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Teachers And Teaching In Malta: Some Key Issues

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Abstract:

This paper presents the findings of a local study that investigated the motivation, job satisfaction, commitment and general health among 237 Maltese and Gozitan secondary school teachers. This research, which is part of a an international study entitled Teacher 2000 Project, shows that our teachers are mostly extrinsically motivated, mainly attracted to teaching by the family commitment factor. A high percentage of teachers were found to be generally satisfied with their job. The most satisfying aspects of their work were when their students achieved success in some way, the 'official' working hours and when working with higher academic ability students. Teachers stated that they spend the highest amount of their professional time on face-to-face teaching. Altruism and family factors rather than personal and career-oriented factors, were the items the teachers felt mostly committed to. To a certain extent, the majority of the respondents did not have excessive stress symptoms, as it resulted, that the more satisfied teachers are with their job, the least likely are they to have any stress symptoms. Several significant main effects among demographic variables, when compared to the factors mentioned above resulted. These findings are interpreted in the light of current educational developments in Malta.

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Introduction

This paper tries to map out what we see as some of the major issues facing teachers and the teaching profession today. The comments and observations are grounded in local research that has been undertaken over the last few years as part of a large study of teacher satisfaction, motivation and health involving Australia, New Zealand, the United States and England in the first instance followed by studies in Canada, Cyprus and now Malta.

In focusing on matters such as these, there is the risk that one is seen as 'talking down the profession'. Many of the issues are contentious, the subject of debate in the community and media, and are often seen in negative terms. However, we believe that progress is about overcoming problems, and before progress and improvement can occur, it is necessary to accurately define and understand any such problems and barriers. In addition, it will become clear that there are also positive aspects to be found in many areas which may ostensibly seem negative and problematic.

Methodological approach

A questionnaire survey was conducted and the instrument used is based on the one devised by Dinham and Scott (1996) for their *Teacher 2000 Project*. The items in the questionnaire were mostly pre-coded with some open-ended questions. However, some minor changes were made to the instrument used, so as to adapt it to the Maltese context. The first section of the questionnaire gathered demographic data. The second section explored the respondents' reasons for entering teaching and their preparation to teach. In the third section, teachers had to rate their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction on various aspects of teachers' work. The fourth section had to indicate the way they spent their professional time. In the fifth section teachers were asked to rate their commitment to various aspects of their personal and professional life. The final section explored health issues (see Portelli, 2004).

In all, 380 questionnaires were distributed to Maltese secondary school teachers teaching in both State and Church schools. Ten secondary schools were chosen to take part in this study – four Junior Lyceums, four Area Secondary Schools and two Church schools. 240 (62.4%) teachers responded to the questionnaire.

Key issues

Orientation to teaching

This sample of teachers where found to be most strongly motivated by extrinsic factors, mainly that teaching fits in well with their family commitments (58.1%). This is in line with what emerged from Mule Stagno's (2001) study about secondary school respondents, who were more likely to have entered teaching as it fitted well with their family commitments (54.2%). Only 50% of the Maltese sample could be described as being in the 'right place' as they identified 'always wanted to be a teacher' as their reason for being in teaching. On the other hand, salary was identified as the reason for joining the teaching profession by only a small percentage of teachers (15%) [see Table 1].

Table 1: Orientation to Teaching in Relation to the Total number of Teachers

		Total	
		Count	*%*
I always wanted to become a teacher	True	115	50.00
	False	115	50.00
Teaching was not my first choice of career	True	115	49.80
	False	116	50.20
I became a teacher because of a lack of other options	True	65	28.50
	False	163	71.50
There was pressure from my family to become a teacher	True	32	14.10
	False	195	85.90
I was attracted to teaching because of the hours and holidays	True	105	46.50
	False	121	53.50
I thought that teaching would fit in well with family commitments	True	132	58.10
	False	95	41.90
I was attracted to teaching because of the salary	True	34	15.10
	False	191	84.90

Gender difference in the teachers' orientation to teaching

On the whole, four out of the seven orientations to teaching items, indicated significant responses in relation to gender. Differences between men and women revealed by this analysis, are in agreement with those to be expected from a knowledge of sex roles and status of teaching as a 'women's career'. Female teachers showed that, on the whole, they were less extrinsically motivated to become teachers than males. In fact, a higher rate of female respondents (57.1%) than that of males (38.9%) said that 'they always wanted to become a teacher.' This research finding matches the study Harker *et al.*, (1998) conducted in New Zealand, where they found that for half the women, teaching had been their favoured career, which was only true for a third of the men. Also, as brought out in the English study of the *Teacher 2000 Project* (Scott, 1999) men (37.0%) were significantly less likely than women (50.0%) to report that they had always wanted to be a teacher.

It is also interesting to note that 'family commitment' was given greater importance by female teachers (64.7%) than male teachers (48.4%). This still makes quite a lot of sense as women usually take on more family responsibilities, especially when they get married. Besides, as reported by Huberman (1993), women might find the short hours of work very convenient when it comes to taking care of the family. Perhaps, this factor could also be a good motivator to help women choose teaching as a career or take on teaching later on in life.

Men (59.6%), in contrast with women (43.1%), were more likely to report that they chose teaching because they had no other option and that it was not their first career choice. Besides, quite strangely, male respondents (19.8%) were more likely to go in for teaching because of pressure from family members, than their female counterparts (10.3%).

Orientation to teaching in relation to age

The responses show that the younger generation of teachers gave more importance to family commitments than the older generation, when choosing teaching as a career. Compare, for example, 50% who chose teaching because they wanted to from the 22-30 year-old cohort with 61% of the 51-61 year-old cohort. This could mean that within the younger generations of teachers there are working mothers who find a teaching career appropriate to their family commitments. As already highlighted, a difference which emerged between the younger and the older cohorts, related to choosing teaching because of the hours of work and the holidays that came with it.

What is also worth noting is that only 37% of the 41-50 year-old cohort stated that they always wanted to be teachers. At the same time the same cohort stated that they found that teaching fitted with their family commitments (62.9%). These responses tend to reinforce initial findings that the most popular reason for entering teaching where extrinsic factors.

Preparedness for teaching

We have all seen the expansion, fragmentation and congestion of school curricula and a similar situation afflicts tertiary teacher training programmes. A proliferation of subjects and courses and increased social expectations on schools has seen similar pressures being placed on teacher training, while there are also increased economic constraints on tertiary institutions to 'do more with less'.

There are other issues as well, such as maintaining an optimum balance between 'theory', 'content' and 'practice', and maximizing opportunities for pre-service student teachers to undertake varied experiences in school settings. Beginning teachers commonly state that they are unprepared for both the workload, and the social problems that they encounter, and systems that still persist with the illogical practice of sending their most inexperienced teachers to the most 'difficult' schools (Bezzina & Stanyer, 2004; Lia & Mifsud, 2000; Portelli, 2004; Vassallo, 2000).

Close to 45% of all teachers felt that their training for the job was inadequate, thus lending support to the general concern over the efficacy of teacher preparation programmes [see Table 2]. However, to some extent, this figure is not so surprising. This is because the complexity of problems faced in the lives of teachers cannot ever be fully experienced in pre-service teacher education programmes, as problems in reality are often far more different. This is in line with what we often hear - beginning teachers stating that they are unprepared for both the workload and the social problems they encounter in teaching (Dinham, 1992). At best then, pre-service programmes just prepare teachers to confront problems. However, we believe that more work should be done in order to make the newly graduating students more satisfied with their training, because apparently, as shown from the study, as time goes by, the levels of dissatisfaction with preparation for teaching are increasing. In another recent study (Bezzina & Stanyer, 2004) the majority of graduates (93%) found the teacher education undergraduate course as rather different to the realities of school life, describing it as 'too idealistic' and 'not practical enough' (51%). This surely raises cause for reflection and debate within the Faculty of Education when we review our teaching components. This becomes more crucial given the need for Universities to review their under-graduate and graduate programmes so as to fall in line with the Bologna Process.

Table 2: Preparedness for Teaching in Relation to the Total number of Teachers

		Total	
		Count	*%*
I had a realistic view of teaching before I began my training	True	126	55.50
	False	101	44.50
My training adequately prepared me for teaching	True	130	57.80
	False	95	42.20

Teacher satisfaction

Whilst the 'typical' teacher in this study would seem to be suited for teaching, and to have commenced teaching because it was what he or she had always wanted to do, this typical teacher is also not satisfied with at least some aspects of his/her occupation. Ratings of overall satisfaction suggest that at least some degree of occupational dissatisfaction was being experienced by over one fourth of the respondents, and ratings for change in satisfaction showed that a significant percentage of participants have experienced a decline in satisfaction since beginning teaching.

This study found that practically 72.6% of teachers described themselves as satisfied with teaching, while 24.4% said they were now more dissatisfied than when they commenced teaching.

Overwhelmingly those surveyed found the 'core business' of teaching – 'students achieve success', 'facilitating student achievement', 'working with higher academic ability students' and 'official working hours' – to be highly satisfying. Factors outside their control, such as the 'status and image of teachers', 'opportunities for promotion', 'class sizes', 'support structures', 'resources to facilitate teaching and learning', 'limited decision making responsibilities', and the 'range of professional development opportunities', were found to be quasi uniformally dissatisfying [see Table 3]. This resonates findings in other local studies (e.g. Astarita & Pirotta, 1999; Bezzina & Stanyer, 2004) that have highlighted the lack of a culture of collaboration that exists in our schools. Work needs to be concentrated in this domain so that a more collegial work ethic is nurtured.

In short, based on this research, it seems that teachers are in urgent need of support, recognition, rejuvination and understanding. There is a pervasive and persuasive argument in the findings that the teachers' level of satisfaction is being affected by quite a growing number of concerns. Overall, teachers' sources of satisfaction were found to lie within the domain of the 'intrinsic' rewards of teaching and are centred on interactions with students and, to some extent, teacher achievement. On the other hand dissatisfaction was found to be more 'extrinsic' to the core business of teaching and centred within society, employment prospects (i.e. promotions), the state of schools and how their profession is regarded.

Table 3: Means and Standard deviations for Teacher Satisfaction items

How satisfying do you find :	Mean	Std. Deviation
It when your pupils achieve success in some way	6.24	1.159
The "official" working hours and holidays in teaching	5.77	1.147
working with higher academic ability pupils	5.70	1.161
your dealings with pupils	5.35	1.143
your degree of mastery of teaching content since you began teaching	5.29	1.281
your degree of development/acquisition of professional skills since you began teaching	5.25	1.327
your capacity to influence pupil achievement	5.17	1.210
your capacity to change pupil attitudes	5.12	1.374
your capacity to change pupil behaviour	5.12	1.374
The degree to which you have achieved you professional goals	5.00	1.340
assisting other teachers	4.96	1.317
your dealings with teachers in your school	4.96	1.431
it when organizing teaching activities	4.93	1.372
The opportunities to socialize with other staff in and out of school	4.89	1.435
your dealings with your school executive	4.87	1.650
your dealings with parents	4.82	1.239
your capacity to contribute to whole school development	4.79	1.498
your status/reputation in your school	4.75	1.387
The amount of time and effort you put into teaching activities	4.75	1.400
your involvement in extra-curricular activities	4.75	1.577
The effects of teaching on your personal /family life	4.64	1.432
The degree of feeling of belonging/collegiality/teamwork in your school	4.58	1.619
The quality of leadership in your school	4.57	1.429
working with pupils with home/welfare problems	4.53	1.504
The reputation of your school in the community	4.52	1.338
the amount of recognition you receive for your efforts from parents and the community	4.41	1.451
your current workload overall	4.40	1.455
The amount of educational change in recent years	4.27	1.378
formal or official communication methods in your school	4.27	1.445
The opportunities you have for exercising leadership in your school	4.26	1.441
your dealings with community members	4.24	1.325
The devolution of authority to the school site	4.23	1.351
the way the professional association work for the betterment of education in this state	4.22	1.403

The amount of your current administrative responsibilities	4.20	1.381
The way the teacher unions work for the betterment of education	4.13	1.493
the quality of supervision from senior school staff received by staff in your school	4.12	1.448
recent changes to curricula	4.10	1.299
The concept of community involvement in schools	4.06	1.377
working with lower academic ability pupils	4.04	1.624
The way the teacher unions represent the interest of members	3.98	1.423
pupil attitudes generally in your school	3.97	1.414
your current salary	3.92	1.522
your dealings with education officials from outside your school	3.87	1.477
The image of teachers portrayed in the media	3.86	1.158
The concept of pupil involvement in school decision making	3.86	1.541
The status of teachers in society	3.78	1.478
the degree of support provided by education officials to implement change	3.75	1.364
The degree of involvement of the local community in your school	3.75	1.273
The way that politicians work for the betterment of education	3.74	1.465
support structures for pupils with special needs in your school	3.72	1.615
the amount of recognition you receive for your efforts from people in your school	3.7	1.658
The opportunity for your involvement in school decision making	3.69	1.612
The in-service courses you have undertaken/been involved in	3.56	1.705
the range of professional in-service courses/consultancy/support offered to teachers	3.55	1.585
The physical working environment of your school	3.55	1.687
The degree of pupil involvement in decision making at your school	3.54	1.477
your school's financial resources	3.46	1.461
support structures for teacher welfare in your school	3.43	1.436
your school's material resources/equipment	3.39	1.632
The amount of ancillary staff support at your school	3.37	1.739
The current possibilities for moving between schools	3.32	1.386
procedures for promotion	3.28	1.428
current criteria for promotion	3.27	1.403
the amount of recognition you receive for your efforts from education officials from outside school	3.25	1.587
your opportunities for promotion	3.25	1.573
class sizes in your school	3.17	1.723
The community's opinion of "official" working hours and holidays in teaching	3.02	1.557

p-value = 0.000

There was a common feeling that formal recognition of teacher achievement at systems level was tokenistic or lacking, and that the employer and the community did not appreciate – in both senses of the word – the role teachers performed today. Clearly, those surveyed want to teach – something they find satisfying – while they are concerned about other matters that may detract them from that central role.

Self-reported current satisfaction

From this study it appears that when talking about the general level of current satisfaction with teaching the majority of teachers are satisfied with their job [see Table 4]. Unlike findings in foreign studies such as those conducted by Chaplain (1995), and in the Teacher 2000 projects conducted by Dinham and Scott (1997) and Harker *et al.*, (1998), this study showed a high level of satisfaction. In fact, similar to what Borg and Riding (1991a, 1991b), Grech et al., (1999) and Mule Stagno (2001) found in their studies - a high percentage, just over 70%, of teachers were satisfied with their job. This could be considered as a very positive response, because it means that the more satisfied teachers are, the more likely they are to give of their best on the job.

Table 4: Current Satisfaction with Teaching in Relation to the Total Number of Teachers

			Total
An overall rating for current level of satisfaction with teaching	Highly Dissatisfying	Count	3
		Percentage	1.3%
	Dissatisfying	Count	8
		Percentage	3.5%
	Fairly Dissatisfying	Count	23
		Percentage	10.0%
	Neutral	Count	29
		Percentage	12.6%
	Fairly Satisfying	Count	90
		Percentage	39.1%
	Satisfying	Count	65
		Percentage	28.3%
	Highly Satisfying	Count	12
		Percentage	5.2%

Though not a significant result, the fact that the highest percentage of teachers most satisfied with their job are from the 51-61 age group, and the least satisfied from the 22-30 age group, goes in line with Huberman's (1993) findings about young teachers' job satisfaction. Various local studies highlight the concerns facing beginning teachers (e.g. Borg & Higgans, 2001; Busuttil & Sciberras, 2001). Veenman describes this as "reality shock" – that is, "the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training by the harsh and rude reality of classroom life" (1984, p.143). It is caused by the beginning teacher's realizations about the world of teaching and his/her lack of preparation for many of the demands and difficulties of school life.

The non-significant result of current satisfaction with teaching in relation to gender, showing that male teachers are more satisfied than female teachers counters what was found in other local studies (Borg & Riding, 1991a, 1991b; Mule Stagno, 2001).

The teachers' current occupational satisfaction was found to be related to their reported level of symptoms of mental distress. The more currently satisfied the teachers were with teaching, the lower were their levels of distress reported. However, whilst most of the teachers in this study's sample said that they became teachers because it was the job they had always wanted to do, it seems that they were not satisfied with at least some aspects of their occupation.

Self-reported changed satisfaction with teaching

Unlike the findings by Harker *et al*., (1998), in terms of how their satisfaction with teaching had changed since they first began teaching, ratings for change in satisfaction, showed that a greater proportion of teachers, are now more satisfied than dissatisfied with the job [see Table 5]. This is surely a very positive factor. The significant result which emerged from this study, showed that those teachers in the 51-61 age group were now more satisfied with their job than when they started. Though in foreign countries this is mainly attributed to the fact that those teachers who think that they are least suited for the profession would have already left by this age, this is not the case in Malta. The reason behind this may be attributed to the intrinsic factors which lead them to join the career in the first place. The fact that the teachers in the 41-50 age group expressed less job satisfaction, could be in a way related to the fact that in this period, as Gould (1978) and Peterson (1964) (in Chetcuti, 2000) argue, around the age of 45 teachers tend to distance themselves from the intense enthusiasm of their personal and professional life. One also has to note that job mobility for the older cohorts was not even considered by the majority of post holders and thus once in a profession or job they would, in the main, remain until retirement.

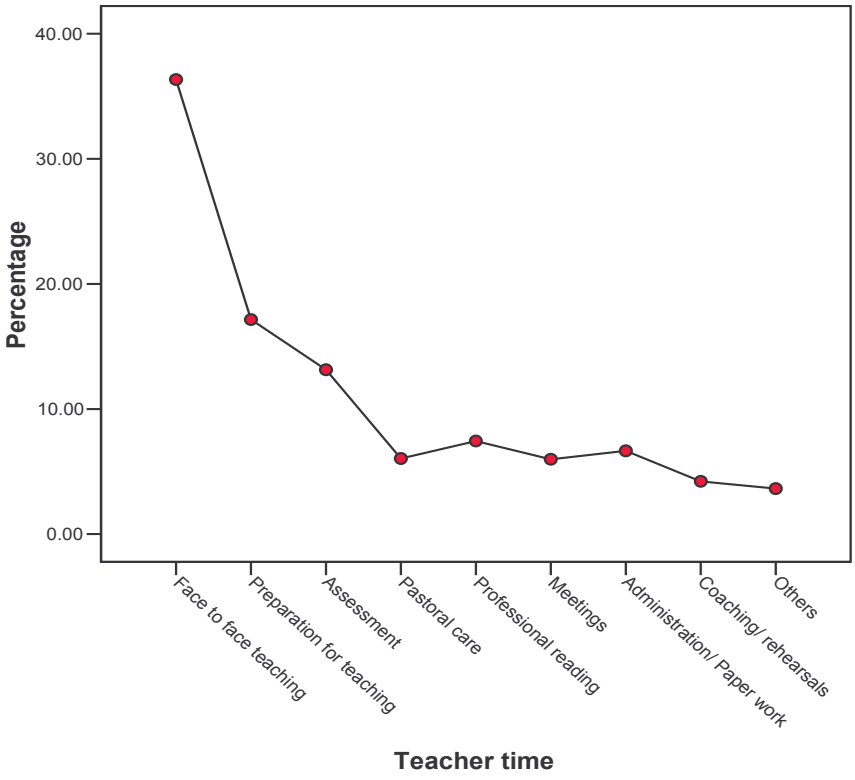
Table 5: Changed Satisfaction with Teaching in Relation to the Total Number of Teachers

			Total
Thinking about how satisfied you were when you began teaching indicate whether you are now more or less satisfied than you were then.	Highly Dissatisfying	Count	5
		Percentage	2.2%
	Dissatisfying	Count	9
		Percentage	3.9%
	Fairly Dissatisfying	Count	42
		Percentage	18.3%
	Neutral	Count	43
		Percentage	18.8%
	Fairly Satisfying	Count	63
		Percentage	27.5%
	Satisfying	Count	48
		Percentage	21.0%
	Highly Satisfying	Count	19
		Percentage	8.3%

Professional teacher time

Part of the questionnaire attempted to identify those aspects or dimensions of work that teachers spent their time on [see Table 6]. As can be expected, face-to-face teaching was identified as occupying most of a teacher's time at school (36%). 17% of the time is spent on preparation for teaching. Assessment and marking takes 13% of their time. Then there is a descending distribution on other items. What is obvious, and this reflects the concerns raised in other local studies (Bezzina, 2003, 2005; Busuttil, 2004; Micallef, 2002) is that teachers are not really engaging in collaborative practices and shared decision making which helps to empower teachers to go beyond their teaching responsibilities and embrace what Hargreaves describes as the 'extended professional'(in Hargreaves & Evans, 1997). This remains one of the main challenges that the implementation of the National Minimum Curriculum has to address.

Table 6: A Distribution of how Teachers Spend their Time



Teachers' personal and professional commitment

All commitment factors were considered as important. However, it is clear that altruism and family are rated high in importance, above personal and career-oriented commitments such as achievement and success, stress avoidance and personal growth. This helps to reinforce the findings re the distribution of teacher time.

The fact that teachers consider the 'aspiration to be fair and ethical' as the most important factor for them, it could be attributed to the fact that teachers consider it very important to be fair without showing any preferences amongst their students. Since 'personal relationships with own children and partners' followed, it shows that our secondary school teachers in this study are still conscious of the importance family values have. Thus, immediately, they have a chance of influencing students positively with respect to family values.

The extent of reported stress by teachers

Though agreeing with several studies, that almost all teachers undergo some symptoms of stress in one way or another, the fact that teaching has been identified as one of the most stressful occupations by Otto (1986), does not seem to emerge from this study. In fact, on the whole, the teachers participating in the study seemed not to suffer from the negative effects of stress. However, this goes in line with the finding that since we have a high percentage of teachers who are satisfied with their job, they tend to feel less symptoms of stress, agreeing with what Gold and Roth (1993) said about teaching – that the lower the job satisfaction in the life of a teacher is, the higher is the stress.

When considering the total percentage for each of the factors related to the general health factors, the negative totals – i.e. those factors which are most probably the symptoms of stress, go in line with most of the local studies previously conducted on stress by Borg (1991) who found that 36.6% of the teachers were affected by stress, followed by Chetcuti (2000), who found 48.2% of the teaching population to be affected by stress. The most negative effect teachers are experiencing is the personal strain factors, also the most common stress effect factor found amongst New Zealand teachers in the *Teacher 2000 Project* (Harker *et al*., 1998).

The teachers in the 41-50 age group seemed to show the most symptoms of stress factors, as they were the least likely to be able to enjoy their day-to-day activities and often thought of themselves as worthless persons. This could be due to the fact that the mid-life transition has a tendency to leave its effects on personal change, which in turn would affect the way teachers feel about their general health, in turn affecting the quality of their output. Besides, older teachers tended to report fewer stress symptoms than young teachers.

On the other hand, nothing much can be said about gender differences, as no significant differences emerged from the study. Similarly, Dinham (1995) found that there was no significant gender difference where on average women usually score higher than males. This also goes in line with the study conducted by Fontana and Abouserie (1993), who found out that there exist no great variations between males and females.

Concluding remarks

The results of this study may not be surprising but definitely present cause for concern. The rapid changes in education over the last decade have undoubtedly impacted on teachers. However, for educational change to be successful, the role and welfare of teachers are critical determinants.

To sum up, the main findings of the study indicate that:

- Maltese secondary school teachers joined this profession mainly for extrinsic reasons. Teaching fitted well with their family commitments, with females showing this preference, significantly more than males.
- Young teachers, rather than the older ones, consider the hours and holidays factor as a very important issue for choosing this career.
- Teachers are not very satisfied with the professional development training they are receiving for their career with this complaint increasing as time goes by.
- A high percentage of teachers rate themselves as being satisfied with their job.
- Teachers are mostly satisfied with intrinsic aspects of teaching which have to do with students' success and achievement, though at times they feel incompetent with the several responsibilities being placed upon them.
- Teachers express dissatisfaction with the way that the community does not value or appreciate teachers' work.
- The teachers from the eldest age cohort have stated that their satisfaction with their job has even increased ever since they started teaching.
- Teachers feel more committed to altruism and family factors rather than to personal and career-oriented commitments.
- Though approximately each age group of teachers suffered from some kind of stress symptom, on the whole, teachers are not alarmingly stressed out.
- The least stressed out teachers are those in the oldest age group, while the most stressed out are those in the 41-50 age group.
- No significant gender difference emerged with respect to teacher general health.

Whilst Malta, unlike other countries, has not witnessed a steady decline in one of the most precious resources that any nation can possess – that is, teachers, we are seeing that there is a steady shift behind the reasons for taking on a career in teaching.

The reasons for this may be many and no one reason will be behind the choice(s) made. However, what is certain is that such reasons do affect how teachers view their profession and how developments in the profession will in turn influence their practice. One thing is however certain – at least for those working within the field of education – teaching is no longer what it used to be, a well respected even though not well paid job. The vocational aspect or attraction has been eroding over the years. Whilst this conclusion may surprise no one, as we have been aware of this for some time, it is a serious issue with grave implications. This study is timely in this respect. Given the major changes that the education authorities want to implement to fulfil the objectives set by the National Minimum Curriculum (1999) and the Strategic Plan (2001) then we need to understand what context we are working in. And, our history of education has shown us that we need to clearly work with and through teachers to accomplish change and development where it matters, at the school site in general and in classrooms in particular, if we want reforms to be successful. We are slowly realising that the major challenge that we face is that of a new mind set, of a mental renaissance (see deliberations of the National Conference in Giordmaina, ed., 2000) within the whole sector of education. For this to take place, it will require quite a lot of hard work, commitment and sacrifice by all stakeholders. If people commit themselves to this cause we may start seeing the difference. To see the difference, to draw the conclusion that we can all make a difference to the quality of education

currently being provided then we need to work with teachers, to understand, to build upon and validate understandings of teacher satisfaction, teacher dissatisfaction, their orientation to teaching, their values and health. This study aimed to do this and we believe that we have presented the education authorities with an introductory study that can help us start appreciating the context we are working in.

Nowadays there is too much pressure and stress associated with the position, and, as Daresh (2003) argues, no longer acceptable to most people. We are working in an environment where children may be disinterested in schooling; where parents are more demanding; one in which various sectors of society keep exerting pressure on schools and educators that they find themselves helpless, frustrated and powerless. Teachers, whilst considered as professionals, have their role questioned time and again as everyone seems to know what teaching is all about and have a right to make demands that are not experienced in other professions. We are also living in a consumer society where money speaks louder than any call for giving of one self to others. At the same time, the beauty and joy that can be gained through teaching and learning are hardly ever celebrated.

The results help to highlight the need to radically review the educational reform arena. Unless we know what teachers feel and how we can influence reforms and bring about development at the school site we cannot bring about lasting change. As Scott (1999, p.43) stated "it seems imperative that there be a reassessment and redefinition of teachers' work and school responsibility, … this should not be restricted to the context of changed promotion and salary structures. Others within the community must assume responsibility for some of the expectations that have been passed on to schools and teachers as a group and as individuals". If we truly believe that our country's future depends, on the one hand, on having good schools, we realise that in order to have good schools we depend upon a steady infusion of committed teachers. And, we need teachers who are ready to take on the challenges of working within an environment that nurtures empowerment, collaboration and collective responsibility (Bezzina, 2005).

If we truly wish to implement the principles and objectives of the National Minimum Curriculum this will require new forms of partnership between all sectors of the community with an interest in education. Through this effort we could attract the best possible candidates for a demanding profession that can influence and prepare young children and people for tomorrow's world whilst at the same time nurturing a learning community in which teachers, as educators, can grow to be themselves and give of their best so that we have creative learning communities for all.

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