

# Let Me Learn

## The Professional Development Institute

*Salvina Muscat*

**I**n her first presentation at the second *Let Me Learn Professional Development Institute* held in Bridgeport New Jersey June 1999, Dr. Christine Johnston from Rowan University, stressed that *Let Me Learn* is student centred as it focuses on the pupil as a learner rather than on the teacher's teaching. Both pupil and teacher using the *Let Me Learn* process develop a greater sense of efficacy about their teaching and learning. (Johnston, 1998). All students will take what they have discovered about themselves anywhere they go. As a result of this, students communicate better among themselves as they acknowledge and accept differences. This also encourages underachievers to participate equally in classroom learning. Hence this process makes pupils feel empowered and builds their self-esteem.

The LET ME LEARN PROCESS is an opportunity for teachers and students to work together to allow each student to gain the most from his or her learning experiences. Ms. Salvina Muscat, Head of Fra Diego Bonanno Girls' School, Marsa, one of the three pilot schools engaged in the Let Me Learn process, reports on the Professional Development Institute organised by Rowan University, New Jersey and on the progress registered by her school.

Teachers who participated in this process were able to realise that the traditional step-by-step teacher-directed instruction could not reach all the students. Hence they made the effort to change their teaching approach in order to create a classroom environment which allowed all learners to feel encouraged and to participate in learning.

During scholastic year 1998/99 the *Let Me Learn Project* started in three Maltese state schools: Mosta Primary School A, Valetta Primary and Fra Diego Bonanno Girls' School, Marsa. Training was given to those members of staff who volunteered to participate in the project. The teachers who participated at Fra Diego Bonanno Girls' school were involved in the process of reflecting on the teaching strategies used in the classroom.

*"I changed in the way I look at and teach my students. I am less rigid in the sense that I give a couple of alternatives when it comes to doing a task. The students then choose the one method which they feel most comfortable with,"* is one of the comments of a member of my staff.

Many more responses were written by the staff in an evaluation sheet they returned in March after five months of training in the *Let Me Learn* process.

The *Let Me Learn* process helps teachers understand how important it is to teach through group work. Because of the differences that exist among students better learning can be achieved through team building activities. Thus this process also helps create in the classroom

a community of learners where every member feels that s/he is contributing to the learning environment. Above all this process encourages reflection on the classroom practice. Teachers are encouraged to inquire about the learning activities and the performance of students. The dynamics of classroom discourse changes as the classroom climate changes. Teacher-learner partnerships are created as students can better discuss with teachers, thus taking more responsibility for their own learning. Following a Staff Development Day organised in December at Fra Diego Bonanno Girls' School, a group of teachers wrote:

*"We hope that by using the Let Me Learn, the students will be able to find their own methods of learning. In this way students will be more motivated as they will better understand what they are learning. The Let Me Learn makes students reflect and responsibility will shift from the teachers to the students, parents and the community."*

In order to better understand the learner, the teacher needs to collect information and interpret it free from every bias (Johnston, 1998). This is done by preparing the students to take the Let Me Learn Inventory (LCI), which has been developed over 6 years of pilot studies in the US and other countries. The LCI is a set of questions which when translated has the ability to identify the student's learning patterns. Every brain functions by using four different patterns of learning, each with a distinct message. These patterns exist in all of



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us to some degree and contribute to our unique learning combination. Once these learning patterns are identified, a dialogue starts between the learner and the teacher. This dialogue will contribute towards the development of the appropriate skills needed in order to facilitate the learning process.

On the afternoon of the first day there was an interesting presentation by the students participating in the *Let Me Learn* process. The way the students spoke was very encouraging. We were introduced to the idea of the Power Card. This is a card which helps students understand what they need to remember to do before starting an assignment. Every student has his/her own card. It is the result of what the *Let Me Learn* instrument tells every student.

As can be seen from Figure 1 (the top part is the card), students are trained to enter their Learning Combination Inventory scores on their Power Card. I do not like this idea as I believe that while it is important to know in which category the students fall, it is not necessary for them to keep thinking of the score. Students tend to consider these numbers as marks which need to be improved. The whole concept is that the *Let Me Learn* is not a test, hence the Power card is not the report of a test.

The students at the presentation kept repeating these numbers as if they were in fact marks. One student who fell into the Bridge category felt really frustrated as he could not improve on his marks. However it was very obvious that the students could use their different patterns effectively while working in groups. They were also very used to working in groups and certainly knew what they were doing. In fact they were very proud to be able to share what they learnt at school with the whole group present.

During another session we were given a view of to the Grady Profile which focused on the idea of alternative ways of assessment. This Profile is an electronic portfolio used in schools for students. At

Figure 1

Sequential	Precise	Technical	Confluent
Score:	Score:	Score:	Score:
*Organize *Order *Compare and Contrast	*Details *Describe *Facts/Reasons *Examples	*Construct *Draw *Illustrate *Experiences	*Imagine *Unique *Create
**	**	**	**

\*\* In these spaces the students will write their own notes, depending on the results received from the *Let Me Learn* Instrument. The following examples will serve as guidelines for the students:

<p><b>I avoid Confluent.</b> <b>I should:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· not worry about mistakes;</li> <li>· think about different ways to complete the assignment (<b>Be Creative</b>);</li> <li>· take small chances;</li> <li>· use time wisely.</li> </ul>	<p><b>I avoid Sequential.</b> <b>I should:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· determine what the question/task asks before I start;</li> <li>· break down the task into beginning, middle, and end;</li> <li>· make a plan;</li> <li>· stay on topic;</li> <li>· use time wisely.</li> </ul>
<p><b>I avoid Precise.</b> <b>I should:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· take notes if I can;</li> <li>· underline key words or phrases;</li> <li>· eliminate answers and use reasoning rather than guessing;</li> <li>· look for information or facts;</li> <li>· use time wisely.</li> </ul>	<p><b>I avoid Technical.</b> <b>I should:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· think about how things work;</li> <li>· use my experiences;</li> <li>· picture it in my mind;</li> <li>· take a break when I can;</li> <li>· use time wisely.</li> </ul>
<p><b>I am a bridge person, but sometimes I need to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· examine the task to see what I need to do;</li> <li>· break down the task into a beginning, middle and end;</li> <li>· plan how I am going to do it;</li> <li>· stay on topic;</li> <li>· use time wisely.</li> </ul>	

present the school administration in Maltese schools are using a detailed database program for information about staff and students. In some schools this is also used for time-tabling. As the Grady Profile is quite similar, one might explore the possibility of improving on this already existing tool in the Maltese schools. Maybe it can also be used as a metacognitive tool in order to help build students' portfolios.

During the final presentation by Dr. Christine Johnston, emphasis was placed on the fact that students learn better while working on set tasks. This is because students will practise problem-solving skills which is somewhat lacking in teaching. Schools often tend to identify pupils as deficient learners and try to remedy this by giving tests or using prescriptive learning as rehabilitation. One important message I received during the LML Institute was the following:

When you place a flower in a shady spot, it naturally will bend toward the sunlight that it needs.

No one says to the plant, "Why can't you be happy where I put you? Why do you have to cause trouble?"

Yet, when a student needs a different kind of learning, he or she is told to stop causing trouble and do it the way everyone else is doing it.

I invite you readers to ponder on this thought!

Hence *Let me Learn* is about giving the student the ability to grow and be prepared for the world after school. This is being done by giving the student a voice, a vocabulary and above all the training in critical thinking to become the capable learner notwithstanding him/her being different.

## Bibliography

- Johnston, C. (1998). *Let Me Learn*, Corwin Press, Inc., California.  
Johnston, C. (1996). *Unlocking the Will to Learn*, Corwin Press, Inc., California.