

New impetus to student-teachers' professional growth

THE university's faculty of education is set to take an important step towards making its degree students finer teachers.

It is planning to introduce a new form of assessment – the 'professional development portfolio' – in which student-teachers collect examples of their practice work and think critically about it in order to improve.

The portfolio would also be a record of their accomplishments to be shown to prospective employers, supplementing their transcript of results and demonstrating they have acquired a number of key skills that make them professional teachers.

A faculty committee on assessment is preparing a guidebook for the students and hopes to introduce the portfolio in October. The Education Division and education officers are collaborating on the venture.

"The portfolio will help our students grow as professionals," said faculty member and committee chairman Deborah Chetcuti. "Teaching goes

beyond standing in front of a classroom and giving a lesson. We are trying to get student-teachers to reflect on their practice and ask the question: 'How can I improve?'

"It will help them learn how to continue to develop professionally even after they graduate."

The portfolio is also in line with the philosophy of the new national minimum curriculum, which speaks of introducing a more 'formative' assessment in schools. If student-teachers are used to creating their own portfolios, they would have more of a tendency to use formative modes of assessment for their students, said Dr Chetcuti.

Use of the portfolio was piloted with a group of student-teachers last year. At first they objected to the "extra work", she said, but they later reported that it was a "good idea".

One student-teacher said: "Even though it is time-consuming it made me reflect on my initial experiences as a teacher. Moreover it gives an indication to heads about my commitment as a teacher. It is



Keeping a portfolio with examples of their teaching practice will help student-teachers develop professionally even after they graduate.

something to be treasured after graduating".

Basically, the portfolio is a collection of information about a teacher's practice. It can include a variety of information, such as tutors' reports and other feedback, lesson plans, descriptions and photographs of how classes were organised, examples of learning aids used, evidence of travel, participation in seminars, conferences and other extra-curricular activities, and reflections on

growth and development throughout the course.

"However, the portfolio is also more than simply a collection of artifacts," says the guidebook being prepared for students. "What distinguishes it from a mere scrap book or album of events is the thought and reflection that goes into its development. It is the means by which you can show your successes and the process of thought and reflection which influenced your growth and development

as a professional teacher."

Dr Chetcuti said the portfolio stemmed from the philosophy that "a grade does not mean that much".

"Graduates have been telling us that they have not been able to show interviewers what they really achieved, and some private schools are already asking teachers for practice files. By giving examples of their best work, the portfolio will enable them to demonstrate what they can do in a professional manner."

THE national minimum curriculum has been created through a consensus-building process involving educators, politicians, parents and teachers, among others.

A national conference, to take place at the university between June 9 and 11, will continue that process, this time discussing implementation rather than the text itself.

Schools are already preparing a number of NMC elements for implementation when the scholastic year starts later this year, said the Steering Committee on Curriculum Implementation, organisers of the conference together with the ministry and

Curriculum 'on its way'

National conference next week

division of education.

Eighteen specialised groups have been set up by the steering committee to study different aspects of the challenge of getting the NMC "on its way".

The groups were also asked to draw up their proposals for action plans for the short, medium and long term; that is, from next year to the next five years.

The conference will discuss their draft reports with a view to bringing them, and any new conclusions, into a single draft strategic plan which the committee is hoping to finalise by the end of the year, following further consultation.

Among the 18 reports under discussion will be those on early childhood education, assessment,

bilingualism, technology education, creativity and self-expression, schools as community centres and parent participation.

Participants of the conference will become more familiar with key concepts in the NMC, while keynote international speakers will speak about comparative experiences in implementing national curricula.

Delegations from schools, among others, will be able to ask questions and make proposals regarding the various aspects of the NMC process.

Anyone wishing to attend the conference, which is open to the public, is invited to contact the university's Socrates office on tel. 32902347, 32902204, or by e-mail at socrates@um.edu.mt.

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