The Let Me Learn Process

Educators' Perspectives of their Learning Experience

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ABSTRACT

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The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) developed in 2012 emphasises the importance of having school communities made up of reflective practitioners who undergo continuous professional development throughout their careers. The Let Me Learn Process aims at training educators to better address the learning needs of all learners. Through this Process, children are encouraged to make sense of the world around them by being given personalised strategies to address the challenges they encounter while learning. Unquestionably, teachers in the contemporary classroom are faced with students coming from different social and cultural backgrounds, having individual interests and embracing unique personalities. This makes it more complex to reach them all in their own individual ways, which is where the Let Me Learn Process comes in. The purpose of this study is to provide a profound insight on the implementation of the Process in one Maltese primary state school that had the opportunity to receive the Let Me Learn Process training over a period of three years, which was completed two years before this study was carried out. Six educators; one head of school, three teachers and two learning support educators participated in both individual interviews and a focus group. This qualitative representation reveals that the Process has served as a positive tool to foster empowerment of learners, awareness of both students' and educators' learning patterns, more effective interaction between the school team and more engaging lesson planning. It helped mark an improvement in the school's overall academic performance and the school experienced more parental involvement than ever before. Nevertheless, this study identifies challenges which the educators experience on a daily basis, mainly the vast and demanding curriculum which restricts the time available in the classroom for the implementation of different teaching strategies.

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LET ME LEARN PROCESS   LEARNING PATTERNS   TEACHING

EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES   REFLECTIVE PRACTICES

Author's Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Dissertation and that it is my original work. No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this, or any other university or institution of learning. I hold the University of Malta harmless against any third party claims with regard to copyright violation, breach of confidentiality, defamation and any other third party right infringement.

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Alison Debono

Dedications

This research is wholeheartedly dedicated to all the students I have had the pleasure to work with, who instilled in me a passion towards inclusion and who have shown me that a little love, dedication and attention, can really go a long way towards students' success and well-being.

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Abbreviations

LMLP	Let Me Learn Process
LML	Let Me Learn
LSE	Learning Support Educator
LCI	Learning Connections Inventory
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
FIT	Forge, Intensify and Tether
SMT	Senior Management Team
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
NMC	National Minimum Curriculum
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
LOF	Learning Outcomes Framework
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
SDP	School Development Plan
FREC	Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction and chapter overview

The main objective of this research is to evaluate educators' perspectives on their experience of the application of the Let Me Learn Process (LMLP, or the Process) when it was introduced in their school. This research attempts to explore how their teaching methods changed when they became aware of the Let Me Learn Process and applied it in the classrooms. It analyses the perceptions of six educators in one local state school with regards to their transformative learning experience through the LMLP. This study aims to discover how teachers are applying the training they received in their classrooms. It also explores if the Let Me Learn Process could be a way how to shift to a more student-centred paradigm.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the study by looking into the local educational scenario and to give a brief account of the Let Me Learn initiative in Malta. Furthermore, this chapter provides an outline of all the sections found in this dissertation.

1.2 The Let Me Learn Process implementation in Malta

The Let Me Learn Process was introduced in Malta in 1999. According to Calleja (2013), the LMLP is a process that has a lot of potential in helping both the students and the educators to discover their learning selves in order to make the learning experience an interdependent one which is accessible to all. The Process has the potential of transforming teachers into better administrators of the curriculum by adapting their teaching methods according to the various learning patterns in the classrooms. Over the years this Process has evolved in a way which mainly focuses on actual experiences based on relevant theory and gives room for deep reflection and evaluation (Calleja, 2013).

The LMLP training manual states that through the LMLP training, educators develop an understanding of who they are as learners and how they can support their students to become better learners. The LMLP helps educators to achieve better results in the classroom when it comes to the application of an inclusive pedagogy, the delegation of autonomy and the discovery of both the

students' and their own learning preferences. Moreover, LML trainers enter schools with the main goal of providing teachers with feedback on the spot (Let Me Learn Training, 2018).

1.3 The main tools used in the Let Me Learn Process

The LMLP as an advanced learning system (Calleja & Johnston, 2015) is made up of the following tools:

1. Learning Connections Inventory (LCI) - The Process starts with the identification of the students' and the teachers' learning patterns which are represented as four distinct scores. The four different patterns are sequence, precision, technical reasoning and confluence. Young students are introduced to four different characters, each representing a learning pattern that teachers refer to, to help them learn with intention.

2. Personal Learning Profile - This profile helps learners state their scores for each pattern and understand the dynamics of these patterns (Johnston, 2015). This is very similar to the concept of creating a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework which makes it easier for teachers to understand the brain networks of a child, therefore providing different means of making learning accessible. Similar to the UDL framework, this profile provides the students with the opportunity to speak out in ways which they feel helps them obtain information best, hence, offering the students means of action and expression and encourages student engagement. Hall, Meyer and Rose (2012) explain how such an idea helps in supporting students by planning lessons with the intention of suiting everyone.

3. Word Wall - The word wall is a very important tool in the Process. This, in correspondence with Bloom's taxonomy, originally created in 1956, helps the students identify which patterns are being asked for in a particular learning activity. Through the use of keywords students can decode the learning tasks they are being asked to do. With such a process students are encouraged to use their processing patterns with intention and learn how to learn.

4. The FIT tool - FIT stands for 'Forge, Intensify and Tether'. This tool is necessary to make the students more comfortable with using all the patterns in order to be able to participate in all the tasks. It helps the students to withdraw from the constant use of the 'Use First' pattern and practise using the 'Use as Needed' and 'Avoid' patterns on a regular basis (Johnston, 1998).

5. Strategy Card – The strategy card helps the students decode tasks appropriately by giving them an indication of how which strategies they can apply in order to fit their learning patterns so as to reflect the requirements of assigned tasks.

1.4 Primary school chosen for the study

For this study, one state Primary school was chosen after the staff had undergone input from the LML trainers for a period of 3 years. The school population is approximately 160 students. As clearly indicated in the school's mission statement, the school works hard to give the students the best schooling experience, full of care and love whilst instilling in the students the love to learn and achieve more in life. The school's motto itself implies its keen interest in all of its students, which complements its mission statement. The School Development Plan (SDP) Report 2016 – 2017 shows a regular mention of the Let Me Learn Process, indicating a team of professionals, including the senior management team (SMT), teachers, Learning Support Educators (LSEs) and LML trainers working together towards achieving a common goal; to support students' intentional learning. However, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis contained a point which implied that the LMLP application was still unclear. This brought the team of professionals together to identify teachers who are still new to the LMLP, in order to guide them towards its right application, with the ultimate aim to cater for the needs of all individual learners in the classroom in a more effective manner. The LMLP training made it to the school's priority development plans.

This research, therefore, explores how this primary school has applied the LMLP to bring about a qualitative change in the teaching and learning process.

1.5 Exploring the research questions

The main research questions around which this dissertation revolves are the following:

- Has the Let Me Learn Process helped educators grow into better facilitators of learning?
- Has the Let Me Learn Process helped the young learners in their learning journey?
- Has the Let Me Learn Process helped the school to be of better service to the students attending the school?

Through these three research questions, I aim to find out the perceived effectiveness of the LMLP when it comes to its application in the school. It is a Process which endeavours to achieve a wider inclusive spectrum in schools, and through this research study, I intend to capture in some detail the implementation of this Process and study the effects it is leaving on both the educators and the students themselves. This is done through the eyes of the educators that form part of the school's community and through the eyes of the school's leadership team. Through interviews, we explore how the Process made an impact on the school as a whole, and whether it has reached its desired goals.

1.6 Overview of chapters

The next chapter provides a critical analysis of the literature revolving around student-centred pedagogy and the local educational scenario. Chapter Three describes the methods used to collect data and their benefits with regards to this research. Subsequently, Chapter Four presents the findings categorised in themes, using a thematic research approach. Chapter Five reviews and discusses the findings in relation to the literature review presented in the second chapter. The last chapter concludes this study by providing answers to the research questions and presents future recommendations to issues which create concerns in the Primary school classroom.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The Let Me Learn Process aims at creating a learning environment in which learning is personalised and learners learn with intention. Through the LMLP learners take in the world around them and make sense of it so that they can "respond to it in an efficient, effective, and appropriate manner" (Calleja & Johnston, 2015). The LMLP is one which considers both students and teachers as active learners. Attard Tonna and Calleja (2010) observe that teaching is a "solitary profession". Most times, teachers work between the four walls of their classroom, which makes it difficult to share new ideas and learn from one another. Therefore, this Process builds on a robust educational theory (Calleja, 2010), supports educators in understanding themselves as learners and helps them understand how the learners under their care make sense of the world through their personalised learning processes (Calleja & Johnston, 2015). This, in turn, helps these educators create learning environments that respect the diversity of needs. It supports each learner to learn autonomously and intentionally. In this way, teachers are able to plan according to the different needs in the classroom and use different methods to explain various concepts. The LMLP staff development process enables teachers' dialogue and conversation to construct educational visions, hence, making it less of a withdrawn profession and more of a circle of interaction between all those involved in the learning process – administrators, teachers, and students that work together to create an inclusive and productive learning space (Johnston & Johnston, 1998).

In this chapter, the Let Me Learn Process is discussed in light of other theories that position this Process within the applied theoretical traditions.

2.2 The Maltese educational system

Locally, children from age five to age sixteen benefit from free education for all. Over the last two decades the education system in Malta has promoted inclusion as a foundation principle on which all educational policies were built. The move away from selection and practices of streaming came about due to the belief that such practices were the main culprits for the high percentage of

early school leavers (Bartolo, 2010). Notwithstanding this awareness, from time to time and under different disguises, streaming practises based on ability or perceived ability enter the educational discussion. Two important documents, both emphasising the importance of putting the child at the centre of learning are the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) of 1999, a document which emphasises and highlights the importance of differentiated learning (Fenech Adami, 2004), followed by a more recent updated document entitled the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

2.2.1 The National Curriculum Framework and the newly developed Learning Outcomes Framework

The NCF for All was implemented in 2012 with the main objective of providing better quality education in order to raise standards and promote life-long learning. Former Minister of Education and Employment, Mrs Dolores Cristina, claims that "this is a NCF that is really and truly student centred; it is flexible enough to cater for the needs and the abilities of every individual student" (p. viii, NCF, 2012). The NCF maintains that different approaches should be used to cater for the different learning needs in the classroom. Recently, the Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) was introduced with the aim of reinforcing and supporting the NCF and thus, leading the education system to move away from curriculum-oriented teaching and learning experiences, while centralising contextual learning. Outcome-oriented curricula are being introduced in many countries. It is believed that the implementation of an outcome-based curriculum would lead to more social equity (Vega, 2014).

2.2.2 The position of equity in local education

There is an evident discrepancy between the academic achievement of Maltese students coming from a high socioeconomic status and those of lower societal status; there is still a strong correlation between socio-economic status and educational achievement (Borg & Raykov, 2015). The Pisa study (2015) shows that students who come from families with low incomes are 2.47 times more likely to perform poorly than students whose families have higher incomes. Living in socially underprivileged areas also plays a part in the students' low

academic achievement (Kyriakides et al., 2019). Furthermore, a study by Sultana (1991) shows that children from a low socio-economic background have a greater tendency to attain lower qualifications and leave school early.

The Social Justice Index Report published in 2017 reveals that Malta still has numerous challenges and has a high rate of students drop out. Moreover, it shows how 19.6% of Maltese students left school in 2016 despite the fact that Malta provides "high-level of equitable access to education at all levels" (p. 119). This points to the importance that needs to be given by the government to continue in its efforts to train all educators to ensure high achievement. A research conducted by Humphrey et al. (2006) in seven European countries including Malta, found that all the participant educators expressed how much they desired to reach all their students in the classroom, encouraged participation of each and every individual irrelevant of their unique abilities and cared about their students' learning and contentment. All of the above highlight the importance that teachers are professionally bound to address diversity and the diverse learning needs of all learners.

2.3 Child-centredness in the classroom

Focusing on the child as a member of a community of learning would bring along a change in the school culture and is conducive to a more effective learning environment (Weimer, 2002). This is a move away from a traditional classroom where the teacher is seen as the leader and dispenser of knowledge, and students as passive receivers of information, presented in a one-size-fits-all method. When a teacher seeks to deliver the curriculum using a child-centred approach, the child is more able to comprehend what is required of them to understand, and it is also a way how to instil in the students the will to continue learning throughout their lives (Doddington & Hilton, 2007). Sugrue (1997 p. ix) states that a child-centred approach in the classroom "pushes the students to the limits of their learning rather than merely allowing them to follow their own interests or 'rest on their laurels' if that is what they choose."

Education policies in Malta ensure that each and every child is entitled to fair education as well as provide guidelines towards a holistic experience which will

positively impact the child academically, socially, emotionally and physically. On the same note, a holistic educational experience will do nothing unless the child is given the necessary tools to control their learning. It is highly evident in modern schools that teachers are met with classrooms in which students have individual diverse needs. It is therefore the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that each and every individual student is served according to their needs (Humphrey et al., 2006). Having a high influx of students with migrant background into our schools, along with the effort of our system to provide an inclusive setting, our classrooms are expected to have a wide range of abilities. This evolving reality of diversity in the student population is a result of three main factors; "demography, mainstreaming and underachievement" (Bartolo & Smyth, 2009, p. 118).

The notion of a child-centred pedagogy implies a substantial amount of trust that teachers have in their students. New and Cochran (2007) claim that this trust has to start from the teachers' will to adopt a pedagogy which intends to put the children's interests, talents and needs as a priority. Furthermore, they assert that the present educational system comes in conflict with a child-centred pedagogy as it provides the teacher with a curriculum which fully-regulates the type of pedagogy to be adopted. Such a curriculum dictates to the teacher which extracts and set of skills are best used for ensuring success in a summative assessment. In addressing the general budgetary estimates of 2017, Education Minister, Evarist Bartolo asserted that the present system has yet to provide the students with creative thinking skills and self-confidence to express themselves better (Pace, 2016). He also argued that the system focuses more than it should on the students' achievement in examinations. A local study conducted by de Battista and Portelli (2014) confirms that the majority of teachers tend to give most importance to textbook content and coverage. They insist that the role of the teacher needs to emphasise a child-centred pedagogy.

2.3.1 The LML metacognitive process

Metacognition is the ability to recognise the most efficient way of learning and to know how to apply the different skills and strategies to different situations

(Fogarty, 1994). Johnston (2015) portrays the three mental processes leading to the determination to learn; actions, thoughts and feelings. Johnston also shows how these three mental processes are interrelated and together guide the students to learning preferences which best support their learning.

Metacognition is not a skill which all students are aware of, however, the LMLP trains students to choose the right pattern by listening to their internal chatter (Johnston, 2015). As defined by Tarrant and Holt (2016), metacognition is the extent to which the students know and comprehend the ways by which they learn and to be aware of actions they use to carry out a task and achieve the end result of a lesson. The Metacognitive Drill, developed by Johnston (2015 p. 21), explains the stages that the learners experience and lead them in their attempt at completing a learning task efficiently. These stages start from the understanding of instructions presented to a specific task (mull) all the way to the phases where students reflect on their efforts and ask themselves how improvement can take place next time (reflect and revisit).

2.3.2 The awareness of the diverse learning patterns

Our classrooms are a conglomeration of abilities, ways of processing knowledge and cultures of schooling. The world is made up of unique individuals who perceive learning from different angles and process learning in distinctive ways. Knowles and Lander (2011) assert that we should not only consider the social backgrounds of the students but also be "proactive in recognising the differences between children" (p. x) and be cognizant of their various needs whilst also providing learning opportunities to each and every student in the classroom. Moreover, they claim that the lack of addressing learning needs acts as an achievement barrier.

It is of paramount importance for the teacher to be aware of themselves and their own learning patterns. In the past, the education system revolved around the teacher-centred ideology, which, as already mentioned, made the students passive receivers of all the information which the teacher threw at them. Unequivocally, teachers taught in the way which was perceived to be the best for themselves (Albrecht, 2003), which may have caused lack of understanding

of what is being taught and communicated (Boström, 2011). For this reason, the awareness of teachers' own learning patterns is a possible solution to have learning accessible to more students. An example parallel to the latter is when there is a teacher who scores high in sequence and prefers to teach in a way in which s/he learns best. This teacher would never realise why one student who scores high in technical and very low in sequence, never assimilates to any of her teachings, therefore, there is a greater tendency for the teacher to fall in the trap of labelling students to rationalise the occurrence. Labelling is a process which occurs unconsciously and inadvertently (Duckworth, Flanagan, McCormack & Tummons, 2012). In view of this, when challenges in the classroom are perceived from a different outlook, labels which may be given to learners such as; "fearful of learning" or "inattentive" are reduced (UNESCO, 2001) and, this is why being aware of one's learning patterns is such an important step of the Process.

When both educators and learners are aware of the learning patterns of each other, it is an opportunity to strengthen the teacher-learner relationship. The students are more able to understand the methods of their teacher, whilst the teacher can plan according to the ways of learning of the students. It is a favourable circumstance which encourages the teacher to be considerate in the way instructions are delivered to the students for them to be able to understand which learning patterns to utilise, hence, the deconstructing of tasks (Dawkins, Kottkamp & Johnston, 2010). A study by Kim and Schallert (2011) confirms that teachers' understanding and caring for their students leaves a huge impact on how students think of themselves, often resulting in an increase in students' confidence. Reciprocally, when students acknowledged the teachers' work and were well-informed of their intentions, it allowed the teachers to reflect on the positive practices of their responsibilities towards the students.

The Learning Connections Inventory (LCI) (Johnston & Dainton, 1997) is a self-reporting inventory that captures the dynamic learning patterns of the learner (Johnston, 2015). Through the LCI, the teacher initiates the process of discovery of how the learner learns best, which are the patterns through which the learner takes in the world around them and makes sense of it (Johnston, 2015).

The scores are then shared with the children to better understand which are the patterns that direct their learning. La Ganza (2008) asserts the importance of a teacher to give the students the autonomy so that s/he reduces his/her influence on the learner through teacher-centred approaches and avoid the learner being fully dependant on the teacher. The LMLP highlights the importance of giving students the opportunity to become familiar with how they learn and helps both the teacher and the student to plan and learn respectively, with intention. This will help the teachers reach all the individuals in the classroom (Tabone, 2009).

2.3.3 Differentiation in the classroom

In today's Primary classrooms it is commonplace to find students with diverse backgrounds and needs. The teacher is expected to adapt their teaching to the needs of each learner.

According to Tomlinson (2014),

> ...teachers in differentiated classrooms accept and act on the premise that they must be ready to engage students in instruction through different approaches to learning, by appealing to a range of interests, and by using varied rates of instruction along with varied degrees of complexity and differing support systems. In differentiated classrooms, teachers ensure that students compete against themselves as they grow and develop more than they compete against one another, always moving toward—and often beyond—designated content goals. (p. 3-4)

Tomlinson (2014) lists a number of conditions which should make up a differentiated classroom, namely:

- a learning environment which is conducive to learning,

- educators who give importance to students' uniqueness,

- a curriculum which underpins support to learning,

- interrelatedness between assessment and learning,

- teachers adapting learning material and ways of learning according to students' readiness, their interests and their learning profile,

- a flexible, yet healthy teacher-student relationship which enhances learners' autonomy,

- teachers giving equal importance to group and individual norms.

In differentiated classrooms students become aware of the different modes of processing and regulating their learning and become more intentional in their learning.

In a local study, Fenech Adami (2004) asserts that differentiation is the key to making learning accessible to all children irrespective of their background and abilities. One of the main issues often raised by teachers in relation to the implementation of a differentiated curriculum is the issue of time. VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005) note that teachers find it difficult to find the time to be able to attend to the range of needs in the classroom. Teachers feel that it is very challenging to provide work which is different in content or level. In a study undertaken by McGarvey, Mariott, Morgan and Abiott (1997) in Northern Ireland, it was observed that a vast curriculum led to difficulty in attending to all the content, let alone diversifying it, with very limited resources.

2.3.4 Collaborative learning

The term collaborative learning refers to any activity which involves the interaction of two or more people joining forces to complete a task together. Collaborative learning is interrelated to the scaffolding of learning since it helps integrate what the students already know with the unknown through their interactions with their peers. Students are able to consolidate the knowledge that they have already grasped, and with the help of a more knowledgeable other (MKO), such as peers who are more advanced in the area, or adults, the students can satisfactorily progress along the learning process. Dixon-Krauss (1996) states that from a Vygotskian perspective, the teacher's role is that of a mediator and through this mediation the teachers support the learners in a specific learning activity and help them share knowledge through social interaction . Therefore, this goes to show that Vygotsky's theory (1978) is pro-social interaction, where students learn through their communication with one

another. A study by Storch and Aldosari (2012) regarding language skills discovered that working with peers gives the benefit of developing language use through problem-solving where they amalgamate their present knowledge, enhance their own and co-construct new knowledge. A study by Yazici (2005) highlights the importance of acknowledging the learners' prefered mode of learning to form teams made up of learners with different strengths. Intentionally forming teams of learners with diverse learning strengths makes for very good collaborative groups.

In the study by Humphrey et al. (2006) educators felt that the development of strong mutual relationships between teachers and students, and amongst the students themselves, was crucial. Having students who are reluctant to accept each others' differences and to value friendships in the classroom could lead to problems in forming groups who can work effectively together.

Therefore, it is the educators' duty to start by moulding healthy relationships with the students where such values are easily passed on to them, prior to the introduction of collaborative work in the classroom. Furthermore, think-pair-share can be used, where students with different patterns are teamed in pairs to work on a given task. Think-pair-share is a collaborative strategy in which the students think about a topic individually and then share it with a peer and exchange feedback. It allows the students to become familiar with collaborative learning before working in larger groups. It is also very simple to prepare and implement in the classroom in the case of students who feel stuck in a certain topic and are not participating (Millis, 2010).

2.4 The formation of inclusive educators

There are those who assume that students who want to learn could do this effortlessly, while others are perceived as those who are not interested in education, hence are excluded from this utopian idea of a classroom with students born intelligent (Pace, 2017). The reality is more complex; the diversity amongst our learners requires a more complex pedagogy, a pedagogy that attends to the diverse needs of all learners.

In the report 'For all to Succeed' (2005), while recognising the progress achieved over the past years in the inclusion of children within mainstream, the report points to the work that still needs to be done on ensuring that every child's learning preferences, talents and potential are catered for. This puts a considerable amount of responsibility on present and prospective teachers' shoulders to work towards a system which views every child as unique and able. An inclusive educator is one who promotes autonomy and social inclusion amongst students, and who believes in a child-centred curriculum and applies the principles put forward by the NCF for All (2012), thus, valuing a holistic education which envisages assessment as a learning and formative experience (Bartolo et al., 2002). One challenge which local schools still face until this day is the challenge to build teams of educators that can successfully offer an inclusive classroom experience (Danforth, 2014).

2.4.1 Reflective practices

Self-reflection is a fundamental practice in the life of a professional educator. Hall and Simeral (2017) states that it is when teaching professionals are actively involved in the reflective process and dialogue about the type of pedagogy they are adopting in the classroom, that transformative change can start to happen in the students' learning. According to Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), critical reflection is based on three key questions; "what?" which relates to the present situation, "how?" which relates to strategies which aim for problem-solving and "why?" which leads to the inquiry of an issue. Calleja (2014) summarises Mezirow's theory as one which focuses on the actual experiences, one's interpretation to various encounters, the importance of perplexing situations in serving as learning opportunities, the ability to be self-critical and the use of ethical and reasonable communication with oneself and others. Christie, Carey, Robertson and Grainger (2015) claim that critical reflection assists the teacher in including critical thinking in the classroom and helps teachers to express their opinions and ideas with each other while transformation is taking place. Moreover, it informs teachers on how to use "disorienting dilemmas" (Mezirow, 1991) to create new attitudes and viewpoints. Disorienting dilemmas are the educators'

new experiences which previously did not fit their meaning structure through which transformative learning can occur.

The Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta External Audit Report which was developed in 2014, highlights lack of analytic and reflective practices in schools which, in turn, reduces the chances of transformative actions. On the other hand, the NCF (2012) stresses the importance that educators in schools are reflective in their practices in the learning community. As can be appreciated, the Let Me Learn Process can be an opportunity for transformative learning to take place, since it is based on actual experience in the classroom and the engagement of both teacher and student in self-reflection for a more positive classroom experience.

2.4.2 Continuous professional development

According to Fisher (2003) certain classroom practices no longer prepare the students for the challenges of the modern world. Given this circumstance, teachers have to be provided with the right tools to move forward, develop skills and stay motivated to execute their duties at the best of their abilities. Han and Hongbiao (2016) lament the turnover rate of teachers - a clear sign of lack of motivation resulting from the low esteem of teachers due to the way society thinks of this profession. On the other hand, he claims that through professional development teachers are kept satisfied and it equips them with skills needed to turn their professional experience into successful classroom performance. As recommended in a white paper issued by the Ministry for Education and Employment, Early Childhood Education & Care in Malta- The Way Forward (2013) "continuing professional development should be mandatory" (p.9), hence, educators should be able to meet outcomes from the NCF by being provided with adequate training throughout their whole career. The report also states that this will result in understanding better basic principles towards fully-advantageous learning experiences which will encourage more students to continue schooling.

Osamwonyi (2016) acknowledges the need for in-service training as one which fills "missing gaps between demands and actual achievement levels" (p.83).

Osamwonyi explains this through the metaphor of a roller-coaster. People trust the roller coaster to be a fully-functional and well-maintained ride, however, if regular maintenance services are not done, the roller coaster may slow down, stop or expose the passengers to dangers. Similarly, the teaching profession with regular in-service training means advancement in knowledge and capacity to be more innovative, creative and productive (Osamwonyi, 2016). On the same note, LMLP training is also provided to teachers in their classrooms for better assessment of their practices. Moreover, by receiving training in the classroom, there is a greater tendency of addressing small issues which interfere with the proper application of the Process and the benefit of receiving valuable and personalised feedback on the spot (LML training, 2018).

A qualitative study conducted locally by Calleja and Montebello (2006) discusses the experience of a primary school teacher who followed the Let Me Learn Professional Learning Process, who became more reflective and started planning with intention. The teacher reported that she became more proficient in choosing the right tasks for the students in her classroom. She also reported that she has more successfully responded to the individual needs of her students in her classroom. Therefore, for this primary school teacher, the Process served as a good source of continuous professional development as it helped her to be critical of her pedagogical practices.

2.4.3 The Let Me Learn professional development process

Through professional development, educators are given the opportunity to work together towards improving their practice. As mentioned in the NCF (2012), "teachers need time to discuss, plan and share best practices to achieve excellence in the teaching they provide" (p. 6). Bubb and Earley (2010) make a distinction between a well-led staff development and an ineffective one. They explain that while effective staff development focuses on school improvement, strategies that benefit students, and is closely related to schools' self-evaluation and improvement plans, an ineffective staff development is one that results in no connection between what is being shared and school improvement.

Johnston and Johnston (1998) stated that most staff development meetings were a "sit down and listen to experts" top-down training which, according to them, contributed very little to classroom practice. On the other hand, the Let Me Learn professional development aimed at helping educators discover themselves as learners and their students' preferred learning modalities. The LMLP, according to Hayes (1996), contributed to opening possibilities for learners with learning difficulties and other special needs. These students were often seen as unreachable, and ones that disrupt their teaching.

2.4.4 Teacher-initiated change

Like in any other profession, teachers should be presented with different options from where they can obtain support in circumstances or situations which arise in the school or in the classroom. There are two ways by which educators can be provided with support; top-down or bottom-up change processes. A top-down change process is one which is directed and mandated by a higher authority or an external force as opposed to a bottom-up change process where teachers feel the need to address an issue within the school and request support from the higher authorities who are not front liners of the problem (Blandford, 2006).

The argument regarding which change process out of the two is most effective has been subject to debate for many years. Pace (1992) stated that change was more often a top-down process where the administration directed change and provided the teachers with in-service training to infiltrate this change in the system. However, even earlier than that, Richardson (1990) claimed that one should consider the educator's self and his/her experiences before determining any form of training. Similarly, Baird and Northfield (1992) stated that real transformation occurs when teachers accept change. One major barrier to the success of change in schools is the lack of educators' trust in the new proposed change process (Hall & Hord, 2006) and their uncertainty in changing the modes of teaching which they are most comfortable using (Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon & Byers, 2002). Blandford (2006) claims that one drawback of a bottom-up change process is the time taken to plan and to finally come into agreement for

implementation. On this account, Ham, Berwick and Dixon (2016) argue that the best option is to have a balance of top-down and bottom-up change processes where there is still control from a higher authority and resources which are being coordinated by the latter, however, the educators take ownership and are in charge of the ways by which the process of change is implemented.

2.5 Summary

Achieving a fully inclusive classroom is, undoubtedly, a challenging task. Through my teaching practice experience and past experience as a student, I have encountered both good and bad inclusive practices. The traditional mentality of a one-size-fits-all approach imposed serious problems in schools, which is why the LMLP, over the years, proved to be a good tool to help learners become motivated and believe in themselves. The LMLP asserts that all learners can learn; all in their own unique ways.

The LMLP aims to make teachers aware of their learning patterns, which, in turn, makes it easier to plan and deliver lessons. This study will delve into the educators' perspective on their experience of the LML professional learning process, a professional training which they attended over a period of three years at their school.

Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the research methodology used for this study. This study explores educators' experiences of a three-year project during which they were introduced to the Let Me Learn Process and supported to implement it among their students in the classroom. Throughout this research, which focuses on the educators' perception of the LMLP implementation in the classroom, the study investigates the educators' experiences with the LMLP and underlines their encounters, their concerns and reflections about the ways in which the Process helped the young learners to learn. They also spoke about how this Process has affected the school and to what extent.

This chapter discusses the research design, the research sample and research tools utilised in the study. It also discusses the tools used for analysis and the limitations encountered.

3.2 Goal of the study

This study aims to analyse the experiences of six educators within a local school where a member of the LML (Let Me Learn) team was resident for three years to support the school in implementing the Process.

As mentioned, the LMLP aims at helping learners learn with intention. It also aims to help teachers value the uniqueness of each learner and support them in their learning journey. The Process supports an education system which values the students' and educators' prior experiences and their learning patterns. The LMLP is a process that has a lot of potential in helping both the students and educators to discover their learning selves in order to make their learning experience a positive one (Calleja, 2013). Let Me Learn is believed to have the potential of transforming teachers into better administrators of the curriculum by adapting teaching according to the various learning patterns in the classrooms, and to mull over their practices, since it gives room for deep reflection and evaluation (Calleja, 2013).

Furthermore, LMLP aims at helping professional staff development to become more meaningful and valid (Johnston & Johnston, 1998). This presents the

LMLP as a process which is pertinent to the whole education system including students and educators; the school community as a whole.

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore whether this training period had any substantial effect on the teaching and learning environment of this school.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Qualitative methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach in collecting and analysing data. Stake (2010) defines the qualitative approach as an "interpretive, experiential, situational and personalistic" (p. 14) approach. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) continue by stating that a qualitative approach "is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience or phenomenon" (p. 23). Similarly, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert that qualitative data is described as the subjects' own interpretation of experiences and then analysed in themes and patterns. These experiences were explored through the use of three individual interviews and one focus group.

The qualitative approach was preferred for this research because of the rich descriptive data it generates. Such data, if properly analysed, can give very useful insights into the daily lived experience of the participants (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2011).

3.3.2 Interviews

Interviews allow for the discussion of people's definition and interpretation of the world around them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The interview is a tool that can capture rich data about participants' experiences, opinions and suggestions. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe an interview to be "an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 123) and that is exactly from where an interview has adopted its name; 'inter' implying an interpersonal occurrence and 'view',

connoting the shared views between the interviewer and the subject. They also state that an interview done face-to-face has the advantage that the interviewer and interviewee connect through the body language which, in turn, makes it easier to interpret information than just by reading a transcript.

Other advantages of an interview as a qualitative tool are that it provides more insight than any other tool and it allows the researcher to build rapport with the participants where a sense of trust is developed, hence, they are more likely to elaborate on matters which arise (Gratton & Jones, 2004).

Gratton and Jones (2004) point out a few disadvantages of interviews such as the fact that interviews are time-consuming; the sample size is kept smaller than that of a quantitative study. Moreover, they assert that the participants may want to provide answers which they think are what should be said rather than expressing their very honest views.

3.3.3 Focus group

The focus group is another tool that aims to extract mixed views on several themes. It is a good tool to explore knowledge and facts as they arise from the discussion between a group of professionals within a certain context and allows participants to be able to convey natural emotions and express themselves spontaneously (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Krueger and Casey (2015) suggest that a focus group is an effective way of collecting data since the subjects influence each other in their responses. Moreover, they indicate that focus groups are strong means of exploring in-depth the issues which are common to the same group of individuals who experience or have experienced it in one way or another. In this particular study, the focus group served to enhance the already acquired information from the individual interviews by going into further detail and expanding on the related themes. Subsequently, it was an essential tool in the exploration of the subjects' authentic experience with the LMLP.

3.3.4 The interview and focus group structures

The individual interviews and the focus group were all carried out in a semi-structured manner. According to Cousin (2009) a semi-structured interview allows the elaboration on complex matters. This was done by presenting the participants with open-ended questions to allow for discussions rather than a question and answer type of interview. Open-ended questions incite interpretations, detailed portrayal and representations (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Three lists of questions (See Appendix 8, 9 and 10); head of school, individual interviews and focus group, were developed with the aim of acquiring as much data as possible with regards to the educators' experiences with the Process. The participants were free to answer in whichever language they feel more comfortable expressing themselves with, which helped in gathering more data since the participants could fully-express themselves and elaborate when asked to. Interviewer-bias poses a threat on the types of answers which are given due to verbal and non-verbal cues in approval of answers which are perceived by the interviewer as the "correct" ones (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Therefore, statements which needed clarification were clarified without any elements of bias by using the participants' same words and asking them to explain their meaning further.

3.3.5 The research process

Prior to the data collection, permission from the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability (See Appendix 1) was acquired to be able to carry out research in a state school. Moreover, ethical clearance from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) was sought (See Appendix 2). The school was contacted and the head of school was provided with a permission letter (See Appendix 3) where I, as the researcher, explained the purpose of this study, the qualitative tools which were to be used, while also providing information with regards to the participants' rights in this study. All participants, including the head of school, were provided with information letters (See Appendix 4 & Appendix 5) followed by consent forms (See

Appendix 6 & Appendix 7) which explained their rights as participants in this study.

There were six participant educators for this research. Pseudonyms were used to hide the real identity of the educators.

Table 1 – Participant Educators

Educators' fictitious names	Roles within the school
Mr Franco	Head of school
Ms Christine	Primary Teacher
Ms Sasha	Primary Teacher
Ms Eve	Primary Teacher
Ms Patricia	Learning Support Educator
Ms June	Learning Support Educator

Table 1 shows the participants' designations within the school. The aim with having different participants' roles was to have a wider representation of perspectives. The perspectives of different professionals and their experience of the training and implementation of the Process were collected.

3.4 The collection of data

3.4.1 Sampling

A small sample size of six educators was taken: three teachers and two learning support educators (LSEs) and the head of school. This research opted for purposeful sampling – participants were sought on pre-selected criteria, namely, that they had to have participated in the Let Me Learn Process training.

Since this research took place two years after the training period ended, a good number of trained educators had moved on to other schools.

3.4.2 Ethics

The participants were ascertained, both in writing and orally before the interview, that they had "...the right to decline to answer any questions, the right to end the interview at any point or not to enter the study at all, and the right to anonymity and confidentiality." (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015)

Participants were informed that interviews were going to be voice-recorded and at a later point, transcribed. Each participant signed a consent form (See Appendix 6 & Appendix 7) that informed them of their rights and that after the study is completed and assessed, all recordings would be destroyed. The subjects' names were hidden using pseudonyms to secure their identity. The participants were given the choice to identify a location in which the interviews and focus group were to take place. They were presented with the option to choose whether they would like to take part in an individual interview or in the focus group. Moreover, participants were given the option to see the interview questions before the interviews took place.

3.5 Data analysis

A thematic approach was adopted to analyse the data collected. Boyatzis (1998) maintains that thematic analysis helps the researcher go about the data collected in a sensitive and more accurate manner in order to better understand the generated data. A transcript was built after carefully listening to the recordings numerous times and notes were jotted down to help in the development of potential themes. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), the interview transcripts were coded in order to identify the most relevant excerpts to this study. Saldana (2013) implies that structural coding is an ideal tool to break down transcripts into organised segments in order to analyse their interrelation and contrast. The codes were categorised into themes and reviewed multiple times for refinement.

3.5.1 Established themes

The data collected was divided into themes which were developed through a carefully administered process of coding. The following seven distinguishing themes were established after thoroughly organising sub-topics;

1. Top-down vs. bottom-up change processes,
2. Educators' resistance to change,
3. Educators' perceived positive outcomes of the Let Me Learn Process,
4. Barriers to the application of the Let Me Learn Process,
5. School's perceived difficulties due to the socio-economic background of the catchment area,
6. Normalisation of the Process in the educators' professional practice,
7. Educators' perception regarding the universal application of the Let Me Learn Process in schools.

The first theme highlights the school community's resistance to the way the LMLP was introduced. The second theme, relates to the conceptual reasoning which led educators to withstand change. On the other hand, the third theme gives an account of the positive outcomes which the educators referred to, particularly in lesson planning, examination results, outreach to parents, long-term planning, educators' interaction, educators' awareness of students' learning patterns, educators' awareness of self and their own learning patterns and empowerment of learners. The fourth theme covers the barriers to the application of the process such as the time factor, curriculum management, relevance and the social conception of self against the actual LCI scores. The fifth theme, discusses the difficulties which educators highlighted as those emerging due to the social background of the students. The sixth theme explores the impact of the Process on the teaching and learning environment. Finally, the seventh theme looks into educators' opinions about the implementation of the Process nationwide.

3.6 Limitations

This research was met with a number of limitations which were out of my control to counteract. This study was carried out in one school that participated in a pilot Let Me Learn experience for a period of three scholastic years. It took place two years after the end of the three-year input. The period between the end of the project and this study meant that some of the educators who were part of the project had changed school and, therefore, were not available for the interview. This was, without any doubt, time consuming and I was left with fewer educators to interview, hence, less opinions and perspectives to analyse.

3.7 Recommendations for future research

As discussed in the above section, limiting this research to one school could have brought disadvantages, since the more perspectives observed, the more data-rich the study is. Therefore, one useful recommendation for future research is to expand the study and open it to more than one school, especially when considering that LMLP training is being delivered to an increasing number of schools around the Maltese islands since its launch.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter the basic components that make up this research were highlighted and elaborated upon. The hypothesis of this research views the LMLP as one which defines an inclusive classroom where students' unique characteristics are valued. The research followed a qualitative design in which interviews and a focus group were used to collect data. A thematic analysis followed a coding process of the transcripts.

The next chapter portrays findings related to the several themes generated from the transcripts of the interviews and focus group with the participant educators.

Chapter 4
Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shall present an overview of the findings. This research study aimed at analysing the transformative learning experience of a group of educators in a school who adopted the Let Me Learn Process as a whole-school approach. The findings are based on the perceptions and experiences of six educators within one local primary school situated in the Southern Harbour region of the island. The sample was composed of three teachers, two learning support educators (LSEs), and the head of school. This research sought to show how the Let Me Learn Process is being applied within the classrooms of educators who received training in the Process and also whether implementing it in their classrooms helped these educators become better facilitators of learning. LMLP seeks to implement a pedagogy of child-centred learning, of autonomy and active learning. The findings from this study show that the LMLP has had a valid contribution to the educators' experience in addressing the diversity of needs of the learners under their care. The study also shows that the Process has had a positive impact on the educators, both at a professional level and on a personal level. Moreover, it shows how such pedagogy affects daily practices in the classroom.

The findings generated the following seven themes:
1 Top-down vs. bottom-up change processes,
2 Educators' resistance to change,
3 Educators' perceived positive outcomes of the Process,
4 Barriers to the application of the LMLP,
5 School's perceived difficulties due to the socio-economic background of the catchment area,
6 Normalisation of the Process in the educators' professional practice,
7 Educators' perception regarding the universal application of the LMLP in schools.

4.2 Top-down versus bottom-up change processes

The Let Me Learn Process in the school was initiated through a direct request by the Ministry of Education and Employment and the Directorate of Education to the Let Me Learn team. The team was asked to work closely with two schools that the Minister believed could benefit from hands-on support as they were facing some challenges with the level of student achievements. The Let Me Learn team was asked to share the Let Me Learn Process with a group of teachers, LSEs and support teachers to implement this pedagogy in their classrooms in order to address some of the challenges and improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school. The top-down change process emerged from the interviews as being an issue, and it was directly pointed out by the head of school who referred to the way the Process was introduced to the school as imposed by an external effort; it was something which was directed by a higher institution in the educational structure. As a matter of fact, this factor was presented by the head of school as a disadvantage.

Il-mod kif daħal il-Let Me Learn fl-iskola, ikolli ngħid li kien daqsxejn imponut. Dik diġa' toħloq problema kbira mal-għalliema. Xi ħaġa li hija imposta fuq xi ħadd ħa tibda mill-ewwel daqsxejn problematika.	The way which the Let Me Learn was introduced in the school was somewhat imposed, I would say. That is something which instantly creates a big problem with the teachers. Something which is imposed on someone immediately has a problematic start.

(Mr Franco, head of school)

The head of school suggested that, were it a collective decision by all educators who felt the need for assistance to deal with major challenges in their classrooms, it would, most certainly, have been more accepted and appreciated from the start. He claims that over the years, the students were faring quite

poorly in examinations, especially when compared to other schools in the college. He, therefore, believes that such important decisions would have been more effective if made as a school community and feature in the SDP (School Development Plan). In this way, the LMLP team would have had the opportunity to show the school the benefits of the LMLP and the type of support the school can expect from the team and how this support could help teachers deal with the challenges which are put forward by them. Thereafter, they would have been able to take ownership of the Process as a whole school rather than as individuals.

Kont nippreferi li kieku ġiet min-naħa tal-għalliema, il-ħtieġa u l-bżonn li jidħol. *I am sure* li konna naslu b'xi mod jew ieħor *through a school development plan* li naslu li l-għalliema għandhom bżonn taħriġ biex ikunu jistgħu jgħinu ħafna iktar lit-tfal għaliex il-marki li kienu qegħdin iġibu t-tfal kienet indikazzjoni li kellna bżonn nagħmlu xi ħaġa dwarha. L-iskola trid tindirizza dawn id-diffikultajiet u tara jekk il-Proċess tal-LML huwiex xi ħaġa li ser tgħin lill-iskola. *Then* għandha tidħol u tkun xi ħaġa bħala skola sħiħa u mhux bħala individwi.

I would have preferred if the need for the LMLP to be implemented in the school had come from the teachers themselves. I am sure that we would have gotten there through a school development plan which would have highlighted to the teachers the need for them to get more training in order to be able to help students because the marks that were being achieved were an indication that something had to be done in this regard. The school has to address these difficulties and determine whether the LMLP would help the school. It's at that point that it should be introduced as a whole school effort, not only for a few individuals.

(Mr Franco, head of school)

The head of school continued by commenting on the fact that, having the Process imposed on the school by an external force was something which he, as the head of the SMT (Senior Management Team), had to work on, together with teachers, LSEs and the other members of the SMT, in order to make it work as one whole team.

Poġġejna u rajna b' liema mod l-għalliema ser ikunu kuntenti b'dan il-proġett u kif se ngħinu lill- għalliema u kif se nissaportjaw lill- għalliema kollha.	We met and discussed how the teachers could be happy with this project and how we will be helping the teachers and support all of them.
	(Mr Franco, head of school)

4.3 Educators' resistance to change

Having this support imposed on them has led to some resistance from the educators and it took the trainers involved with the school the whole of the first year to gain the trust of the educators. At first, many educators perceived the introduction of the Let Me Learn Process as yet another chore added to the multitude of tasks that they are expected to deliver.

Tant hemm affarijiet li trid taħseb, *assessment for learning* u hekk... u biex taddattahom mhux faċli.	There are so many things to think about, like the assessment for learning and other things...and to tackle them all is not an easy task.
	(Ms Sasha, primary teacher)

The head of school insisted that teachers' disposition towards this Process makes a difference. In his interview, Mr Franco claims that this brought about some resistance from the staff and he found it hard to convince some of the staff about the importance of this support. Some of the teachers were also not very happy that LMLP training was to be given during peripatetic lessons; time

which teachers often use for correction of children's work and preparation of lesson resources.

It-*training* kien ser isir waqt il-*peripatetic* u nfatti damu jiġifieri dik xi ħaga li b'mod onest ma niħdux gost biha.	The training was to be held during peripatetic lessons and it lasted long. That is something which, in all honesty, we are not pleased about.
	(Ms Christine, primary teacher)
Qalulna li LML *training* kien se jsir waqt *peripatetic lessons*. Dak il-ħin, għalina huwa l-unika ħin li fih nikkoreġu u nagħmlu ħafna xogħol siewi.	We were told that LML training was scheduled during peripatetic lessons. That is the time when us teachers usually correct students' work and do a lot of other valuable work.
	(Ms Eve, primary teacher)

The head of school also highlighted the fact that some teachers found it difficult to understand how the concept of the LMLP could be implemented in the teaching of the content areas. The Head insisted that one of the tasks was, in fact, to help the teachers value the process of learning as one made up of interconnected processes and not as a disjointed, compartmentalised experience.

...il-problema kienet li l-għalliem kien jaħseb li kellu jkun hemm LML fil-lezzjoni tal-Malti, tal-Ingliż, tal-Maths.	The problem was that the teachers thought that there had to be LML in the Maltese, English and Maths lessons. It was difficult

Sabuha diffiċli biex jifhmu kif dan il-proċess seta' jgħaqqad dawn il-lezzjonijiet kollha tal-ġurnata imma fi proċess wieħed. L-għalliem kien baqa' jara l-proċess bħala xi ħaga li huwa f'*compartments* differenti. Naħseb l-iktar biċċa xogħol hija li l-għalliema jibda jara kif se jara dan il-proċess bħala kontinwu.

to understand how this Process would combine all the lessons during the day as one single process. The teachers kept seeing the Process as split into separate compartments. The most challenging task is for teachers to start perceiving the process as a continuous one.

(Mr Franco, head of school)

4.4 Educators' perceived positive outcomes of the Let Me Learn Process

Educators identified the following positive outcomes as a result of their involvement in the LMLP:

- Improved academic performance,
- Long-term planning,
- Empowerment of learners,
- More engaging lesson planning,
- Educators' awareness of students' learning patterns,
- Educators' awareness of their own learning patterns,
- Educators' interaction,
- Outreach to parents.

4.4.1 Improved academic performance

The school has been trying to address the issue of poor academic results, in particular in national tests, for quite some time. Students in this school have been struggling with high stakes exams. In benchmark results, the school has been faring quite poorly when compared to other schools, even within the same college. The head of school explained how statistically, the academic

achievements in Maths and English have been very low for quite a number of years. In fact, this was one of the targets he had set for himself, that is, to help improve the school's overall standing in these national benchmarks. To his satisfaction, Mr Franco explained that since the application of the LMLP in the classrooms, the school's achievement in Maltese and English languages was closer to the mean average of other local schools whilst the achievement in Mathematics exceeded the latter.

Meta bdejt inħares lejn ir-riżultati tal-*benchmark*...meta kont għadni kemm dħalt, l-*achievement* ta' din l-iskola primarja kien batut ħafna, speċjalment fil-Matematika, speċjalment fl-Ingliż. Is-sena l-oħra, l-iskola ġiet *compared* mal-*mean* tal-iskejjel oħra u kienet viċin ħafna tal-*mean*. Il-Maths qbiżnieh, l-Ingliż konna qegħdin viċin u l-Malti konna viċin ħafna wkoll.	When I looked at the benchmark results... when I had just started working here, I could tell that this primary school's achievement was poor, especially in Maths and in English. Last year, this school's results were compared to the mean of other schools and we came really close to it. In Maths we exceeded the average, whilst in English and in Maltese we came very close to it.

(Mr Franco, head of school)

Mr Franco also mentioned that the curve of progress was slowly going upwards with every passing year and he asserted that there was clear evidence of improvement in Math achievement when compared to the previous six years. He stated that the LMLP had a central role in this improvement.

Il-proċess naħseb kien parti mir-raġuni għalfejn stajna naraw progress fil-qasam akkademiku f'din l-iskola fl-aħħar snin, minn meta beda l-	The Process played a part in this academic progress in this school in the past years, ever since the project of the LML commenced. I am not stating that it was the

proġett tal-Let Me Learn, mhux qed ngħid l-unika raġuni għalfejn, imma kien parti mis-suċċess li kien hemm f' din l-iskola primarja.

only reason, however, it was part of the success of this primary school.

<div align="right">(Mr Franco, head of school)</div>

4.4.2 Long-term planning

During the interviews, the educators explained how during the training they had had the opportunity to discuss and analyse the validity and applicability of the LMLP to their respective classes. As educators, they had the support and input of the Let Me Learn trainer to address the challenges they were facing in their respective classes. Ms Christine emphasised that once an agreement was reached and teachers saw the benefits of the support being offered, the school could then include this as an integral part of the school action plan. Mr Franco explained how the Process was incorporated within the formulated SDP targets.

...it-*targets* li konna qegħdin noħolqu kienu dejjem bl-*input* min-naħa tal-LML u naraw kif nistgħu ndaħħlu il-Let Me Learn f'dawn it-*targets* li aħna nissetjaw u fl-i*steps* li nkunu ħa nagħmlu għax-xena partikolari.

The targets which were being set were always based on input from the LML's side. We determined how we could include LML in reaching various targets which we set and in the strategies which we were to utilise in the different scenarios.

<div align="right">(Mr Franco, head of school)</div>

4.4.3 Empowerment of learners

The interviews have also highlighted how the Process helped put the students as the focus in relation to the changes that were taking place. This empowered the learners to take control of their own learning. Four out of six participants mentioned experiences in which they could notice changes in their students'

self-esteem, self-confidence and effort. Moreover, some of the excerpts below show that the application of the LMLP promoted strategies of inclusion and differentiation.

It-tfal naħseb li kienu jħossuhom li huma ħafna iktar utli. Meta wieħed beda jara li huwa apprezzat għax-xogħol li qed jippreżenta, anke jekk forsi mhux xogħol li huwa akkademikament tajjeb ħafna, pulit ħafna u sistematiku, għalihom kienet xi ħaġa li għenitu ħafna u mliet iżjed lill-istudent b'iktar kuraġġ u iktar beda jemmen fih innifsu. It-tfal bdew iħossuhom li huma kapaċi iktar jippreżentaw ix-xogħol u bdew iħossuhom iżjed kunfidenti fihom infushom.

I believe that students could feel more fulfilled. Students could notice that their work was being appreciated more, even if it was not academically excellent, neat or systematic. It was something which helped them, encouraged them and made them believe in themselves more. Students started feeling more confident to present their work and their self-confidence improved too.

(Mr Franco, head of school)

Kien hemm wieħed kien *careless* ħafna fl-affarijiet. Beda jipprova ...speċjalment il-pitazzi. Kont nagħmillu *stickers* tal-*puppets* tal-LML u beda jipprova u allura beda jaffettwa.

There was a student who was careless in his work. Then, he started showing an effort, especially on his copybooks. I used to give him stickers of LML puppets and he was trying and it was leaving its impacts.

(Ms Sasha, primary teacher)

Jien naf li Lincoln iħobb jibni, mela għal dik il-lezzjoni tajtu xi ħaġa biex jibni u minnha ħa ħafna.	I am aware that Lincoln loves to build, therefore, as part of a particular lesson, I gave him something to build and he learnt a lot from it.

<div align="right">(Ms Eve, primary teacher)</div>

One participant stated that students understood their roles within the groups better through their knowledge of each others' scores on badges which they carried. These badges indicated each student's own personal LCI (Learning Connections Inventory) scores.

Il-*badges* għenuhom għax setgħu jifhmu l-irwoli tagħhom fil-gruppi.	The badges helped them to understand their roles within the groups.

<div align="right">(Ms Christine, primary teacher)</div>

Ms June, a LSE within the school, made reference to a very interesting experience she was involved in. Ms June was supporting three students and she claims that through the use of the LMLP, she helped all three students, who all had different LCI scores, to carry out a task assigned by the class teacher. She approached the task in different ways by addressing it using their preferred learning patterns. Each of the three students produced, in their own individual ways, three books with illustrations in Maltese. These made these students feel proud of their work, and for a while they were at the centre of attention of the rest of the class and they felt empowered and enjoyed learning even more.

L-għalliema tat xogħol lit-tfal biex jiktbu fuq l-annimal favorit tagħhom u minn hemmhekk bdejt naqbad *bits and pieces* minn dak li ħadt mit-taħriġ tal-LML u	The teacher tasked the students to write about their favourite animal, and from there I used bits and pieces from what I have learnt during LMLP training and I used them in this project. The

għaqqadtu f'dan il-proġett. *The other students looked up to these three students* għax l-outcome kien tliet kotba sbieħ ħafna.

other students looked up to these three students as the outcome was three wonderful books written by them.

(Ms June, LSE)

4.4.4 More engaging lesson planning

One other area mentioned by the participants was their lesson planning and delivery. Half of the participants claimed that the LMLP helped them in forming better groups of students; groups having different strengths. In these groups, they could all contribute in different ways through their learning patterns. In the excerpt below, Ms Sasha explains how the grouping of students became easier and gave lesson planning more meaning when mixing different patterns together, hence, making differentiation more viable.

...bil-LML stajt inpoġġi lil min għandu sekwenza baxxa ma' min għandu sekwenza għolja, min għandu preċiżjoni għolja għal ma' min għandu preċiżjoni baxxa, u kellna bilanċ.

Through the use of the LML, I could put someone who is low in Sequence with someone who is high in Sequence, someone who is high in Precision with someone who is low in Precision; therefore, we had balanced groups.

(Ms Sasha, primary teacher)

4.4.5 Educators' awareness of students' learning patterns

Another benefit that was highlighted by the educators who were interviewed was that they felt that they became more aware of their students' learning patterns. All of the participants referred to this awareness as a result of the LMLP training received and its application in the classroom. This awareness led to pedagogical reflection as educators became acquainted with the various

learning patterns; they realised that they have been expecting certain standards of work, without taking into account the students' scores.

...kultant aħna konna qegħdin nitolbu affarijiet min-naħa tat-tfal li forsi kienet il-mod li aħna konna nħossuha li hija l-aħjar mod, eżempju kif wieħed jippreżenta x-xogħol...	Sometimes we were expecting things from our students which were our understanding of what the best way should be, for example; the way students present their work.
	(Mr Franco, head of school)
Għalija il-LML jfisser gwida, għax tgħinnek tiskopri l-abbiltajiet ta' kif [l-istudenti] jesperjenzaw u jesprimu l-abbiltajiet tagħhom...	In my opinion, the LMLP is a guide as it gives you the ability to understand how the students experience and express their abilities.
	(Ms Patricia, LSE)

Ms Sasha claims that the awareness of the students' learning patterns did not only help her understand why certain work was presented in a certain manner, but it also helped her and other teachers better understand the behaviours of their students during lessons and in general. Furthermore, Ms Eve pointed out that knowledge of her students' learning patterns became especially useful when students were transitioning from one grade to another. Because the students had tags showing their scores, educators had an understanding of the students' interests and abilities straight away. Ms Christine recalled an experience through which she reflected on the learning patterns of a student who, although quite intelligent, was showing difficulties in his writing. Once she realised how best to support him he made a tangible improvement.

Kelli student partikolari li fil-kitba kien ibati imma fil-verita` hu kien student bravu jiġifieri kien jaqra ħafna u kellu ħafna ideat. Imma kien ibati biex ipoġġi l-ideat wara xulxin. Li imbagħad bdejt ngħid u rrealizzajt li dan kellu nuqqas ta' organizzazzjoni li jien veru ddejjaqni. Meta ndunajt x'inhi l-problema irrealizzajt li mhux għax ma jafx imma għax ma jafx iqassam xogħlu sew. Imbagħad ħdimna fuqha u għamel *improvement* sew.

I had a particular student who had poor writing skills, however, in reality, he was a bright student who read a lot and was creative. However, he struggled to put his ideas in order. Thereafter, I realised that he was lacking organisational skills, which is something I dislike. When I realised what the issue was, it became clear to me that the issue was not that he did not know how to complete the task, but rather this weakness in organising and planning his work. We worked on this matter and he made a big improvement in that regard.

(Ms Christine, primary teacher)

4.4.6 Educators' awareness of their own learning patterns

Five out of six participants mentioned that the Let Me Learn Process has helped them acquire better awareness of themselves and their learning patterns. Ms Sasha mentioned that the first part of their training was to understand how they learn, hence, understand themselves before focusing on anything else. All the five participants mentioned that the discovery of their learning patterns was something which they had never reflected on before.

...bdejt nirrealizza li eżempju għalhekk jien inħobb nuża ħafna *visuals* għax jien studenta li meta kont żgħira u

I came to realise that, for example, the reason why I love using visuals is because, as a young student and even

għadni s'issa nitgħallem hekk.

nowadays, that's how I learn.

(Ms Christine, primary teacher)

Three of the participants mentioned that this self-awareness led to a better understanding on how to adapt work for the students in their classroom, thus, differentiation could be applied in ways that help teachers reach all students during a lesson.

Jien bħala għalliema nħobb inkun organizzata ħafna u għandi *score* minnhom għoli ħafna. Allura meta jkollok student hekk l-oppost tiegħek hija ftit *challenging* imma jkollok idea aħjar kif se taddatta għalih.

As a teacher, I like to be highly organised and one of my scores is very high. Therefore, when you have a student who is your total opposite, it becomes quite a challenging task, but you get a clearer idea of how to adapt to that particular student.

(Ms Christine, primary teacher)

In addition, three participants mentioned that being aware of their own learning patterns helped them understand aspects in their personal lives and in the workplace. For one of the educators, the Process gave her a better understanding of her dealings and relationship with relatives, whilst for another two educators, the Process served to better understand the basis of their disagreements with colleagues at school. As a matter of fact, one participant mentioned that she could now understand why she worked better with one particular colleague rather than with the other.

4.4.7 Educators' interaction

The head of school, Mr Franco, and one of the teachers, Ms Christine, asserted that the LMLP nurtured educators' interactions. It was an especially positive development that improved the way the community of the school discusses and addresses matters related to teaching and learning.

Jien naħseb li l-LML kien jagħti lok għal diskussjonijiet bejn l-istaff jiġifieri anke waqt *staff meetings* jew SDP *meetings* li kien ikollna. Kien punt li wieħed kien jista' jiddiskuti modi kif jittekilja suġġetti partikolari.

...naħseb waslet li l-i*staff* żviluppa ħafna iktar kif jaħseb biex jippjana l-lezzjonijiet li kienu iżjed addattati għat-tfal tal-klassi tagħhom.

I think that the Process brought about discussions amongst staff members even during staff meetings and SDP meetings which we used to have. One could discuss different ways how to tackle particular subjects.

I think that it led to staff development especially in the way they would plan lessons which were more suitable for children in their classroom.

(Mr Franco, head of school)

4.4.8 Outreach to parents

During his interview, Mr Franco also made reference to the outreach to parents. He stated that more parents were participating in the short courses organised by the school for them from time to time. He continued to explain that, with the assistance of the LMLP team, they succeeded in targeting the parents and caregivers of the children attending the school and get them on board. These parents became more interested in their children's learning needs. He also mentioned that it was beneficial for the parents to be aware of their own learning patterns as they could better understand how to best assist their children at home.

Kien hemm xi għoxrin ġenitur li attendew għalih [il-kors tal-LML], ġenituri li s-soltu ma kinux jattendu għall-ebda kors li nagħmlu aħna imma bl-għajnuna tal-LML, il-ġenituri skoprew b'liema modi jitgħallmu huma stess u setgħu forsi jgħinu lit-tfal tagħhom aħjar id-dar.

There were around twenty parents who attended [the LML course], parents who had never attend any courses organised by the school previously. With the help of the LML, the parents discovered they ways in which they themselves learn and by thus, they could perhaps help their children better at home.

(Mr Franco, head of school)

4.5 Barriers to the application of the Process

The interviews with the educators also identified a number of issues that were challenging the application of the LMLP. Some of the challenges which the educators mentioned throughout the interviews were the following:

- The time factor,
- Curriculum management and relevance,
- The difference between the social conception of self and the LCI scores,
- Group dynamics.

4.5.1 The time factor

Time was one of the most frequently mentioned challenges when it came to implementing the Process. They all highlighted the fact that time in the classroom is very limited and the curriculum is very demanding.

...fil-primarja, [il-ħin] itir minn idejk mingħajr qas tkun taf kif.

In primary, [time] flies without even noticing.

(Ms Eve, primary teacher)

Participants were concerned with the length of time it takes to include LMLP in a lesson. Participants believe that applying LMLP during lessons would take too much time and would make it difficult to cover what needs to be covered within the curriculum. Four of those interviewed spoke about the need to receive more

...attivita' lhemm, *talk* 'l hawn... Jiġifieri it-*teacher* l-iktar ħaga li kienu jinkwetaw fuqha hija l-ħin reali biex jippreparaw u jagħmlu lezzjoni.

An activity there, a talk here... So for the teachers, the biggest concern was the real time to prepare and deliver a lesson.

(Mr Franco, head of school)

training in the application of the Process within a real classroom situation.

To be honest nixtieq li nitħarreġ iżjed dwar il-ħin li tlaħħaq li *actually* tagħmlu [il-Proċess] mal-lesson li ġa għandek. Kif se tikkopera kollox f'daqqa. Ehe, dik hi. Għax jien meta għamilt *lessons* hekk, ħaduli iktar ħin mis-soltu għax ħabba studenti li jibda jitfixkel, min ikun nesa'...[għalhekk] il-ħin kif jiġi *addressed* għadha mhux ċara.

To be honest, I would like to have more training with regards to the time to fit everything in and incorporate [the Process] in the lesson that you already have. How I can incorporate everything together. Yes, that is it. Because when I carried out lessons like that, they took more time than usual because of students who were getting confused, there were those who forgot... therefore, how the time element can be addressed is still unclear.

(Ms Christine, primary teacher)

4.5.2 Curriculum management and relevance

Four of the participants spoke about the amount of content that they are required to cover, making it difficult to really work on anything else other than the prescribed curriculum.

Is-sillabu wisq *heavy*. Meta tkun Year 6 u jkollok dak il-kurrikulu kollu biex iddaħħal ħabba l-*benchmarks*, *it would be impossible I think*.

The syllabus is too heavy. When you are teaching Year 6 and you have all that curriculum to work on due to the benchmarks, it would be impossible I think.

(Ms Eve, primary teacher)

Jekk ma jkunx hemm eżamijiet u l-kurrikulu jaqtawh u jkollok biss *points* u ma jkollokx trid tagħmel dik bilfors, *LML would be nice. Children would come to school much happier.*

If exams were to be removed and the curriculum is reduced and one only has points, without the need to do all which is included, LML would be nice. Children would come to school much happier.

(Ms Patricia, LSE)

Ms Christine highlighted that at times, she finds it difficult to implement the Let Me Learn Process strategies because notwithstanding her interest personally, she does not see how these would help in the delivery of the prescribed content.

[Il-kors] kien interessanti ħafna, iżda ma nafx. Kultant rajtu wisq. Kien fih wisq lezzjonijiet biex jien finalment minn dawk il-lezzjoniijiet kollha...mhux li narani nużah wisq.

The course was very interesting, however, I have my doubts. At times I thought it was too much. It had many lessons, and I don't see myself using much of it.

(Ms Christine, primary teacher)

Three of the teachers, while not making clear reference to the patterns and to the LMLP, confessed that they do find it useful and make use of it; in their own words, "indirectly". When asked what they mean by that, the answers gathered could all be summed up in the answer I got from Ms Eve;

...*indirect* jiġifieri jien ma nużahx bil-mod kif jien *expected* li nużah. Ma noqgħodx nikteb fuq karta li dak [l-istudent jitgħallem] hekk u l-ieħor hekk, iżda minnu naf ngħaqqad gruppi iżjed bis-sens u tgħinni wkoll niftakar il-bżonnijiet tagħhom ħabba l-*badges* li jilbsu.

Indirect means that I do not use it in the way I am expected to. I do not write down that one student learns in a way and the other in another. However, through it I know how to group students more sensibly and it also helps me remember their needs since they wear badges.

(Ms Eve, primary teacher)

4.5.3 The difference between the social conception of self and the LCI scores

Ms June was one of the two educators who questioned the validity of the self-reporting nature of the LCI. During the focus group discussion, two of the participants argued that the children, when filling in the inventory, might only have represented what they wish to become and not necessarily what they really are. Therefore, they might have simply reflected what is expected of them socially.

Fil-verita` anke jien biex niġi biex nimla xi ħaga fuqi nnifsi hemm differenza bejn jien x'nixtieq inkun u dak li jien fil-verita`.

In reality, even when I try to fill in something about myself, there is a difference between what I would like to be and what I really am.

(Ms June, LSE)

Two educators participating in the focus group discussed experiences during which they confirmed that the LCI scores could not be confirmed by their observed actions. They argued how they had observed students who got certain LCI scores, but then showed a totally different output than that expected.

...ġieli ninnutaw xi tifel fi *groupwork* b'ċertu *score* għoli imbagħad narawh jinqata' lura u nibda ngħid 'hmmm...mela le ta, mela l-*iscores* m'humiex sew'.	Sometimes we notice a boy during group work with a certain high score but then we see him lagging behind and then I start saying, 'hmmm...so the scores are not accurate'.

(Ms June, LSE)

Amongst the other things which the participants mentioned might hinder the correct execution of LCI scores, are the age appropriateness of the inventory, the misinterpretation of the Likert psychometric scale by the students and the students' urge to finish the inventory in the shortest time possible. In this regard, Ms Eve suggested a method which, in her opinion, can be adopted to better assess the students' learning patterns and give out scores which are more reliable.

Jiġifieri jien għalija l-inventarju għandu jkun iktar milli bil-kitba u tittikja, issir pereżempju *session* għat-tfal, iżjed *hands-on*. Eżempju ttihom jibnu, mela tgħid ara mela aħna nafu li int tajjeb biex tibni.	In my opinion, the inventory should be more than just writing and ticking boxes, for example, a more hands-on session could be held for the students. For example, the students are given something to build, therefore we would know that they are good at building.

(Ms Eve, primary teacher)

4.5.4 Group dynamics

Two of the teachers mentioned their difficulty in applying the knowledge gained from the Process to create groups. They both mentioned that, in some cases, it was hard to create groups as students would refuse to work with each other in any way.

Naħseb ikun tajjeb li tiġi ndirizzata li taddatta l-proċess fi grupp li ma jaħdimx flimkien biex tgħaqqadhom iżjed flimkien. Nemmen li l-ewwel trid taħdem iktar fuq kif ħa jaħdmu iżjed flimkien u fuq *friendship* għax inutli tgħaqqadhom flimkien bl-i*scores*. Mhux faċli.

I think that it would be a good idea to address the adapting of the process in a group of students that don't click so that they become closer. I believe that one should work more on how they should work together and on friendships because otherwise, it is useless to put them together according to their scores. It is not easy.

(Ms Sasha, primary teacher)

4.6 School's perceived difficulties due to the socio-economic background of the catchment area

Three out of six participants highlighted the problems arising from the deprived socio-economic situation of most of the students that attend the school. In their opinion, while the curriculum and the Let Me Learn Process are important, at times these should take a backstage and address the social problems that some of these children bring with them to school due to their home situation.

...inti ħa jkollok student li apparti l-i*scores*, l-iktar ħaġa li se taffetwalu t-tagħlim tiegħu hija s-sitwazzjoni tiegħu d-dar.

You will have a student who, apart from the scores, the thing which most affects his learning is the situation at home. I believe

| Nemmen li kultant trid twarrab l-i*scores* fil-ġenb u dawk jiġu l-ewwel. | that sometimes you have to put the scores aside as these things come first. |

<div align="right">(Ms Christine, primary teacher)</div>

One of the participants mentioned that difficult social backgrounds were the main reason for issues of bullying in the school, hence, it was an issue which had to be prioritised over other things at school. Another participant blamed the home background and the challenging social background for the poor academic performance of the students.

| Klassi waħda għandek ħdax [-il student], sitta minnhom huma batuti. Is-*social backgrounds* tagħhom... | In one class you have eleven students, six of them do not do well. Their social backgrounds... |

<div align="right">(Ms Christine, primary teacher)</div>

4.7 Normalisation of the Process in the educators' professional practice

Through this research, it was interesting to note in what ways the Process has become part of the daily activities of the school. While all of the teachers and LSEs said they saw the value of the process, they highlighted the fact that there are certain areas where they feel it could be better applied.

Two of the participants, both teachers, maintained that they find the LMLP mostly useful in Mathematics. The reason for this, as stated by Ms Sasha, is that in Mathematics, one uses hands-on activities more often, therefore, it is more likely to use group work in a Mathematics lessons and that's when she sees LMLP applied at its best. She also asserts that she would rather focus on the application of the Process in one subject, at first, than incorporating it in all the subjects at one go. This confirms the statement by the head of school, Mr Franco, who claims that the teachers still viewed the Process as divided into subject compartments.

L-iktar li nħoss li hu utli u l-iktar nużah għalissa u għalissa bdejt iżjed naddattah fil-Maths għax għandek ħafna *hands-on activities* u taqsam il-gruppi biex jaħdmu iżjed flimkien.	I find it most useful when adapting it during Maths as there are more hands-on activities and you divide the students in groups to work together.
	(Ms Sasha, primary teacher)

4.8 Educators' perception regarding the universal application of the LMLP in schools

In order to gauge the Process' value in the eyes of the participants, one of the questions asked related to what they think about the Process being introduced in other schools.

Three of the participants, Mr Franco, Ms Sasha and Ms Christine, stated that more schools should take up the Let Me Learn Process. Mr Franco, the head of school, while agreeing that the Process should be introduced in more schools, repeats that educators should not only be informed but be actively involved in the negotiation process. Having a bottom-up and democratic process of introducing new ideas and processes will ensure a better success rate, according to Mr Franco. Ms Sasha highlighted the Process' potential with regards to the support that it can give to parents. Through this Process, parents can get more familiar with their children's learning. Ms Sasha also acknowledged the value of the Process in helping students to improve the interactions with each other.

...jekk tidħol bħala xi ħaġa edukattiva nazzjonali, naħseb iva l-mentalita` tinbidel. Anke pereżempju l-*parents* jkunu jafu x'inhuma l-punti ta' tagħlim tat-tfal tagħhom.	If it becomes a national educational strategy, I think that, yes, the mentality would change. Even, for example, parents would know what are the points of learning of their children. I think

Naħseb anke' jekk it-tfal ħa jintagħu flimkien barra mill-iskola, ħa jitkellmu, jiġifieri huma ser ikunu jistgħu jifhmu iżjed lil xulxin avolja minn lokalitajiet u skejjel differenti.

that even when students meet outside of school, they will talk, therefore, they would be more equipped to understand each other even if they come from different localities and schools.

(Ms Sasha, primary teacher)

Ms Christine sees value in introducing the Process in all schools. However, she mentioned that the Process has to be personalised to the challenges faced by the different schools.

Nemmen li kulħadd għandu jkollu dak it-tip ta' *knowledge* imbagħad jaraw huma kif jużawh. Imma tajjeb li għallinqas tkun ħadt il-kors.

I believe that everyone should have that type of knowledge, then they can be free to use it how they see fit. It is good that, at least, they receive the training.

(Ms Christine, primary teacher)

During the focus group, two of the participants, Ms Patricia and Ms June, cautioned that time and curriculum overload could pose problems in the introduction of the Process, because like anything else it will require time to implement.

Allura ħabba l-ħin u l-kurrikulu eżaġerat li għandna, mhux ikollna ċans nagħmlu affarijiet sew. Il-LML irid il-ħin għalih.

Due to time and the too vast curriculum we have, we are not finding time to do things well. LML requires time.

(Ms June, LSE)

One participant, however, doubted how beneficial it would be to have the LMLP introduced in all schools. She recalled her personal experience as a student asserting that she did not need such things as the LMLP, to get to where she is

now. She also mentions that in life, students will not always find the commodity of having work adapted according to their learning patterns.

Jien naħseb li jekk il-LML ser jiġi implimentat f'kull skola, is-sistema edukattiva mhux se tmur għall-aħjar. Fil-verita` jien ma narax differenza għax jien fi żmieni qatt ma tgħallimt bil-LML imma *still* fejn irrid nasal wasalt. U dan *ok*, tajjeb int tħobb it-teknika allura jien intik affarijiet biex tieħu pjaċir iktar. Imma fil-verita` fil-ħajja, int ser issib kollox li jakkomoda lilek? Eżempju l-Università ħa jtuni kollox bit-teknika? Fhimt? Jien ma kontx naf x'inhu LML imma naf li għandi kitba rrid nagħmilha, jekk qaltli mur id-dar u għamel dan il-proġett irrid nagħmlu. Fl-aħħar mill-aħħar bi ftit għajnuna xorta għamiltu. Aħna tgħallimna mingħajru u għamilna suċċess xorta waħda.

I think that if the LML is implemented in every school, the education system will not improve. In reality, I do not see any difference because I, in my school years, never learnt with LML and I still got to where I am today. And ok, a student likes technical things, so I give them tasks which they will like more. But realistically, in life, are you going to find everything which accommodates your needs? For example, at University are they going to give them everything involving technical tasks? I didn't know what LML was but I knew that I had writing which I had to do, and if someone told me to go home and do a project, I had to do it. All in all, with some help, I still did it. We learnt without it and succeeded all the same.

(Ms Eve, primary teacher)

4.9 Summary

Throughout this chapter, the main themes and issues that emerged from the individual interviews and the focus group discussions were presented. The findings were categorised into themes which were put together after carefully

reviewing the transcripts. These discussions with the educators have provided some interesting insights which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the findings in relation to the literature review presented in Chapter 2. Through this research, the experiences of educators who underwent Let Me Learn Process training will be presented. The Process promotes a more inclusive strategy in the classroom and fosters a student-centred environment. This study explores how such a process could help teachers in their professional development and help to impact the school community as a whole.

In this chapter, I will be analysing the findings and presenting theories and studies which suggest ways how the LMLP can help educators rise above various barriers and serve as a teachers' tool to facilitate students' learning and make the school community a better place to grow in.

5.2 Top-down versus bottom-up change processes

One of the challenges that the project had to face is the introductory stage. The Ministry, with all the good intentions, asked the Let Me Learn team to identify two schools that were facing difficulties, to work with them for some time and help them face these challenges. The team accepted the challenge and on launching this project, soon realised that the teaching staff were not aware of this support. The head of the school this research was conducted at, reminiscing on how the process was introduced to the school, explained that the Process, at least in these initial stages, felt like an imposition from above, causing resistance from the teaching staff. The studies by Hall and Hord (2006) and Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon and Byers (2002) both argue that a top-down process increases the chances of demotivating teachers to accept the new proposed changes and cause uncertainty in adopting new ways of teaching other than those which they are most familiar with. The head of school pointed out that the school was aware of the apparent problem of the students' poor achievement and the need to act on a plan to overcome such a situation, but they were taking long to come up with a plan to which could really tackle the challenges which they were very much aware of. This is, in fact, what Blandford (2006) highlights as one of the disadvantage of a bottom-up change process; that it often takes too

much time for a plan to be drafted, have all stakeholders come into agreement and to implement the plan of action. For this reason, the likelihood is that a bottom-up change process initiated by the educators would have delayed the immediate response to such an issue which was posing a threat to the whole school.

It is pertinent to note that once the initial resistance was overcome, the school started to include the LMLP into the School Development Plan (SDP), and educators got involved and were given the freedom to control and employ this pedagogical practice into the school action plan. So while the Process was still something which was mandated by a higher authority the teachers were given the space to make their own decisions. Therefore, as Ham, Berwick and Dixon (2016) suggest, while teachers had at some time or another participated in the training, because it was a line of action that the school had decided to follow, teachers could choose for themselves to what extent it was valid to their classrooms and how they used it.

5.3 Educators' resistance to change

Change is never easy and the educators at this school took time to accept the changes that the school was asking them to do. It took a whole year to convince educators of the benefits that the Process can provide. It took hours of persuading to help the school community to see how such support can help them overcome the challenges which they had identified.

The findings revealed that teachers were worried that the implementation of yet another project was going to eat away from their time with the class. Teachers felt that the time they have with their class was already not sufficient to cover the vast curriculum. So before anything could be started, teachers had to be on board. They had to be assured that participating in the LMLP was not an add-on to their already overloaded days, but on the contrary, it was support by the LML trainers to help them accomplish what they would like to achieve with their class. This was highlighted by the head of school who pointed out that the teachers' disposition is of paramount importance when it comes to their approval of proposed changes within the school. Richardson (1990) emphasises

the importance of ensuring that the educators' experiences are considered before any transformation in practice is expected to occur. That being said, Baird and Northfield (1992) confirm that successful transformation takes place when educators come into terms with change and allow themselves to change accordingly.

Another aspect which was mentioned by the head of school as a challenge to the educators was how they would use the Process continuously throughout all subjects. He was concerned with the fact that educators perceived the Process as one which requires more time and work to implement, because they thought they had to apply it differently in the various subjects they teach. It is a fact that activities can vary substantially from one subject to another, however, educators must look at the Process as the key to the understanding of the different ways by which the students learn best (Johnston, 2015). This means that the Process acts as a guide for teachers to plan the lessons with intention and cater for each and every individual in the classroom (Hall, Meyer & Rose, 2012), and provide the students with equitable opportunities to learn (Tabone, 2009).

The findings revealed that it was easier for the participants to form groups according to the learning patterns, through their knowledge of the students' learning profile. On the same account, this collaborative learning is able to enhance problem-solving skills and language development as the students pool in their present knowledge, strengthen their own, and co-construct new knowledge (Storch & Aldosari, 2012). Therefore, the Process, although used for relatively different activities across the various subjects, can still serve as a tool for these educators to plan effective, collaborative activities in all subjects, where the students can contribute in distinctive ways (Yazici, 2005).

5.4 The perceived positive outcomes of the Let Me Learn Process in the school

From the interviews, the educators referred to different positive aspects which were brought about through the application of the Process. The main ones which were mentioned during the interviews were the upward change in

academic results, the empowerment of the learners, the educators' awareness of students' learning patterns and their own, and more effective staff development and interaction.

The head of school compared the academic results before the Process and after its application on the whole school. He found that after they started working with the Process the results, especially in Mathematics and English language, showed a sharp improvement. He proudly mentioned how the school managed to exceed the average in Mathematics which was a huge success. When the Process was proposed to the school, they incorporated it in the school's action plan as a means of strategic planning to tackle issues of low attainment and lack of motivation in students and teachers. It is interesting to observe how the main issue of the school was the low statistical achievement in the main subjects, which could be the result of too much focus on academic results. Knowles and Lander (2011) assert that barriers to achievement often follow when learning needs are not addressed. The LMLP helped address the individual needs of the students and, ultimately, made a positive difference in their achievement.

The positive academic results were the outcome of the main ingredient; the empowerment of learners. Teachers were more aware of the students as individuals with their individual baggage of strengths and weaknesses. This phenomenon was highlighted in a study by Kim and Schallert (2011) where they found that when students felt understood and cared for, there was a marked increase in their confidence and a more positive approach to how they think of themselves. This aspect was also highlighted by the present Education Minister Evarist Bartolo in his 2017 budgetary estimates speech when he highlighted the importance of continuing to work on fostering self-confidence in students to better express themselves (Pace, 2016). Within the school under study, this was a target which was achieved. Two-thirds of the participants referred to some sort of empowering experience they encountered. The application of such a Process, which promotes child-centred pedagogy, allowed the students to be in control of their learning through the knowledge of their learning patterns. In view of this, academic achievement and empowerment of

learners were interwoven. Better achievement was a result of empowerment of learners and the improved academic results, in themselves, brought a more positive school environment which automatically injected a higher dose of motivation. Moreover, it brought a change in school culture and created a school environment which is more conducive to learning (Weimer, 2002).

One of the main explanations given for the low result attainment was the low socioeconomic backgrounds of most of the students in the school. Borg and Raykov (2015) show that the socioeconomic factor can, in fact, be a contributing factor for low academic achievement. This position is also evident in the statistics in the PISA (2015) results that confirmed that students from low-income families achieve 2.47 times less than those from families with good income. The school in this study is one which is situated in the Southern Harbour region – a catchment area with families of low socioeconomic backgrounds. This was presented as a concern by half of the participants. Therefore, one can understand how this factor was one of the triggers which were influencing the academic achievement of the students. Educators' low expectations of students was a contributing factor for low achievement. The LML team worked on this by showing that, notwithstanding the background, showing the children that they can achieve and give them confidence that they can perform, managed to bring about this change in both attitude and actual academic results.

Another major positive outcome of the Process was that it proved to help the students further develop metacognitive skills as they discovered in what ways they learn most effectively and how to go about a task to reach the objectives. Before the LMLP the educators admitted that they expected the students to hand in the same quality of work, ignoring their individual preferences. Moreover, they commented about how discovering their own personal learning patterns have helped them understand that, although students' performances might differ from the way they expected them to perform, they can, in their own way, still produce high achievements. Teachers often feel more comfortable to teach in the way they would understand best if they were the students (Albrecht, 2003) and thus, students often feel at a disadvantage. As a result, this

was hindering the students' understanding in the classroom (Boström, 2011). The Process has helped teachers to adapt their teaching to the various learning preferences of the students, which made teaching more accessible and reach more students. Furthermore, this has resulted in fewer students being labelled as challenging. Students were now being perceived from a different lens; a lens that values diverse learning patterns (UNESCO, 2001). This is a very positive outcome which contrasts with one of the findings in the survey conducted by Fenech Adami (2004) which reports that teachers often fail to adopt differentiation by interest and sequence.

This implementation also brought about very positive interactions between the teaching staff. The meetings helped the educators to reflect on their current pedagogies and on their own practice and share such practices with each other during SDP meetings. This collective reflective practice helped in the transformation of students' learning. Hall and Simeral (2017) stress that when educators share their reflections through effective dialogue, change will occur and leave lasting results in students' learning. This is also highlighted by Robertson and Grainger (2015) who claim that critical reflection contributes to the creation of new attitudes and viewpoints. In fact, this study has shown that through various disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991), these educators experienced a change in their perspectives towards the challenges they face in their daily chores. As a result, this change has led them to approach these challenges in the classroom more effectively, together. In addition, it transpired that the Process helped the educators on a personal level as well, in a way that made them understand each other better. It was a tool which connected the members of teaching staff to work better as a team. Subsequently, this school was able to overcome the lack of analytic and reflective practices which was reported in The Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta External Audit Report (2014). The Process also served as a means of continuous professional development to these educators since they experienced an advancement of knowledge which could be used to develop their teaching practices into more innovative and productive ones (Osamwonyi, 2006).

5.5 Hurdles in the application of the Process

Notwithstanding the above positive outcomes, the teaching community at this school still found this change process challenging at times. As already discussed in the first theme, amongst the main hurdles which the teachers reported to have experienced in the implementation of the Process were the issue of time, the over loaded curriculum and group dynamics.

All participants in this study stressed the challenge to find time to allocate for all the activities which are required to be done within a scholastic year. This phenomenon was recorded in a study by VanTassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2005), where they found that teachers barely found time to address all the different needs in the classroom and because of the time factor, it was a challenge for them to provide work which was varied in content and level. Teachers also commented on the preparation time needed to address the diverse needs of the students.

It is not the case that the teachers were not interested in dedicating time to address their students' needs; they were in fact eager to incorporate what they have learned in their plans for teaching and learning. That notwithstanding, time limitation remains one of the main challenges for teachers in applying inclusive strategies in their classroom. Maltese teachers, as the study by Humphrey et al. (2006) shows, are eager to reach all their students, and seek to encourage them to participate regardless of their abilities. Teachers show great interest in their students' learning and contentment. In this present study four out of six participants expressed their wish to receive more support by LML trainers within the classroom. This, in itself, showed that educators in this school are in general appreciative of the support and they are asking for more structured and in-class support to ensure proper differentiation.

The heavy curriculum demands posed one other major concern for the participants. Participants struggled to cover the content and often felt that, in order to cover the curriculum, the quality of support suffered. As a result, five out of the six educators explained that, while they kept what they have learned at the back of their minds, they did not have the time to really help the students

go through a metacognitive process to ensure understanding. A heavy curriculum, according to New and Cochran (2007) regulates the type of pedagogy used and minimises child-centred practises. As a matter of fact, a local study by de Battista and Portelli (2014) found that teachers give major importance to learning from textbooks and to covering the syllabus rather than practising child-centredness. It is being hoped that the revision of the NCF (2012) and the LOFs (2015) will succeed in moving the system away from curriculum-oriented teaching and give importance to contextual learning and child-centredness.

Another hurdle highlighted by the teachers in this study was the sometimes-challenging group dynamics between the students. Disagreement between students often caused difficulties. In the study by Humphrey et al. (2006) strong teacher-student, student-student relationships were flagged as important components for learning to occur. Group dynamics do not blossom overnight and require the educators to instil in the students a sense of tolerance towards each other. Therefore, although the negative group dynamics may have delayed the positive effects of the Process, the teachers started working on it and have reported improvement in student-student and student-teacher relationship.

5.6 Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of this study and related them to the literature that was researched. The main themes discussed highlighted the challenges educators faced in their attempt to implement the LMLP in classrooms and the benefits which they attributed to the introduction of the Let Me Learn training and support.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

This chapter provides answers to the main research questions, according to the findings analysed in the previous chapter. Moreover, it presents different suggestions for the implementation of the Let Me Learn Process emulating from the data generated through this study. It also seeks to put forward some recommendations that could be useful to teachers, and also discusses recommendations for further similar studies. Finally, the last section portrays my concluding thoughts regarding this research.

6.2 Answering the research questions

6.2.1 Has the LMLP helped educators grow into better facilitators of learning?

The changes brought by the NCF (2012) and the LOFs (2015) towards a more inclusive reform have emphasised the uniqueness of each child. Through this research, it was evident that teachers, while valuing these principles, remained also very much aware of the limitations that the limited time to cover the vast curriculum was posing on theirs and their students' performance. This was making it difficult for them to create varied and adapted material (VanTassel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2005). In contrast, this study shows that the LMLP has served as a tool for the educators to better understand the needs and the behaviours of their students. Furthermore, it has been the key to more differentiation practices in the classroom, where educators could group children with diverse learning patterns. This has resulted in the fostering of collaborative learning where students can express themselves, experience scaffolding of learning with their peers (Storch & Aldosari, 2012) and contribute in different ways, depending on the various tasks presented (Yazici, 2005). The increase in collaborative work and better understanding of the learners are both stepping stones towards a more differentiated, child-centred classroom, hence, a more inclusive mentality. Furthermore, the Process has served as a means of improving pedagogical practices, up-skilling and continuing professional development.

6.2.2 Has the LMLP helped the young learners in their learning journey?

This study showed that the Process has played a key role in the students' academic performance. The school has managed to overcome challenges posed by the socioeconomic background of the students and a history of underachievement and, for the first time in many years, experienced an upward change in results. In three years of sustained LML support the students were empowered to learn and felt more appreciated for the work they do. The study also showed that the interpersonal relationships between the educators and the students, and also amongst the students themselves, have improved.

6.2.3 Has the LMLP helped the school be of better service to the students attending the school?

The findings of this research have found that the Process has helped teachers in better understanding themselves and their students. This brought about improved communication within the learning community of the school. Although initially participants expressed a lack of trust in the change project, because they saw it as an imposition from above, once accepted, the educators found a way how to discuss it and try to make it work collectively, and, in turn, incorporated the Process as part of the School Development Plan. The educators and the school administration appreciated the LML team's availability and willingness to answer questions which the teachers might have had; this made the application of the Process easier. The positive results afforded by the Process have led to a school community open to learning. The LMLP experience that the educators had was palpable and left a positive effect on the school. The school, notwithstanding its location which attracts students from low socio-economic backgrounds, has proven that students can still succeed.

6.3 Recommendations for teachers as the facilitators of learning

6.3.1 Fostering healthy relationships

This research has shown what impact healthy relationships and shared aspirations can have on learners' academic achievement. The LMLP, despite the challenges it faced in the beginning, has worked through the years on sustaining a healthy working relationship amongst teachers and between teachers and students. A recommendation with regards to this is that this healthy collaboration between teachers and students should continue to grow because it is the foundation of any change process. It is the teacher's role to initially start developing healthy relationships with the students by earning their trust and showing them that they are understood and cared for. It then follows that a teacher can teach students tolerance towards one another and use collaborative work to get them used to working with each other. Through the Process, the students can build healthy relationship by better understanding each other and their behaviour.

6.3.2 Using the curriculum as a guide rather than a set of instructions to follow

All of the participants showed their concern about the vast curriculum which restricts them from differentiating their lessons and material. Through my previous teaching experience, I have come across this issue as well, and I am aware of the repetitiveness which the syllabus incorporates. Therefore, my suggestion to address this is to look at the curriculum as a guide rather than a checklist which must be fully ticked. For instance, a thematic approach in lesson planning and teaching allows the educators to combine different skills together and interlace subjects in a cross-curricular manner. This will make more sense to the students as learning would be interrelated with real situations and the students' interests.

6.4 Recommendations for the enhancement of the LMLP

6.4.1 Permanent LMLP expert in every college

Having a permanent LMLP expert in every college would ensure high quality standards in the application of the Process. LMLP experts provide teachers with feedback on the spot (LML Training, 2018), therefore, if teachers are provided with one LMLP expert who regularly follows up on their challenges and asks for feedback, they could always refer to this person to answer any queries. Moreover, the educators would be more comfortable to ask questions to someone with whom they would have built a rapport.

6.4.2 Providing top-up courses

A professional teacher is required to undergo continuous professional development to update his/her pedagogy and keep up with new methodologies and practices (NCF, 2012). In-service training fills "missing gaps between demands and actual achievement levels" (Osamwanyi, 2016, p.83). Therefore, it would be a practical idea to provide the educators with top-up courses to strengthen their understanding of the LMLP principles and update them with recent findings. This will enhance the effectiveness of the Process in addressing the educators' concerns which may change from time to time.

6.5 Recommendations for future studies

6.5.1 Sample size

In this research, only one school was studied. Participating in this study were six educators; one Head of School, three teachers and two LSEs, all of whom received LMLP training. This school was one of the first two schools which received LMLP training. It would be, therefore, interesting to explore what impacts the Process has had in other schools. This would give a wider array of perspectives in this regard.

6.5.2 A longitudinal study

A study which spans over a number of years would give a clearer indication of the progress which the LMLP has brought about in different schools. Therefore, conducting a longitudinal study would provide the LMLP team of experts with ample data to improve and revise the Process along the years. Furthermore, it would provide gathered evidence of teachers' successful practices and concerns, which may become useful in discussions and decision-making.

6.5.3 Including the students' viewpoints

In this research, I aimed to discover the Let Me Learn Process application through the lens of educators. It would be interesting to include the students' perspectives on the topic as it would give a voice to the students who are also protagonists of the Process taking place in the classroom. The LMLP experts would become more familiar with the students' challenges, as told by them. It is a fact that sometimes, adults may interpret students' actions in ways which would still not give them a clear picture of the students' real difficulties.

6.6 Concluding thoughts

This research aimed to explore the educators' perspectives of the effects of the Let Me Learn Process on the participant educators and their performance in the classroom. Despite the barriers identified and discussed within, this study revealed positive results in the teachers' pedagogical approach in the classroom. This research confirms that when educators are supported within the context in which they are working, and given the tools to work with, they have the power to positively influence other aspects such as the students' motivation to achieve, students' academic performance and the communication between the administration and educational support staff. All of these results affect each other and are interdependent. This research showed that the Let Me Learn Process can support differentiation and is a tool which promotes a child-centred pedagogy.

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Appendix 1

Permission by the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability

Appendix 2

FREC Ethical Clearance

Appendix 3

Permission Letter to Head of school

Permission Letter – Head of school.

Date: _____

Dear Head of school,

I am Alison Debono, currently studying B.Ed (Honours) with Primary Education at the University of Malta. I am interested in conducting with the title of 'The Let Me Learn Process – Educators' perspectives of their learning experience'.

Being very keen on the topic of inclusive education, I am highly interested in the positive and negative aspects of this process and how it is promoting inclusion in one local state school where this is being implemented, if at all. I aim to discover how the teachers are applying the training they are receiving in their classes and if the introduction of the four learning patterns; sequential pattern, precise pattern, technical pattern and confluent pattern are beneficial both to the students and to the teachers.

The research supervisor is Dr Colin Calleja, Let Me Learn coordinator and Head of the Inclusion and Access to Learning Department at the University of Malta. I will be using two qualitative research methods; a focus group of three teachers, two individual interviews with trained teachers and a one-to-one interview with you as part of the Senior Management Team. The estimate time of the interviews and focus group is one hour while the estimated time of the interview with you as the Head of school is half an hour. Interviews will take place somewhere agreed as most convenient to the participants.

Participation in this study is voluntary and therefore, participants hold the right to refuse from being part of it. They have the right to refrain from answering any questions and can also withdraw at any time without being exposed to any negative consequences. With the subjects' permission, the interview will be audio recorded on a mobile device to make it easier when building transcripts and collecting data. Moreover, the focus group will also be audio recorded for the same reason. I would be glad to hand in a copy of the transcript when ready

so as to make sure that what is written down is mutually agreed upon. Personal data about all participants is kept strictly confidential. Real names of participants and the school will not be published to secure subjects' anonymity. Instead, pseudonyms will be used to replace original names of subjects. Audio recorded data will be securely stored during the work on the research and will be destroyed once the study is finalised.

Therefore, I am kindly asking you if you will accept my request in conducting my study at your school. Should you choose to contribute in my study, kindly distribute information letters and consent forms to teachers who have received a considerable amount of training with regard to the Let Me Learn. This is due to the fact that I would like to investigate the practice of the process in the classrooms and its effectiveness. Thank you in advance.

Yours Faithfully,

_____   _____

Ms. Alison Debono   Dr. Colin Calleja

B.Ed (Hons) Primary Education   HOD Inclusion and Access to Learning

Email: alison.debono.15@um.edu.mt   Email: colin.calleja@um.edu.mt

Appendix 4

Information Letter – Head of school

Information Letter – Head of school

Date: _____

Dear Head of school,

I am Alison Debono, currently studying B.Ed (Honours) with Primary Education at the University of Malta. I am highly interested in conducting a research with the title of '*The Let Me Learn Process – Educators' perspectives of their learning experience.* The research supervisor is Dr. Colin Calleja who is also the co-ordinator of the Let Me Learn programme in Malta. Therefore, this is a written request for you to consider taking part in this research as part of my B.Ed. (Honours) with Primary Education dissertation. This letter is intended to give you a clear overview of the study itself and what your participation will entail if you decide to be part of this study.

I will be focusing on the Let Me Learn process and its implementation in the classrooms and in school. I am keen to find out to what extent this process has been a transformative experience for teachers and to identify its positive and negative aspects from the head of school's and teachers' perspectives. I am seeking to find answers to the following questions;

- Has the LMLP helped educators grow into better facilitators of learning?
- Has the LMLP helped the young learners in their learning journey?
- Has the LMLP helped the school be of better service to the students attending the school?

I am interested in conducting a one-to-one interview with you as part of the Senior Management team. This is due to the fact that I would like to investigate a wider picture of the effectiveness of the Let Me Learn Process in the school.

Participation in this study is voluntary and therefore, you have the right to refuse from being part of it. You have the right to refrain from answering any questions and can also withdraw at any time. In case of refusal or withdrawal from the study, you are not exposed to any negative risks or consequences. Your participation will involve an interview of one hour on average and will take place in an agreed location. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded on a mobile device to make it easier when building transcripts and collecting data, however, audio recording is optional. I would be glad to hand in a copy of the transcript when ready so as to make sure that what is written down is mutually agreed upon and if there is anything which you would like to add, you are free to do so. Personal data about all participants is kept strictly

confidential. The audio recording will be deleted as soon as the research is concluded for security purposes. Real names of participants and the school, in this study, will not be published to secure subjects' anonymity. Instead, pseudonyms will be used to replace original names of subjects.

In case you have any questions with regards to your rights or the study itself, please contact me via email - alison.debono.15@um.edu.mt.

Should you wish to participate, kindly complete the attached consent form.

Yours Faithfully,

_____   _____

 Ms. Alison Debono   Dr. Colin Calleja

Researcher   Supervisor

B.Ed.(Hons) with Primary Education   B.Ed.(Hons)(Melit.),M.Ed.(Melit.),Ph.D.(Leipzig)

alison.debono.15@um.edu.mt   colin.calleja@um.edu.mt

Appendix 5

Information Letter – Educators

Information Letter – Educators

Date: _____

Dear Educator,

I am Alison Debono, currently studying B.Ed (Honours) with Primary Education at the University of Malta. I am highly interested in conducting a research with the title of '*The Let Me Learn Process – Educators' perspectives of their learning experience.* The research supervisor is Dr. Colin Calleja who is also the co-ordinator of the Let Me Learn programme in Malta. Therefore, this is a written request for you to consider taking part in this research as part of my B.Ed. (Honours) with Primary Education dissertation. This letter is intended to give you a clear overview of the study itself and what your participation will entail if you decide to be part of this study.

I will be focusing on the Let Me Learn Process and its implementation in the classrooms. I am keen to find out to what extent this process has been a transformative experience for teachers and to identify its positive and negative aspects from the head of school's and teachers' perspectives. I am seeking to find answers to the following questions;

- Has the LMLP helped educators grow into better facilitators of learning?
- Has the LMLP helped the young learners in their learning journey?
- Has the LMLP helped the school be of better service to the students attending the school?

This research will be based on two methods of qualitative data; one-to-one interviews and a focus group. You can choose to participate in one of the two or in both. Should more than the required number of teachers give their consent to participate in both the individual interviews and the focus group interview; I will randomly select teachers who will participate in individual interviews and others to take part in the focus group.

Participation in this study is voluntary and therefore, you have the right to refuse from being part of it. You have the right to refrain from answering any questions and can also withdraw at any time. In case of refusal or withdrawal from the study, you are not exposed to any negative risks or consequences. Your participation will involve an interview of one hour on average or a focus group which will take around one hour and will take place in an agreed location. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded on a mobile device to make it easier when building transcripts and collecting data. Audio recording of

the one-to-one interviews is optional. Moreover, the focus group will be audio recorded for the same reason. I would be glad to hand in a copy of the transcript when ready so as to make sure that what is written down is mutually agreed upon and if there is anything which you would like to add, you are free to do so. Personal data about all participants is kept strictly confidential. The audio recording will be deleted as soon as the research is concluded for security purposes of the participants. Real names of participants and the school will not be published to secure subjects' anonymity. Instead, pseudonyms will be used to replace original names of subjects.

In case you have any questions with regards to your rights or the study itself, please contact me via email - alison.debono.15@um.edu.mt.

Should you wish to participate, kindly complete the attached consent form.

Yours Faithfully,

_____   _____

Ms. Alison Debono   Dr. Colin Calleja

Researcher   Supervisor

B.Ed.(Hons) with Primary Education   B.Ed.(Hons)(Melit.),M.Ed.(Melit.),Ph.D.(Leipzig)

alison.debono.15@um.edu.mt   colin.calleja@um.edu.mt

Appendix 6

Consent Form – Head of school

Consent Form – Head of school.

<u>Title of Study</u>: **The Let Me Learn Process – Teacher's perspectives of their learning experience.**

I confirm that I have read and understood the information letter for the above study.

I understand that there will be no identified risks related to the research conducted.

I understand that I will be taking part in an individual interview.

I understand that audio recording will be taken for the sole reason of producing a transcript to examine details shared during the interview.

I understand that the recording will be deleted as soon as the research is concluded and the examination process of the dissertation is finalized.

I understand that I have the right to refuse or stop participating in this study and this will not impose any negative consequences for myself or the study.

I understand that I have the right to refrain from answering any of the questions asked by the interviewer.

I understand that I can stop the interview at any time.

I agree to the anonymity of my name in the finalized publication.

By signing hereunder, I confirm that I have understood the aims of the study and how it will be carried out and I consent to participating in the study.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Supervisor   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix 7

Consent Form – Educators

Appendix 8

Head of school - Interview Questions

Individual interview questions – Head of school

- What are some concrete outcomes of the LML in this school?

- What are your opinions on the LML based on a whole school approach?

- How is the Let Me Learn Process incorporated within the SDP?

- Do you think there is enough awareness of the Let Me Learn Process amongst teachers and learners? Why?

- Have you noticed any changes in the achievement of learners and teachers as result of the Let Me Learn Process? In what ways?

- Have you noticed any positive impacts on the school in general, since the LML has been implemented?

- Have you noticed any negative impacts on the school in general, since the LML has been implemented?

- Do you think it is beneficial to the local education system?

- Do you agree that LML is a learning system to improve the core goal of education? How?

- What is your opinion on LML in relation to staff development?

- Do you have any suggestions/ideas with relation to the LML which you think will make it a better process?

Appendix 9

Individual Interview Questions

Individual interview questions - Educators

- What is relevant to you from what you have learnt during LML training?
- How are you incorporating LML into your lesson plan preparation?
- How did you introduce the four learning patterns to your students?
- Do you think that by identifying your learning patterns and those of your students help in maintaining a better relationship with them?
- How do you think you have reached your students by identifying learning patterns and taking down scores?
- Do you think implementing LML in class is effective? Please elaborate.
- How do you incorporate it in your lessons?
- Do you think that the students are able to decode their tasks by being aware of their learning patterns?
- What are your opinions about the LML training?
- Have you noticed any changes in the way of teaching your students?
- Can you mention some experiences with students which prove that this system was leaving its impacts?
- Can you mention some experiences in school where you thought that LML was not enough?
- Has LML helped you understand yourself and has this been effective in your teaching?
- Do you think that SMT determined this change if present? How?
- Do you think LML can be applied in any classroom irrelevant of different backgrounds the students come from, different learning abilities and different cultures?
- Do you think that having a fixed LML trainer in school would help in improving your teaching along the way?
- Do you think that this system, if applied in every local school in Malta, would bring change to the whole education system?
- Can you think of any important aspects of teaching which were not covered during LML training which you feel need to be addressed?
- Did you find any difficulties with applying LML in your classroom?

Appendix 10

Focus Group Questions

Focus group questions

- Describe the Let Me Learn process in one word.
- Do you think time is an issue?
- Have you noticed a more popular learning pattern?
- Do you think that a word wall helps students recognize better which pattern they should adopt?
- Do you think that if the classrooms are still streamed according to grades achieved in summative tests, LML would be less effective?
- How does the application of the LML in the classroom affect the student's perception of his/her value as a member of the classroom?
- Did the LML affect your performance while planning? How?
- Did the LML affect your performance in the classroom with the students?
- Is there something you are still unsure of in relation to the Let Me Learn?
- What do you think about self-reflection in relation to the Let Me Learn Process and professional development?