

Learning communities: schools, parents and challenges for wider community involvement in schools

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This presentation will focus, for the most part, on a project of parental involvement in a state primary school located in a predominantly working-class area in a Mediterranean country. It will draw briefly on qualitative empirical work carried out with a colleague (Carmel Borg). The presentation gives an account of the socio-economic context of the school, and foregrounds, through empirical data culled from transcribed semi-structured interviews, the voices of parents, administrators, school-council members and teachers. It will be argued that, if this project is to develop into a genuine exercise in democratic participation, parents must begin to be conceived of not as “adjuncts”, but “subjects”. The parents interviewed in this empirical work see themselves as such, and derive confidence from the fact that, at the time of the interview, their claims and recommendations were translating into concrete developments. The second part of the presentation will discuss the issue of parental involvement in schools within the context of a wider discussion on ‘changing the face of the school’ by helping it develop into a community learning centre. Insights from the work of Paulo Freire and his Education Secretariat, when he served as Education Secretary in the Municipal Government of São Paulo, Brazil, and from SMED in Porto Alegre, Brazil, will be drawn upon.

Parental Empowerment ¹

In the late nineties, I was involved, with a faculty colleague (Carmel Borg), in the co-ordination of a parent empowerment project in state primary school located in a working class locality in the South of Malta. Formal educational achievement in this locality has been low for quite some time. In 1995, there were only five new University students and five University graduates from the locality (Parliamentary Question, No. 34, 490). A recent study indicates that the area in which this locality is found has a “graduate density which is a staggering twenty times less” than that enjoyed in “the fashionable, upper middle class areas of Attard, Balzan and Lija” (Baldacchino, 1999: 210).

The school catered for the education of children whose ages range between 3-11 years. Its population consisted of 350 pupils and 12 teachers, a Head and two Assistant Heads. The school area still is 1,500 square metres. The school population was approximately four times as much as the number (82 pupils) allowed in Italy for schools with the same area, as can be inferred from a 1995 study (Mintoff et al, 1995: 35). This study indicates that this particular school was, at the time of the project and subsequent research, one of the most densely populated in Malta and Gozo.

We were asked to join the project, as resource persons, by one of the persons who sat on the School Council. The mother who approached us (she happened to know me since we both sat on a Board of Directors for a

national employment training agency at the time) is a middle class parent, one of the very few such parents in the locality to send their children to a state school. Her father was an esteemed figure in the community and the rest of the parents looked up to her. She expressed the Council's wish to develop a parental empowerment project and felt we could both make a contribution in this regard.

A Freirean Approach

Both of us drew, and still draw, our inspiration from the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (Borg and Mayo, 2006), among others. A connection with Freire's work can be established in the context of parental participation in schools (see Borg and Mayo, 2001, p. 250) in as much as this issue constituted a main area of concern in his efforts, as Education Secretary in São Paulo, to democratize public-sector schools in this city. Parent education was also one of Freire's first activities in education when he worked for SESI.

The coordinating team of the project in question included members of the School Council. More than 50 parents, all women, turned up for the first meeting. The first session centred around the theme of 'Homework' which

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the parent coordinator and staff at the school identified as a topic very much on the minds of mothers/female guardians within the community. The session itself, which was coordinated by one of us, consisted of a mixture of 'teaching' and dialogue. The women themselves identified the second topic. Every effort was made to ensure that the women participants had a direct say in the selection of the theme for co-investigation. Only thus can one ascertain that the object of co-investigation connects with their "thematic universe". The emphasis on dialogue is manifest throughout this excerpt²:

Grace: In previous meetings you generally listen and that's it. And he (the speaker) often tells you at the end "would you like to ask me anything?"...But ...you are either shy. The way we are doing them now...even with chairs in a semi-circle...I see this as something positive.

Victoria: These meetings are more open. You can say what you feel about it (the matter at issue) and you are respected and listened to...not as though it (the idea) entered one ear and emerged from the other.

Interviewer: Was this a new experience for you?

Victoria: Certainly!

Interviewer: Didn't you have any such opportunities before?

Victoria: No!

Mary: In fact, before, only somebody, for example, like you could speak and we listened. We were like fools. Now, at least, we can express our opinions. We are being given the chance to say what we think about the issue...we have already made great progress...because it is useless to listen, listen, listen and not say what you feel is good for the children. At least, we now have the opportunity to express our views...(when exploring reasons why other parents, apart from the usual 30, do not attend the session)...You know why? ...because they (the other parents who do not bother to come) think that the meeting is being held the way it used to be held in the past...that he (the speaker) is the only one who speaks...the same litany as usual...they do not know that they have the opportunity to speak and state whatever is bothering them at school, do you understand?

Rita: It's as though we now found you, meaning that we do not just listen. You are also listening to us...we are easily finding somebody who is prepared to listen to us.

Rose: At other meetings you sit down and only listen...in this kind of meeting, we discuss among ourselves and not just listen. We express our point of view, the way we see things...It has to be said that these kinds of meetings started only now, which means...We never (before) had any meetings of this sort...which means that once we had something organised for us, we responded.

Carmen: We often have meetings held by (mentions a particular organisation in the community)...All right, we listen ...but it is not possible for you to give your opinion. You do not agree with everything. There could be something which you do not like. You cannot participate and express what you feel. You only listen. Here (in this project) at least, if I do not like this particular thing, I have the opportunity to tell you and tell you what I like...after all, not everyone agrees, isn't it so?

The pedagogy throughout was 'directive' (Freire, in Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 103). One of the coordinators, or guest 'resource person,' anchored the discussion on the topic agreed to by the participants, interspersing the dialogue with brief expositions. The intention was to ensure that the sessions did not degenerate into examples of *laissez faire* pedagogy. On the other hand, every effort was made to ensure that the 'authority' which the guest speaker enjoyed, granted to him /her by the participants as a result of their recognition of the guest's competence in the matter at issue and as a pedagogue, did not degenerate into *authoritarianism* (Freire, in Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 91; Freire, in Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 181).

The persons who consistently attended the sessions were women. Would a change in the time of the sessions have attracted more male parents / guardians? Many of the female parents we interviewed sounded very pessimistic. When asked this question, some women first reacted by stating that their husbands either work evening shifts or else work also in the evening, presumably part-time, in the latter case.³ Others indicated that there is a mentality which has to be confronted here,

namely the patriarchal notion that the child's schooling is primarily the mother's concern:

Jane: Let me tell you...Since we have children who are being prepared for their Holy Confirmation and so forth, he (presumably the Parish Priest) holds meetings for parents in the evening. It's mainly women. There would be perhaps about three or four men...it is held at 6 pm.

Rose: We have meetings on parental skills. They needed twelve couples to form it (the group). I do not think we formed it (the group)... twelve couples... since you have to be accompanied by your husband. Because if it was possible to come alone there would have been more people... Which means...Even when we have church meetings there would not be any men. These take place in the evening.

Lillian: When we had MUSEUM (Society of Christian Doctrine)⁴ meetings, there were no men present....and this applies not only to the MUSEUM meetings...mothers take greater interest in their children than men. You find few (men) who do (take interest).

Helen: My husband is a shift worker. He can be off duty during the morning. He tells me 'Tell me what happened during the meeting'.

The agendas were introduced by the mothers/guardians, including grandparents. They were discussed at the various meetings with the project coordinators and led to an identification of priority areas. One of the priority areas was creative expression, given that it was felt that people from this particular area of the island tend to be "very low on confidence." This led to an engagement, in the project, of another cultural worker, a Faculty colleague who is a specialist in Creative Arts among primary school children. Given the importance of a language of international currency in a micro-state context (Bray, 1992; Mayo, 1994; Baldacchino and Mayo, 1996), it is not surprising that parents chose, as the other priority area, the teaching of English.

The demands of the parents, who regularly turned up for the sessions (there was a time when we had an average of thirty per

session), eventually began to translate into something concrete.

Gemma: During our last meeting, we mentioned, for example, cultural outings. It was immediately taken up. Because our teacher (the teacher who teaches Gemma's child) is going to take them out this Thursday. He is going to take them to Valletta. He is going to take them to a museum and similar places. It (the suggestion) was immediately taken up. That's why they're (the meetings) good.

Rose: (identifying concrete developments) The English issue, for example.

Interviewer: Have there been any developments?

Gemma: There certainly have been developments because my daughter is now even speaking English at home. ...Which means there certainly have been developments.

Carmen: And even our suggestion that, during English lessons, they (the pupils and teacher) speak English, has been taken up.

Jane: First of all, as we were saying (before the tape was switched on), we immediately noticed progress...And the children are also reading more in class...if we are talking about 'reading', right? We also spoke about encouraging more children (to read) and the Headmaster(sic) told us that he is taking them down to the Library. This is supposed to have also started. I would like to see more (things happening). ...Now, last week, we also spoke about cultural outings. Now they will be starting next week. Which means that what we asked for last week did not fall on deaf ears...

Victoria: The project is developing well... I think that English, as my friend said, is being spoken in the classroom. The children are speaking English. And as for myself, I feel satisfied until now...

Grace: and even when we ask for something to take place, it happens. Perhaps it does not happen quickly,.. since you cannot change things suddenly. But they are happening... slowly but they happen...

There are important issues that have to be faced in projects such as this. On whose terms was the partnership carried out? To what extent were the social relations involved genuinely democratic, that is to say, involving a two-way flow of ideas for action, as opposed to being hierarchical? One of the dangers stemmed from the fact that we were seen to be 'experts' by virtue of our University background and position (see Horton, in Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 192). This could easily have led us into adopting a patronizing posture.

One of the greatest challenges, in situations and projects such as this, is that of being able to listen on the lines suggested by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogia da Autonomia* (Freire, 1998, p. 107):

Listening is an activity that obviously goes beyond mere hearing. To listen, in the context of our discussion here, is a permanent attitude on the part of the subject who is listening, of being open to the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other. This does not mean, of course, that listening demands that the listener be "reduced" to the other, the speaker. This would not be listening. It would be self-annihilation.

One must reiterate that this might come across as being a very simple idea. Being able to listen is, however, no mean task. A colleague of mine, Ronald Sultana, captured the idea beautifully when, writing in Maltese and in the context of a process of parental involvement in public schools, he argued for the development of a "school that listens" (Sultana, 1994, pp. 14-16).

We were under no illusion that the task ahead is plain sailing; indeed it cannot be. Connecting with the participants' universe of knowledge and relevance is not a straightforward task. *Habitus*, in the sense conveyed by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, often hinders us in attempts to remove or, more realistically, mitigate class obstacles.

Constant recognition of the ways in which we are differentially located with regard to those with whom we claim to work should be born in mind as we seek to occupy different spaces within the system that, though structurally oppressive, is not monolithic and therefore offers spaces in which transformative action can be engaged.

The parents clamoured for a role which was at odds with that ascribed to them by educational administrators and teachers. Two teachers at the school had this to say about the

nature of parental involvement and exposure to sessions on parental skills:

Parents seem to be embarrassed to attend these courses and feel that it is too late for them to learn. Their culture also reflects the idea that the teacher is responsible for educating their children. Parents do not set future objectives for their children's achievement as they see it as something impossible and useless (in A. Borg, 1999: 38).

By introducing parents in classrooms there will be disorder....and children will never learn to be independent (in A. Borg, 1999, p. 38)

In much of the international literature, it is argued that teachers' perception of parents is often fashioned by their social-class location, often a contradictory class location, to use Eric Olin Wright's term (Wright, 1980: 265).

Sylvia: I was irritated by the underlying prejudice. During the last meeting, one of the teachers passed a pejorative comment. I responded aggressively to her comment. I told the teacher that "if you're saying something against these people, you're saying it against me." The teacher responded by telling me "you are different." I am also frustrated by their attitude towards children...comments like "these kids are terrible" are frequent. If the teachers on the council are representative of the teachers in the school, I do not think that the school is doing anything to alleviate the plight of the children. They are too dismissive. Unfortunately, I have to be negative. What we get from the teachers are negative comments. No...the teachers are not from...One of the teachers sends her kids to a private school. In fact I was repeatedly asked why am I sending my kid to this school...they were surprised.

Head of School (new at the time, male, middle aged): My impression is that teachers are still wary of parents. Of course, there are teachers who are prepared to accept parents. There are also teachers who view parents as obstacles..."They are creating difficulties for us, they are obstructing us....that's what they're doing."...they do not accept the fact that the parent will be biased towards his child. They (the teachers) do not accept this. ...However, in terms of attitude, the

teachers are still wary of parents...not all of them.

Interviewer: Do you think that the effect of the 1984 Strike is still being felt among the teachers?

Head: No, I don't think so....I would answer 'yes' for the older ones. Here I have a young staff.

Interviewer: They are a minority (the older teachers).

Head: A minority. The younger staff is more willing to accept parents. In fact, they accept them more. Still, the teachers' fear lies here...this is what we need to establish...we need to establish regulations... regarding the role of the parent and the role of the teacher. Because the teacher's fear is that the parent begins to interfere in his professional work...we should establish clear parameters that the parent has the right to know what is going on at school. The parent has the right to know what the child is learning. However the teacher remains the professional. When it comes to the child's behaviour, the parent knows more than the teacher. However professionalism must remain in the teacher's hands. The teachers are afraid that the parents start interfering as to how much homework is being assigned, whether homework is being assigned...this is really their fear...

Of course, the parents do not deny the teachers' competence in terms of pedagogy and content. In fact, their quest for greater dialogue with the teacher is often based on respect for the latter's pedagogical competence ('authority', not 'authoritarianism'). Mary stresses this point in her taped interview with us:

Mary: It pays the teacher to discuss matters with us and for us to discuss matters with her. For, if we work hand in hand, this would be for the benefit of the child. At the same time we would not be undermining her work (when helping the child with homework) and the way she teaches...and we would not be confused either...because we learnt our things in the past...the teacher would certainly tell you not to tell those things to the child because you could confuse her...we're not up to date...

Teachers tend to look down on parents. Such a feeling of superiority can be detected in

what teachers perceive as parental involvement and in what they are prepared to contribute to the development of parental involvement within the school.

Sylvia: When I first introduced myself, I was asked by the Assistant Head of School if I could sew... they needed somebody to sew the curtains for the school. I bought the material for my curtains 10 years ago, and it is still in the chest of drawers. In the beginning they used to call me to take care of the food and drinks. They have this rigid mentality that anything beyond their responsibilities in class is not their work. Once I was very busy and I asked them to take care of the food and beverages. They (the teachers) took it so badly that I decided to bend over backwards and provide them myself by asking my husband to shop for the stuff... during my first (council) meeting, I remember very well that the purchasing of food and drinks and their distribution was turned into the central issue.

The perception here, on the part of the 'professionals' involved, is that of pseudo-participation. The participatory experience does not focus on the power structure of the school and, say, the politics of its curricula. On the contrary, as with the pseudo-participatory schemes associated with certain worker-management teams, a feature of 'TQM' (Total Quality Management), the participatory experience often centres on little else apart from 'tea, toilet and towel' issues (Mayo, 1999: 3), fund raising activities (Sultana, 1994: 13) or the consolidation of schoolwork at home. This is what a teacher at the school had to say:

Parents can help academically from home without interfering in class....parents can help students read outside school by organising a meeting place where, let's say, a group of five to eight students read together (in A. Borg, 1999: 37 - 38).

Outlining his vision for the development of the school, where he aimed to promote a "culture of co-operation rather than competition", the Head had this to say about the role of parents:

Head: The parents have a very important role. I would have liked to give them a bigger role. However, I do not like to rush

through things. I see the parents' role as helpers in the school. ...helpers both from the academic angle, in the sense of helpers who engage with teachers in say a reading scheme...However, I also see them as helpers in the running of the school...Outings...why should we not bring parents with us...they can keep an eye on...there would be that connection between the children and parents also as part of the school...that is, children and parents identify with the school, regarding it as theirs.

What emerges from these quotes is the conventional image of the parent as 'helper.' But, of course, the parents have been clamouring for a role which extends beyond that of 'helper.' The excerpts from the interviews with parents indicate that the project is likely to remain meaningful to them as long as they continue to perceive their voice for change in the school as not simply being heard but as yielding concrete results, albeit gradually. Parental involvement entails more than being simply an "adjunct",⁵ helping with outings or with the children's homework. Important though this latter task is, it would still confine parents to a subordinate role in the relationship with teachers and other school personnel. They would still be engaging in a relationship with the school on the latter's own terms.

From 'Adjunct' to 'Subject'

An alternative vision for parental involvement programs is one where the parent is conceived of as 'subject' (Freire, 1970). In this concept, parents are conceived of as authentic beings capable of engaging in creative endeavours and critical thinking (Borg, 1993, p. 5; Borg, 1998: 16-17; Borg, 1999: 34 - 35). They are conceived of as persons capable of exercising that right which has been affirmed in a whole tradition of literature in political science, namely 'the right to govern,' a right which, in Freire's Hegelian sense of 'subject', connotes social collectivity.

All parents have the potential to regard the world as a place where their contribution can make a difference. Of course, one must recognise the objective limitations involved in this regard. Change occurs not suddenly, but gradually. The 'victories', albeit small, could be sufficient to inspire confidence. The school subsequently had its own newsletter and family literacy programme, two developments that were the outcome of pressure by the parents themselves. The women participants have now been organised into a women's group based in the locality, dealing with issues larger than that of parental involvement in their child's primary

school. The very same woman who invited us to join the coordinating team is the person who is organising this woman's group bearing the name MaraMediterra.

I would like to think that sessions, such as those in connection with project, constituted an important forum for parents to articulate their needs and acquire the skills for real participation. A project such as this could be enhanced in a situation when schools are reclaimed as sites of struggle for personal and social empowerment. This important stage can be reached through a process whereby society renounces the concept of schools as spheres of teaching in a hierarchical framework, controlled by an impersonal and centralised bureaucracy, and ultimately reshapes them as important vehicles for community involvement and action (see Parson, 1990) embracing a wider spectrum of stakeholders. We have to move away from the traditional image of schools as places where parents leave their children as they go about their morning chores. We also have to move away from a conception of schools as "daytime enclaves that most students and teachers leave only for lunches or special outings", places which "Community members rarely enter." (Curtis *et al*, 1992: 113).

These images have to be replaced as part of a gradual transformation of the school into a community learning centre (Parson, 1990; Mayo, 1994). This would be in keeping with the reforms the Municipal Bureau of São Paulo sought to introduce when Paulo Freire was Education Secretary during the PT Mayor Luiza Erundina de Souza's term of office (Freire, 1993; Torres, 1994; O'Cadiz *et al*, 1998). As Nita Freire, Paulo Freire's widow, told us in an interview:

He worked very much and seriously to 'Change the face of the school.' This means: to make it really popular because it would be happy, pretty, efficient, agreeable. To this end, he would be counting upon the participation of the educational agents (teachers, students, directors, supervisors, people in charge of pedagogic orientation, guards, people in charge of meals, cleaners, janitors, mothers and fathers of the students, etc.). (Borg and Mayo, 2000: 115; see also Borg and Mayo, 2007)

Genuine parental involvement entails the engagement, on equal terms, of a very important stakeholder in the educational enterprise, in a process intended to 'change the face of the school' into one which offers greater democratic spaces and possibilities to different members of the community.

Parents in schools as community learning centres: wider stakeholder involvement

There are several reasons that justify the development of schools as community learning centres. By serving as community learning centres (see Parson, 1990), schools can make an important contribution to the development and revitalisation of the public sphere. They would provide educational services to members of the community at large. Furthermore, the community, in which the school is located, can be conceived of as a learning community.

Schools, especially state schools, are public resources. Their conception as community learning centres can therefore be seen as an attempt to make democratic use of public resources, rendering them accessible to and more popular with a wider section of the local community than is the case at present. This invites parallels with the *Partido dos Trabalhadores'* attempts to develop 'Popular Public' schools in cities such as São Paulo and Porto Alegre, Brazil, when this party was in power at the municipal level.

There is also an economic argument to be made given that the cost, *per capita*, of public resources in a micro-state such as Malta, where the project was developed, and Cyprus, where this conference is taking place, is higher than that incurred in larger states. One must make better and maximum use of resources lest these resources become 'idle capital' for several hours during the day and entire months during the calendar year.

There are also powerful pedagogical arguments to be made for conceiving of schools as community learning centres. It is not only adult members of the community who benefit from such schools but also children. In forging strong links between schools and the community one would be creating greater space for the involvement of more stakeholders, such as parents, in the educational process. This has the potential to forge closer ties between schools and their pupils' immediate home environment. In the words of Francisco, a teacher in one of São Paulo's popular public schools during the reform which the Freire led secretariat carried out in the late eighties:

There is no point in handing children books to read if they are not understanding what is happening on their own street. So only [by] departing from her [the child's] daily life experience can we form a critical citizen and [instill] the idea of the right to citizenship. (in O'Cadiz, et al, 1998, p.189).

It was Freire who stated, in *Pedagogy of Hope*, that the learners' "concrete localization" constitutes the starting point "for the knowledge they create of the world" (Freire, 1994, p.85). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he states:

The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (Freire, 1970a, 1993, p. 95).

The surrounding community provides a significant part of the culture in which the children are immersed. This culture provides them with an important framework of relevance. The community, including the parents themselves, can therefore serve as an important learning resource for the teaching of children during the morning and early afternoon hours. There are teachers for whom this is not necessarily a new challenge. From conversations I carried out with older members of the teaching community in Malta's public education sector, when I visited schools, a few years ago, to evaluate student teachers on their practicum,⁶ I was told about their previous experiences in inviting community members to share with children their first hand and, in many instances, professional knowledge of a specific topic included in the syllabus.

The idea of developing schools as community learning centres, however, has implications for the initial and ongoing formation of teachers. It would seem appropriate for student teachers, especially at Primary level, to be initiated into the task of researching the community in question prior to the start of their teaching practice session. Knowledge of the school's surrounding community can serve as an important teaching tool. It can help render what is taught more culturally relevant and meaningful to pupils. This derives from the unmistakably Freirean approach to work in the cultural circles; those involved as educators in the cultural circles were to spend some time in the community where they were going to be engaged. The intention is for the educators, working in tandem with other members of the circle, including learners, to immerse themselves in the culture of the community, expose themselves, often through informal conversations, to the people's speech patterns and gain access to their universe of knowledge (see Chapter 3), jotting down various aspects of the people's life in their notebooks (See Freire, 1970a, 1993, pp. 110-111).

The idea of student-teachers researching the community where they will be carrying out their practicum is, in my view, an important aspect of their initial formation as educators. It can serve to bring them closer to parents and other community members and might make

them eschew the kind of prejudice and outdated ideas concerning parental involvement mentioned earlier in the piece.

The idea of developing schools as community learning centres poses a number of challenges for those working in and around them, some of which I underlined in the last chapter of a book of mine (Mayo, 2004). It is not only teachers and heads who face these challenges. Many other stakeholders are being called upon to face this challenge. And parents feature prominently among these stakeholders, as the bulk of this paper will have shown. Questions I posed earlier suggest that different stakeholders need to collaborate. They need to do so not on their own 'narrow' terms. There is also the challenge for local councils and school councils to avail themselves of this opportunity and work together to help transform the school culture for this purpose. They need to ensure that funds available for physical adjustments to the building are secured to render the place accessible to and suitable for people of different ages.

One cannot expect adults to learn and participate in an environment meant to accommodate children. And where it is necessary to build new schools, the local councils and school councils should ensure that these schools are designed as multipurpose community learning and action sites. The emphasis placed on the school councils' and the local councils' active role in this venture should not imply a decrease in the State's major responsibilities in this regard. The councils' action should also include making legitimate demands on the State to honour these responsibilities. As with the popular public schools in São Paulo, and with any project elsewhere concerned with social justice, education is regarded as a right, something to which each citizen is entitled. It is conceived of as a public good which needs to be safeguarded

and, in certain contexts, retrieved, given that this right is constantly threatened by the New Right's onslaught on the public sector, an onslaught born out of a conviction that the services traditionally provided by this sector are ripe for commodification and privatization.

These are some of the issues that come to mind with respect to the development of schools as community learning centres. Such a development would, in my view, help create the right infrastructure for a genuine and ongoing parental involvement in the education of their children.

Note

¹ This paper draws its material from Borg and Mayo (2001), reproduced as Chapter 4 in Borg and Mayo (2006), and Chapter 4 of Mayo, P (2004).

² Detailed research on this project, with more excerpts from taped interviews with the parent-participants, can be found in a paper by Carmel Borg and me published in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (Borg and Mayo, 2001a). This was intended as socially committed action research, a form of praxis on our part, a reflection on our 'world of action,' as a contribution to transformative action.

³ At least two parents mention this in the taped interviews.

⁴ It is common for children of primary school age to attend religious lessons at the Society of Christian Doctrine centres, found in each locality, in preparation for their Holy Communion and Holy Confirmation.

⁵ We are indebted to Dr Mary Darmanin for this term and distinction.

⁶ Teaching practice' is the term we use in Malta.

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