

Article

The School Community's Role in Educating for Responsibility for Inclusion

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Abstract: This study explores responsibility for inclusion, a notion rooted in the belief and practices of various religions. It draws on the thoughts of Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt and Paolo Freire, all of whom were greatly influenced by their religious tradition. Ten qualitative interviews were performed with senior school leaders. Data were interpreted through thematic analysis, and the results show that inclusion starts from the self who welcomes the other. Inclusion of students with severe disabilities, especially with severe autism, remains problematic at schools in Malta, and headteachers seem to struggle to implement inclusive values and attitudes. Successful methods for better inclusion include collaboration of all school community members, the involvement of students in decision making, participation of all students in school events without any discrimination, the Peer Preparation Programme and the buddy system.

Keywords: responsibility for inclusion; education; ethics; inclusive values



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1. Introduction

Inclusion is grounded in the inherent dignity of the human person. Strongly rooted in various religious traditions, it has been the subject of philosophical inquiry and has become an important principle in international human rights. The dignity and equal rights of all human beings, regardless of race, gender, status or religion, is recognised by the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations 1948). This is further strengthened by various articles and core principles in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989), among which the principles of non-discrimination and the best interests of the child, and the rights to participation and optimal development, as well as by the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations 2006), which includes, among its general principles outlined in Article 3, respect for inherent dignity, non-discrimination and the “full and effective participation and inclusion in society”. Though a focus on inclusion has brought heterogenous classrooms to schools, school communities are still struggling to include a wide diversity of students. The writings of Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt and Paolo Freire can be useful in providing a philosophical underpinning to the concept of inclusion. While these authors were not religious in the traditional sense, they all engaged with religious concepts and ideas as they explored ethical responsibility to others, the nature of evil and the pursuit of justice, as well as the transformative potential of human action. Thus, even though their writings do not draw on religious doctrines explicitly, their ideas intersect with religious themes and resonate with many religious ethical and moral teachings, allowing such ideas to be more accessible and engaging to people of different faiths, or those of no faith at all, which is important when considering the multifaith nature and growing secularisation of school communities.

1.1. *The Necessity of the Other for the Development of the Self*

Deeply influenced by his Jewish heritage, Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) emphasised the transcendence and infinite value of the other, resonating with religious ideas of unconditional love, selflessness and the sacred value of every human being. Arguing that the self grows through the alterity of the other, the French personalist affirmed that every encounter with the other is a pedagogical experience (Levinas 1979, pp. 196, 203). The “face of the other” calls for responsibility: the self shall welcome the other (Levinas 1979, pp. 77, 171), respect the other (Levinas 2001, p. 163), and accept the other without any form of possession, domination or violence (Ben-Pazi 2015; Garza and Landrum 2010; Levinas 1979, pp. 203–4). Indeed, for Levinas, morality is “first philosophy” (Levinas 1979, p. 304; 2011, p. 211), calling for responsible human relations (Ben-Ari and Strier 2010). The responsible self is always obligated towards the other who cannot be replaced by any other (Lehnhof 2014; Levinas 2001, pp. 108, 112; Dimitrova 2006, pp. 15–31; Simmons and Carnahan 2019). According to Levinas, “the true ego is the ego which discovers itself in the urgency of responding to a call” (Levinas 2001, p. 112). Thus, citing Dostoyevsky—“we are all guilty, the one toward the other, and I more than all the others”—he explains: “It is not in order to recognise itself as more guilty by specific acts committed that the I who speaks here accuses itself. It is as me, always the foremost one responsible, experiencing inexhaustible obligations . . . and recognises in this wrong the identity of its ‘I’” (Levinas 2001, p. 112). The responsible self does not engage in blaming games, neither is it preoccupied with reciprocity (Levinas 2001, p. 133). Levinas calls for disinterestedness in human relations, and therefore, no expectations for any material payments or rewards as the alterity of the other is a reward in itself, an experience of excellence (Levinas 2000, p. 125; 2001, pp. 112, 120; 2011, p. 58; Sanchez 2010).

1.2. *Hannah Arendt and Responsibility*

Born to a secular Jewish family, Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) engaged with religious concepts and ideas, even working on Augustine for her doctoral dissertation, and became one of the most influential political philosophers of the 20th century. Her ideas on the significance of human action and the pursuit of the common good align with religious teachings on social justice, community and the ethical responsibility of individuals in the world.

She questioned the moral and ethical choices of people involved in the racism and mass killings during the World Wars, concluding that the regular citizens who had been involved in the Holocaust were following the orders of their superiors without investigating the underlying causes of these orders, and faulted them for not engaging in critical thinking about where their actions were leading to. Consequently, they did not feel personally responsible for the consequences of their actions in obeying the dictator who took this responsibility on his shoulders (Arendt 2003, pp. 24–30). She expressed her disappointment in the human race, stating: “I had somehow taken it for granted that we all still believe with Socrates that it is better to suffer than to do wrong. This belief turned out to be a mistake” (Arendt 2003, p. 18). A Holocaust survivor herself, she thus called for critical reflection and evaluation of the origins of ideologies, as critical thinking enables people to choose between right and wrong (Arendt 1973, pp. 158–65; Fonseca 2016). Arendt held that unless educators take moral responsibility for education of their students, they would not be able to raise responsible future citizens who commit to creating a better future world. In her words: “The teacher’s qualification consists in knowing the world and being able to instruct others about it, but his authority rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world” (Arendt 1954). If this responsibility is rejected, the teacher’s authority is not present. She recalled her own education, stating: “my early intellectual formation occurred in an atmosphere where nobody paid much attention to moral questions; we were brought up under the assumption: *Das Moralische versteht sich von selbst*” (Arendt 2003, p. 22, English translation: “The moral is obvious”). The horrifying events of the 20th century revealed that it is dangerous to assume that every school provides moral education. This should be

carefully addressed on personal and professional grounds by every school leader as well as every educator.

1.3. Diversity Enables Growth

This research also draws on the thoughts of Paolo Freire (1921–1997), who focused on the transformative potential of education in challenging social inequality and oppression. This work thus aligns with religious teachings that advocate for justice, liberation and care for the marginalised. Catholicism was in fact a major contributor in the development of the thought of this Brazilian educational philosopher, who held that people grow through relating to each other, thereby expanding their knowledge. They learn new views and build conclusions through dialogue that calls for mutual respect, even when opinions differ (Freire 1995, pp. 62–71; 2001, pp. 120–21; Kester and Booth 2010). In *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Freire 2001), the influential educator—deeply influenced by liberation theology and Dom Helder Camara, the famous Catholic archbishop of Recife, Freire’s city—presented a very useful guide for all educators to implement democratic settings in their classrooms through the active involvement of their students in their own learning and development of critical consciousness (Diemer et al. 2016; Freire 2001, p. 49). Freire encouraged freedom of speech, viewing it as indispensable to raising critical thinkers and responsible future citizens (Freire 2001, pp. 36–38). He highlighted that professional teachers must be authentic and practise what they preach (Freire 2001, p. 68), for only then will they be able to instil ethical values of equity, acceptance, respect, love, care and inclusion in their students (Freire 2001, pp. 42, 94; Tanti Burló et al. 2017). Educators should constantly evaluate their practice (Attard Tonna and Calleja 2010, p. 44; Freire 2001, p. 30), reflect on their own attitude and develop respectful and ethical relations between themselves and with their students (Benade 2010; Freire 2001, pp. 36–43; Humphrey et al. 2006; Roberts 2008).

1.4. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

The phenomenon of responsibility for the other is explored in depth in the literature; however, there is a gap with regard to responsibility for inclusion and how it should be imparted to others. Moreover, there is a knowledge gap on how the current educational system in Malta addresses the issue of responsibility for inclusion in school communities.

The aim of this research, therefore, was to investigate the phenomenon of responsibility for inclusion based mainly on the literary works of Emmanuel Levinas, Hannah Arendt and Paolo Freire and then explore how school communities currently relate to education towards responsibility for inclusion. Levinas was chosen because his main idea is that one needs to respond to the other in disinterestedness, and this can help develop an in-depth understanding of responsibility for inclusion and how it is manifested in interpersonal relationships. The ideas of Arendt are important because they hold that moral education is necessary to raise critical thinkers and responsible future citizens who do not shift their personal responsibility onto the shoulders of others but are personally responsible for their actions, decisions and consequences. Freire was added because of his ideas on the incompleteness of the self and education being a perpetual process. Moreover, he provided a myriad of real-world examples of how to teach students responsibility for inclusion in a classroom.

This study, therefore, attempted to answer the question: What is the role of school communities in educating students on responsibility for inclusion? The following secondary questions were also part of the research: (1) What does responsibility for inclusion entail? (2) How does the school community educate its students when it comes to responsibility for inclusion? (3) What is the educators’ role in promoting and fostering inclusive values and attitudes to pupils?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study since this allows for an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomena (Creswell 1998). Since quantitative inquiry deals with empirical facts (Newby 2010), this would not allow for insight into the opinions and motives of certain decisions and actions that accurately reflect the studied phenomena. The process of inquiry was inductive, and thus the conclusions were drawn at the end of the process (Atieno 2009). The epistemological perspective of this study employed the assumption that social phenomena are complex, dynamic and constructed by the individuals involved (Yilmaz 2013). The interpretivist–constructivist paradigm embraced in this study enabled us to gain a holistic picture of responsibility for inclusion; therefore, this research presented and interpreted the subjective views of its participants (Tuli 2010; Wahyuni 2012).

2.2. Study Participants

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994, pp. 23–24) and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014, pp. 86–87) emphasise that school leaders have a key role in promoting inclusion, combatting discrimination and taking responsibility for building inclusive educational entities. Headteachers and college principals (that is, the leader of a group of headteachers of a group of schools in the same locality or district), were thus invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 262) suggested a sample size of 3–10 when studying phenomena, such as, in this case, inclusion. Terry et al. (2017, p. 49) also suggested that ten semi-structured interviews are enough to produce valuable results in qualitative research using thematic analysis. Thus, one college principal and four headteachers from state schools, three headteachers from church schools, one college principal and one headteacher of independent schools accepted our invitation to be interviewed and participate in this research. This thus allowed the phenomenon of inclusion to be explored in the three different types of schools present locally. Prior permissions had been sought and obtained from the respective institutions or departments, and approval was sought and obtained from the relevant institutional review board. The interviews took place in January and February 2020, and the participants were encouraged to express themselves freely and describe their personal experiences (Burton 2000, pp. 196–98).

2.3. Data Collection Method

The data for this study were derived from semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. As Creswell pointed out, qualitative interviews enable the researcher to explore the perceptions of the participants within their natural settings (Creswell 1998, p. 17). The researcher directs the conversation based on questions prepared beforehand; however, the participants are allowed to express their views freely, providing insight into their experiences, motives, attitudes and actions (Creswell 1998, p. 125). The researchers prepared seven open-ended questions about responsibility for inclusion and the role of school communities in promoting and sustaining inclusive values. These questions were aimed at finding out how senior school leaders understand responsibility for inclusion, who is responsible for inclusion in their school community, and how it is imparted to others.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews were analysed through thematic analysis, as this approach is very structured and rigorous; can be applied to many different, qualitative studies; and produces trustworthy results (Braun and Clarke 2012). The six-step approach suggested by Braun and Clarke (2012) was followed.

The first stage involved familiarisation with the raw data, and the second stage involved coding. An open coding technique was used, with codes being developed as they emerged from passages of the text. The data were not coded line-by-line; only the segments

of the data that were relevant to answering the research questions were coded, in line with the principles of theoretical thematic analysis (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). The third stage involved generating initial themes by searching for patterns and similar codes. Following Braun and Clarke (2012), this stage finished with the initial themes, relevant codes and data extracts under each relevant theme. The fourth stage involved reviewing these potential themes for similarities and differences, with some codes and collated extracts being moved to different themes, while similar themes were merged. This allowed for the thematic analysis to proceed to the fifth stage, in which the themes were finalised, and their codes defined. The final themes were: (1) understanding and reflecting on responsibility for inclusion; (2) ongoing evaluation of inclusion in the school community; (3) the role of the school community in imparting responsibility for inclusion, morals and ethical values; and (4) change in society. These themes were then used to formulate the results and discussion below (sixth stage).

2.5. Trustworthiness of the Research Study

The validity of the results of this study was achieved through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability; thus, trustworthiness was established (Guba 1981; Guba and Lincoln 1982; Lincoln and Guba 1985; cited in Morse et al. 2002). While reading this paper, leaders of school communities and other experts in the field can relate to the experiences explained, thus confirming credibility. A detailed description of the data enables the readers to judge the transferability of the results to different settings. Dependability was achieved by utilising a clear and traceable process of inquiry; however, only short samples of the interview transcripts are provided in this paper to avoid identification of the participants. Confirmability was established through the extracts of the raw data clearly referring to the interpretations and conclusion (Guba and Lincoln 1989; cited in Nowell et al. 2017).

3. Results

Since the selected quotes were taken from transcripts, the English used may be colloquial or contain grammatical errors, but they have been reproduced as is.

3.1. Theme 1: Understanding and Reflecting on Responsibility for Inclusion

Headteacher 1 referred to responsibility for inclusion as “a philosophy, the way of thinking, the way of looking at life and especially the way of living”. She stated that:

It's not a matter of “oh, what a beautiful dark-skinned child”, and it's easy to include him, but then the real question is, are you really inclusive with people who are not attractive? (. . .) And when you take decisions, when you take important decisions, you have to make sure that the decisions are in the interest of everybody.

This headteacher highlighted the need for reflection and dialogue to build an inclusive school community. She realised, however, that inclusion might be problematic at times, asking rhetorically: “Are you really inclusive with people who are not attractive?” She pointed out that the real problem with inclusion might arise when it comes to including those who perhaps have severe disabilities or challenging behaviour, poor persons, victims of abuse, or wars, etc. Moreover, a democratic approach is encouraged at her school. Headteacher 5 emphasised the importance of human rights, dignity and respect for everyone without any discrimination when describing responsibility for inclusion: “Keyword: respect. Students between themselves, students towards teachers, teachers towards students. Here we have a nice community and the students are learning to accept each other”. Headteacher 2 pointed out that “Multiculturalism is enriching”. Principal 1, however, argued that there is not enough awareness about multiculturalism, stating: “Unfortunately, we do get parents and children coming here and asking me to change the classroom because there are many foreigners in that classroom. They still have a mindset that the foreigners may set a bad example”. Headteacher 4, however, faced a different situation. Her main concern was the inclusion of “Pupils who are not interested in anything, pupils who are suffering

from aggression, domestic violence. Foreigners, all I have is two". For this school leader, responsibility for inclusion means "to know each and every child", and creating caring relationships with her students. She took a very inclusive standpoint when one of her students was referred to a learning zone (a specialised educational centre for students with challenging behaviour). She recounted:

When I came, on my first day I had a meeting with the inclusive coordinator, the EO [educational officer], the service manager. Everyone was here, and we had agreed that the following week that child would go to the learning zone. So I asked them just to give him a week with me because I had never seen that child. He did not know me. I did not know him. I was a new head, and the child is still here with us today. He never went to another school. (. . .) Yes, it was hard because during the first term I even had to pull him myself, really pull him inside and yes I was hurt, I was kicked, punched, but I showed him that I wanted him here and I used to speak with him. I never shouted.

Responsibility for inclusion was also understood as caring for the wellbeing of students, getting to know who the students are, what their unique strengths and needs are, as well as an evaluation of all difficulties. Headteacher 6 stated

The wellbeing of a person who is being included: What are his needs? How do we [respond to] their foreign needs? Is it OK if he continues in a mainstream [school]? With a mainstream curriculum, is he gonna cope with it? Does he need an adapted timetable? Do we need to do some adaptations?

All the study participants emphasised that every individual is unique and important. As a matter of fact, Headteacher 7 stated "I mean, it is a very important value as Christians and humans to include everyone. It's part of our daily life".

3.2. Theme 2: Ongoing Evaluation of Inclusion in the School Community

The interviewed leaders engage in self-reflection and constantly evaluate what is needed at their school, and whether certain arrangements facilitate or hinder inclusion. They believe that there is great progress in their schools regarding inclusion of children with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and foreigners. Headteacher 5 commented that the notion of inclusion contributed towards acceptance of persons with a different sexual orientation. Headteacher 6 pointed out that while migrants and students of different faiths are included smoothly, students with severe autism may cause problematic situations. In her words: "Screaming for an hour and a half . . . is it fair on the others?".

Headteacher 3 also stated that inclusion might be challenging when it comes to including children with severe autism, and Headteacher 2 admitted that students with hidden disabilities are not fully included by their peers. She also recounted: "I employed a member of staff who is a foreigner, the first staff member who is a foreigner and I think there is some hostility, not so obvious, and I'm afraid that the children will get this . . . hidden message". This headteacher also found out that staff members were excluding an employee with a disability, concluding that "I think I need professional help because I'm not really trained in this area. It was a struggle this year". These problems indicate that the staff members are not fully aware of and do not understand the underlying philosophy of inclusion that people grow through positive relations with others who are unique and different from themselves. Inclusion requires acceptance and respect of fundamental human rights, children's rights and the rights of persons with disabilities without any discrimination. The same headteacher pointed out that exclusion starts with adults, not with children. She reflected that:

We are speaking a lot about inclusion of pupils but the staff, employees at schools, are still very exclusive (. . .) so it's a bit of a dilemma for the children, I think. Because we tell them to integrate, but they see us as being exclusive.

Headteachers 1 and 2 mentioned that there is not enough awareness and understanding of inclusion on the national level, and that children receive inconsistent messages at home or through media and this confusion is reflected at schools.

3.3. Theme 3: The Role of the School Community in Imparting Responsibility for Inclusion

Headteachers 1 and 3 emphasised that education for responsibility for inclusion, virtues and values needs to have a practical outcome. These schools utilise religious education lessons as well as PSCD lessons to introduce inclusion, diversity and multiculturalism. Headteachers 1 and 2 pointed out that in order to impart inclusive values to students, they must represent them themselves. The leaders of church schools also mentioned the Peer Preparation Programme (PPP), a project that enhances awareness of diversity in the classroom, viewing it as enriching—a way to promote inclusion and educate towards responsibility for inclusion. Headteacher 1 stated “we do Peer Preparation Programme, yes. Depending on the severity of the situation. And we do acknowledge as well kindness, and we acknowledge altruism. We give certificates. We praise”. Headteacher 3 said “We try to instil this sort of, you don’t say policy, a sort of ethics, . . . from when they are 5, 6, 7 years old”. They also highlighted a need to be sensitive while discussing certain conditions or situations:

We celebrate World Autism Day, [the day] for children with Down Syndrome, etc., but we never emphasise that at school. We have A, B and C who have this condition. We just mention it (. . .) to get more awareness about these topics but nothing more.

Headteacher 5, however, was convinced that inclusion enters in a natural, smooth way; therefore, there is no need for a special inclusion programme. The school leader explained that “If we make a program to include them, from the beginning we put a label on those children”.

Headteacher 4 took every opportunity to educate students towards responsibility for inclusion by, for example, including an employee with a disability in all school celebrations and during assembly. She also has an open door policy so that any child or staff member can come to her office to speak to her about any difficulty or a problem and implements learning to construct knowledge instead of passively receiving it. This in turn helps raise critical thinkers. Headteacher 6 uses inclusive strategies like the PPP and a buddy system (peer-to-peer support), and involves students in decision making by encouraging them to voice their ideas on what activities should be organised by the school during special occasions such as carnival, etc. Headteacher 1 mentioned that “we also talk about inclusion,” indicating that the school community engages in reflection on this topic. Headteacher 1 also mentioned the buddy system, arguing in its favour: “they learn. They love doing it. It’s not something that is imposed as a punishment”.

Principal 2 took responsibility for inclusion very seriously when a student with Down syndrome joined the school and many of the staff members found it difficult to support the student. The principal recalled how “I had to send the teachers for more training because quite a few teachers had no experience with pupils with Down syndrome and the few challenges that come with that”. The PPP at the school also helped students understand and accept the unusual behaviour of some students. In the words of the same school leader:

*I think the case of the Down syndrome pupil was a big learning journey for us. She struggled to be in the class. She couldn’t stay in class. She couldn’t sit down, she couldn’t stay still. . . . She would run out screaming. She would have a hissy fit. So that had to be explained to the children. That kind of thing down the line was *Maria* is having a bad day and understanding why *Maria* has bad days and good days. So that would be included [in the explanations to children].*

Learning through inquiry, discussions, active involvement in a community, reflection and dialogue were highlighted by Principal 2 as very important features of education. Headteacher 8 opined that, “If educators are prejudiced, that will rub off on their students, and the students will become prejudiced as well”.

Principal 1, however, opined that there is not enough awareness about responsibility for inclusion amongst educators and they do not realise their role in instilling ethical and inclusive values in students.

3.4. Theme 4: Change in Society

A number of school leaders pointed out that they experienced a lot of difficulties in confronting the narrow mindset of staff members. For example, a person with disability employed in one school was not accepted by other staff members at the beginning. Explaining why it was sometimes important to go against the current, Headteacher 4 described that

some teachers have told me that we lack discipline in our uniform, for example. And I told them: "What are our priorities? We have children who do not have money to buy certain things (. . .). They keep the children alone in a corner or at the board, so they don't tease others (. . .). Even, for example, the first year, during my first year here, the children started hugging me. You know. They crave love. And I used to hug them, pick them up all the time. I had, yes, educators coming in telling me: "Ms, be very careful, don't hug them".

Headteacher 6 also clashed with the closed mindset of the staff members, recounting that "The first thing I told the teachers when I was placed here was not to use sarcasm, not to bully students and to be respectful".

Headteacher 8 reflected that the students are becoming more inclusive because of the diversity found in the classes, yet Principal 2 pointed out that many educators still do not embrace the change and stick to the old teaching methods, pointing out that

It's quite [an] occurring attitude to think that you [teacher] can just stand in front of the class, and they [students] will learn, and they will be educated in an exam. That's a very past tense approach. (. . .) I heard someone say: "We are all using Windows 10 for our teaching. Nobody would use Windows 1995 from 25 years ago. Yet, in education, there are people who are still using the same techniques from 25 years ago".

4. Discussion

4.1. Theme 1: Understanding and Reflecting on Responsibility for Inclusion

The school leaders viewed responsibility for inclusion as a philosophy that guides personal principles and values; thus, inclusion starts from the self who welcomes the other. Similarly, Levinas stated that responsibility always starts from the self who invites the other into his or her privileges (Levinas 1979, pp. 77, 171). Freire highlighted that professional teachers must be authentic and practice what they preach (Freire 2001, p. 68). Headteacher 1 stated that people should accept the other even if personal opinions differ, even when the other is not attractive and they should do so without any discrimination. This ethical approach towards the other is presented in Levinasian thought as the starting point of every human relation when the other is accepted the way he or she is without any domination or violence (Ben-Pazi 2015; Garza and Landrum 2010; Levinas 1979, pp. 203–4; United Nations 1989, 2006). Headteacher 3 was convinced that education towards solidarity and morality is necessary, correlating this with the strong belief of Arendt that the importance of morals is enormous, as they have a huge impact on people's behaviour (Arendt 2003, pp. 18–22). Headteacher 1 mentioned that decisions must be beneficial to everyone, illustrating the democratic classroom described by Freire (2001) and Benade (2010). All the participants agreed that responsibility for inclusion has to be assumed by "everybody, from the smallest member of our community to the oldest member of our community. It doesn't matter whether you are a member of a teaching staff or ancillary staff, everybody", as expressed by Headteacher 1.

Headteacher 4 followed all the suggestions made by the philosophers cited at the beginning of this paper in order to take responsibility for inclusion by taking on personal responsibility for every situation at school. This school leader built ethical relations of proximity, initiated inclusion through her welcoming attitude and disinterestedness, and accepted every student without any discrimination (Freire 1995, 2001; Levinas 1979, pp. 77, 171; 2000, p. 125; 2001, pp. 112, 120; United Nations 1948, 1989, 2006).

4.2. Theme 2: Ongoing Evaluation of Inclusion in the School Community

Headteachers stated that students with learning difficulties and obvious disabilities are included by their peers who take care of them through disinterestedness. Levinas repeatedly highlighted disinterestedness as a core part of human relations (Levinas 2001, pp. 112, 120; 2011, p. 58; Sanchez 2010). Furthermore, the children's attitudes corresponded with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations 1989) and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations 2006). Inclusion of migrants at schools indicates acceptance of the other without any discrimination and welcoming alterity of the other, corresponding with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations 1948), and Levinas' ideas (Levinas 2001, p. 163; United Nations 1948). Inclusion of students with severe disabilities, especially with severe autism, remained problematic at schools (Headteachers 2, 3 and 6). The theoretical literature suggests a development of ethical, welcoming relations, getting to know who the other is, and accepting the way they are (Ben-Pazi 2015; Garza and Landrum 2010; Levinas 1979, pp. 77, 171, 203–4). Arendt believed that the self must take personal responsibility without shifting it onto others, the situation or the system, and must critically evaluate every aspect (Arendt 2003, pp. 24–30). Moreover, responsibility always starts with the self (Levinas 2001, p. 112). The exclusion of an employee with disability by staff members might have negative repercussions on students, and Freire warned that educators must be authentic in order to be able to pass on values and virtues to their students (Freire 2001).

4.3. Theme 3: The Role of the School Community in Imparting Responsibility for Inclusion, Morals and Ethical Values

People learn through relations with the other (Levinas 1979, pp. 196, 203; Freire 2001, pp. 120–21), and this statement was thoroughly seen in the interview with Headteacher 4. Practical ways of educating towards responsibility for inclusion, morals and ethical values at that school involved exhibition of inclusive values and attitudes through the headteacher's own example, employment and active involvement in the school community of a person with disability, which links theory with practice, as elucidated by Freire (2001). The school represented by Headteacher 4 also applies teaching to construct knowledge; something also suggested by Freire (2001) and Arendt (1954; 1973, pp. 158–65). Involvement of students in decision making (Headteacher 6; Freire 2001), participation of all students in school events without any discrimination (Headteacher 7; United Nations 2006), the PPP and the buddy system mentioned by Headteacher 6 were used to encourage students to form ethical relations, create more awareness of the benefits of inclusivity, to take on personal responsibility, care and help each other in disinterestedness. These strategies employed in the state schools correlated with the theory reviewed (Levinas 2000, p. 125; 2001, pp. 112, 120; Freire 1995, 2001).

Linking theory with practice was conducted at schools during religious education lessons, PSCD, as well as during breaks, before and after school hours, as an effort to educate pupils towards ethical relations with the other (Benade 2010; Freire 2001). Moreover, in church schools, responsibility for inclusion and development of ethical relations based on disinterestedness, acceptance and respect for diversity were imparted through PPP and the buddy system that corresponds with the theoretical literature (Levinas 2001, pp. 112, 120; 2000, p. 125; United Nations 1948, 1989, 2006). Commitment towards inclusion was shown by Principal 2 when this school leader did everything possible to support a student with Down syndrome, exhibiting a disinterested approach and a responsible example (Freire 2001, p. 68; Levinas 2001, pp. 112, 120; Levinas 2000, p. 125; Levinas 2011, p. 58; Sanchez 2010). The strategies and praxes used by independent school leaders included PPP, ethical relations based on acceptance and care for each other (Ben-Ari and Strier 2010; Levinas 1979, 2001), critical reflection, learning through inquiry, discussions, discovery of knowledge and listening to the community. These ideas are also illustrated in the theoretical literature (Arendt 1973, pp. 158–65; 1998; Freire 1995, 2001).

4.4. Theme 4: Change in Society

Headteachers 4 and 6 took responsibility for their students even when this meant going against the system previously created at school. Arendt stated that a human being always has the personal responsibility of distinguishing between right and wrong and standing on the right side even when it means disobeying superiors (Arendt 1973, pp. 158–65; 2003, pp. 29–45). Levinas was clear that the self is always responsible for the other and that there is no escape from this responsibility (Lehnhof 2014; Levinas 2001, pp. 108, 112; Dimitrova 2006, pp. 15–31; Simmons and Carnahan 2019). Principal 1 stated that there is not enough awareness, understanding and responsibility for inclusion taken on by educators. Headteachers 4 and 6 struggled to implement inclusive values and attitudes at their schools because of closed mindsets among educators. Arendt's reminder about the moral responsibility of every educator seems to be heeded in these schools (Arendt 1954). Principal 2 reflected that there is a need for more awareness among educators, as well as the adoption of new teaching methods. This perfectly illustrates Arendt's call to educators, reminding them about their moral responsibility to raise students who are ready to take on the responsibility of creating a better world in the future (Arendt 1954).

5. Conclusions

The theoretical literature suggests that responsibility for inclusion should be understood as an ethical, welcoming and caring attitude with self-initiating inclusion by accepting others the way they are, without any discrimination or prejudice. This requires recognising and respecting the human rights of every human being without any limitation. Any form of violence, domination or possession is totally forbidden. Responsibility for inclusion entails the realisation of "right and wrong", that is, the moral aspect of human life. It requires personal responsibility for one's decisions and actions as well as respect towards diversity of opinions and views. Responsibility for inclusion requires disinterestedness, that is, an approach of offering oneself to the other with no expectations for any material payment, as the alterity of the other is a reward in itself.

In order to impart responsibility for inclusion, educational institutions need to transform into school communities where collaboration between all members is necessary. Thus, the head of school, assistant heads, teachers, learning support educators, ancillary staff, parents, students and other professionals need to unite in the common aim of providing quality education that involves holistic development, the delivery of academic subjects, as well as moral and ethical education. Teaching critical thinking and raising personally responsible students will result in more inclusive societies in the future. The role of educators in instilling inclusive values and virtues to students is enormous. They must, however, be authentic; they need to practise what they preach and build relations with their students based on mutual listening, respect, understanding and acceptance. Students have a right to disagree and have different opinions, and reflections need to be articulated in dialogue, not polemics. The voice of the students must be heard, and any decisions that are taken should be beneficial for everyone. Relationships, collaboration and collegiality should be encouraged between educators, as these offer support when dealing with challenging situations, expand knowledge, enable one to see reality from different perspectives and help to develop more innovative and creative ideas. School communities should also provide opportunities for students to collaborate, exchange their ideas, and develop relations between themselves, as these enable learning from the diversity of the other. Cooperative learning, therefore, offers time for students to grow and create together while learning to collaborate, help each other and take care of weaker members.

Levinas and Freire stated that every encounter with the other has a pedagogical effect on both the self and the other (Freire 1995, pp. 62–71; 2001, pp. 120–21; Levinas 1979, pp. 196, 203). Persons cannot grow and learn in isolation, and a lack of interaction with other human beings limits education and personal development. Any exclusion or segregation should therefore be eliminated. Diversity is enriching because the alterity of the other enables personal growth of the self and the other. Development of ethical relations of

care and acceptance should thus be encouraged in inclusive school communities. Arendt calls for moral education, critical thinking and the personal responsibility of every citizen.

The ideas of Levinas, Arendt and Freire helped to elaborate the phenomena of responsibility for inclusion and how it should be imparted to others. Responsibility for inclusion calls for “togetherness” and the development of disinterested, ethical relationships between people. Only this permits personal growth and learning from each other. People are not predestined, but are able to choose between right and wrong, taking personal responsibility for their decisions and choices, either to care for the other, thus enabling growth, or to be unethical, thereby inviting injustice, racism and annihilation. The incorporation of Levinasian thought together with those of Freire and Arendt can greatly contribute towards the development of inclusive, democratic and just school communities in today’s world.

The findings of this research can be applied to all the three types of schools discussed because the results clearly indicate that the school communities that were most successful in educating towards responsibility for inclusion and imparting inclusive values and virtues to pupils utilised the concepts suggested by Levinas, Arendt and Freire the most, regardless of whether they were a church, state or independent school. Narrow-minded educators were mentioned by the leaders of all types of schools: in a church school, staff members did not accept an employee with a disability and showed hostility toward a foreign colleague; in state schools, Headteachers 4 and 6 had to engage in changing mindsets of employees in their schools, stating clearly that students must be respected and that one ought to avoid sarcasm and exclusionary practices like keeping certain students in the corner of a classroom. They also mentioned striving towards acceptance of and respect for a disabled employee. Principal 1 also stated that not all educators are inclusive and do not realise their role in promoting inclusion. Similarly, the leader of the independent school, Principal 2, mentioned that there is not enough awareness about responsibility for inclusion amongst educators, and that not all educators adapted new, inclusive teaching strategies, preferring instead to stick to old teaching methods and therefore struggling to deal with inclusion. All of the participants agreed that educators have an indispensable role in imparting inclusive values and virtues to pupils and that education about values, rights and rules are important features of education. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that school communities in Malta are educating students towards responsibility for inclusion; however, success is dependent on how many of the ideas suggested by these philosophers are really implemented. As this research found, the schools in which there was a clear understanding of the underlying philosophy of inclusion managed to create a cohesive, democratic school community where dialogue, respect, acceptance and sensitivity were used to notice and include even those who were less attractive. In contrast, educators who were not aware of the underlying philosophy of inclusion excluded a foreign colleague or a colleague with disability. Therefore, training on the grounds of inclusion, responsibility for inclusion and education towards inclusive values and virtues is a must if schools are to become truly inclusive. Teacher training on autism and new educational strategies are also required. Deep reflection on one’s standpoint, as well as practices at the personal and school level are also essential. As highlighted by Freire, unless one is authentic, one cannot instil virtues and values in others.

The results of this study show that the phenomenon of responsibility for inclusion is present in Maltese schools. There are some exceptional examples that reflect excellent ways of educating towards responsibility for inclusion, values and virtues; however, further awareness about this value and the benefit of diversity is necessary among all school community members. The writings of Levinas, Arendt and Freire may be useful in this matter, as they bring conceptual clarity to the concept of inclusion while allowing for critical examination of the challenges and complexities of how human dignity can be respected and promoted in practice in school communities today. One therefore suggests that staff should undergo training that offers the possibility of discussing and reflecting on responsibilities for inclusion, including the possibility of reflective practice. Such training should help familiarise educators with the writings of Levinas, Arendt and Freire in order to deepen

their philosophical and ethical reflection on inclusion. Policy documents on inclusion could also give attention to responsibility for inclusion and how this can be grounded in the thoughts of these three authors. Further research on how their ideas might resonate in other settings as well as research on how students themselves can become agents of inclusion is suggested.

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