagogical approach to take on the learners' funds of knowledge also entailed my acceptance that an important practice in the learners' everyday life was their use of Facebook. My acceptance of setting up a closed group was very important not only to shift some control onto the learners who decided what to post and what to discuss but also in the setting up of a "third space" (Moje et al., 2004) which started in the critical literacy classroom but spread out to our closed Facebook group. The extension of the classroom onto the social network helped in achieving our new positionality because it created a bridge between school, home and social lives. It has put down the boundaries of space, and language use was no longer associated with the negative experiences of reading and writing in the secondary classroom or the forced activity prescribed by the traditional language teacher but became the medium which enabled us to get to know one another; a tool for empowerment as we discussed posts or ideas started in the classroom; and the means by which we could connect with each other when we were not physically close together. All this was important to make us feel more at ease to discuss themes and issues emerging in the different spaces. Most importantly this new space facilitated the construction of a classroom community beyond the classroom which is built on friendship and trust where labels were put down; individuals are appreciated for their strengths and supported to overcome any weaknesses or inhibitions they might have.

## **6.6. Conclusion**

What resulted from this study is very much in accord with the findings by Maybin (2007) that 'schooled' and 'vernacular' are not necessarily the extreme ends on a literacy spectrum but can in reality cohabit peacefully and be used to enhance the learning experience. What educators must keep in mind is that the

learners' "imagination, emotional and moral engagement, critique, humour and fun are all important aspects" (Maybin, 2013, p.66) of their reaction to texts. However these do not feature in our current assessment regimes because they cannot easily be measured. This means that in classroom practices, in the run of teaching towards assignments and tests, educators run the risk of disseminating a "reductive, impoverished form of reading which fails to match up to learners' natural propensity and aptitude for collaborative, creative and rewarding readings of many different kinds of texts" (ibid.) thus leading to unacknowledged learners' funds of knowledge, unfair ascription of deficits and eventual disengagement. However, overcoming this is possible but it depends on the "the teaching style and classroom ethos" (Maybin, 2007, p.527), the choices made with regards to literacy activities brought into the classroom and the naturalization of vernacular everyday practices.



# Chapter 7: The Way Forward

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Don't judge people too quickly,



Just like people judged me quickly in the past and failed to see the real me ...

B\_\_'s slide 9 in project presentation

*"I am continually reminded of young people's strategic uses of other forms of representation as they navigate urban areas with ease and yet appear to struggle with formal print texts in school [ ] Why is there such a disparity in what we observe youth doing in ethnographic studies with literacy outside school, as they engage with particular kinds of texts, and what we observe them doing in formal, standardized, constrained literacy activities?"*

*Moje, 2002, p.220*

## Vignette

In the past year and half, of my study so many changes took place with regards to my role at the college. I have been appointed Key Skills leader for Maltese Level 1 and Level 2 on the three year ESF 3.102 project mentioned in chapter 1 p.11, where I have the role to monitor how Maltese could be embedded in the vocational programme. I am currently serving a two year contract (2014-2016) as Foundation Programmes Co-ordinator which gives me a voice in discussions concerning the running of Level1 and Level2 (curriculum, syllabi, assessment, induction, pastoral care, attendance, parental involvement) and access to particular committees such as the Inclusion Committee. Since my new roles were taken up while the study was underway, I was well in touch with what the learners were saying and I made it a point to sound their voices in these fora. In doing so I was not only responding in a qualitative way (by directly listening to the learners) to indicators<sup>35</sup> 3, 4, 8 and 10 of the “European Quality Assurance Reference Framework” in particular the “quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review of VET” (Allulli, 2012) but also living up to the main aim of the study which is making the learners’ voices heard even at levels of administration which the learners have no way of accessing.

*Personal reflection end of the study April 2014*

In this study I have conducted classroom ethnography with a group of seven adolescent learners on the Level 1 Introductory Programme at the institute of Building and Construction Engineering within the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology. The aim of this study was to give voice to the learners and hear from them what their backgrounds were; what caused their disengagement from mainstream compulsory education; what interests and literacy practices

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<sup>35</sup> A set of indicators were developed as a reference instrument to help the promotion and improvement of VET systems in Member States. This indicators intended to check: “1. Relevance of quality assurance systems for VET providers; 2. Investment in training of teachers and trainers; 3. Participation rate in VET programmes; 4. Completion rate in VET programmes; 5. Placement rate in VET programmes; 6. Utilisation of acquired skills at the workplace; 7. Unemployment rate; 8. Prevalence of vulnerable groups; 9. Mechanisms to identify training needs in the labour market; 10. Schemes used to promote better access to VET” (Allulli, 2012)

they held out of college; and to discover what pedagogical practices fitted them best thus enhancing their motivation and participation.

## 7.1. Overall Findings

The overall findings indicate that:

1. The learners came from working class families who valued education and invested in it because they considered it a means to improve their children's chances for the future.
2. At school the learners experienced a discrepancy between their "habitus" (upbringing, language use, behaviour) and the "field" of education (what was expected of them in the classroom).
3. Due to their lack of fitting in, within the classroom, learners were attributed deficits and labelled with forms of learning/behaviour difficulties.
4. Lack of support and empathy from teachers led the learners to become victims of teacher and peer bullying.
5. Learning, and learner identities were negatively affected and learners acquired a very low self-esteem.
6. The learners believed that they were unable to learn and were completely disengaged especially from academic subjects such as Maltese, English and Maths.
7. Language was a problem because while they preferred to speak and discuss in their home language (Maltese), spelling in Maltese was harder. On the other hand all notes, text books and assignments were in

English so they found it hard to understand and to present their arguments coherently in English (Standard) so they were often misunderstood and failed.

8. Learners felt more at ease and could express themselves more clearly when a combination of both languages was used (vocational tools in English but arguments and/or description of processes in Maltese). The use of translanguaging played a key role in their involvement in classroom practices.
9. Work on the learners' identities and self-esteem through critical literacy was necessary before any teaching and learning could occur effectively.
10. It was important for the learners to form a cohesive group and build trust in one another before they could share their difficulties and start to tackle some of their inhibitions.
11. The learners lived rich lives outside the college, were members of groups, held part-time jobs and had various interesting hobbies thus their funds of knowledge were high.
12. When these funds of knowledge were acknowledged and used as points of departure in classroom practices the learners had a lot to offer, participated enthusiastically and their motivation improved drastically.
13. Discussing and negotiating modes of assessment with the learners ensured that they were engaged, the learning process was enhanced and they experienced success while still meeting the level descriptors of the MQF (App.2).
14. A positive classroom experience where home, school and social experiences were brought together changed the learners' perception of self. They realised that they have agency in the construction of a better

future and were empowered enough to continue their educational experience and enrolled on Level 2.

So the first eight findings were very much linked to the learners' disengagement, and listening to the learners' stories reveals that it was not their learning difficulties or attention deficits that hindered their education but a system that lacked support; that continued to insist on reading and writing as the main modes of assessment; and unsympathetic teachers who not only failed to adapt their pedagogy to make classrooms more inclusive and promote equity but who became perpetrators of bullying and injustices, convincing the learners that their inability to do well on tests and acquire qualifications was due to their lack of abilities. This is typical of a system that is built around standardised testing and a 'deficit' approach to education which marks learners with labels that they continue to carry with them as they grow older.

Indeed it is very hard to get rid of such labels because learners come to believe and live up to them and because even at MCAST there are many lecturers who prefer to continue to refer to Lv1 learners in terms of weaknesses rather than strengths and who refuse to consider alternative pedagogies and modes of assessment which are not only more just but also more adequate for learners following vocational courses in a vocational college.

This was proven in the other seven findings which reflected the learners' transformation, and engagement in their learning. These findings show that when the learners are valued, supported and encouraged they have much to offer and they surely rise up to lecturers' expectations. Of significant importance, for the Lv1 learners in this study, was the work we did on identities and life histories followed by critical analysis of the education system and MCAST's mission statement. For the first time the learners were put in a position where they could question what they had gone through and consider the possibility that while the fault for their failure existed, it ought not to be posited in them. Another fundamental factor was my (lecturer's) respect, the fact that a power balance was established in the classroom which saw me and

the learners switching roles of teachers and taught in different situations and particular circumstances; and where teaching and learning were a continuous negotiation. Finally and equally important was the pedagogical approach which placed the learners' needs, strengths and interests at the heart of lessons, assignments and assessments. Assignments and assessments were intended to celebrate the learners' competences and not to fail them for their limitations. Assessment became formative and experiences of success made the recognition of limitations part of a process, not a dead end. Limitations became a challenge the learners were ready to face. The classroom was no longer a threatening space but a third space where the spaces they occupied in their everyday life (college, social life and home) came together to enhance their engagement and learning.

All these findings, I feel, are critical for MCAST considering this particular moment in time, when the college is living through so many important changes. A new Principal who is very much open to inclusion and alternative methods of education that enhance the learning experiences of all learners was appointed. At the same time work started on a three year project ESF 3.102, Inclusion for Employment, which is directed towards the development of home-grown embedded/contextualised courses for the Foundation Programmes (Levels 1, 2 and 3). This is in its final stages and will be implemented in October 2014. Alongside the above changes, a revision of syllabi, assessments and grading criteria in the Foundation levels is underway. Also IATs were developed and a new structure to progress from one level to the next was set up. All of these decisions and changes within the college are taken at administration levels and learners have no way of being heard. Thus this study provides an opportunity for MCAST's management to hear the learners' voices, discover what failed them before and what worked positively in this study and take stock of all this in their decisions in the hope of making the Foundation Programmes more engaging for future learners.

Indeed it can be argued that the fact that this classroom ethnography was spread over one scholastic year (although I am still in touch with and receiving

feedback from the learners on the study) is a limitation because there is no way of knowing what the learners will do in the future. Other limitations are that the number of learners participating in the study was limited to seven and the study was carried out in just one institute therefore generalisation of these findings is not a proposition of this study.

However I believe that “triangulation” of data collected through the various methods, as mentioned in chapter 3 (table 1, p.67), including my personal experiences as a student, and a teacher outside and inside MCAST; the voices of the participants/learners who narrated their life experiences on various occasions in so many different ways revealing experiences which were very similar and consistent, and confirmation through parents’ interviews, who had no way of knowing what the learners and I had discussed or where my research study was going at the time of their interviews, is a strong feature of this study which increases validity and reduces bias. To further reduce this bias I consulted the literature which is discussed in chapters 4 and 6 of this thesis. Additional support to the validity of my findings are the facts that all the learners reached the key competences expected at Level 1; they enrolled on Level 2; they continue to keep their communication open and support one another through their Facebook group; only one learner dropped out this year due to an unsympathetic teacher and a curriculum loaded with theoretical and academic stuff at Lv2; college attendance of the rest of the learners at Lv2 is regular and teacher feedback about learners’ commitment to their work as well as assessment results so far are positive; and the learners on this study intend to enrol on Level 3 and continue their studies.

Hence the above findings call for some recommendations (listed below) some of which I have already forwarded to the college (App.20), and a move towards action has already been initiated especially with regards to the involvement of parents and the revision of syllabi, assessments and grading criteria.

## 7.2. Recommendations

1. IATs should not be selective but diagnostic as part of a holistic profile which includes interests and everyday practices of learners. Results should be discussed with learners to highlight strengths and weaknesses and develop a plan of action. This procedure would bring to the fore discrepancies between IAT results and the actual abilities of the learners in everyday life contexts thus avoiding learners being placed on the wrong level on the basis of standardised results, rendering disengagement highly probable.
2. Parents of learners on Foundation Programmes should be included in the education process, so in my new role I reviewed the induction policy to include the parents and made contact straightaway through induction meetings to inform them about the college structures, policies and procedures. I have also established regular contact with parents regarding attendance of learners and any other issues related to their well-being in the college.
3. For the Foundation Programmes to be effectively delivered, constant training for staff is necessary to keep up to date with the latest research studies and practices in the fields of literacy, numeracy and pedagogy in Vocational Education. To secure the engagement and retention of learners MCAST should move away from a 'deficit' approach of 'autonomous literacy skills' (Street, 2004) and towards situated literacy practices (Barton et al., 2000; Gee, 2004; Tett et al., 2006) and start drawing on the learners' interests and funds of knowledge (Moll 1992). Teachers should aim for inclusive classrooms where language, culture and social differences are celebrated. Classrooms should become learning communities where teachers and learners collaborate together to promote positive, relevant and engaging teaching and learning experiences. Mentoring should be provided for teachers to make the



important but difficult transition from traditional subject oriented teaching to student centred approaches.

4. Vocational units should keep their vocational, practical content high and not be transformed into academic, theoretical units. They should inform the key skills content to make them functional, to enhance the learners' access to vocational content and not the other way round. In this way learners will be able to see the relevance of the key skills in their vocational courses.
5. The "quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and review of VET" (Allulli 2012) should not only be followed at institution level but also at classroom level. Learners are the ones we should go to for feedback because they are directly affected by whatever happens in the classroom and if we are to meet their needs we need to get to know directly from them what those needs are.
6. While opening the doors of MCAST to all those who wish to further their education is a noble initiative which reflects MCAST's mission statement, I strongly believe that we need to check that structures are in place to secure a successful experience for our learners. We need to evaluate existing structures and make amendments where needed, especially with regards to key skills/competences and their relevance to the vocational courses; Maltese and English language policy (standard or functional; academic or vocational, "autonomous" or "situated"); forms of assessment, assignment and re-sit deadlines, grading criteria etc. If we fail to address these immediate issues we would only be giving learners who apply at MCAST a disservice and reinforcing a negative image of education and educational experiences held by a good number of them especially those on our Level 1 and Level 2 Foundation Programmes.

In conclusion I feel that the learners' voices in this study have spoken loud and clear and outlined injustices that are inherent in our compulsory education system. I experienced the same injustices thirty-four years ago and notwithstanding all the changes in the country the same practices continue to marginalise learners still today. The learners' sharing of their life histories, the work on their identities and their commitment to their studies once they were given a fair and engaging opportunity is an invitation they are making to MCAST. It is an invitation for the college to live up to its mission statement and indeed become the alternative college for learners who prefer Further Education to Higher Education. MCAST can stop the cycle of negative school experiences by promoting positive teaching and learning experiences where learners are at the centre and diversity is celebrated. The college should aim not only to develop those competences needed by learners to secure future employment but also to provide all diverse learners, at all levels, with that space needed to develop a new positive identity and good perception of self. This implies a definite move away from the 'one-size-fits-all' approach, since "what works well in one location or for one group of students, may not work well in another" (Hodkinson et al., 2007, p.411). The way forward is a move towards acknowledging the learners' different cultures and funds of knowledge. MCAST ought to be the college where all learners are empowered to find their voice and the courage to engage critically with negative past experiences and take action to aim for better futures:

*"I really think people today judge us by the way we look and not by who we really are inside and what we are capable of doing, for example – my art work and music is my life but people judge us way too fast and fail to see what we are made of. And also we are judged by academic measures and not by our skills and what we can do – for example, I went to apply for an art school and they told me I'm not good enough in school to get into that art school. I think it would be better if they see what you're good at and not what your weaknesses are."*

B\_\_'s own writing in his PPT presentation

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# Appendices

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## Appendix 1: The Malta Qualifications Framework and The European Qualifications framework

**Table 3: The Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning**

|   |                                                                     |                    |   |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| 8 | Doctoral Degree                                                     |                    | 8 |
| 7 | Master's Degree<br>Postgraduate Diploma<br>Postgraduate Certificate |                    | 7 |
| 6 | Bachelor's Degree                                                   |                    | 6 |
| 5 | Undergraduate Diploma<br>Undergraduate Certificate                  | VET Higher Diploma | 5 |
| 4 | Matriculation Certificate<br>Advanced Level<br>Intermediate Level   | VET Diploma        | 4 |
| 3 | General Education<br>Level 3<br>SEC Grade 1-5                       | VET Level 3        | 3 |
| 2 | General Education<br>Level 2<br>SEC Grade 6-7                       | VET Level 2        | 2 |
| 1 | General Education<br>Level 1<br>School Leaving Certificate          | VET Level 1        | 1 |

[http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/QF/maltareport\\_en.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/QF/maltareport_en.pdf)

**Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**

Each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications

|                                                              | Knowledge                                                                                                                                          | Skills                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Competence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                              | In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual                                                                        | In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments) | In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Level 1<br>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are     | basic general knowledge                                                                                                                            | basic skills required to carry out simple tasks                                                                                                                                                                              | work or study under direct supervision in a structured context                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Level 2<br>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are     | basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study                                                                                                | basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools                                                             | work or study under supervision with some autonomy                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Level 3<br>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are     | knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study                                                        | a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information                                                          | take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study<br>adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems                                                                                                                                            |
| Level 4<br>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are     | factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study                                                                | a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study                                                                                                    | exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change<br>supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities |
| Level 5 (*)<br>The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are | comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge | a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems                                                                                                          | exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change<br>review and develop performance of self and others                                                                                                |

## Appendix 2: Level Descriptors

| Level 1                                                                                                                                                      | Communication in Foreign Languages (English)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>The student is able to understand familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases in the personal, public, occupational and educational domains.</i> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| AREA                                                                                                                                                         | KNOWLEDGE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | SKILLS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | COMPETENCES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Technical Module</b>                                                                                                                                      | <p>The student has knowledge of very basic vocabulary and phrases related to everyday life and representative of the home, work social and public settings. This means that the student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is aware that the act of communication involves an exchange of information between listener and speaker.</li> <li>• is able to recognise frequently occurring written text types such as newspaper articles, magazine articles, invitations, manuals, etc.</li> <li>• is able to understand the gist of very basic written texts.</li> <li>• is able to write personal details.</li> </ul> | <p>The student is able to use language at a very basic level. This means that the student can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listen to and understand simple utterances delivered slowly and clearly articulated.</li> <li>• produce in speech, simple and direct exchange of information on topics and activities of immediate relevance.</li> <li>• read and understand short simple sentences, notices, and signs.</li> <li>• write personal details as required in basic form-filling.</li> </ul> | <p>The student demonstrates competence at a very basic level. This means that the student is able:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to use language in a predictable and specified context using the knowledge and skills learnt.</li> <li>• to demonstrate an awareness of linguistic strategies to solve communication difficulties.</li> <li>• to adopt a positive attitude in communicating.</li> </ul> |

**At Level 1**, the student is assessed on his/her ability to:

- read and understand;
- provide a sample of language in speech and in writing reflecting the knowledge, skills, and competences associated with this level. This will be carried out using direct and indirect assessment in which the student is placed in relatively authentic work-related situations which enable him/her to show what they can do with the language.

The following forms of Assessment may be used to assess the speaking and listening skills:

- simulations;
- role play;
- interviews.

Short paper and pencil tests such as selective deletion, gap-filling, multiple choice, short-answer questions, labeling diagrams, grid-filling, and table completion to assess are forms of assessment may be used to assess the reading, listening, and writing skills. It is recommended that assessment at this level should be carried out at regular pre-determined points during, and at the end, of the course. The assessment criteria should include:

- vocabulary control;
- basic fluency in speech and writing;
- basic sociolinguistic competence;
- basic phonological control;
- task achievement.

**At Level 2**, the student is assessed on his/her ability to:

- read and understand;
- provide a sample of language in speech and in writing reflecting the knowledge, skills, and competences associated with this level. This will be carried out using direct and indirect assessment in which the student is placed in relatively authentic work-related situations which enable him/her to show what they can do with the language.

The following forms of Assessment may be used to assess the speaking and listening skills:

- simulations;
- role play;
- interviews.

Short paper and pencil tests such as selective deletion, gap-filling, multiple choice, short-answer questions, labeling diagrams, grid-filling, and table completion are forms of assessment may be used to assess the reading, listening and writing skills. It is recommended that assessment at this level should be carried out at regular pre-determined points during, and at the end, of the course. The assessment criteria should include:

- vocabulary control and range;
- basic fluency in speech and writing;
- basic accuracy in speech and writing;
- basic sociolinguistic competence;
- turn-taking strategies;
- basic phonological control;
- co-operating strategies;
- task achievement.



Appendix 3: The Classroom



## Appendix 4: Timeline

| Timeline       |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------|-------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| June 2012      | Reading Core Literature |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| July 2012      |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| August 2012    |                         | Ethics form  |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| September 2012 |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| October 2012   |                         | Introduction |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| November 2012  |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| December 2012  |                         |              | Aims of the study,<br>research questions,<br>context,<br>participants,<br>positionality, |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| January 2013   |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| February 2013  |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| March 2013     |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| April 2013     |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| May 2013       |                         |              |                                                                                          | methods and methodology |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| June 2013      |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| July 2013      |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| August 2013    |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| September 2013 |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| October 2013   |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| November 2013  |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| December 2013  |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| January 2014   |                         |              |                                                                                          |                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

|                    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                                          |                                  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Februar2014</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <b>Conclusions &amp; recommendations</b> |                                  |
| <b>March 2014</b>  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                                          |                                  |
| <b>April 2014</b>  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                                          | <b>Checking &amp; redrafting</b> |
| <b>May 2014</b>    |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                                          |                                  |
| <b>June 2014</b>   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                                          |                                  |
| <b>July 2014</b>   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                                          |                                  |
| <b>August 2014</b> |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                                          |                                  |

## Appendix 5: Ethical Approval Letter



### **The School Of Education.**

**Head of School**  
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

Department of Educational Studies  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield  
S10 2JA

07 November 2012

**Telephone:** +44 (0)114 222  
**Email:** edd@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Nadia

#### **ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**

***Voices to the unheard: acknowledging the past and taking critical action to shape the future'. Classroom ethnography of the past and present school experiences of a Level 1 class in a vocational college.***

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'S. A. Warren'.

Dr Simon Warren  
**Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel**

Cc Dr Kate Pahl

Appendix 6 : Learners' drafts of possible consent forms

English.

1. I agree that I Interview people or by Interviewed.
2. I agree that wyl ~~there~~ during this disscution beetween eachother recording will be taken.
3. I agree that <sup>our or peoples</sup> names are anonemace.
4. I agree that people who don't want to participate are free to refuse or stop when I wish.

I agree that we meijh Interviews.  
I agree that you can Tecold us.  
I agree that our names ar coverd  
I agree to LEV wen I wix  
Jude

## Appendix 7: Consent Form

‘Voices to the unheard: acknowledging the past and taking critical action to shape the future’. Classroom ethnography of the past and present school experiences of a Level 1 class in a vocational college.

|                                                                                                                  | Yes                      | No                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I discussed, read and understand the aims of the study.                                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I had the chance to ask questions.                                                                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I can stop taking part at any time, without giving any reason.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree that the discussions and talks are audio recorded.                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree that the researcher may use my information in future publications, papers, articles or presentations. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I agree that my work may be used as evidence .                                                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I agree that my name will not appear in any publications, papers, articles or presentations.                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I am happy to take part in the study.                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

---

Name of Participant

---

Date

---

Signature

---

Name of Researcher

---

Date

---

Signature

## **Appendix 8: Information sheet for parents/ learners**

‘Voices to the unheard: acknowledging the past and taking critical action to shape the future’. Classroom ethnography of the past and present school experiences of a Level 1 class in a vocational college.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am Nadia- Maria Vassallo and I am starting a study for my course with the University of Sheffield. This study aims to look at the life stories of learners and the life of the classroom.

I would like to observe my own classroom and have discussions with learners. I would also talk with learners, parents and other teachers. I will audio record the conversations and write them up. Then we can go over them and change or leave out anything you want before I use them in the study. When I write up the conversations I will not use the true names of people and places and you can choose your own false name. At the end of the study I will store the recordings and the write ups and use them only for this study and articles or papers linked to it.

I would like you to be part of my study. However, you may refuse to take part, stop taking part at any point, or skip any questions you don't wish to answer.

This study is very important to me and I believe that your participation may help me and the learners show that every one of us is important and we have much to tell to the system.

I want to assure you that only I will see the information you give me and if I publish this study, I will not use your true name.

If you have any other questions you wish to ask about the study please feel free to contact me on 79465671 or [nmvassallo@gmail.com](mailto:nmvassallo@gmail.com)

Best regards,

Nadia-Maria Vassallo

## Information sheet for learners

'Voices to the unheard: acknowledging the past and taking critical action to shape the future'. Classroom ethnography of the past and present school experiences of a Level 1 class in a vocational college.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am starting a study for my course with the University of Sheffield. This study aims to look at your life stories and the life of the classroom.

I would like to observe the classroom and have discussions with you. I would also talk with you, your parents and other teachers. I will audio record the conversations and write them up. Then we can go over them and change or leave out anything you want before I use them in the study. When I write up the conversations I will not use the true names of people and places and you can choose your own false name. At the end of the study I will store the recordings and the write ups and use them only for this study and articles or papers linked to it.

I would like you to be part of my study. However, you may refuse to take part, stop taking part at any point, or skip any questions you don't wish to answer.

This study is very important to me and I believe that together we can show that we are all important and we have much to tell to the system.

I want to assure you that only I will see the information you give me and if I publish this study, I will not use your true name.

If you have any other questions you wish to ask about the study please feel free to contact me on 79465671 or [nmvassallo@gmail.com](mailto:nmvassallo@gmail.com)

Best regards,

Nadia-Maria Vassallo



## Appendix 9: Presentation in Sheffield

### The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography

Luke Eric Lassiter, 2005

- From 'reading over the shoulders of natives' to 'reading alongside natives'

Collaborative ethnography 'deliberately and explicitly emphasizes collaboration at every point in the ethnographic process [ ] from project conceptualization, to fieldwork, and, especially, through the writing process' (p.16)

Nadia-Maria Vassallo

### Getting Ethical Approval

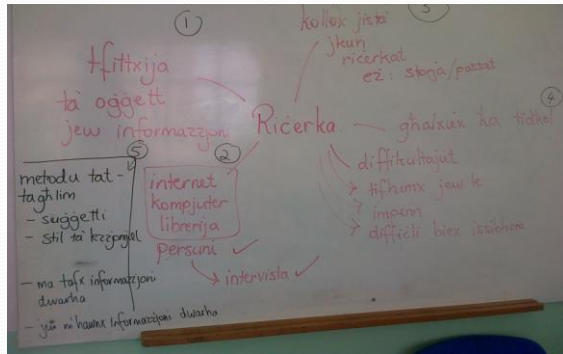
Giving the students voice from the offset of the project.

- Informing them about my studies.
- My next 'assignment' – the thesis.
- Doing a research study – what is research? How to go about it?
- Getting feedback about things they would research.
- Becoming part of the project – why would I participate?



Nadia-Maria Vassallo

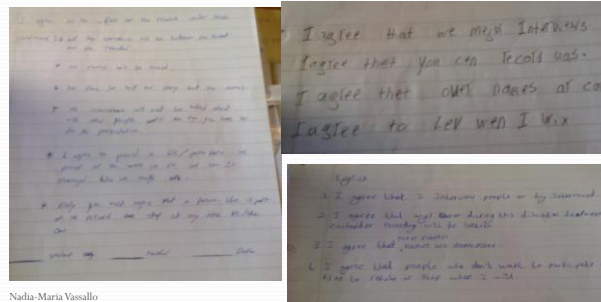
This is what came out during the discussion and brain storming.



Nadia-Maria Vassallo

An English lesson which followed the previous Maltese session.

Writing task: Which conditions would you put in place in order to take part in the study?



Nadia-Maria Vassallo

## Critical literacy sessions

- My life history

'my consultants have the right to know who I am and what I am about as I seek to learn the same from them.'

Lassiter, p. 108

Nadia-Maria Vassallo

5

## Themes that emerged

- Bullying (peer, teacher, parental)
- Learning difficulties
- Parental involvement (school, students' lives)
- Family background
- Student's self-perception vis-à-vis schooling, abilities.
- Effects on self-esteem
- Effects on future plans

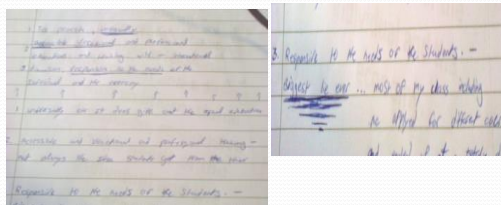
Nadia-Maria Vassallo

6

## Some other sessions...

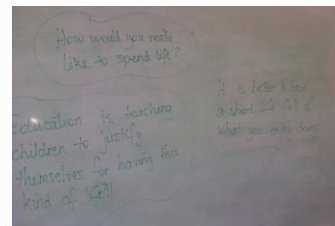
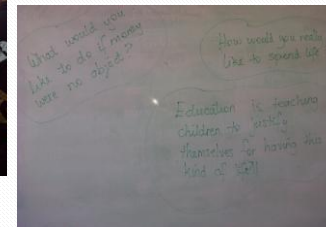
- Reading and identifying the character that we feel is closest to who we are and stating why.
- Analysing the mission statement of our college.
- Reading through, and reacting to, the Education Act.
- Viewing a video clip (proposed by the students) and discussing it.

To provide universally accessible vocational and professional education and training with an international dimension, responsive to the needs of the individual and the economy.



Nadia-Maria Vassallo

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Nadia-Maria Vassallo

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## Interviews

- I had planned to let the students speak freely during the interviews but they were finding it very hard so I had to prompt with questions. So they ended up being semi-structured interviews because I had to pose questions for them to speak out.
- Main points tackled in interviews:
  - Family background.
  - School experiences (positive/negative).
  - Current school experience.
  - Literacy practices in and outside the college.
  - Exams, results and assignments.
  - Peer/teacher relationships

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## My plans for this term

- Interview the parents and compare their views with those of the students.
- Write up the introduction, the context and participants sections and give them back to the students for feedback.

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## Where am I at the moment?

- They don't like to speak in English because they consider it 'playing the elite' and yet they prefer to write assignments in English (very similar to how I feel).
- They accept as 'natural' that they are not 'good in academics' and that they are better in the trades.
- They do not question the system but blame their intellectual abilities for not passing or attempting exams (both at primary and secondary).

Nadia-Maria Vassallo

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## Where am I at the moment?

- What part did family background play in how they performed at school, and consequently in how they perceive themselves as students today?
- How can we move from critical literacy sessions to taking action?
- Should I attempt getting the parents involved more even though we are in a 16+ vocational college?

Nadia-Maria Vassallo

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## Appendix 10: Presentation in Project Training

When the students first come to a foundation class they are often convinced that they are lacking the key skills necessary to be successful on the course.



### Key Skills

English, Maltese,  
Maths, IT,  
PD and Science  
(from level 3).



Key competences including learning to learn, social and civic sense, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression, ought to be embedded within subjects.

Students on foundation courses are:

- eager to start practising their vocational area
- have high hopes that they can succeed in it
- are convinced that they will struggle because of the key skills.

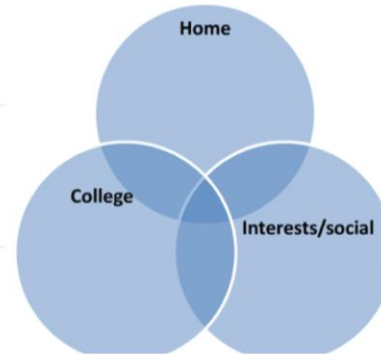
Often they blame themselves for the deficiencies they are sure to possess due to failure experienced throughout compulsory education.

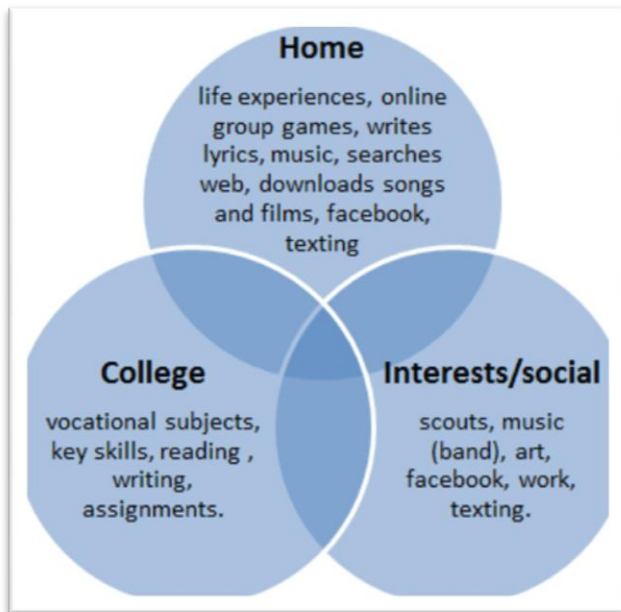




So the first task I set is aimed at making students aware of all their daily activities. I get the students to think about the practices they engage in throughout the day inside and outside the college.

Activity 1: What are the practices students are likely to engage in within the different spaces?





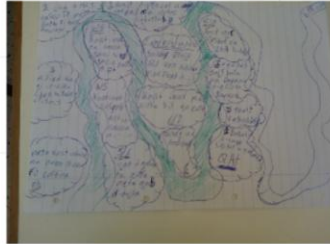
Activity 2: Can you identify any literacy practices going on in the students' activities you identified?

- ### Next
- **Highlight the practices in which literacy is involved.**
  - **Often literacy activities at home and in their social context are not recognised by the education system.**
  - **Students have come to believe that they are not valid.**

In their eyes literacy is only reading and writing which is strictly related to school. So when asked they would tell you that they do not engage in any literacy practices outside the college.

## Identities

- life histories
- memory trails



- Students become aware of significant moments in their life (both positive and negative).
- They become more conscious of their different identities and their strengths and weaknesses.
- We understand better who our students are and what experiences they bring with them.

Activity 3: What are your expectations of students' behaviour?  
How did you come to have these expectations?  
Do you find them reflected in your students?

Very often the difference between the teacher's 'habitus' and the students' 'habitus' is the major barrier for teaching and learning to happen.

- Once in touch with their reality we can make a move towards their worlds.
- We can create a space that bridges what goes on outside the college with what happens inside.
- To do this we might have to leave our comfort zone and venture into their worlds instead.

We facilitate their learning by helping them make a link between what they know and what they need to learn.

We need to guide and model. Just as we show them how to use a tool in the workshop, we have to show them how to do things in the key skills.

Just because students are 16+, it doesn't mean that they can do things without being shown and guided first.

We have to remember that the students have different interests and different learning styles or preferences.

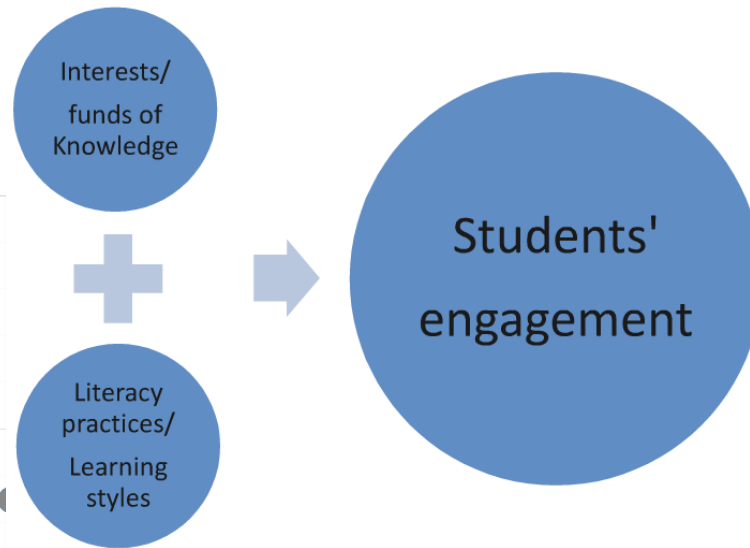


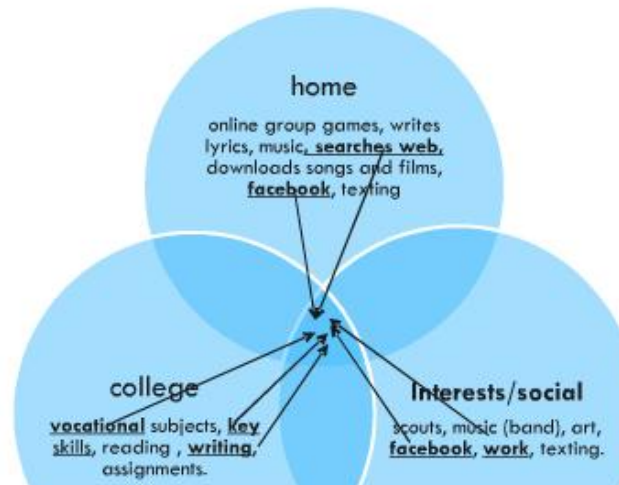
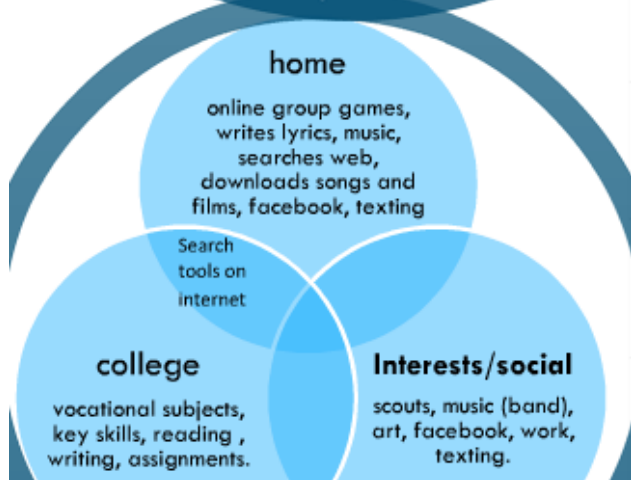
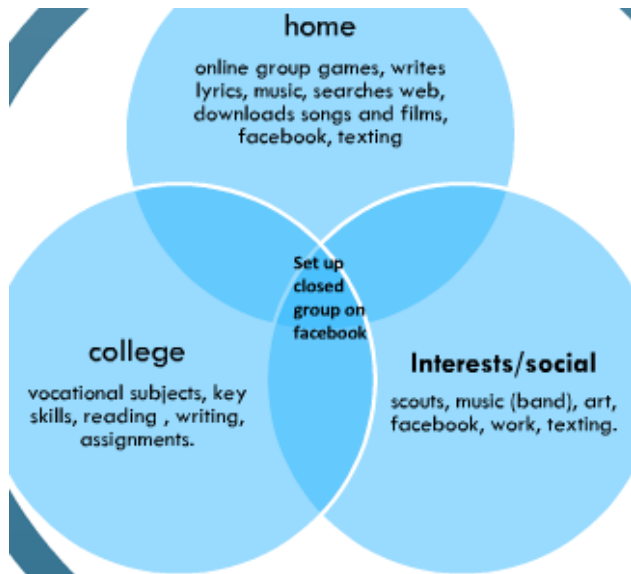
We have to try and include:

- different modes of teaching/learning.
- different ways of representing what is being taught (it is always beneficial to use a multisensory approach)
- different means of expression by our students.
- multiple means of engagement



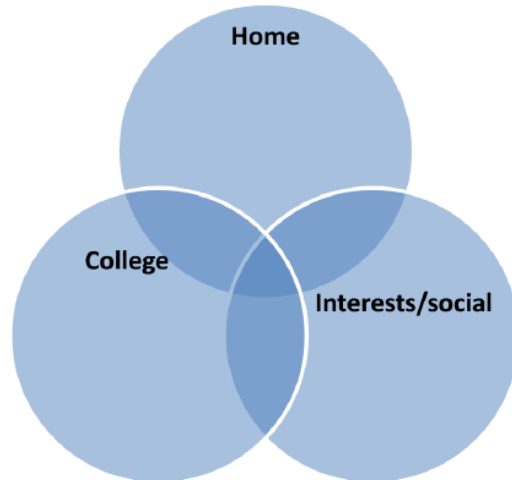
Activity 4: In what way can we draw on the literacy practices identified earlier to engage our students?





## Appendix 11: Workshop activity with teachers

Activity 1: What are the practices students are likely to engage in within the different spaces?



Activity 3: What are your expectations of students' behaviour?

How did you come to have these expectations?

Do you find them reflected in your students?

Activity 2: Can you identify any literacy practices going on in the students' activities you identified?

Activity 4: In what way can we draw on the literacy practices identified earlier to engage our students?

## Appendix 12: My day as a student in Sheffield

### Last day at Sheffield



Six o'clock...Time to get up and get some work done... Ahh.. My first coffee!



Getting ready for my first lecture....



*Hmm... Chilly!*



Out of the hotel and on my way to Kenwood Suite... Up the road... and turn left.



### Qualitative research.... first lecture today

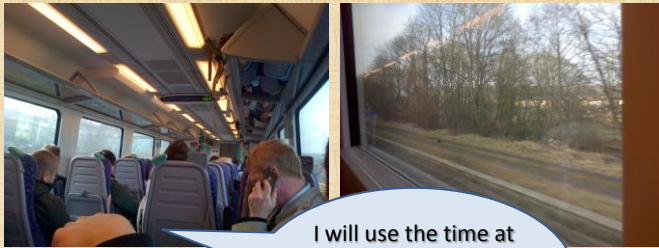


*No one here yet.. I guess I have time for another coffee...!*

**Robert's coffee tastes much better!**



The 1hr 30 minute train trip to Manchester Airport



I will use the time at the airport to do some reading and plan some work...

Half way there at Stockport... On our way to Manchester Piccadilly

Sheffield is always so nice...



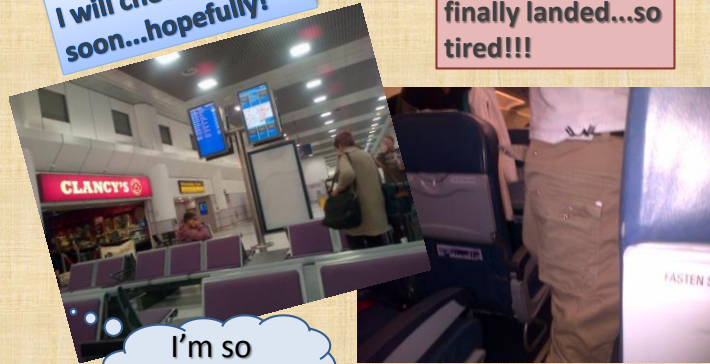
Arriving at Manchester Airport



OK sociology... Here I

Six hours later...

I will check-in soon...hopefully!



Back to Malta... finally landed...so tired!!!

I'm so stiff!!!!

*As from tomorrow back to  
school as usual with so many  
plans and things to do*

*.....*

### Appendix 13: ACADEMIC CLASS PROFILES

|                                        |                                                               |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| FOUNDATION PROGRAMME LEVEL 1 - ENGLISH | CLASS/GROUP: Extra lessons – critical literacy / intervention |
| INSTITUTE OF IBCE                      | PERIOD COVERED: October – May                                 |
| LECTURER: Ms Nadia-Maria Vassallo      |                                                               |

| DATE / WEEK | WORK COVERED<br>FROM SCHEME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | RESOURCES / TASKS / ACTIVITIES<br>ASSIGNED WORK                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| October     | - Jien min jien? X'ghamilni dak li jien? Diskussjoni u kitba.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Life history.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| November    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Life stories</b> naqraw u niktbu&gt;</li> <li>- Niddiskutu l-<b>education act u l-mission statement tal-MCAST</b>. Diskussjoni u kitba.</li> <li>- <b>Mela Jien Biss:</b> Introducejna l-ktieb u qrajna l-ewwel kapitlu ghamilna diskussjoni u qamu temi : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–generation gap</li> <li>–language use</li> </ul> </li> <li>- <b>Identity:</b> why is identity important? Do I have different identities? How is my identity formed? How important is it for me to be me? Can we be different? Should we be different? Does difference scare us? Why?</li> <li>- Discuss our <b>interests</b> and how we came to have them through <b>family practices</b>.</li> <li>- <b>Read assignment briefs and prepared for assignments by doing extra work related to tasks.</b></li> <li>- <b>Intervention:</b> Introduce the topic cars Ask each other questions related to cars and answer them orally. Introduce soft 'c' rule. Read text and go over soft 'c' words. Work out exercises related to text.</li> <li>- <b>Introduce long and short vowels and start work on magic 'e' rule.</b></li> </ul> | <p>Copies of education act (parents and students) and copies of mission statement.</p> <p>Handouts.</p> <p>Copies of chapters from Maltese reader.</p> <p>Assignment briefs.</p> <p>Handouts (texts and exercises).</p> |

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| December | <p>Continued work on assignments.</p> <p>Reading chapters from Maltese reader, discussions and writing.</p> <p><b>Lsn 3</b></p> <p>Grammar: Introduced nouns</p> <p>Reading/Vocabulary</p> <p>Reading of notes mechanical</p> <p><b>Lsn 4</b></p> <p>Embedded Mechanical</p> <p>Measurements</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>Handouts.</p> <p>Chapters from books.</p> <p>Took notes and worked out exercises.</p> <p>Read through a handout adapted from notes given in embedded lesson. Learners find a different word with the same meaning as the underlined words in text. Word bank provided.</p> <p>Learners read through handout related to measurement and the use of a steel rule.</p> |
| January  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b><i>What do we find hard to accept? When did we feel unaccepted?</i></b><br/>Discussion and Writing.</li> <li>- <b><i>Presentations:</i></b> Who am I and where I come from?</li> <li>- <b><i>What would you do if money was not of value in your life?</i></b> discussion</li> <li>- Listening comprehension and reading text - <b><i>Boeing</i></b></li> <li>- <b><i>Vocabulary</i></b> – give another word for.</li> <li>- <b><i>Exercises</i></b> based on text.</li> <li>- <b><i>Discussion</i></b></li> </ul> | <p>Individual identity mind maps.</p> <p>Video clip.</p> <p>White board for mind map with main ideas elicited during brain storming and discussion based on video clip.</p> <p>Recorded text for listening.</p> <p>Texts and exercises.</p>                                                                                                                            |
| March    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b><i>Focus group discussion about particular themes that emerged from the study and parental involvement.</i></b></li> <li>- <b><i>Work on assignment</i></b> (Malti).</li> <li>- <b><i>Presentations of individual projects and discussions.</i></b></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>Assignment brief and tasks.</p> <p>Individual projects (ppts, pictures)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |



|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                   |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| April | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Memory paths:</b> Thinking about those moments that are most vivid in our memory and drawing paths.</li> <li>- <b>B__ presentation of his memory path and discussion.</b></li> <li>- <b>J__ presentation of his memory path and discussion.</b></li> <li>- <b>Sh__ presentation of his memory path and discussion.</b></li> </ul> | Memory paths      |
| May   | - <b>Work on vocational presentations</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Internet and PPT. |

*SUBJECT ATTENDANCE COMMENTS*

|                                                                                                                               |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Learners attended extra lessons regularly and I was amazed with their enthusiasm vis-a-vis task and projects assigned.</b> | M     | G     | S     | Jh    | J     | B     | K     |
|                                                                                                                               | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Lecturer's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 14: Code of Ethics article

<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20121203/local/teachers.447999>

*Monday, December 3, 2012, 16:07*

### **Code of ethics for teachers sets guidelines on private lessons, use of social media**

Teachers who give private lessons to pupils who are in their class in a way that takes advantage of their professional relationship may be in breach of a revised code of ethics.

The new code also spells out that teachers need to keep a “professional distance” from their students and avoid inappropriate communication through social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

These are among the new guidelines outlined in the revised Teachers’ Code of Ethics and Practice that was launched this afternoon.

Education Minister Dolores Cristina said the code is the work of her ministry together with the Malta Union of Teachers and the Council for the Teaching Profession in Malta.

She said that one could not tolerate a situation where teachers made a business out of the students in their own classes, but there could be situations where parents insisted that their children go to private lessons with the same teacher they have at school. There could also be situations where pupils were only comfortable with their class teacher.

She said the code formalised what the majority of teachers already put into practice. This was the second revision of the code that was made to keep it up to date with new trends.

Adrian Camilleri, the president of the council, explained that the code was based on six key principles: Maintain trust in the profession, maintain a professional relationship with students, respect the uniqueness and diversity of students, collaborate with colleagues, parents, guardians and carers, act with honesty and integrity and keep their professional knowledge up to date.

Dr Camilleri said that if a teacher breached the code the council had the power to recommend to the minister what action to take. Action could include reprimand and censure.

Ms Cristina added that the council was working on drafting, for the first time, a code of ethics for learning support assistants and kindergarten assistants.

She said that she was currently in discussions with the MUT to explore ways of setting up structures to make schools safer to avoid instances when parents assault teachers. However, she cautioned, such incidents were very rare and one had to go about this sensitively as schools could not be locked up for parents.

Among other sections, the code lays down that teachers are to:

"Maintain professional boundaries whilst in school and out of school, avoid improper physical contact, avoid inappropriate communication via any form of media and avoid inappropriate relationships with students.

"The members of the teaching profession are duty bound and are ultimately responsible to maintain a professional distance;

"They are to refrain from taking advantage of professional relationships with students for their own personal benefit, including by giving private lessons to students from the classes they teach or who are under their administrative responsibility, against payment, whether monetary or in kind;

"Teachers are expected to conduct pastoral interventions with students professionally, and behave in keeping with their unique position of trust and status as role models;

"Teachers are expected to follow behaviour management and safe schools policies and guidelines as directed by the relevant school, college and education authorities;

"They are expected to act appropriately towards students exercising care in their language, gestures and attitudes, ensuring that they do not act in such a manner that is embarrassing or disparaging and ensuring that they do not use abusive language or offensive names or make inappropriate remarks; and Act with a professional attitude and behaviour at all times."

**The new code can be seen at**

<http://education.gov.mt/en/Ministry/Documents/New%20Code%20of%20Ethics%20Doc%20EN.pdf>

## Appendix 15: Activities carried out during the scholastic year

| Activities carried out during the scholastic year |                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                   | Workshop/Vocational Based                                                                                                                                                            | Standalone sessions contextualised/everyday life experiences                                                                                                                                 | Critical literacy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Listening and speaking                            | Vocabulary - Tools and related verbs.<br>Instructions, explanations<br><br>Description of work and processes undertaken.<br><br>Informal chats that accompanied the work being done. | Case stories - Tools and related verbs.<br><br>Description of work and processes undertaken.<br><br>Dialogues.<br><br>Role plays.<br><br>Videos and discussions.<br><br>Their presentations. | Critical discussion about the education Act and MCAST mission statement.<br><br>Life histories, memory trails.<br><br>Their presentations about who they are. Discussions about topics of interest. Videos, Songs.<br><br>Interviews, focus groups, Feedback on transcripts and thesis chapters etc. |
| Reading                                           | Instructions, notes, assignment briefs                                                                                                                                               | Adverts, tables, articles, newspapers, handouts and worksheets, Reading comprehensions, books, assignment briefs, case stories, transcripts, my research material.                           | Documents, life histories, memory trails, facebook, posters, lyrics, transcripts, my research material, books, newspapers                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Writing                                           | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                | work process, request forms, accident reports, risk assessments, emails, dialogues, assignments, notes/life histories, memory trails, feedback, points on documents, presentations,          | points on documents, life histories, memory trails, Facebook, feedback, presentations                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

## Appendix 16: Note on Maltese Spelling

Maltese spelling is built with a 30 letter alphabet which reflects the Arabic alphabet in phonemes and an English script. As part of the Maltese alphabet are a number of silent letters commonly used within words, similar graphemes with just a dot to change the sound of the letter (għ, h, g, ġ, z, ż, i, ie). There are also the voiced and voiceless consonants which produce a similar sound (voicelss) at the end of words, *ċerv* (deer) sounds like *ċerf*, *spag* (string) sounds like *spak*, *ħobż* (bread) sounds like *ħops*, *granġ* (crab) sounds like *granċ*, *ħadd* (no one) sound like *ħatt*. Some other spelling patterns of words derived from Arabic depend on the root of the word which is the consonants in the 'mamma' (infinitive) which we determine by asking 'what has he done yesterday?' *Seraq* (he stole) – s-r-q is the root. That root is always either three-consonants or four and will appear in every word derived from that verb eg. *Serq* (theft), *serqa* (robbery), *misruq* (stolen), *serqet* (she stole) etc. Some of the consonants in the root may be silent or not present at all eg. *Beka* (he cried) b-k-j is the root. 'j' and 'w' in Maltese are weak consonants so they are not always present in the mamma but may come out in other words derived from that verb eg. *Bikja* (a cry) or *bkejna* (we cried).

Also in Maltese the subject verb agreement does not only differ on the basis of singular and plural but also according to gender. Also, since Maltese is rooted in Arabic, Anglo-Saxon and Romance, the conjugation of verbs as well as plural suffixes varies drastically between different categories according to the morphology of words, rendering spelling and grammar quite difficult.

## **Appendix 17: Letter to Heads of Schools from Education Directorate**

**DIRETTORAT GĦAL  
KWALITA` U STANDARDS FL-EDUKAZZJONI  
FLORIANA VLT 2000  
MALTA**

**Department of Curriculum Management  
Tel: 2598 2449 / 2598 2478 / 2598 2480 Email: francis.fabri@gov.mt**

### **LETTER CIRCULAR**

**Information: X** **Date: 18th March 2014**

**Action Required: X** **Ref: DCM 75/2014**

**To: All Heads of State Primary Schools and Sections**

**From: A/Director, Curriculum Management**

**Subject: Grouping Students in Primary Schools**

### **Grouping by Month of Birth from Kinder 1 to Year 4**

The rate of intellectual maturity at a very young age is such that a twelve-month difference among children sharing the same class represents a considerable developmental headway or lag. This impinges unfavourably on the rate and quality of classroom learning.

By way of addressing this, the Ministry for Education and Employment, is reintroducing the practice of classifying very young children by month of birth from Kinder 1 to Year 4 in State schools, where children numbers permit.

Having classes grouped by month of birth will restrict the range of intellectual maturity of children in any one class and thereby make it more possible for children to learn and progress together. It should also make it less challenging for teachers to address the needs of each and every child.

Grouping by month of birth will be introduced in scholastic year 2014-2015 and all classes from Kinder 1 to Year 4 are to be classified accordingly.

### **Grouping Students in Years 5 and 6 employing Banding and Standardised scores**

In Years 5 and 6 the classification of children will be according to a banding procedure, where children numbers permit. The criterion for grouping children will be the overall level of achievement as indicated by the Annual Examination results in Maltese, English and Mathematics. The raw scores in these core subjects will be standardised by the Research and Development Department and sent to schools for Heads to determine the bands (as per guidelines which will be circulated in due course) and then assign children to classes. This is to be done strictly after receiving, and by using, the standardised scores and not by using the raw scores as printed in the children's result sheets. **These standardised scores will only be used for administrative purposes. They must not be used for reporting purposes.**

The introduction of banding will result in classes with a restricted range ability range; more restricted in fact than what one will find in a mixed ability class. This too will make it more possible for children to learn and progress together as well as making it less challenging for teachers to address the needs of each and every child.

The administrative practice of banding classes according to standardised scores will be introduced in scholastic year 2014-2015 and all Years 5 and 6 classes are to be classified accordingly.

The process of forming classes from Kinder 1 to Year 6 should not merely be a mechanical exercise. For instance, efforts should be made to exert some degree of gender balance in each class.

Thank you for your collaboration.

**Dr Frank Fabri**

**A/Director, Curriculum Management**

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## Appendix 18: Sample of Trascript and coding

| Transcrip Beppe's mother<br>18/03/2013                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Maltese</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <i>English</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <i>Comment</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| *the mother was very emotional throughout the interview she was often with tears in her eyes and running down her cheeks*                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <p>Fl-ewwel żmien li kelli t-tfal żgħar ma kontx naħdem għax nemmen li dak hu żmien importanti, l-ewwel ftit snin. Imbagħad meta mar l-iskola Beppe kien dejjem jibki u jgħidli li s-sir tefgħu barra... u jien kont ngħidli sinjal li għamilt xi haġa*emotional with tears in her eyes* hażina. Hu qatt ma qalli għaliex kien jifgħu barra. Kellu ħafna bullying mis-sir imma jien ma kontx naf għax qatt ma qalli. Wara ħafna sirt naf, lanqas ilu xejn u minn ġenituri oħrajn għax qaluli dak it-teacher li kien jagħmel hekk, hekk u hekk, lil Beppe hemm għadu. Imbagħad bdejt nisma' minn bosta studenti oħra boys, għax lil boys kien jagħmel hekk, li kollha kien jgħajjarhom li mhuma tajbin għal xejn.. li njaranti u hekk. <b>Heqq u Beppe tant kellu esperjenza hażina li l-iskola sar jobghodha. Ma kienx jieħu gost imur.</b> Anke hawnhekk l-MCAST hu mingħalih ġej għal ħafna xogħol bl-idejn u minflok sabu ħafna Malti, Inġliż u Maths qishom sugġetti xorta tal-iskola. Qabel kellna t-trade school. Jien kont immur trade school u kien ikollna malti, Inġliż u Maths imma mbagħad il-bqija kien ikun ħjata allura kien ikollna ħafna Prattika. Ma narahiex li s-sistema hi tajba, għalkemm jgħajtu ħafna bl-MCAST jien ma naħsibx li għal dawn it-tip tat-tfal hi tajba l-MCAST. Jiena hekk naħsibha.</p> | <p>At first when the children were still very small I did not work because I believe that the first few years are very important. <b>Then when Beppe went to school he used to cry all the time and he used to say that the Sir had sent him out...</b> and I used to tell him that he must have done something *emotional with tears in her eyes* very wrong then. <b>He never told me why he had sent him out. He had a lot of bullying coming from his teacher but I did not know about it, he never told me. I found this out much later, quite recently in fact and from other parents who told me that the teacher who used to do such and such things to beppe is still teaching in the school. And then I heard from other boys, because boys were the main victims, that he used to call them names and tell them that they aren't good for anything... that they are stupid and so on... so Beppe had such a bad experience of school that he started to hate it. He did like to go.</b> Even here at MCAST, he had imagined that he would come to do a lot of hands on practical work and instead he found a lot of maths, English and Maltese, the same subjects he had at school. Before, we used to have trade schools. I used to attend a trade school and we used to have maltese, English and maths but then the rest of the lessons were sewing so we used to have a lot of practice. I don't think this is a good system, although they boast so much about MCAST I don't think that for this kind of students MCAST is the solution. That is what I think.</p> | <p>Family influence on school and literacy. Beppe's primary school experience. Mother's frustration for not knowing what her son was going through/ lack of involvement School identity Family background, the fact that mother went to trade school shows that she too had failed to achieve the necessary requirements because in the past the system was selective at form 2 and those who did not do well in exams were sent to trade school. Family identity, perceptions of mother What kind of student? The kind that 'fails the absic skills'??</p> |
| <p><i>Teacher: Kieku kellek tiklassifika lil Beppe bħala student... jġififieri naf li għidtili li tqisu bħala xi hadd li jiggwadanja ħafna iktar kieku mit-trade imma kieku kellek tiklassifikah bħala student f'dawk li huma Malti, Inġliż u Maths, kif tiddiskrivih?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p><i>If you had to classify Beppe as a student... I mean, I know that you said that you think Beppe will gain mostly from the trade but if you were to classify him as a student in Maltese, English and maths, how would you describe him?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <p>Niddiskrivih bħala tifel tan-nofs ma ngħidx li hu tifel daqshekk injorant pero hu tant jiddejjaq joqghod bilqiegħda jikteb*banging smoothly with fist on table to make more emphasis on what she is saying* li hu għalih il-kitba hija ħela ta' ħin. Għax jien anke meta narah id-dar jibda jikteb ħa mmur naqra.... jerġa jiġi naqra....jerġa ħa mmur naqra. Ngħidli ipprova oqghod siegħa ikkoncentra f'dak li qed tagħmel, tghaddi s-siegħa ma...m'għandux sabar. Pero mbagħad narah li meta jkun irid għax jien eżempju meta nisimghu jtkellem bl-Inġliż, nibda ngħid dil-kelma xinhi? Narah... u Hu jrid. Għax perezempju din il-ġimgħa ma nafx jekk forsi qallekx. Daħħal f'rasu li jrid imur l-universita' tal-Inġilterra għall-kitarra. Issa mexa pass lura meta ġab l-applications u ra li jrid l-'A' levels.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>I would describe him as an average boy. I wouldn't say that he is that stupid but he he hates sitting down writing so much* banging smoothly with fist on table to make more emphasis on what she is saying*that for him writing is a waste of time. <b>Because even when I observe him at home, he start writing and [he says] let me go and .... he comes back a short while ..... and again [he says] let me go .... I tell him, "try to sit still for an hour and concentrate on your work" an hour passes but... he is restless. But then again, when he wants to, because for instance, when I hear him speaking in English, I say to myself, what kind of word is that [impressed]. He can... and he wants [to achieve].</b> Because for instance, this week, I don't know whether he has told you? <b>He was convinced that he wants to go to university in England to study guitar.</b> Now he has gone a step backwards because when he got the application he realised that he needs 'A' levels. I told him, "You see how</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Family identity how the mother perceives her son's ability in relation to school O School practices, behaviour code sitting down for long span of time writing ut of school practices Perception of self after the level 1 programme Teacher influence</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |



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| <p>Għidtlu qed tara kif l-iskola... qalli imma għax jiena ħsibt li għax taf titkellem sew bl-Ingliż....</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>school...<br/>He said, "but I thought knowing how to speak in English would be enough...."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                          |
| <p><i>Teacher: Imma inti taħseb illi l-fatt li l-esperjenzi li kellu fl-iskola kienu determinanti għax jiena bħalek issa jien il-Beppe ilni naħdem miegħu mil-bidu tas-sena s'issa u barra li naħdem miegħu naħdem ma studenti oħrajn jġigifieri nista' narah in comparison mal-oħrajn u huwa student intelligentissimu. Jġigifieri jien naħseb li l-esperjenzi li kellu giegħluh jemmen li hu mhux kapaċi...</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p><i>But do you think that experience he had at school were determinant, because I have been working with Beppe since the beginning of the year and I have also worked with other students and he most definitely stands out. He is very intelligent. So I think that his experiences have induced him to believe that he is not poor....</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                          |
| <p>*stops me in the middle of the sentence* Ehe ehe *crying* ehe dik hi għaliex hu dejjem l-iskola dejjem kienu eżempju meta kien fil-primarja, dan it-teacher partikolari, għax naf through ġenituri oħra (issa ta' naf) kien dejjem jgħidlu għax int mhux kapaċi, int ma tasalx. Kien jgħidilhom ħafna li huma injoranti, allura huma flok... Jien illum il-gurnata ngħidlu inti messek ma kontx... tagħmel iżjed biex turih li inti... imma hu kellu dik il-barrier li għalih jekk jgħaddi jew mhux ħa jgħaddi dan it-teacher... kif tgħid...ma kienx ħa jirrikonoxxi li huwa tajjeb allura hu beda jaqta' lura u jien kont ngħidlu... u hu kien jgħid li jien m'iniex tajjeb... f'dik is-sena giegħlu jemmen li hu mhux tajjeb. U dan it-teacher iħobb jagħmilha għax pereżempju meta l-kbir kien ser jagħmel tal-Junior Lyceum kien jgħidli... le għal bidu kien jgħidli "L-Ingliż minn fejn iġibu?" U jien kont ngħidlu, "Minn fuq it-televisin għax aħna ma nitkellmex bl-Ingliż id-dar." U kien jgħidli Kemm jikteb compositions sbieħ u hekk, imbagħad meta nduna li għadda mill-English qalli, "How surprised I am!" Għidtlu għala. Qalli, "Għax jien kont ngħid li ma jgħaddix!" Jġigifier jiena naħseb li... u Beppe issa drajtu jekk tgħidli illi Beppe din kemm hi sabiħa jew tgħidli iii proset ġibt 50 darb'oħra ħa jipprova jġib 52. Għax jien anke d-dar narah eżempju beda jmur l-iscouts. Kont ngħidlu Bep tgħallem strument.. ehe orrajt.. beda d-drums imbagħad qalli ma ħa nibda stument iehor... imsomma nsejt xinhu. Issa ġie u qalli ma ħa ndoqq il-katuba ta' fid-Duluri. U li jien immur narah. Hu jgħidli toqgħodx thallini fejn narak ta' ma għax jiddejjaq imma li hu jkun jaf li hemm xi hadd qed jagħtih l-attenzjoni u li hemm xi hadd pereżempju l-crafts, l-affarijiet li jagħmlu li jien id-dar nużahom, hu jieħu pjaċir imma jekk teacher jaħsel jimbuttah, daqshekk.</p> | <p><b>*stops me in the middle of the sentence*</b><br/><b>Ehe ehe *crying* ehe that's it... because at school they have always, for example, when he was in primary, this particular teacher, I know through other parents, used to tell him repeatedly that he was would never get anywhere, that he was poor. He used to tell them that they are stupid, so instead of.....today I tell him you shouldn't have..... you should work harder to show him that you..... but he had this barrier that whether he'll make it or not, in the eyes of this teacher.... how do you say.... he would never concede that he is good so Beppe started to give up and I used to tell him.... and he used to tell me that he was not good..... Throughout that year he convinced him that he was not good.</b> And it's this teacher's attitude because when he used to teach the eldest son, for instance when he was about to do the JL exam, he used to tell me..... No, at first he used to tell me, "From where does he get all this English?" and I used to tell him, "from TV because we do not speak in English at home." And he used to say how good his compositions were and so on. Then we he realised that he had passed his English, he said, "How surprised I am!" I asked him why. He said, "because I thought he would not pass!" And so I think that... and now I know Beppe, if you tell him, "mm Beppe how beautiful this is or well done, you have got a 50", next time he'll try to get a 52. Because even at home I see how he reacts. For instance when he goes to scouts. I used to tell him to learn an instrument...ehe alright... he started the drums and then he decided to start another instrument... I can't remember what it was. Now he came and told me that he was going to play the in the procession of Our Lady of Sorrows, and I go to see him. He asks me to stay out of his sight because he gets annoyed but at the same time he is aware of my attention and that there is someone for example in crafts, all the things they do, I make sure to use them at home and he likes that but if he does not bond with a teacher, that's that.</p> | <p>Teacher influence</p> |
| <p><i>teacher: inti bħala, apparti dan l-episodju tal-bullying li inti ma kontx taf bih, kemm kont tħossok welcome fl-iskola? Kienu jinvolvukhom fl-iskola?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p><i>Apart from the bullying incidents which you didn't know about, how welcoming was the school, where you involved in any way?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                          |
| <p><b>Le*strongly*le. L-iskola kien hemm dawk il-klikka ta' ġenitur li għandhom it-tfal fl-A... I-A u I-B. It-tfal li kienu fis-C ma tantx kienu jġu kkalkulati.</b><br/>Eżempju anki, work experience, jekk</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p><b>No *strongly*no. At school there was a clique of parents who had their children in the A class... A and B classes. The students who were in class C were not considered much. For instance even in</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                          |

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| <p>jien it-tifel tiegħi irid welding għax bagħtu ġardinar. U meta mort l-iskola u għidtlu imma isma jekk it-tifel ha ttiħ gimgħa work experience tih fuq l-esperjenza li jixtieq hu. Issa billi lit-tifel bagħtu gimgħa work experience ġardinar, x'ha. Ara meta bagħtu gimgħa l-heritage ha pjaċir għax uza jdejh u thammeg, għax Beppe jhobb jithammeg. Allura ha pjaċir imma meta kienu bagħtuhom gimgħa esperjenza San Anton qalli "Uff xi dwejjajq!!" Qisni naraha jien li l-iskola timxi kollox on the paper* banging on table*. Jien ma narahix hekk jien naraha illi jekk it-tifel qed jgħidlek jien irrid hekk ipprova ifhem x'inhuma jgħidulkom it-tfal.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p><b>work experience. If my son wants welding why did you send him to do gardening? And when i went to school and told him [headmaster]. Listen if you are going to give my son a week of work experience give him something that he wants to do. What did he gain by sending my son for a week's experience as a gardener? But then when he was sent for a week at Heritage he enjoyed it because he used his hands and got himself dirty. Beppe likes to get dirty so he enjoyed it but when he went to San Anton he was really bored and told me "ooff how boring!!!" I think that school works out fine on paper*banging on the table*. But it shouldn't be so I think that if students are telling you what they wish to so try to understand what they are telling you.</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: Gimgħa ilu iddiskutejt mal-istudenti dwar dan il-punt tal-ġenituri involuti fl-iskola u għamilna focus group Beppe u sħabhom u għidtilhom min jaf kieku anke hawn fl-MCAST lill-ġenituri nibdew ninvolvuhom iktar, iktar ninfurmawhom dwar intom x'intom tagħmlu u Beppe kien wiehed minn dawk li qabel illi jixtieq li jara l-ġenituri iktar involuti min-naħa tal-iskola. Jiġifieri jien naħseb li din hija xi haġa li lilu taffetwah hafna.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p><i>Last week I discussed whether or not parents ought to be involved more in school during a focus group. I asked Beppe and his friends what they think of the idea to have parents more involved in MCAST, inform them about what the students (their sons and daughters) are doing? Beppe was one of those who agreed that parents should be more involved by the college. I guess this is something that affects him.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |
| <p>Taffetwah. Għax anke l-iscouts pereżempju ma ara dak inhar sa jkollna curry night ma eja u jien mhux nibza mid-dlam imma fejn jidhlu għelieqi nibza. Allura ngħidlu iva niġi imbagħad nibda ngħidlu Bep hemm grieden? Jibda jgħidli le ma xi grieden allura jien immur għas-sagrificċju għalih nibda nzomm ruħi iebsa għax inkun qed nibza nibda ngħolli saqajja fuq is-siġġu u nħares 'l hemm u 'l hawn imma għalih immur... għax naf li jkun qed jiehu pjaċir. Jien anke jekk ikun ħiereg Bep għandek hekk, għandek hekk jibda jgħidli ma qisek sejra int. Għax niehu pjaċir narahom sejrin, issa sejrin camping u hekk. U hu jiehu pjaċir jara lilna... qegħdin qed ngħidlek... issa ser idoqq id-Duluri jien indum nistennieh narah ħiereg... l-ewwel kwart d-dar nirrangalu l-uniformi imbagħad narah ħiereg imbagħad meta narah bl-uniformi *pride in her voice* Dak inhar ġie u qalli ma ha ndoqq il-katuba, x'hi qalli hekk!!! Imbagħad bdejt nipprova ngħidli li l-katuba hija l-istrument li jmexxi l-iscout. Allura bdejt nagħmilha bi kbira kemm jien ferħana bih, kemm jien kburija u hu jiehu pjaċir. Allura naħseb ehe li kieku l-iskola pereżempju, hawnhekk s'issa ilni sentejn u qatt ma rajtha, jagħmlu display tax-xogħol li jagħmlu t-tfal. Il-Mosta jagħmluha... il-Mosta jagħmluha. Jagħmlu tlett ijiem filgħaxija u jagħmlu display tal-affarijiet li jagħmlu t-tfal. Jiena naħseb li t-tfal bħal ma hu Beppe jridu l-attenzjoni u jridu lil xi haġġ li jhossuhom li b'dak li qed jagħmlu they are proud. Jien hekk naħseb... Jien anke ma naqbilx issa</p> | <p><b>Yes it does because even at scouts for example "mum look, on that day we are having a curry night. Mum you should come."</b> But I am really scared of the dark especially if the event is in the countryside. So I tell him that I will go but then I start asking him "Bep, are there any rats?" and he reassures me, "no mum, there aren't any rats." So I go even though it is a sacrifice, I go for him and I stay scared stiff, I lift my feet off the ground and rest them on a chair and look around all the time... but I go, for him.... because I know that he appreciates my presence. Even when he is going out, I start asking Bep "do you have this, do you have the other" and he says, "Mum it seems as if it's you who's going out!" Because I like to see them off, whether it's camping or something else. And he likes to see us ....[caring]...He really does... Now he is going to play the drums in the procession of Our Lady of Sorrows. I spend ages waiting for him to get ready to see him off... First we spend a quarter of an hour checking his uniform and then I see him off, and when I see him in his uniform *pride in her voice* . One of these days he came and said mum I am going to play the katuba, and when he told me!!! Then I tried to explain to him that that is the instrument that leads the scout. So I made a big deal out of it, and told him how happy and proud I was and he was happy. So I guess that even at school, yes, if at school, for example, I have been working here and I have never seen it happen, if they make a display with all the students ' works. It is done at Mosta [another institute].... at Mosta they do it. I think that students like Beppe need attention and they need to feel that there are people out there who are proud of their work. That's what I think.... For instance</p> |  |

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| <p>ma nafx jekk inbidletx is-sistema, meta Beppe mar is-sekondarja, mar go skola li in inverted commas <b>10:00</b> kellha t-timbru li kienet skola tat-tfal ħżiena. U lilu kull darba li kien jgħid fejn imur skola kont narah qisu jgħid ma kienx jgħid bl-isem tal-iskola kienu jgħidulu fejn tmur skola Santa Venera *name of village* għax kulhadd jgħidlek li dik l-iskola għandha timbru ta' skola tat-tfal li ma jridux jitgħallmu. U għal-iskola veru kien hemm tfal hekk għax is-Sir kont ngħidlu... Jien ma naqbilx magħha. <b>Ok forsi tgħidli jekk tibgħatu go skola tajba jew ma jlahħqux jew itellfu.</b> Imma inti li tibgħat go skola tat-tfal li ma jridux jitgħallmu, jekk ma jmorru ma jmorru, jekk ma jagħmlux il-homework ma jagħmluhx qisu t-teacher diġa jaf li dawn it-tfal ma jridux jitgħallmu ma naqbilx magħha għax inti t-tifel ibagħtu ma tfal li huma... biex forsi tħajru u jekk tara li t-tifel batut tkellem lill-ġenituri u forsi tara x'jista' jsir mhux tibgħathom go skola. Mela l-ewwel bagħtuhom Santa Venera, minn hemm bagħtuhom agħar go Ħaż-Żebbuġ.... U agajn orrajt dawk it-tliet snin li għamel Ħaż-Żebbuġ, is-surmast jistedinna, u dejjem jgħidilna x'qed jagħmlu kellu teachers li kienu jhobbuh...qed tifhem. Anke eżempju Beppe jhobb ħafna l-art. Għaliex biex tidhol skola tal-art irid ikollok certu 'O' levels? Imma jekk hu jhobb l-art għax iħobb ipingj?! Heqq Hu jaf li jekk imur il-Mosta mhux ħa jlahħaq magħhom.</p> | <p>also disagree with the school system, I don't know maybe now it has changed, but when Beppe went to Secondary, he was sent to a say which in inverted commas was known as a school for low achievers. And I used to see that whenever he was asked about his school, I used to see him withdraw and he never used to say the name. They used to ask him which school he attended, he answered, Santa Venera *name of village* because every one knew that school had a label that it catered for students who did not want to know about school. And at school there really were such children.... and I used to tell the headmaster that I disagree.Ok maybe you might say that if they are sent to a good school, they either fail to keep up or disrupt the others. But to send them in a school with students who do not care whether or not they attend, who do not want to learn anything, who don't care about homework, so the teacher already has a preconceived idea about the students he has. I disagree because if you send a boy with children who are....[motivated] you might get him interested and then if you see that a boy is having difficulties to keep up, you send for his parents and see what could be done, but not send them in a school.... So first they sent them to Santa Venera, from there they sent them to a worse school in Ħaż-Żebbuġ... And again, it is true that during those three years in Ħaż-Żebbuġ, the headteacher used to invite us, he used to tell what is being done in the school, teachers were ok.... you see. And then also, for example Beppe loves art. <b>Why is it that to go to an art school you need certain 'o' levels?</b> If he loves art because he loves drawing?! He knows that if he goes to Mosta he will not manage to cope! [because he hasn't got the art 'o' level]</p> |                                                               |
| <p><i>Teacher: Imsomma hemm level 1 ukoll. He was unlucky li bagħtu hawn ma nafx għaliex bagħtu hawn.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p><i>But there is level one as well. He was unlucky that he was sent here. I don't know why he was sent here.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                               |
| <p>Għax dak dam ma ddecieda u meta mar biex japplika kienu għalqu l-applications u s-segretarja qalltu tibzax issa applika mal-late applications imma mbagħad meta mar biex japplika mal-late applications qalltu l-kors ma fetaħ u reġa' ħa daqqa oħra għax qalli jien ma ridtx immur hawn. Hu art and design ried imur.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>Because he took a long time to decide and when he went to submit his application, the application period had closed so the secretary told him to apply with the late applications but then when he went to apply at a later date she told him that the course hadn't reopened and that was another big blow because he did not want to come here. He wished to go to art and design.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Big blow because he was not accepted at Art and Design</p> |
| <p><i>Teacher: iva infatti lili qalli first day meta iggojnjana hawnhekk. Imma almenu he is doing well xorta he is doing his best hawnhekk imma hu l-arti jrid. Mela allura kemm thoss li s-sistema kważi kważi anke lilek, lil Beppe ikkonvincitu li mhux kapaċi, u lilek kemm affewatek fil-mod li inti thares lejn x'jista' jagħmel it-tifel?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p><i>Yes, in fact he told me when he first joined us. But at least he is doing well just the same. He is doing his best here but he prefers art. So then do you feel that the system has convinced Beppe that he lacks what it takes, and to an extent even you, has it affected you in the way you look at the possibilities/chances you son has?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                               |
| <p>Jien mhux nemmen li t-tifel mhux kapaċi, jien nemmen li l-iskola għandha tinfetaħ iżjed għal dawn it-tfal. Orrajt hawnhekk nara tfal li huma tajbin u li ħa jkomplu imma mhux it-tfal kollha huma l-istess. Eżempju orrajt is-second year, level 2 tawhom il-karta biex jagħzlu x'ser jagħmlu [fit-term li jmiss] allura lil-level 1 għaliex le. Lil Beppe għidtu... qalli le...x'għandhom differenza minnhom? Għaliex dawk iva</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>It is not that I don't believe in my son's abilities. I believe that the school has to give more options to these students. Alright, here [at the college] I see students who are high achievers and who can go on to higher levels but not all the students are the same. For instance, OK the second year, level 2 students were given an application to choose the trade they want to work on [in the coming term] so why didn't they do the same with the level 1s. I told Beppe.... he said no.... so what is the difference</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Funds of knowledge</p>                                     |

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| <p>u dawn le? Biex issa jerġa jġri bħal ma ġralu l-Mosta jġi biex jagħzel u jgħidulhom full up. Jien nara l-klassi ta' Beppe tliet kwarti minnhom kollha jaħdmu u kollha jaħdmu xogħol tal-idejn, allura kompli tihom is-sengħa la jridu jaħdmu heqq. Heqq Għax hemm tlieta minnhom jiena narahom naqra mhumix.... imma meta tismagħhom jikkellmu tgħid dawn jaħdmu affarijiet tal-idejn u tarahom li huma dedikati għall-affarijiet tal-idejn. Jiena meta nħares lejhom ngħid dawn donnhom ma jridux skola imma jridu x-xogħol tal-idejn mela allura għax ma jagħfsuhomx iktar fuq ix-xogħol tal-idejn.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>between the two groups? Why is it that those are given the option and these aren't. No probably he will go through the same ordeal he went through before, he'll come to chose and they they'll tell them that it is full up. When I look at Beppe's class, three quarters of them have a job, and they all do a vocational job, so give them more practice in the trade. There are three of them who when I look at them I don't think they are ..... but then when you hear them talking you can tell that they do vocational jobs and you can tell that they are well versed and dedicated to their jobs. When I look at them I say that they do not seem much interested in school but they want to work, so why don't they [school] make more emphasis on the practical side of the trade.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                           |
| <p><i>Teacher: Beppe huwa l-iktar student li din il-ħaġa tat-tesi qed joħodha bis-serjeta. Qisu għandu messaġġ ġo fih li jrid jgħaddi u qed jieħu din l-opportunità miegħi biex jgħaddih dal-messaġġ. Meta bdejna din ir-riċerka, Beppe qalli biex nagħmlu closed group u fih għandi access jien u sħabu tal-klassi. U fih sikwit ifittex jien naf jew xi saying, jew xi ritratt jew xi video li vera jkollu messaġġ u jien ġieli nikkummentalu. Darba minnhom ippostja messaġġ vera tajjeb u jien rajtu u għidtlu ok Beppe issa xi trid li nagħmel bih dan u qalli miss jien nixtieq li niddiskutuh fil-lesson li jmiss. U ddiskutejnieh fil-lesson ta' wara u vera qamet diskussjoni tajba fil-klassi u jien ovvjament ridt li nagħmel il-lezzjoni u minnha ħriġna li niktbu email u jiena dik l-email ta' Beppe bgħattha lis-sur Borg. Għaliex Beppe irnexxielu jagħmel ċertu recommendations fuq il-level 1 group. Meta kont imsiefra l-Università kien kuljum filgħaxija jibgħatli fuq dan il-grupp u jgħidli kif mort illum miss? Urejthom xi xogħol minn tagħna? Kif laqgħuh miss? So jiena nara fih potenzjal immens.... U meta ġie biex jgħidli din tal-Ingilterra jien għidtlu Beppe jien ninkoraġġik u jekk għandek bżonn tagħmel l-'O' levels Beppe jien ninkoraġġik li tagħmilhom because I believe that he can do it. He can do it. Jiena naħseb li Beppe huwa wieħed minn dawk l-istudenti li remiet is-sistema u remietu ingustament. Beppe mhuwiex limitat. Huwa intelligentissimu.</i></p> | <p><i>Beppe is the student who has taken most interest in my thesis. It seems as though he has a message within him and he is taking this opportunity to pass on this message. When we started working on this research, Beppe suggested that we set up a closed group on facebook and only the students and I can access it, and in it he often posts a saying or a picture or a song or video clip that carry a strong message and I often comment about them. On one occasion he posted a video with a very good message and after watching it, I asked Beppe what he wanted me to do with it and he said that he wished to have it discussed in class. We did that in the following lesson and we had a very good discussion but obviously I wanted to do a lesson out of it and so we decided to write an email which was later forwarded to the assistant director of the institute because Beppe had managed to make some very valid recommendations about the level 1 course. When I was abroad [sheffield] he used to post a message every day and ask how I did, whether their work was shown to my colleagues and how it was received.... So I see in him a lot of potential and when he told me about his plan to go to England I said, "Beppe I encourage you and if you need to do your 'o' levels, Beppe do them because I believe that he can do it." He can do it. I think Beppe is one of the students who were unjustly thrown by the wayside by the system. I say so because I don't think that he is limited in any way. He is very intelligent.</i></p> | <p>[unfortunately although I had advised him of my plan and he had agreed to answer their mail, this never happened].</p> |
| <p>Jiena narah anke jekk jgħid jien irrid nasal s'hawn, b'xi mod jew ieħor għax anke lili ġieli għall-iscouts ġieli jgħidli ma għandna bżonn niġbru naqra fondi, tini naqra ideat. U huma jagħmlu dan hawn in-knotting u allura ngħidlu aghmlu ftit knots u eżempju bieghuhom bħala keychains. U narah għax anke mbagħad l-iscout leader jgħidli pereżempju Beppe ħareġ b'din l-idea u eżempju biha qlajna 50 euro. Qed tifnem għax jien dejjem indaħhalhom f'moħhom, jiena dejjem ngħidilhom lit-tnejn li huma (her sons), ħadd mhu ħa jagħtik il-flus ta' xejn allura dejjem dejjem nipprova</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>I can see him even if he says that he wants to get somewhere, one way or another he will because even for scouts, sometimes he tells me, "mum we need to raise some funds, give me some ideas." And they do these knots and so I tell him, "you can do some knots as keychains." And I can see him [interested] because then even the scout leader tells me for example "Beppe has come up with this idea and we have raised 50 euro." You see, I am always telling them [beppe and his brother]... i am always telling both of them [her sons] that no one will give you money unless you give something in return, so I am always trying to teach them that scouts shouldn't rely only on our fee, that helps, but they should do things</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>He is in control out of school, he knows what to do and acts, school makes him passive and inactive</p>                |



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| <p>ngħidilhom mhux l-iscouts dejjem jitolbuna l-fee biss, il-fee trid tkun imma bl-affarijiet li jagħmlu huma, jistgħu jiġbru l-flus. Jien eżempju dakinhar ħajjartu, imma mbagħad qalli le ma ma jridx l-iscout leader, li jagħmel tuck shop żgħir fl-iscouts għidtlu imma tbigħu affarijiet healthy cereal bars, cereal boxes u jekk fix-xahar taqla' imqar 5 euro fix-xahar l-iscouts ara kemm ha ttiħ. Pero Beppe jħobb jorganizza, Beppe jekk tgħidlu Bep ħa nagħmlu barbeque, ara l-ieħor le (his brother)l-ieħor mhux daqshekk jibqa' bilqiegħda fejn ikun, imma Beppe le, Beppe mill-ewwel jibda x'irrid nagħmel?? X'irrid nixtru? x'irrid... u ma jaqtax qalbu eh! Ma jaqtax qalbu.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>themselves to raise the money. For example a couple of weeks ago I have suggested that they open a small tuck shop selling healthy stuff such as cereal bars, cereal boxes and so on. If in a month they manage to make 5 euro in the long run the sum will rise. However Beppe likes to organise things. If you tell Beppe that we are going to do a barbeque, he's not like the other one [his brother] the other one wouldn't move a finger, but Beppe will immediately start asking what can I do? What do we need to buy? What do I... and he is not easily discouraged eh! He is not discouraged!</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                        |
| <p><i>Teacher: infatti jien fil-bidu tas-sena kont staqsejthom into x'literacy practices għandkom u qaluli jiena ma tantx naqra u għidtilhom imma literacy practices mhumiex qari ta' kotba biss, kull fejn għandek xi tip ta' qari jew kitba jew komunikazzjoni dak huwa literacy practice. U fost l-affarijiet li semmieli Beppe, semmieli li jħobb jikteb is-songs **iva veru** u li jħobb jaqra xi comics għidulhom Manga. Ma nafx tosservahx jagħmel xi affarijiet oħra li għandhom x'jaqsmu ma' literacy forsi.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p><i>In fact at the beginning of the year I had asked about their literacy practices and they all said that they don't read much but I pointed out that literacy is not just the reading of books. I told them that every kind of reading, writing and communication is a literacy practice. And amongst other things, Beppe said that he likes to write songs**yes that's true** and that he likes to read Manga comics. Do you observe him doing these practices or other things related to literacy?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                        |
| <p>Jiena li nosservah jagħmel, pereżempju Beppe anka jekk jilgħab playstation jew computer games jew hekk, dejjem jilgħab affarijiet li jisma' l-ħaddieħor jiteklem, ma nafx x'logħba hi, u nisimgħu jirrispondi lura u jien ngħidlu Beppe ħi ma' min qed titkellem u jgħidli ma din il-logħba hekk, xi ħadd minn pajjiż ieħor qed jilgħab miegħu u b'hekk ninnutah li jaf Ingliz tajjeb, għax hu meta jilgħab mhux qed jilgħab eżempju ma' cartoons li mhumiex qed ikellmu, hu għandu certu logħob li xi ħadd jibda jkellmu lura pereżempju ara għejjen is-suldati, trid taqbez ic-cint u hu jiteklem lura. Allura nibda ninnutah li ngħid 20:00 ara jikteb ma tantx iħobb imma fejn jidhlu dawn l-affarijiet ... qed tifhem. Pereżempju jekk jiġu, l-mummy għandha ħafna ħbieb barranin, jekk jiġu mhux ħa joqgħod jgħid le jien ma nasalx... jgħidli ma nkellimhom ngħidlu mela u jaqbad u jmur u jaqbad parlata. Għandu certu affarijiet ta li jibda jgħidli ma tgħid tiskanta hekk. narah Pero Beppe jinfluwenzawh ħafna ħafna l-ħbieb u kultant ngħidlu Bep jaħasra kemm nixtieqek tifhimni iktar. Darba kienu hawn u tlieta minn dawn li jkun magħhom marru l-bandli u ħadu video u jien meta rajtu għidtlu Bep sorry imma dan il-video m'għoġobnix. Għidtlu inti taf kemm tista' tidhol f'inkwiet bih! Marru l-bandli u qgħadu jtilgħu fuq iż-żurzieqa bil-kontra. Eħh imbagħad qalli eh iwa. U ġie u qallu, qallu neħhieh. Ma neħhieh imbagħad għidtlu jien isma għidtlu la hemm it-tifel</p> | <p>What I do observe, is that even when he is playing on his playstation or on the computer, he always plays things where he listens to someone else speak, I don't know what game it is, and hear him answering back and I tell him, "Beppe whom are you speaking to?" and says that the game is like that, some one from a different country is playing against him, so I notice that he can speak in English well because when he palsy, he is not palying against a cartoon that is not speaking to him. He has certain games that speak back to him for example, "look out the soldiers are coming, you have to jump over the wall," and he answers back. And so I notice and say to myself, " he does not like writing much but where these things are concerned... you see." For example if they come, my mother has got many foreign friends, when they come he does not say "I'm not able to..." he just asks me whether he can go to speak them and he soon starts a conversation. He has got certain qualities that when he speaks to me I am surprised. But I think Beppe is easily influenced by his friends and I often tell him "Bep dear I would really like you to understand me more." Once they [peers] were all here [canteen] and three of them went to the swings and Beppe went with them and they took a video and when I saw it I told him, "Bep sorry, but I did not like that video." I said, "do you realise that it could get you into a lot of trouble?!" They went to the swings and they repeatedly went up the slide the wrong side. And he said," never mind." Then his friend came and he told him, he told him to delete it. He didn't so then I told him [the other student], "lisen that is my son in that video so I have the right to ask you to delete it." And he did. But</p> | <p>Group influence</p> |

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| <p>għidtlu tiegħi għandi dritt li ngħidlek le u neħfieh. Imma nibza' li l-ħbieb ...naħseb li hu jekk ikollu jagħmel xi ħaġa tajba naħseb jiddejjaq jagħmlu mill-ħbieb... naħseb li jibza' li hemmi l-ħbieb jgħidulu li qed jagħmel too much... hekk għandi feeling fuqu.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>I'm afraid that his friends.... if he had any intention to do something right, he would think twice because his friends might think tell him that he is doing too much.... I have that feeling about him.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                 |
| <p><i>Teacher: U taħseb li ġeġja din anke mill-fatt li kellu xi problemi... *interrupted*</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p><i>Do you think this attitude has anything to do with the problems he had... *interrupted*</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                 |
| <p>Ehe nibza' li jekk irid iġib 80 joqgħod lura biex iġib 70 biex sħabu l-oħrajn għax anke hawnhekk qatt ma jiġi jgħidli pereżempju dik it-teacher jew ħlief fuqek u fuq tal-PSD li jgħidli kemm huma teachers caring ilbqija l-oħrajn. Eżempju hemm teacher partikolari, jitkaża għax tagħmel ċertu affarijiet fuq face book. Jien nipprova ngħidli dik hija ħajjitha wara l-iskola, imma hu dittur eh, ma ħax pjaċir. Ma ħax pjaċir!</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p><b>Yes I think that if he can get an 80 he would hold himself back and get a 70 so that his friends, ..... because even here he never comes to tell me for example that teacher or...he only speaks about you and the PSD teacher and tells me how caring you both are, as for the others nothing. For example there's a particular teacher who really annoys him when he sees the unadequate stuff she puts up on facebook.I try to tell him that that is her life after outside school, but he is quite adamant eh, he does not like it. He did not like it!</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                 |
| <p><i>Teacher: Infatti lili qaluli lili wkoll *interrupted*</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p><b>Yes in fact they told me as well *interrupted*</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                 |
| <p>U jien qisni mbagħad inħsadt u għidtlu isma' Beppe hi dik friend miegħi mhux miegħek, la mhux qed tara ritratti fuq tiegħek lili ħallini, imma ma qalli le ma għax dik teacher jiġifieri huma lit-teacher jarawha step naħseb jien jarawha step warajna [parents] *jarawha bħala role model*allura meta raha qisu hu kien diġa mdarras minnha u komplja jiddarras. Jiena pereżempju Beppe anke meta jara teacher tpejjepp taffetwah wisq. Jgħidli imma ma ġol-iskola.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p><b>And then he almost alarmed me and i told him, "Listen Beppe, she is friends with me not you, since you are not seeing the pictures on your facebook , you should not interfere." But he said, "No mum, because she is a teacher." So they see the teacher a step behind us [the parents] *they see her as a role model* so when he saw her, he was already put off by her attitude and that made it all worse. For example, even when he sees a teacher smoking, it really bothers him.</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                 |
| <p><i>Teacher: għax hu qisu diġa għandu idea cara ta' x'inhu tajjeb u xmhux, ta xinhu leċitu u xmhux. Issa mhux għax hu xi tifel qaddis għax ta' din l-età mħumiex imma ehe naħseb anke press li kellu esperjenza xejn sabiħa minn teachers qisu jipretendi li teacher tkun ċertu, ċertu.*interrupted*</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p><i>Because it seems that he already has a clear picture of what's right and what isn't; what is acceptable and what isn't. Nowm it's not because he is a saint himself because at his age it is very hard to be one but yes, also because of the negative experiences with teachers he expects that a teacher is kind of, *interrupted*</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                 |
| <p>Eżempju hu anka persuna jgħidli, eżempju dakinhar kien hawn tfajla hawn litteralment kellha l-qalziet vera baxx. Ġie u qalli ma għidilha. Għidtlu x'ngħidilha? Qalli għax mhix pulita nofs wara jidher. Hu beda jhossu skomdu. Hu dawn l-affarijiet jarahom ta' għax jien anke lili narah. Pereżempju Jien anqas lir-raġel ma ngħid tajba qiegħda? Qabel ma noħroġ immur ħdjej ngħidlu Bep, pereżempju nhar is-Sibt ħriġt u kelli libsa sewda u żarbun kannella u pancho kannella u le qalli pzz *sound* ma ta' dik il-libsa sewda ma' żarbun kannella imma stenn għidtlu ħa nilbes pancho kannella. Ehh, eh, orrajt qed tifhem jiġifieri hu dawn l-affarijiet jarahom u jagħti kas imma again jien naħseb li affetwatu ħafna u hu jaf, 25:00 jien naħseb li hu jaf fejn irid jaasal imma m'għandux biżżejjed biex jaasal. Ara eżempju din tal-università, minn meta nduna li jrid jagħmel l-'O' level u l-'A' levels qisu mar mm hemm barrier. Issa jien jahasra ngħidli mur</p> | <p>For example some days ago there was a girl [student] in here [canteen] and she had a very low waisted trousers. He came up to me and told me to go and tell her. And I asked him what I should tell her and he said she that she was not smart with half her backside on show. He really takes notice of these things. When I am going out I don't ask my husband about the way I look but I go to him and ask him. Last Saturday I was wearing a black dress and a brown shoes and brown pancho and he said, "no pts *sound* mum that black dress with a brown shoes. But then when I told him that I had a brown pancho, he said Ehh, eh, Ok. You see he notices these things but then again <b>I think that his experience has left an impact on him and he knows, I think he knows where he wishes to reach but he hasn't got enough [qualifications] to get there. Take for example, this university thing. Since he realised that he needs to get his 'o' levels and 'a' levels he has withdrawn, there's a barrier. Now I tell to at least go to the school of music and start from there. If nothing he would get an understanding of what discipline is.</b></p> | <p>Impact of schooled literacy on his identity/ insistence of mother on the promotion of schooled behaviour</p> |

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| <p>school of music. Ibda mill-iskool of music l-ewwel nett tkun taf x'jigifieri dixxiplina.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                        |
| <p><i>Teacher: U anka jkollu iktar background ta' musika.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p><i>And he would have more background about music.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                        |
| <p>Imma hu qisu għax jien ġieli jkun qed idoqq fuq għax hu fuq idoqq u jien inkun isfel u nibda ngħid din hu qed idoqqha għax dan qatt ma mar jitgħallem imkien u nitla' nkiss inkiss ninqabd u jgħidli ma qed nisimgħek wara l-bieb. Ngħidli imma istra din ta' Elton John int kont qed idoqqha? Jgħidli mela. Ngħidli qisa qisa erga semmagħhieli. U vera jiehu pjaċir, vera jiehu pjaċir. Imma again.. jibza' li jekk jagħmel pass ... anke eżempju meta jmur idoqq jgħidli ma tantx tħallini narak...għax qisu....</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>But he's like, because sometimes when he is playing upstairs, that's where he plays his music, I hear him from dowsatirs and I ask myself whether he is really palying because he has never been to any classes. So I slowly creep upstairs, but he hears me and tells me that he knows I am behind his door. And I ask him, "was that you palying the Elton John song?" and he says "yes yes" and I ask him to play it again and he really likes that, he really likes that. But again... he is afraid that if he makes a step forward..... even when he goes to play [music] he tells me to stay out of his line of vision.... as if....</p>                                                                                                         |                                                                                        |
| <p><i>Teacher: Jaħasra jaf li hu kapaċi imma fl-istess ħin m'għandux dik il-kunfidenza fih innifsu. Pero insa r-riċerka, tajjeb li qed nitkellem miegħek għaliex issa anke fuq din tal-iskool of music nipprova nkellmu anke jien għax hu lili jsaqsin i hafna jigifieri.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p><i>He knows that he has the talent but at the same time he hasn't got the confidence in himself. But forget the researh, the fact that we are talking about all this is important. Becasue now that I know more, I can back you up even for the school of music thing because he often asks me so...</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                        |
| <p>Anke school of art ngħidli mur school of art jiena taf kemm inħegġigħom. Jien għandi biċċa painting id-dar u ngħidilhom ara ħa, kieku dan ikun il-part time job tagħkom, toqogħdu d-dar tistgħu tgawdu l-familja, qed tagħmel xi ħaġa li tħobb tista' taqla' xi ħaġa tal-flus żejda.. imma Beppe jiena narah meta jaf li jrid imur x'imkien u joqgħod bilqiegħda, jiena narah, naħseb eżempju din l-iskool of music naħseb qed jibza' li ser imur u joqgħod siegħa u nofs bilqiegħda.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <p>Even school of art. I tell him to go to the school of art. I am always trying to push them. I have a painting at home and tell them "look at it, drawing could be your part-time job. You would be able to do it at home close to your family, and while doing something you like you would be earning some extra money.... But I think when he realises that he has to go somewhere where he has to sit down, such as the school of music Beppe is afraid that he will have to go and spend an hour and a half sitting down.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                        |
| <p><i>Teacher: Pero nkellmu ta' għax jien pereżempju l-lesson siegħa tkun u anqas qatt s'issa ma ġie u x-xogħol li tajtu jagħmel m'għamlux u taf xhiex, lilu ngħidli minnek m'qedx nistenna daqshekk biss ta' minnek qed nistenna iktar pereżempju u dejjem he rises up to the challenge *Beppe c-challenge iħobbha* hu jaf li jien qed nesiggi minnu għax narah ta' ċertu livell. U he never lets me down Jien iktar nibza' li f'din il-biċċa xogħol tal-iskool of music jibza' jimmexerja lilu nnifsu ma' oħrajn għax jaħseb li hu *inqas* inqas jigifieri..... Il-primarja u s-sekondarja kellu l-problemi li kellu, tarah imma li issa għamel kambjament fl-atitudni kemm ilu hawn fil-level 1. Tarah li qisu qed jinbidel? Tarah li qisu qed iħares lejn perspettivi oħra jew le?</i></p> | <p><i>I will speak to him though because so far, during my lesson which is an hour long he has never refused any work .You know what I always tell him that from him I am expecting a bit more and he always rises up to the challenfe *Beppe likes a challenge*. He knows that I expect more from him because I consider him of a certain level. And he never lets me down. This school of music issue worries me because I am afraid he is putting off because he is afraid to measure himself with others because he thinks he is "not up to the level" yes .... in primary and secondary we said that he had several problems, do you see any changes in him now, since he has started at level 1? Do you see him considereing other options?</i></p> |                                                                                        |
| <p>Narah li mhux qed jiġi għal qalbu 100% imma mhux uff xi dwejjaq għada skola, dik qatt ma qalha u pereżempju, għandu bidu ta' ċesta f'għajnejh u għidli Bep aħjar ma tmurx għax kellu woodwork u minħabba t-trab u qisu ddarras u qalli uff xi dwejjaq ħa nerga noqgħod hawn? Imma mhux għal qalbu 100%. Hu ġie hawnhekk fuq nota ħażina għal darbtejn, one li ma marx l-art u two li qed ikollhom hafna mhux xogħol tal-idejn qed ikollu hafna maths, english, maltese, psd,</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p><b>I can see that he is not 100% happy but it's not that he ever complains that he does not want to come to school. He never said that he doesn't want to come on the contrary, for example he has a small cyst on his eyelid so I told him you should stay at home because he had woodwork and I was afraid of the sawdust. But he said, "Uff how boring do I have to stay home again?" But still he is not 100% happy. He started here on a double negative note, the first that he did not go to art and design and the second is that they have to do so many</b></p>                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>Mother's perception of her son's experience on the level one programme at MCAST</p> |

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| <p>computer qed tifhem. Allura hu, anke jigi hawn [canteen] jghidli eja ma isa ghax ghandna woodwork. Ghalkemm hu l-woodwork qatt ma haseb fih anke jekk jigi b'xi haqa jaf li jien wahhaltha *hemm rizultat f'idejh ta' xi haqa* u jiehu pjaçir. <b>30:00</b> Dik li jiena naraha. Qed ngħidlek qatt ma qalli ma niçix skola, imma mhux qed jigi 100% kuntent</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p><b>theory lessons including maths, English, psd, computer and Maltese when compared to practical sessions. So when he comes here [canteen] he says, " quick mum hurry up because I have woodwork now."</b> Although he had never thought of woodwork, when completes a task and brings the object home I make a fuss of it*he can see a result* and he likes that. That's what I think. I'm telling you he never said I don't want to go to school, but he's not 100% happy.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: jixtieq iktar hands on.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <p><i>He wishes to have more hands on sessions</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| <p>Naħseb li l-iskola trid tagħti u trid toħroġhom iktar għal l-affarijiet li hawn fis-suq. Ghax tfal bħal Beppe li mhumiex bi ħsiebhom. Jiena beppe jghidli li mhux bi ħsiebu jibqa' għall-università u hekk. Allura ibda... kif qiegħdin ngħidu jekk hawn siġġu mkisser u taf li għandu bżonn ftit welding, qabbad it-tfal jagħmluh. U dik ukoll li juru x-xoġhol tagħhom. Naħseb li t-tfal iktar ma tfaħharhom iktar ma tgħidilhom. Jien almenu l-Beppe hekk narah, iktar ma tgħidlu eh proset, darb'oħra iktar ħa jagħmilha aħjar. Eżempju l-iscouts, is-soltu mingħalija trid iddum xi erba' snin scout qabel ma tiġi leader, hu għabha f'sentejn. Allura tgħidx kemm jiehu pjaçir anke badges, jien ma tantx għandi paçenzja allura ferħan içempel lill-ommi, nanna għandi badge eja wahhalhieli. U jdendilha mal-gwardarobba u jibda jara l-badges u jigi ħdeja u jibda jghidli dak miegħi daħal ma, erbgha għandu badges u jien għandi tmienja. U jien ngħidlu Bep good luck to you li għandek imma t-tifel l-ieħor. Le le ma jghidli jien lilek biss qed ngħid. Qed tifehem?</p> | <p>I think the school has to give more and it has to prepare them more for the needs of the market. Because children like Beppe... Beppe always tells me that he doesn't want to keep on studying for university or the like. So they should start giving them work to do, if there is broken chair which needs some welding, make them fix it. <b>And the other thing is let them show their work. I think that the more you praise children, the more you tell them... that is what I think, that is how I see Beppe, the more you praise his work, the next time he will do it better.</b> For example at scouts, it takes about four years to become a leader, he managed to get there in two years. So he is really proud even with this badges, he calls my mother to come and sew his badge. And he hangs his uniform to the wardrobe and he admires his badges and he starts telling me, "X started with me and he has four badges but I have eight!" and I tell him, "Bep, good luck to you for what you have but the other boy..." "No, no, mum," he says, "I'm just telling you." You see?</p> |  |
| <p>Teacher: Ghax hu qed iħoss success f'din il-ħaqa..*interrupted*</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Because he is feeling that he is successful in this thing... *interrupted*</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |  |
| <p>Hu qed iħossu importanti, hu qed iħossu li anke issa ħa jagħmlu car wash, ilu jghid nies għadu anqas ħareġ il-flier. Ilbieraħ beda jpingi l-flier, kieku hu kif jagħmlu l-flier allura ħadu fuq karta issa llum ħa jurih lill-G. Issa li nibza' hi li l-G jghidlu le mhux hekk ta' il-fliers lesti...</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <p>He is feeling important, he is feeling, even now they are going to do a car wash, he has been telling so many people evnthough the flier isn't out yet. Yesterday he started to draw a flier, how he would have it done, so he took it to the g on a paper. No what I am worried about is that the G will tell him, "no not like that because the fliers are ready...."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: ehe u jerġa' jagħmel pass lura...</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p><i>Ehe and he will go back another step.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |
| <p>Għax hu jghidlek... imma jien nipprova nbenġilhielu ghax ngħidlu imma ħi dawn l-affarijiet huma ilhom jagħmluhom jkunu ilhom jaħsbu għall-flier. Qed tifhem.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>because he would think... but I would try to make him see, I would tell him,"they have been doing these things for ages so they have thought about the flier ages ago." You see?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: U tajjeb li jzommha ghax jista' jigi bżonnha għal xi haqa oħra ghax dan jista' jkun qed jorganizza xi haqa għall-parroçca għal-argument dan qatt ma taf fiex tista' ssib ruħek.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p><i>And it is good t keep it because he might need it for something else. He might find himself organising an event for the parish, you can never tell what he might be doing.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |
| <p>Mhux hekk le jien nipprova jiġifieri li nieħdu postijiet miegħi biex nurih l-affarijiet. Imma jien qisni nara li ż-żgħażaġh tal-lum m'għandhomx biżżejjed opportunitajiet. Hekk anke....</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>That's right, I try to take him places with me to make him see things. But I feel that today's youths haven't got so many opportunities. Even....</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: erġajna qed nagħtu wisq kollox importanza l-kitba u l-qari naraha jien, suppost konna we were</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p><i>A lot of importance is being given to writing and reading at a time when we're supposed to be moving away</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |



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| <p><i>moving away imma ma nafx jien.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |  |
| <p>Eżatt. Le dik li qed ngħidlek għax hu eżempju jhobb jorganizza u jinkwieta jekk ikunu sejrjn tliet leaders x'imkien u wieħed jiddroppja jinkwieta għax jgħidli ma commitment huwa commitment, dak qalli ġej għax ma ġiex. Qed tifhem... Allura dik li nixtieq iktar jien li l-iskola tapprezza anke meta ma nafx kellhom xi sports day jew hekk... ġie qalli uff... football, basketball, football, football... qalli aħna rridu xi haġa bħal tug of war. Huma jridu xi haġa li huma joħorġu l-energija li għandhom qed tifhem x'irrid ngħid. Allura nara li anke hawnhekk, it-tfal ma jinvolvuhomx biżżejjed. Ma jinvolvuhomx allura t-tfal jekk ikunu bħal Beppe jiddejjqu.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>Precisely. That is what I am saying because he likes to organise things and he worries when three leaders agree to go somewhere but then two of them drop out. He complains because for him a commitment is a commitment and if one says that he is going then he should go. Do you understand... so that is what I wish to see more in schools. I wish to see school appreciating these qualities. Even when they had a sports' day or something like that... he returned and said, ooff... football, basketball, football, football... he preferred something like tug of war. They want stuff that gets them to use up their energy, do you know what I mean? So even in such things students are not involved [in decision making], they are not involved so students like Beppe get bored.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: Jien lill-istudenti għidtilhom trid nagħmlu Kunsill u hu biss qalli iva.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>I asked the students whether they would like to set up a council but only Beppe said yes.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| <p>Jiena ninnota għax anke kif jittkellmu l-oħrajn.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>I can see that too, because even in the way the others speak.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: Beppe differenti huwa student li jieħu azzjoni.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <p>Beppe is different he is a student who takes action.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |
| <p>U anke kif jittkellmu, pereżempju jien li ma niġix minnhom kif jirrisponduni.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>Even the way they speak, for instance, the way they answer me back even though they don't know me.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: Imma dik ġeja mill-background ukoll. Inti x'għidli fil-bidu? L-ewwel snin tat-trobbija.... dik tagħmel differenza.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>But that is also dependent on his background, as you said earlier .... the first years of upbringing, that makes a difference.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |
| <p>Dawn l-affarijiet jiena anke meta nara l-shab Beppe. Pereżempju jien nirrabbja ma' Beppe għax ngħidlu Bep ma tilbisx tajjeb għall-iskola, imma mbagħad ir-raġel jgħidli ħa jagħlaq 17 ħa tibqa' tibghatu l-iskola qisu libsitu l-mummy. Ngħidlu veru ehe imma la sejjer man-nies. Anke darb'ohra wieħed minnhom ġenu biex ikabbar il-misluta, l-ewwl għid lili imbagħad għid lili dan it-tifel, għidtlu ara ma nkunx naf li ġġenu biex ikabbar il-misluta għax għidtlu dak saħħa għandu dik għax dik suppost pin. Pero mbagħad Beppe taf x'għandu, eżempju jien għandi missieri strict ħafna esaġerat, esaġerat. Kieku ngħidlek tgħidli għad hawn nies hekk! Biex imur għand omni pereżempju jagħmel stikka għax minn missieri mhux jibza' li missieri jgħid lili imma jibza' li jgħid lili. Hekk anke kif jilbes jekk jitleq mid-dar b'jeans baxx kif jasal hemm itellgħu. Hu (Beppe) carer ħafna. Hu carer. Hu eżempju anke d-dar meta nnaddaf, jien inħobb indawwar l-affarijiet. Hu l-ewwel wieħed li jinnota u jieħu pjaċir jgħidlek prosit. X'riħa t'indafa hawn. Anke jekk insajjar xi haġa jgħidli ma nista' nieħu naqra miegħi. <b>Hu din tal-bullying tefgħetu lura ħafna... tant dara li kulhadd imaqdru ....li tefgħetu li jibza' jagħmel pass.</b> Ara kellu entuzjażmu għall-universita' u hekk... għall-ewwel kont naqra xettika imbagħad bdejt nagħidlu inti ara, ċčekkja ara jstax jgħinkom xi ftit il-gvern uhekk. Imbagħad meta ġab l-application u ra kemm għandu bżonn eżamijiet....</p> | <p>These things even when I see his friends. I tell Beppe off about the way he dresses for school and I tell him that he does not dress adequately but then my husband interferes and tells me that he is almost 17 and that he shouldn't be looking like a mummy's boy. I agree but if he is going to meet with other people! On another occasion one of his friends was convincing him to enlarge the size of his earring. First I warned Beppe, then I warned the other boy and told him that it is a miracle he has got the one he has because initially that was only meant to be a pin. But then Beppe, for example, my father is very strict, extremely strict. So to go to my mother's for instance he covers his earring with a plaster because he is afraid that my father will scold me for letting him ear such earring. Even the way he dresses, if he leaves home with his jeans slight low he brings it up as soon as he gets there. Beppe is very caring. Even at home he is the first one to notice that I cleaned the house, or that I have moved a piece of furniture or I cook something different and he compliments me. The bullying episodes have affected him badly... he got so used to people telling him off and putting him down.... that now he is afraid of taking a step forward. He was full of enthusiasm about university and so on... at first I was sceptic about it but then I encouraged to find out whether they could get a scholar ship and so on. But then we he received the application and saw all the qualifications that he needed.....</p> |  |

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| <p><i>Teacher: But I still I believe he can do it. Li jrid jagħmel hu li ma jaraħiex bġala xi haġa impossibli u jiffoka fuq l-affarijiet biċċa biċċa. L-ewwel fit 'o' levels imbagħad in-next step għax hu kapaċi imma ma jridx jaqta' qalbu. Irrid jemmen iktar fih inniisu. Sfortunatament, l-esperjenza li kellu m'għinitux imma jekk din is-sena jkollu sena positiiva u hekk tidher li ħa tkun għax s'issa mill-assignments tiegħi għadda kollha u l-lecturers l-oħra kollha jfaħħruh. Kollha ndunaw li hu sensitiv u li trid toqgħod attent miegħu anke kif tikkoreġih.</i></p> | <p><i>But I still I believe he can do it. He shouldn't look at it as an impossible feat and focus on the process to get there one step at a time. First the 'o' levels, and then the next step because he is able but he shouldn't be discouraged. He has to believe in himself. Unfortunately, the negative experiences that he had did not help him but if this year he manages to do well and I'm sure he will because he ahs passed all his assignments so far and all lecturers speak highly of him. They all realised that he is very sensitive and that one has to watch out what to say to him and how.</i></p> |  |
| <p>Iva dakinhar ġie jgħidli s-sir tal-benchfitting, qalli Beppe għandu xi haġa għidtlu le dak għax hu sensitiv. Jiena nemmen li jasal u hekk imma</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>Yes a few days ago the bench fitting lecturer came and asked me whether we had any problems at home but then I explained that Beppe is very sensitive.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |
| <p><i>Teacher: Ma nafx hemmx xi trid iżżid aktar.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p><i>Is there anything else you wish to add?</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |

## Appendix 19: Drawing the themes

| 1. Getting to know each other and starting to build the classroom community. | 2. Working on our individual positionality and different identities. | 3. Changing the classroom practice to enhance the learners' engagement. | 4. Newly formed identities and perceptions of self        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Yellow: schooled literacy and perception of school                           | Shocking pink: out of school literacy practices/identity             | White: group/peer influence/importance                                  | White: group/peer influence/importance                    |
| Green: school identity                                                       | White: group/peer influence/importance                               | Red: link between in school and out of school practices                 | Pink font: perceptions of the level 1 programme           |
| Turquoise: perceptions of MCAST                                              | Red font: school experiences                                         | Khaki: funds of knowledge                                               | Mustard font: perceptions of self after the programme     |
| Gray: family influences on literacy and education                            | Blue font: teacher influence on students' self perception            | Bottle green: changes in practice due to technology                     | Purple font: classroom community                          |
| Dark turquoise: family background                                            | Green font: lack of parental involvement and consultation            | Red font: school experiences                                            | Blue font: teacher influence on learners' self perception |
| Purple: family identity                                                      | Brown font: acceptance of fate                                       | Blue font: teacher influence on learners' self perceptions              |                                                           |
| Purple font: classroom community                                             |                                                                      |                                                                         |                                                           |
| Blue font: teacher influence on learners' self perception                    |                                                                      |                                                                         |                                                           |

## **Appendix 20: Improving our structures to secure success and retention rates on Foundation Programmes**

Literacy and education are often linked to economic and social improvements. Throughout the years legislation has sought to provide a structure whereby education is available to all. However, it is common knowledge that although education is compulsory up to age sixteen not all those who attend make the same gains and indeed there are some who gain nothing at all apart from a blow to their self-esteem.

*"While reading and writing are more important and relevant than ever before in the context of our digitised world, our literacy skills are not keeping up. We urgently need to reverse this alarming situation."*

Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth

*"Reading and writing are much more than a technique or a skill. Literacy is about people's self-esteem and ability to function and flourish in society as private individuals, active citizens, employees, or parents."*

Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands

*UNESCO Special Envoy on Literacy for Development*

*"It is the intention of the Maltese government to do its utmost to ensure that everyone in Malta is provided with the best opportunities to acquire the required literacy skills. [] a complementary National Literacy Campaign [] will be implemented also in the light of recent results obtained by Malta in the Programme for International Assessment (PISA) 2010 where the percentage (36.3) of 15 year-olds who were low achievers in reading literacy was significantly higher than the EU average (19.7) and in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2011 where the mean reading score (477) of Maltese ten year-olds was significantly lower than the international average."*

Mr E. Bartolo  
Minister for Education

In view of the above statements, and keeping in mind that MCAST is the vocational college in Malta to which many of the youths described above, as well other older adults, turn, it is of fundamental importance that the services and courses offered at MCAST truly cater for the learners' needs. One must also keep in mind that each individual Foundation student at MCAST occupies

a particular spot on a very wide spectrum of abilities, skills and social situations. Also, apart from Maltese learners, the number of foreign learners enrolling at MCAST is increasing every year and a good number of these learners hold a mother language that is neither English nor Maltese and therefore encounter major difficulties on the courses we offer which are mainly assessed in English. Attracting learners to further education, increasing engagement and retention and hence improving **functional** literacy amongst the country's youths and adult learners are only possible if strong structures are in place. Therefore since qualifications are not a requirement for entry on the foundation courses, if we hope to help learners reach the end of the course successfully, we have to make sure that learners enrol on the right level and on the right course; and that they are offered the necessary support to progress, reach their potential and make it through.

This means that on enrolment, learners need to embark on a learning process which starts when they sit for an initial assessment test (IAT) in key skills (maths, English and Maltese). This IAT would help the college determine the level and the route (ideally we should have two options, one vocational or one vocational with key skills) on which the student should be placed as well as reveal to the learners areas which they need to strengthen in order to succeed on their course. Hence ideally, the initial selection should be followed by a closer look at the results to ensure that a correct interpretation was given to IAT results and identify areas of support needed by the student in order to provide adequate provisions.

To provide adequate provision we need to be in touch with our context and our learners. I will now describe different categories of learners that enrol on the Foundation Programmes at MCAST.

- a) Learners who are Maltese nationals and who have been through our system of compulsory education, but did not achieve a qualification in their SEC exams. In their majority they understand English and Maltese just enough to cope with classroom and workshop instruction. They may also manage to make themselves understood in both languages if the need arises (even if they are reluctant to speak in English). However, for several reasons (including learning difficulties, social barriers, a discrepancy between schooled literacy practices and out-of-school practices etc.), their reading and writing are not strong enough to secure a good mark on the IATs so they are placed at Level 1.
- b) Learners who are Maltese nationals and who have been through our system of compulsory education but, for a few marks, did not achieve a qualification in their SEC exams. They would certainly be able to

understand English and Maltese well enough to cope with classroom and workshop instruction. They can communicate and get their message across in both languages if the need arises. Their reading and writing are good enough to secure a good mark on the IATs so they are placed at Level 2.

- c) Learners who are Maltese nationals, have been through our system of compulsory education, have never been assessed or diagnosed with learning difficulties or learning disabilities (thus received very little support if any), failed the mainstream and so apply to MCAST on level 1 with very limited school literacy skills and a very limited chance of progressing to higher levels.
- d) Learners who are Maltese nationals, have completed the Pathway Programme and apply on level 1. It is important to recognise that as things stand at the moment these learners haven't got many courses they can choose from especially because of health and safety issues. The result is that they are mainly being absorbed by IICT. This choice however does not necessarily reflect their wishes or meet their needs. It is also important to note that while some of these learners may well be able to cope with the level 1 programme and do well, others may enrol on level 1 for the simple reason that there is nothing else they can apply for. The latter group encounter difficulties in both key skills and vocational content but stay on in the lack of other options. The consequence is that often the programme has to be slowed down and other learners within the same class are frustrated and disengaged.
- e) Foreign learners who apply at MCAST because they are living in Malta and need qualifications to find a job but most of them are faced with a strong language barrier because all vocational courses are assessed mainly in English and mostly involve a lot of reading (research) and writing. Not to mention that there is the key skills component which is compulsory, so unless they strengthen the language basics before they embark on a vocational course they are bound to get discouraged and drop out or fail their assignments.

### **A way forward**

The initial assessment test may need to be revised. The development of an online test for parts of the IATs (grammar and punctuation skills and reading and comprehension) should be considered as this would facilitate scoring and recording of results. Discussing IATs with learners once they start the course

should become part of our practice because that helps them to acknowledge their weak areas and focus on the action that needs to be taken. This is also very important because it may give Lecturers the opportunity to acknowledge any discrepancy between the IAT results and the actual abilities of the learners in everyday life contexts. Learners (as has already happened) may be placed on the wrong level on the basis of IAT results rendering disengagement highly probable. Therefore there should be an adequate period of time that truly allows for transition between levels, courses or institutes. At the moment this is not possible because by November some assignments are already issued and done therefore transition is in reality hindered.

In the case of learners in category (a) the embedded level 1 course which is delivered by the Learning Support Unit (LSU) lecturers in conjunction with the vocational lecturers is a good step forward but does not reach all the learners enrolled at this level. In order to be able to reach what is reachable, constant training for staff is necessary to keep up to date with the latest research and practices in the fields of literacy and numeracy. To secure the engagement and retention of learners we should move away from an approach of 'autonomous literacy skills' (Street, 2004) and towards situated literacy practices (Barton et al., 2000; Gee, 2004; Tett et al., 2006) and start drawing on the learners' interests and funds of knowledge (Moll 1992).

On the other hand to reach out to those learners who continue to be totally disengaged from the key skills and any theoretical aspects that fall within their vocational units we need to start considering another route which leads to a certificate in pure vocational skills/competences. This may be a transcript of units covered and skills/competences achieved. This route would not only attract the disengaged learners but also the learners coming from Pathway (category d) who have significant learning disabilities. From the calls we are making to chase after our learners it is pretty evident that learners leave the college to settle for the odd jobs here and there any way, so we might as well try to give them some expertise, limited as that may be, in specific areas. We are continuing to stress that they are not employable unless they are fluent readers and writers (in two languages) and numeracy literate, but learners are proving us wrong because they are finding employment and dropping out. If we offer the watered down purely vocational route we might get them engaged to a point where they consider enrolling on a course which includes key skills and theory but trying to reach them the other way round is not proving to be very successful.

Category (b) learners need a structure of support which LSU is doing its utmost to offer however, very often, the unit finds itself short of staff and resources. If the number of learners on the Foundation Programmes continues

to increase, it becomes very obvious that the staff to offer support (lecturers and LSAs) ought to increase as well. Again continuous training is needed since the problems we encounter on our daily basis change and evolve every year.

Category (c) learners need a solid structure which is not in place as yet at the college. Although we have the Inclusive Education Unit (IEU), this just includes the coordinator and few LSAs working with LSU. We do not offer the services of psychological assessments and any screenings or diagnostic testing conducted is sporadic and carried out by the undersigned and two other members of the LSU staff on a voluntary basis during free lessons or after college hours. This obviously leaves many of the learners who were already failed by the system undiagnosed and with no support at all. These learners are not even entitled to access arrangements during assignments and tests. Not to mention that MCAST is following access arrangement procedures which are MATSEC based and therefore intended for academic courses and not vocational ones. Therefore the college needs to work on a policy for access arrangements and most definitely the college needs to build a structure through which struggling learners can be assessed, diagnosed and supported. Ideally this entails the recruitment of qualified staff (educational psychologist, literacy specialists, INCOs, social workers etc.) to offer the service to all institutes.

Category (e) learners need yet another structure. After IATs and interviews (the latter are not being done as yet) profiling of foreign learners should be done before they apply for a course. This would mean that we could guide our foreign learners better as to what course to choose. If we realise that their language is too weak for them to successfully handle a vocational course we should guide them towards enrolling on an English Language Programme for Foreigners alongside the purely vocational course before they embark on any other course.

I strongly believe that opening the doors of MCAST to all those who wish to further their education is a noble initiative and it reflects MCAST's mission statement. However I am convinced that that is not enough. We need to check that structures are in place to secure a successful experience for our learners, and we also need to evaluate the structures that are already in place and make amendments where needed, especially with regards to key skills and their relevance to the vocational courses, Maltese and English language policy (standard or functional; academic or vocational), forms of assessment, assignment and re-sit deadlines etc. If we fail to address these immediate issues we would only be giving learners who apply at MCAST a disservice and reinforcing a negative image of education and educational experiences held by a good number of them especially those on our Level 1 and Level 2 Foundation Programmes.



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