The Exam Discourse:
The need for a shift in paradigm

Streaming, which has been a topic of hot debate in the past years, is once again standing in the limelight due to recent movements and research studies presenting their arguments in favour or against the subject.

The document, ‘Biex it-Tfal Kollha Jmorru Ahjar’, proposes a reform in the transition from Primary to Secondary Education emphasising the need to review the current setup. At the heart of the document lies the notorious Junior Lyceum exam, for which students are streamed in Year 4. It has been reported that preparation for this exam is resulting in a lot of stress and anxiety among students, teachers and parents alike. This document has furthermore stated that “Primary Education, especially in the upper years, has been reduced to coaching pupils for the high-stakes exam at the end of Year 6.”

When selective exams are used as a measure of students’ success rate, one would be utilising a paradigm which supports, encourages and facilitates a student’s ability to obtain good grades in high-stake exams. This type of discourse, which centres on academic achievement, is detached from a holistic understanding of the true problems surrounding the issue. This is further reinforced when exam results are published in newspapers.
for comparative purposes. The emphasis is on measurement of achievement through grades and standardised testing with the consequence that areas of learning which fall outside the statistics, such as music, drama, art, physical education, creative thinking and other soft skills are never taken seriously.

Such a paradigm emphasises uniformity and takes place in a top-down environment in which policy-makers impose programmes, procedures and policies on individuals having less control of their learning. When too much attention is placed on these statistics (to the detriment of other current educational realities), one fails to take into account individual differences in cultural backgrounds, rates and modes of learning, and other crucial factors that influence a student’s exam performance. Ignoring these differences is one of the reasons why particular students continue to fail exams, drop out of school at an early stage, and feel that education has failed them.

It is high time that we move away from a preparatory system and towards a developmental system which is more child-centred, thus ensuring a well-rounded education. By a well-rounded education we understand an educational experience which seeks to nurture abilities which cannot be quantified, such as building successful relationships with others, giving meaningful service to the community, developing emotional maturity, ethical behaviour and ultimately, a passion for learning.

In our opinion, the discourse needs to be shifted to one which promotes a more holistic educational development, since learning signifies much more than making it through high-stakes exams. However, such a shift carries a number of other implications. Educators need to be allowed more flexibility in order to use their professional expertise to personalise instruction and give students meaningful choices. Since differentiated learning is still a new concept among some educators, continuing professional development and the provision of ongoing support should be interwoven in this new system.

Another area which needs to be reconsidered is the present form of assessment. One needs to promote a mode of assessment which, rather than comparing students to each other, compares a student’s present performance to his/her prior performances. So, rather than using precious newspaper space to continue perpetuating the stigma that certain areas of Malta carry, one needs to write more about, and celebrate, the individual’s development and success. It is only through positive thinking and the feeling of success that one can alleviate the burden of failure that children from deprived areas very often carry with them throughout their scholastic years.

A holistic developmental education encourages schools and colleges to develop innovative diversity learning programmes which respond to the local and personal needs of their learners. Success can only be achieved if schools will be allowed to take initiatives and are supported with financial, physical as well as human resources to respond to the

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diverse social and cultural realities that different localities pose.

Having a vision for the future which merely comprises of action plans that measure up to the needs for employment will not give us better results. Results are achieved when it is ensured that every child is on the path of success, that is, that every child is progressing when compared to previous performances. Students are engaged in learning activities and coursework that will help them function in the real world. Educators and students are empowered to have more control over their learning environments and students are enabled to develop competencies at their own pace. Above all, the need to classify students with disability labels is lessened and students are allowed to shine in their areas of strength.

**The Let Me Learn team**

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**Bidu mill-ġdid!**

*Reġa wasal iż-żmien biex nibdew it-taħriġ. Fil-bidu ta’ Jannar li ġej, grupp ta’ edukaturi, fosthom ġhalliema tal-primarja u s-sekondarja, Learning Support Assistants, Amministraturi u Subject Coordinators, se jibdew it-taħriġ tagħhom, li se jsir fiċ-Ċentru tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali (NCC) fil-Ħamrun.*


Jekk tixtieq aktar informazzjoni, jew jekk tixtieq tippartecipa f’dan it-taħriġ, żur il-website tagħna fuq www.letmelearnmalta.org
Kemm ilek tahdem maċ-Ċentru tal-LML?
Nhar il-11 ta’ Jannar, 2009 nagħlaq tliet snin bl-eżatt.

X’bidla ġab mieghu dan ix-xogħol?

Esperjenzajt xi bidla fil-mod ta’ kif thares lejn l-esperjenza tat-tagħlim?

X’inhuma l-affarijiet pożittivi u n-nuqqasijiet li qed tesperjenza f’dan ix-xogħol?

Liema kienet l-ahjar ġurnata fix-xogħol tieghek s’issa?

U x’sar minnu Bernard?
Bernard wera’ x-xewqa li jerġa jmur lura fil-klassi u issa qiegħed jghallem l- istorja fil-klassijiet tas-sekondarja fil-kullegġ ta’ St Albert.
The theme chosen for this year’s event was ‘Reflective Practice – your food for thought.’ In fact, the importance of reflection was emphasised in the opening speech given by Mr Colin Calleja, coordinator of the LML Process and lecturer at the University of Malta.

Educators Mr Carlo Zarb, Ms Claudine Sawyer and Ms Lara Anne Brincat as well as B.Ed 3rd year student Veronique Micallef Grimaud delivered remarkable presentations in which they shared their experience of personal and professional growth throughout this learning process. The presenters linked this experience with their practice and demonstrated how the LML process has brought significant changes to the way they perceive the learning process. They commented that the Let Me Learn process, apart from helping them to focus on the strengths of their students, has equipped them with strategies enabling them to reach different learners. Reactions to these presentations were given by Ms Joan Brincat, assistant head at St. Joseph Blata, and Ms Maria Camilleri, head of school, Mariam Al Batool.

Certificates were awarded to 38 educators from 15 different schools in the primary and secondary sectors. 21 B. Ed students were also awarded a certificate for the successful completion of the training.
Mr Caruana’s English Form 2 class has 24 students, with varying degrees of reading levels. Some of the students know the grammar well, others don’t. Some students are very fluent in speaking the language, but rarely turn up with their homework. Others seem to be always lagging behind and then there are those who seem to be learning faster than he is teaching. Many teachers, like Mr Caruana, feel frustrated at having to deal with the demands of the syllabus, knowing that he is not respecting the individuality of the students in his class.

The National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) emphasises the fact that schools have to support the wide spectrum of students in all their diverse needs. It states that the “educational community must develop a system that identifies, from an early stage, the potential and needs of all students.” Schools should provide “a basic educational package for everyone and specialised provision catering to the particular needs of specific students.”

Many educators feel trapped between the pressure of our exam-oriented system and the knowledge that they are not rendering justice to a good number of students in their classrooms. Since our classrooms are so diversified, and they will continue to be, our best bet as educators would be to learn how to provide differentiated instruction in order to respond to the varied needs of our students.

The term differentiation is not a new term. In fact it has been used for a number of years. Differentiated instruction applies to an approach to teaching so that students have multiple options for taking in information and making sense of ideas. Although essential curriculum objectives may be similar for all students, methodologies used in the classroom must be varied to suit the individual needs of all students. Therefore, the teacher would first need to identify the students’ varying readiness levels, their interests as well as their learning patterns. This knowledge will help the teacher to react responsively.

In this context, teachers are required to be flexible in their approach to teaching, adjusting the curriculum and presenting the information to learners rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. Classroom teaching becomes a blend of whole-class, group and individual instruction. Instructional approaches should vary and adapted in relation to the diverse needs of the students in the classroom.

There are a number of books about the topic that provide a thorough explanation of the principles of differentiated practice, and also equip teachers with tools and strategies which help teachers vary their instructional methods. The following are two books on the subject that can be borrowed from our library:

*Differentiation in Practice*, by Carol Ann Tomlinson and Caroline Cunningham Eidson, is a resource which can help teachers differentiate the curriculum. This book explores how real teachers incorporate differentiation principles and strategies throughout an
Differentiation and diversity in the primary classroom, edited by Eve Bearne, examines the process involved providing a curriculum for children across a range of abilities. A major underlying assumption throughout this book is that diversity and difference are to be welcomed in the classrooms.

Throughout the use of practical advice, case studies and examples, this book will help teachers to reflect on and improve their practice.


What does the shooting of a LML DVD involve? Our latest LML DVD, which revolves around the implementation of the LML Process in the secondary classroom, is the second in a series of visual resources aimed to support our training.

This has been no easy feat, considering the amount of schools, students and teachers participating in it. The original plan behind it was to present different realities of teachers and students implementing the Let Me Learn Process and bringing to the surface possibilities that different learners have discovered.

One of the challenges has been to adapt the script to a mixed audience, ranging from teachers who are deeply engaged in the Process, to others who have just been introduced to it. It was also very laborious to go through the long hours of footage from the different classes and select those that most express the instances of implementation, strategising and personalisation. One needs to keep in mind that the lessons being filmed were not staged so filming included many other class sequences that, although valuable in their own right, had to be filtered in a twenty-minute concise feature film.

It has been very encouraging to learn that the teachers and students who were actually being filmed, although quite hesitant at the beginning, were very comfortable in front of the camera. There was hardly any need of refilming or prompting of any sort; they were at ease doing what they know best – teaching and learning. This contributed greatly to producing an authentic and realistic final product. The staff of Picture Box, particularly Joe Meli, who was in charge of the filming, editing, audio and all the other technicalities involved, were highly professional. They understood the needs of each setting and worked around it.

All in all, the whole team contributed to make this DVD a big success – perhaps not in the Academy Awards series, but undoubtedly in the way it manages to deliver the message that a number of educators in the Maltese context are willing to embrace and work with diversity in their classroom setting.
Għaldaqstant, il-membri tat-tim tal-LML iddeċiedew li jibdew jiddedikaw ħafna mill-enerġija u l-hin tagħhom biex jipprovdu servizz ta’ mentoring lill-ġalliema li jkunu għadhom kemm lestew it-taħrig fil-proċess tal-LML.

Is-sena li għaddiet, ‘I fuq minn 50 edukatur għażl li jieħdu dan is-servizz u dik hi r-raġuni għalfejn kontu qegħdin tarawna spiss niġru mas-saqajn fl-iskejjel tagħkom! Din is-sena dan is-servizz ser ikompli jingħata importanza qawwija.

L-ġajnuna li nipprovdu tiddependi ħafna mill-bżonnijiet ta’ l-ġhalliema konċernati. Hemm min talabna li nagħmlu awareness session ma’ l-istudenti, hemm min wera x-xewqa li jkollu ġajnuna fil-validazzjoni ta’ l-LCI u hemm uħud li xtaqu li jieħdu ġajnuna fi proġetti ofra li qed jieħdu sehem fihom huma u l-istudenti tagħhom u li fihom qed jużaw il-proċess tal-LML.

Il-feedback li ġbarna s’issa kien inkoraġġanti ħafna u s’issa jidher li mejjin fit-triq it-tajba. Nixtieq nieħu l-opportunita’ biex nawgura lill-ġhalliema li qed jagħmlu ħilithom biex jimplimentaw dan il-Proċess ghaliex qegħdin naraw li qed isir ħafna xogħol taħjeb! Dawn huma ftit mill-kummenti tagħkom!

“L-idea tal-mentoring hija tajba ħafna ghaliex naf li nista’ nserrah fuq persuni li jistghu jagħtunti s-sapport neċesserju u pariri siewja fl-implimentazzjoni tal-proċess. Iħalluni libera li nagħżel u niddediedi jien x’tip ta’ sapport nixtieq u għalhekk huwa servizz flessibbli ħafna” Romina Hollier, year 4. Paola B


“Mhix xi ĥaġa komuni li tiġi offrut servizz ta mentoring wara li tagħmel xi tip ta’ taħriġ. Huwa servizz utli ghaliex naf li m’inin wahdi u personalment, inħossni akta komda meta nkun naf li hemm xi ħadd jissapportjani! Xi kultant ikolli bżonn ta’ mbuttatura żghira!” Christa Galea, Learning assistant, Mater Boni Consiglii, Paola.
Mill-Qrib: Intervista ma’ Ms Diane Fenech u ma’ Ms Edel Spiteri


1. Rajt xi differenza kemm ilek timplimenta l-Let Me Learn fit-tagħlim tiegħek?

2. X’ taħseb fuq is-sapport li qed jiġi offrutt mit-trejners tal-LML?
Peress li hawn Malta m’aħniex imdorrijin bil-one-to-one mentoring, għall- bidu ma tħossokx komda kemm tixtieq bil-fatt li persuna se tiġi tarak fil-klassi. Shabi kienu jaraw il-mentor tiegħi bħala tutor ġejja tara l-lezzjoni imbagħad taghtli l-feedback tagħha. Maż-żmien, aktar ma bdejt inqatta’ ħin mal-mentor tiegħi, niddiskuti ideat ġodda u nippjana metodi ġodda, l-idea ta’ tutor li ġejja fil-klassi biex tikkritikak tkissret u l-mentor saret għaliija sapport imprezzabbli.

3. Kif għenek dan is-sapport?

4. Thoss li dan is-sapport huwa essenzjali?
Ma nhossx li l-mentoring huwa xi ħaġa ta’ sena jew sentejn u daqshekk. Sakemm il-hin min-naha tal-LML trejners jippermetti, nixtieq nibqa’ nikkonsulta ‘l-mentor tiegħi ġejja sena wara oħra.

Jiena għalliema li nemmen li l-entużjażmu fil-klassi huwa bla dubju ta’ prijorita’.
1. Rajt xi differenza kemm ilek timpimmente l-Let Me Learn fit-taghlim tiegħek?


2. X’ taħseb fuq is-sapport li qed jiġi offrut mit-trejners tal-LML?

Is-sapport kien utli ħafna, ghax meta terga’ tibda s-sena skolastika ġdida tkun ilek li spiċċajt it-taħriġ xi 5 xhur u forsi ċertu affarrijiet tinsihom.....(il-memorja ma tibqax li kienet!)

Barra minn hekk il-grupp ta’ tfal li jkollok ikun differenti minn tas-sena ta’ qabel u għalhekk tista’ tiltaq’a ma diffikultajiet li ma tkunx iltaqajt magħhom waqt it-taħriġ. It-trainer tieghi (Michelle) għenitni ħafna kemm waqt li kont qed nagħmel il-class profile u meta għamilna l-LCIs. Barra minn hekk għenitni biex mat-tfal għamilt il-powercard, ghax ghad li kont għamilt tiegħi, ġejt f’diffikulta’ kif ser nagħmilha mat-tfal. Darba oħra ġiet waqt lezzjoni tal-komponiment fejn jien ridt li t-tfal jużaw il-Konfluwenza u l-input tagħha gheni ħafna.

3. Kif għenek dan is-sapport ?

Il-fatt li jien kelli persuna lejn min nirreferi f’diffikulta’ gheni ħafna matul is-sena l-ohra. Ħafna drabi konna nikkomunikaw bl-email u kull meta kelli mistoqsija jew diffikulta’ fuq xi ħaġa dejjem sibt l-ťgħajnuna pronta. Naħseb li dan is-sapport gheni biex ma naqtax qalbi u ma nitlifx l-entużjażmu ghal-Let Me Learn.

Għeżież Edukaturi,


info@letmelearnmalta.com
Peozija dwar il-patterns li nuża biex nitghallmu

Jekk tkun għoli fis-Sekwenza
Zhur ikollok il-paċenzja
Ħajtek dejjem ippjanata
Infurmata w organizzata.
Titlob hafna nformazzjoni
Għax trid li jkollok direzzjoni.

Jekk tuża l-aktar il-Preċiżjoni
Ikkollok hafna attenzjoni
Tfittex hafna fid-dettall
U ma ħallli mkien battal.
Għax tkun ferm osservanti
Taqra u tikteb, għalik importanti.

Jekk imbagħad timxi bit-Teknika
Tkun tippreferi aktar il-prattika.
Issewwi u tahdem sew b’idejk
U forsi ma tkunx trid in-nies ħdejk.
Għax ta’ fit kliem u iżjed azzjoni
Fix-xogħol ta’ jdejk għandek id-doni.

Jekk tinzerta tkun Konfluwenti
Tkun trid tagħmel xi haga differenti.
Thobb tkun għalhekk originali
Tolq xi ħaga u mhux tikkupjani.
Ikkollok hafna ideat
U tkun trid turi lil kulhadd.

Dawn l-erba’ patterns twieldu magħna
Kollha bżonnjużi għat-tagħlim tagħna.
Xi wieħed jew aktar jispiqka ġo fina
Kemm fit-tagħlim u anke f’ħajjita.
Ikkollok xi jkollok u tkun xi tkun
Thoss li inti dejjem għandek raġun.

Iżda trid tiptakar li m’intix waħdek
Hemm ħaddiehor li qed jgħix miegħek.
Trid tidra tifhem u tirrispetta
U tagħmel mill-ahjar li tista’
Biex tahdem ma’ shabek minghajr ilmenti
U b’hekk inkunu ferm aktar kuntenti.
The contribution of LML in International Conferences

The third Let Me Learn International Conference was held in Tarragona, Spain in July 2007. During this conference, the LML Malta Centre had the opportunity to share its findings about the research study that was carried out among educators who have participated in the Let Me Learn Professional Learning Process (LML PLP). A copy of this study can be obtained from our website: www.letmelearnmalta.org. The second LML DVD, revolving around the implementation of the LML Process in secondary education classrooms was also launched at this conference.

The LML Malta Centre has also made its contribution to the Social Capital International Conference that was held in Malta in September 2008. The LML Centre presented a paper about how the LML Professional Learning Process helps create social networks between teachers thus promoting professional interaction and collegial sharing of experiences. Through such interactions, learners benefit from a richer capital of professional practice.

Recently, the LML team has participated in a learning conference, ‘The Whole Child – Embracing A Global Vision’ which was held in November 2008 in Turkey. This provided an opportunity for the trainers to learn how they can pursue approaches that help students grow personally, as well as academically, thus embracing the needs of the whole child. The LML team members had the opportunity to participate in a number of institutes in which they explored differentiated instruction and examined how research about the topic can be translated into action.

Our New Website

*We are proud to launch our new Let Me Learn website, www.letmelearnmalta.org. In creating this new website, our goal was to provide a useful resource for educators who wish to explore or implement the Let Me Learn Process.*

The website is made up of various sections. First of all there is a comprehensive explanation of the theories and concepts put forward by the LML process. This includes an explanation of the Interactive Learning Model and an overview of the four learning patterns. An important page in this site is the ‘Resources’ section. In this section, one can find PowerPoint presentations, lesson plans and other ideas that can be used in the implementation of the LML Process. The Let Me Learn videos are also streamed on the website in the ‘Media’ section. It was one of our aims to make these videos accessible to educators who wish to explore the LML process. These videos are also an important resource for the Let Me Learn practitioners. One can also look up the ‘Research’ section in order to learn more about the studies that have been carried out in the field. A search feature has also been added in order to help you navigate around the site! An important feature which we would like to promote is the ‘Forum’. We would like to invite educators to use this space in order to discuss key issues. A question, comment or article will be posted and visitors will be invited to leave their reactions and their opinion. Another important feature is the chat which will enable us to communicate with each other, providing instantaneous feedback.

Hope to meet you on the web!