Chapter 13
Micro-Teaching at the University of Malta

Raphael Vella, Maria Cutajar and Charmaine Zammit
University of Malta

Abstract

This chapter describes the micro-teaching sessions developed in relation to two programmes for teachers following the CARE/SS courses in Malta. It describes the tasks given to teachers and the different outcomes and types of presentations, as well as the teachers' own assessment of these tasks. The chapter begins with a discussion of micro-teaching within the context of continuous professional development courses for teachers and then focuses on the micro-teaching sessions developed by the University of Malta CARE/SS team and teachers. Microteaching helps teachers refine skills such as the use of digital technologies and receive immediate, constructive critique from peers and academics, enabling them to reflect on their practice. One of the advantages is the safe, supportive environment in which they are held. In Malta, the two classes were actually quite small, which meant that the setting provided a low-risk environment where teachers could experiment with new teaching methods and techniques without the fear of failure. While this supportive setting fostered creativity in teaching, some sessions tended to be more like traditional presentations. In one of the courses in Malta, the micro-teaching sessions also facilitated peer learning, collaboration, and interdisciplinary learning, as teachers from different arts subjects approached topics from their specific perspectives. The chapter analyses the two courses critically, understanding how tasks could have been further improved.

Introduction

The University of Malta CARE/SS team developed two courses for teachers, both of which came to an end with micro-teaching sessions prepared by the participating teachers. While the two courses shared some content, the pedagogical approach was quite different in each case. One of the courses (called Course 1 in this chapter) was a blended course, most of which was held online over several weeks, and included five visual art teachers and one generalist primary teacher. One of these teachers opted out of the micro-teaching session, and the remaining five participants worked individually. The other course (Course 2) was short-term and intensive (three days), and was held entirely face-to-face, with the participation of twelve teachers representing different arts subjects: art, music, drama and dance. The teachers in this school showed an interest in organising a face-to-face workshop, probably due to the excessive exposure to online workshops during the pandemic. The second course still included the use of online technologies and its micro-teaching sessions involved group work. The different pedagogies employed helped us to make comparisons between the two courses, some of which will be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter.

Micro-teaching is a methodology that can enhance educators' strategies and skills, and prove crucial for professional teachers aiming to refine their practice. It emphasizes the improvement of specific teaching skills through focused practice and constructive feedback in a safe, supportive environment. This method not only fosters experimentation with new techniques but can also boost teachers' confidence while working with new content: this was particularly in evidence during the Maltese micro-teaching sessions. Moreover, micro-teaching can facilitate peer learning and can serve as a vital tool for professional development that encourages ongoing learning and adaptation.

Dwight W. Allen (1966), one of the key figures of micro-teaching methodologies, believed that micro-teaching can help teachers improve their teaching methods in a relatively short period of time and change their perceptions of their own teaching behaviour. He advocated for a systematic approach to teacher training and professional development, where feedback played a critical role in the individual teacher's

transformation of his or her own practice. One of the uses of micro-teaching that Allen proposed was team teaching, which was implemented in Course 2 of the Maltese CARE/SS courses. In recent years, the emphasis on teacher effectiveness in educational policies has increased the importance of enacting practices that approximate as closely as possible actual teaching scenarios, leading to the strengthening of practice-based teacher preparation in various contexts (O'Flaherty et al., 2024). Developing teacher effectiveness is especially valuable in teacher training programmes, providing teacher trainers with a focused instrument for developing specific skills, a vehicle for continuous training and a setting in which instructional skills and behaviours can be modelled and supervised (Pandey, 2019). While the Maltese CARE/SS courses and micro-teaching sessions were implemented with in-service teachers, some of whom were seasoned practitioners, it was evident that continuous professional development that includes micro-teaching can be beneficial at different stages of a teacher's career.

Micro-teaching sessions in Course 1
Instructions given to participating teachers relating to micro-teaching required them to fill in a template reflecting their approach to their micro-teaching session. Each micro-teaching session was to place an emphasis on a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) or two, include creative resources like online videos, an outline of their teaching approach, list online tools (like Padlet) that were planned for the session and describe briefly students' involvement in learning activities with an emphasis on Acquisition, Investigation, Practice, Production, Collaboration, Discussion, the six learning types described by Laurillard (2012).

One of the microteaching sessions focused on SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 14 Life Below Water. The Prezi presentation prepared by the participant introduced the idea of responsible citizenship and linked it to the depiction of overconsumption in examples of art. Further information about overconsumption, its effects on life under water and its connections with practices like overfishing was given, followed by a children's video on contemporary threats to life under water. This was followed by a practical task requiring participants to design a mind map related to recycling in art, accompanied by relevant internet links. The teaching approach selected by the participant was small group instruction with a student-centred constructivist pedagogy, linked to inquiry-based learning. Learning types included in the sessions were acquisition, investigation, discussion, production and practice. The presenter initiated a discussion about relevant SDGs, helped to develop the acquisition of knowledge about overconsumption and its effects on sea life, and finally progressed towards production and practice with the creation of a sculpture made of recycled materials and things.

Another participant's microteaching session revolved around SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, Infrastructure), with a special emphasis on urbanisation and architectural heritage in Malta. This participant focused mostly on her own teaching and what kinds of activities she uses with her students, so the session felt a little more like a lecture than a micro teaching session. The content was quite rich, targeting the Senior Secondary Art Option Students (ages 14 – 16) through issues-based activities that touched on a variety of related themes – from spatial planning and the media to the farming industry, the loss of prime arable land and the loss of recreational spaces. Artistic examples were also varied, including both conventional approaches to graffiti. The teacher explained that a brainstorming exercise about sustainable development in Malta by means of a mind-map could be used to introduce this SDG to students. This task encourages argumentative responses related to global issues and the negative impact of processes of excessive urbanization and gentrification on people's lives. Although the presenter had difficulty coping with some technical issues during the session, she nevertheless provided examples of visual art pedagogies that serve to create a good platform to engage online communities, making use of Padlet to locate densely populated areas around the country. She also listed some digital tools and software that can help with computer-aided designs in environmental posters and similar activities and suggested that teachers could make use of street art and itinerant performances in order to extend beyond art institutions like theatres and museums. The teacher also made reference to all of Laurillard's learning types (add ref). Students acquired information about the SDG and recorded their personal understanding of issues related to sustainable cities. Inquiry was implemented via the investigation and documentation of different artists and artworks by means of a work journal. Discussion on the importance of heritage, conservation and restoration fostered an understanding of the importance of aesthetics in architecture, while sketching landscapes and other scenes and realizing a finished product developed practice and production skills respectively amongst students. Finally, teamwork was also encouraged during the organization of an exhibition that galvanized the importance of collaboration.

While the third presenter made reference to a number of SDGs, her micro-teaching session focused mainly on SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production. In this case, the teaching approach approximated that of a teacher with her students. The session began with "I am going to pretend you are my little ones", then moved on to a short presentation on the importance and significance of flowers for the ecosystem, the flower industry, the commercial cultivation of flowers and the unsustainable resources and services used to grow and transport the flowers. The teacher targeted mainly young students and artistic techniques and activities included the making of paper dolls with flowers. Students were encouraged to research artists like Arcimboldo and Georgia O'Keeffe, and brainstorm on flowers grown in Malta in order to design floral compositions and textile designs with endemic flora and recycled fabric. The main learning types identified by this presenter were discussion, investigation and production.

The fourth participant chose SDG 13 Climate Change, with a special focus on rising seas due to global warming. for his micro-teaching session. In order to convey clearly the threats posed to various aspects of human, animal, and environmental health and safety, he used online videos and works of art about the sea by contemporary artists like Ana Teresa Fernández, Timo Aho and Pekka Niityvirta, and Pedro Marzorati. His teaching approach emphasised collaboration among teachers and the need to integrate various disciplines over a period of class time to this specific SDG. In his plan, he included a week dedicated to climate change and its effects on societies, during which students could learn from science, geography, art and other teachers as well as experts in related fields. This period of content acquisition and small group discussion would lead to periods of art practice and production, focusing on the creation of layered images using online tools, work on a collaborative installation and the production of posters using Canva (which had been introduced to the course participants by the University of Malta team). While the presentation was mainly in an expository mode, the participant prepared a rich variety of sources, including films and references to related issues such as the use of fossil fuels that made the session very informative.

The fifth participant in the micro-teaching programme prepared a session that revolved around SDG 14 Life Below Water. Creative resources she chose included an online video and polls (Slido), aimed at the primary sector (the participant is a generalist primary teacher). She used plenty of visuals in her presentation and referred to class activities that were tactile and hands-on. She also linked the content of the lesson to her own personal experience of finding plastic objects on the beach. An initial brainstorming task required students to share their ideas of life below water, followed by an introduction and class discussion about plastic pollution. The discussion included an activity in which students were challenged to think and share how each one of them can reduce plastic usage in their daily lives. This task presented the teacher with an opportunity for assessment of learning. This acquisition and discussion period was followed by a practical activity. Students were guided to create a poster that can be shared on social media, reminding people not to throw plastic objects on the beach and in the water.

Evaluation of Course 1 Micro-teaching
Technical problems were in evidence in two of the five micro-teaching sessions. One of the sessions was held on Zoom and was hampered by what seemed to be a weak internet connection. Another participant conducted her session physically in class but experienced connection problems between her device and the class monitor (this was resolved by using a different laptop). While both situations were relatively minor and represented 'regular' problems in classrooms nowadays, it is important to note that backup plans might be necessary in case devices or online tools do not function as planned.

Another issue that has been already referred to is the fact that sessions tended to follow an expository rather than interactive mode involving peers in the class at the time of the micro-teaching session, even though the participants had been informed about the importance of thinking of the sessions as 'regular' (albeit scaled down) lessons with students. In at least one case, it was noted that the participant had very likely prepared a scaled down teaching encounter that simulated a real teaching experience and pedagogical skills, but seems to have switched to a more traditional approach after she observed a previous presenter share information in a lecture-like presentation.

When a few of the participants were asked about their experience during interviews at the end of the course, they referred to the micro-teaching sessions as one of the course's highlights. One of them replied that micro-teaching was a valuable experience and could have been improved if they had been given more time and space to work on the premises (several sessions in the Course 1 programme were held online). This is a valid comment and can be taken into consideration in future courses because the teachers clearly enjoyed the possibility of giving each feedback at the end of the micro-teaching sessions.

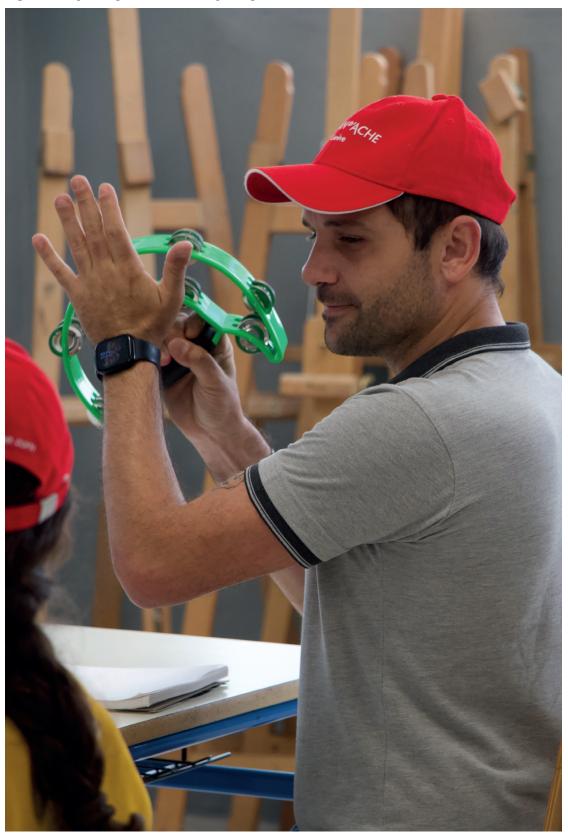**MicroTeaching Session for course 2**

For the case of course 2, the micro-teaching sessions convened as group efforts. Basically, while one group played the teaching role and the other group acted out the students' role, in the subsequent microteaching session the 2 groups switched roles. For the purposes of this section and the subsequent section sharing evaluation comments on the microteaching session in course 2, we refer to the teaching groups taking turns to lead the microteaching as Group 1-2 and Group 2-2. Both groups included 5 members as two participants could not attend the 3rd course meeting when the microteaching session was held due to travel duty.

The chosen theme of Group 1-2 for the microteaching concerned emotions linked to SDG 16- Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. This microteaching experience was performed by a team of five teachers, three of which were specialised in visual art, another in music and another in drama. Their performance still included a balance of all arts disciplines, despite the absence of dance teachers in the team. Group 1-2 started by inviting the participants to join in a brainstorming exercise considering different types of emotions. For this activity Group 1 started with photos as an artistic form to fuel participants' thinking about emotions in the arts. For this first activity, a whiteboard was used by one of the teaching group to record the different types of emotions that came up. In the next activity, group 1 invited the audience to attend to the emotions that excerpts of music from Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No.6, generated within them (Figure 1). In this activity, the Music teacher in the teaching group1 took the lead articulating the emotions that the music playing in the background was building up in her so encouraging the audience to do the same. The rest of group 1, acting as the teaching group in the later part of the explanation, then started chiming in, leading those who were acting the student part to follow suit in exploring emotions in music (Figure 2). Later, she asked those playing the students' role to think of movements/actions that they would associate with the generated emotions.

Figure 1. *Participant playing the piano in the music room transmitting her video online*

Figure 2. *Responding to music while exploring emotions*

 In a subsequent activity group 1 turned participants' attention to the 'Google Arts and Culture' app (Figure 3). The digital tool was used to search for works by renowned artists such as Lichtenstein to explain how, through the artwork the artist commands the emotions of those who view the work. A reproduction of Roy Lichtenstein's 'Whaam' painting (Figure 4a) was projected on the interactive whiteboard alongside comic art (Figure 4b), which was used as propaganda during the Second World War. The participants playing the students' role were encouraged to use the Art-in-a-Bag materials (Figure 5) to create a comic strip cartoon which narrates a short story concerning conflict. They were invited to work in small groups to create a comic paying attention to the emotions they wanted to elicit by their creation (Figure 6). Unfortunately, the microteaching session had to be stopped because time ran out and this small group student-led activity did not take place as originally planned.

Group 2-2 chose the second sustainability development goal (SDG2) of 'Zero Hunger' and how it is dealt with in the arts as their chosen micro-teaching theme. This microteaching session started out with an exposition activity on the part of the teaching group 2 connecting the different sustainability goals with planet care and social issues before zooming in on the 'Zero Hunger' goal for ending world hunger. During this more traditional teaching episode, group 2 presenters were more like walking through the participating audience a number of different art media and how these may be used with students to teach them about SDG2. But during this teacher-led activity, group 2 also demonstrated co-teaching as they all chimed in giving this informative episode a conservational orientation. Questions were then directed at the audience in an attempt to open the conversation to the participants who were acting in the student role, but this did not appear to work well. In the next activity, the teaching Group 2 invited the participating audience to work on an artistic creation to raise awareness on SDG2. Again, this microteaching session was stopped when the students were still working on their creations because time ran out.
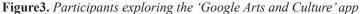
Figure3. *Participants exploring the 'Google Arts and Culture' app*

Figure 4a. *Participant referring to Lichtenstein's work*

Figure 4b. *Participant referring to comics*

Figure 5. *Art-in-a-Bag contents*

Figure 6. *Participants collaborating*

Evaluation of Microteaching Session for Course 2

Due to intensive sessions where time ran out, the microteaching templates of Course 2 were sent to the two groups including guidelines via email. Although the templates were explained during the session and samples were shown, the participants still did not manage to complete them well. It could be because it was Summertime and given that the participants were working half-days, they found it hard to dedicate time to liaise with each other online to fill in the templates. This reduced the links between the microteaching performance and the SDGs they aimed for. It seemed that the microteaching activities were more considered as acting performances which most of the participants excelled in.

The microteaching sessions took place in the same location as the rest of the face-to-face course. The horse-shoe arrangement assumed for the physical space in which the course convened and how the course convened emphasizing student-centred strategies for learning permitting a lot of opportunities for the students to take on teaching roles may have served as unspoken prompts for participants to follow suit in the microteaching setting.

The microteaching sessions were held as a last activity on the 3rd day of the 3-day course after the refreshments break which also permitted students some last-minute time to continue organizing themselves for the microteaching. Both groups amply prepared for the microteaching.

As for the case of course 1, during the course 2 microteaching session, several technology-related problems arose. Primarily, there was a persisting problem with the high-definition multimedia connector (HDMI) connector to the interactive whiteboard, but this problem had a detrimental effect on several of the planned micro-teaching activities. As aforementioned, this showed how digital technologies can fail us and the need for contingency planning. Teamwork came on show several times here with some of the teaching group continuing with the planned teaching activities as best they could while one or two of the teaching group receding into the background trying to get the digital devices to work. There was also put on show how teachers find themselves having to think on their feet finding solutions to arising problems on the fly. For example, while 2 members of the teaching group 2-2 worked on fixing the HDMI connector problem, the complement of the teaching group continued with the learning activity inviting the participating audience to pin paper post-it notes on the traditional whiteboard sharing words that evoked thinking about world hunger and SDG2. This incident also put on display the seamless collaboration in co-teaching.

At the beginning of the first microteaching session, some of the teaching group 1-2 appeared to be uncertain of themselves playing the teaching role with their colleagues manifesting this through a flippant, joking attitude. Evidently the microteaching session was getting the participants to move out of their

comfort zone and putting them in what appears to have been uncharted waters taking the lead teaching colleagues in a more formal setting (Ledger and Fischetti, 2020). The awkwardness only lasted the first couple of minutes into the session. The strength of the other Group 1-2 teaching colleagues confidently playing the role from the very start and the fact that the participant group chose to overlook the behaviour gave them the additional space they needed to switch into the teaching role required of them for the microteaching episode. As happened for the case of the microteaching in course 1, microteaching does not always work as intended. What is described above as participant difficulty to switch into the role of teaching peers may be one reason. There might be other reasons for microteaching to derail such as alternative understandings of what is meant by a microteaching session by involved participants as may have been the case for some of the illustrative examples of derailment in the microteaching session of course 1.

During the interviews, an Art teacher mentioned that microteaching served for developing a stronger teamwork among them as all group members "had time to express themselves and with regards to their particular subject". By 'particular' she referred to the different arts subjects within the specialised school- Visual Art, Drama, Dance and Music. She explained that all group members were sensitive to represent the integration of diverse art forms.

Despite their efforts aiming at interdisciplinarity through different arts, their microteaching still was mostly dominated by the drama subject. In a way this could be due to the teaching, which is a performance in itself, especially when involving each group member in switching roles as teachers and students (Figure 7). Had it been dominated by Music, Dance or Visual Art, microteaching would have turned into a mere presentation or teacher-centred approach. In a way, microteaching provided a platform for the participants of Course 2 to experiment with diverse teaching methods, drawing upon elements from different artistic disciplines to create engaging learning experiences for students. The participants' use of the materials inside the 'Art-in-a-Bag', continued to confirm this. While rehearsing for their micro-teaching sessions, they exchanged ideas stemming from their expertise, for instance in constructing props by moulding the self-hardening clay (Figure 8a) and in maintaining rhythm while playing the tambourine (Figure 8b). Besides collaborating on interdisciplinary project-based learning, such experiences encouraged them to eventually tailor their lessons to specific learning needs and styles.

Figure 7. *Participants wearing red caps taken from Art-in-a-Bag to show students' role*

Figure 8a. *Sharing expertise in clay moulding*

Figure 8b. *Sharing expertise in music rhythm*

Conclusion

The participants clearly appreciated the possibility of developing microteaching sessions during the courses implemented by the University of Malta CARE/SS team. Some feedback showed that these sessions were among the participants' favourite sessions because they gave them the possibility of interacting amongst themselves in a safe environment and receiving immediate feedback from peers. Some participants also expressed the desire to have more opportunities of this sort because they believe that interaction and collaborative experiences among teachers are lacking. Given that most participants' teaching experiences were limited to the secondary sector, it was not possible to gauge whether this lack of collaborative interaction is also prevalent in the primary sector. Having peers provide constructive criticism encourages a culture of open communication and continuous improvement among teachers. Such sessions can also provide teachers with the opportunity to experiment with new teaching methods; however, this was not always the case in the two courses in Malta. This may be due to the fact that some of the participating teachers were not familiar with micro-teaching methods. Further courses can probably encourage innovation and more creativity in teaching approaches.

References

Allen, D. W. (1966). Micro-Teaching: A New Framework for In-Service Education. *The High School Journal*, *49*(8), 355-362.

Laurillard, D. (2012). *Teaching as a Design Science: Building Pedagogical Patterns for Learning and Technology*. Routledge.

Ledger, S., & Fischetti, J. (2020). Micro-teaching 2.0: Technology as the classroom. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, *36*(1), 37-54.

O'Flaherty, J., Lenihan, R., Young, A.M., & McCormack, O. (2024). Developing Micro-Teaching with a Focus on Core Practices: The Use of Approximations of Practice. *Education Sciences, 14*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14010035

Pandey, N. (2019). Developing Teaching Competency Through Micro Teaching Approach. *Techno Learn*, *9*(1), 25-35. https://doi.org/10.30954/2231-4105.01.2019.4