
Introduction

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It is the Institute for Education's mission to promote quality education for all educators and educational leaders, foster learning communities and contribute to equity and social justice. One way of achieving this is by gathering and sharing latest research on education. Establishing an annual symposium and giving an opportunity to postgraduate and doctoral students and researchers to share their research in education with the community of educators and educational leaders, as well as with parents and policy makers in Malta is the Institute's contribution to this end. Through this journal, this research is being made available and easily accessible to the learning community beyond the symposium itself. As such, it is meant to serve as a resource and source of inspiration to educators, educational leaders, policy makers, parents and the interested public alike.

The topic chosen for the first annual symposium, namely 'Internationalisation and Multiculturalism in Maltese Education and Society' is highly topical. Malta, by virtue of its size, insularity and geographic location, has been subject to various waves of colonial rule, influencing the language, culture, religious practice, social, economic and political make-up of the islands today (Baldacchino and Royle, 2010; Caruana et al. 2013). In the more recent past, Malta's accession to the European Union in 2004 contributed in part to an increase in foreign residents, particularly following the lifting of work permit restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian citizens in 2013 (EUROSTAT 2020). However, beyond EU accession, the share of migrants in Malta has increased exponentially in recent years from 11,000 in 2004 to 23,611 in 2013 and 83,267 in 2019 (EUROSTAT 2020). This represents an increase in the share of migrants among the total population from 3% in 2004 to 6% in 2013 and 17% in 2019 (EUROSTAT 2020). Indeed, this share exceeds by far the share of migrants among the total population in countries like Germany (12% in 2019), Italy (9% in 2019), the United Kingdom (9% in 2019) or France (7% in 2019) (EUROSTAT 2020) and is well above the average in Europe (11%) (IOM 2020: 24).

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Although migrants remain a relatively small share of the total world population, international migration has witnessed an increase globally in the past two decades. While they have accounted for 2.3% in the 1970s, their shares have increased in recent years to 3.0% in 2010 and 3.5% in 2019 (IOM 2020:21). Beside the increase in numbers, the countries of origin and destination, migration channels and migrants' legal statuses have diversified substantially in recent years, amongst other factors (Vertovec 2007; IOM 2020). This is due in no small part to wars, political (Arar et al. 2019, 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020) and environmental crises (Adamo & Izazola 2010; Arar et al. 2020b; IOM 2020) emerging as push factors for migration.

This increase has implications for public service provision, including education (Vertovec 2007; Arar et al. 2020a, 2020b; IOM 2020; Bezzina & Vassallo 2019). As is reflected in the articles in this journal, it has impacted both the number and diversity of students in classrooms in terms of countries of origin, religious and cultural practices, language proficiency, educational background or experiences of political and economic struggle and personal trauma, to name but a few. But what is more, teachers and students have been ill-prepared for this change personally and professionally.

But besides that, Baldacchino (2003) reminds that this increase is felt more strongly than in larger countries due to Malta's size and population density, resulting in 'fears' of 'invasion'. Indeed, various articles in this journal have uncovered similar perceptions among educators, educational leaders, students and parents regarding the increase in migrants in Maltese society and education. Vertovec's research (2018) confirms this connection between migration and public perception, finding that

even slight but rapid diversification has notable effects. In places where a relatively small but fast influx of migrants have arrived, tendencies toward xenophobia are greatest. Therefore, it is not just the perceived size of migrant groups that affects people's assessments of change, but it is the pace of change that some find distressing. (Vertovec 2018: 2)

The symposium and this journal are intended, therefore, both to take record of the developments and provide insights into how educators, education leaders and students are responding to this development. It does so with the aim of uncovering and addressing negative perceptions to foster equity and social justice. Moreover, it does so by providing recommendations for policy and practice and, thus, serving as a resource for the learning community.

These developments and perceptions thereof are explored at the macro-, meso- and micro-level. Chapter 1 focusses on the macro-level analysis and investigates the development of multiculturalism in Maltese society in general and education in particular. Chapter 2 analyses the impact at the meso-level by exploring the impact on schools as learning communities and analysing supportive framework conditions in this regard. Finally, Chapter 3 is dedicated to the micro-analysis and delves into the experience of educational leaders and educators. Over and above these analyses, Chapter 4 of the journal showcases good practices in addressing multiculturalism in education.

The journal articles provide a rich and diverse picture of the impact of multiculturalism in Maltese society and education. We are indebted to the excellent contributions made by the authors and the dedication and commitment by the selection and editorial board, who have guided the authors in the development of their articles, as well as contributing an introduction and context for the different chapters.

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