

Evaluating the YiXue Educational Programme (YEP)

Listening to Voices of Different Stakeholders:

A Case-Study Approach

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Preface

This case study research attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of the YiXue Education Programme (YEP) by analysing youth, their parents' and educators' opinions and experiences. This programme consisted of five Yi Qi Zhi Neng seminars held in Malta between 2012 and 2015. The research was conducted by the Department of Counselling, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta. The aims of the research were to measure the effectiveness of the Wei Ling Yi Method on the psychosocial profiles of the participating students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)/Learning Difficulties (LD) and then to offer recommendations for further research, implementation and policy based on its findings.

Wei Ling Yi comes from a distinguished Chinese family which has been cultivating healing techniques for generations. He has over 40 years experience as an educator and has been delivering teachings and knowledge in seminars and courses in German cities and other locations in Europe for the past 20 years. In Germany he founded the YiXue Education Centre. To help children and to support schools in their work, he developed the Zhi Neng seminars which are part of the YiXue teaching system.

The Wei Ling Yi method includes special exercises which consist of movements for the body to enhance focus, brain work, social behaviour, communication, alertness, intuition and good morals. These exercises are aimed to increase intelligence, lead to higher awareness and unfold latent potentials in students so that they develop self confidence and find peace of mind.

The research team opted for the use of a mixed-method approach. They observed the rigorous scientific approach in carrying out their research and limited themselves to interviews of the subjects themselves, in this case the parents and their son or daughter, who had attended three or more YEP seminars as well as the documentation, questionnaires, academic results and written and videotaped testimonials from participants as well as their educators. Researchers took extensive care to explain the methodology and the rationale behind every tool and method used in this case study for purposes of objectivity and for validation of findings.

The conclusions and findings of this report indicate positive improvements in communication skills, in social relationships and social interactions after the seminars. The statistical results also declare very positive results with regard to participants' academic achievement with significant improvements. Moreover, it was found that youth following YEP improved their attention span, addressed their behaviour in positive ways, had more control and management over their emotions, improved concentration and thereby enhanced their wellbeing.

The final recommendations yielded from the data of this research report include further implementation and research, holding more YEP seminars, further studies and more action research to help build the required body of literature on the Wei Ling Yi Method. By way of implementation it is mentioned that such data, that is this research

report, should be presented to policy makers and all stakeholders, among other suggestions.

I would like to thank the research team for their professional work and all those who contributed and participated in this YiXue Educational Programme (YEP), especially Master Wei Ling Yi for his innovative work with the children and the Maltese and German YEP teams. This research exercise was commissioned by the YiXue Life Cultivation Malta Association which was responsible for the organization of the YEP seminars in conjunction with the YiXue Education Centre, Nossen, Germany. The Community Chest Fund sponsored this research and also contributed towards the expenses incurred in running the seminars. This YEP initiative would not have been possible without the approval and constant support of the Ministry for Education and Employment and the Education Directorates.

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Executive Summary

The aim of this Research Project was to explore the effectiveness of the Wei Ling Yi Method on the psychosocial profiles of students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)/Learning Disabilities (LD) and to elicit the relevant recommendations for further research, implementation and policy as elicited from the data. The programme being evaluated is the YiXue Education Programme (YEP). YEP utilises the Wei Ling Yi Method and is designed and run by the YiXue Centre in Nossen, Germany. In Malta YEP is co-ordinated by the YiXue Life Cultivation Malta Association.

The YiXue exercises referred to by the participating youths and parents form part of the YiXue Culture i.e., the Culture of Oneness. They were developed by Master Wei Ling Yi and they are part of the traditional knowledge of his family and Masters. Master Wei Ling Yi regards this as a new pedagogical approach.

In order to ensure an objective evaluation, the research team neither met Master Wei Ling Yi and his team nor observed or attended any of his sessions up to the date of submission of this report. The findings yielded positive results as reflected by student-participants, their families and their schools. Links to the literature were carried out in the findings and discussion chapter in order to allow for a totally open approach to the evaluation and recommendation as yielded from the data presenting in the conclusion of this report.

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List of Abbreviations

AD(h)D	Attention Deficit (hyperactivity) Disorder
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
ASC	Academic Self-Concept
DSM-5	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition
EST	Ecological System Theory
FG	Focus Groups
GCA	Global Conceptual Ability
HW	Home Work
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IQ	Intelligence Quotients
LD	Learning Disabilities
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
M	Mean
M.U.S.E.U.M.	Magister Utinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus Master (Lord) May all the whole world follow your Gospel.
ODD	Oppositional Defiance Disorder
PDD	Pervasive Developmental Disorder
PSD	Personal and Social Development
SD	Standard Deviation
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulties
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TCM	Traditional Chinese Medicine
YEP	YiXue Education Programme
UREC	University Research Ethics Committee

Evaluating the YiXue Educational Programme (YEP)

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This report first presents the context of the evaluation process, the philosophical background and conceptual framework of the authors, followed by the methodology and research tools, the participants and the findings. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are presented and recommendation as yielded from the data are put forward.

Context of the YiXue Education Programme (YEP)

Over the past 20 years, Master Wei Ling Yi has been carrying out research on the Wei Ling Yi educational method. The effects of the Wei Ling Yi method have been reflected in studies in Germany (Yi Qi Zhi Neng Bao, 2012) through observations and evaluation derived from personal testimonials from both participants and their parents/families (Appendix A) who have attended seminars and workshops.

The Wei Ling Yi method documents effects on the development and behaviour of children in terms of social behaviour, emotional regulation, and school performance (Yi Qi Zhi Neng Bao, 2012). It has also been shown to have positive effects with respect to the abilities and talents of students with profiles including: Attention deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD(h)D), Asperger Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), Specific Learning Difficulties (SPLD)/Learning Disabilities (LD) including dyscalculia, dyslexia, along with concentration and social and linguistic challenges. Participants and their families have reported positive effects with respect to psychosomatic illnesses such as asthma, allergies, eating disorders and pain. This method has also proven to have a significant impact upon receptivity to learning, academic performance and school results. The benefits of this method have been shown across the board, children

with a significantly above average intelligence and who exhibit communication problems also report positive benefits from this method.

The aim of this Research Project was to explore the effectiveness of the Wei Ling Yi Method on the psychosocial profiles of students with SPLD/ LD, and to elicit the relevant recommendations for further research, along with recommendations for the implementation and development of policies and procedures which will support such populations. Appendix B presents a detailed explanation of Wei Ling Yi Education Method whilst Appendix C presents a detailed profile of the professional who designed it – Master Wei Ling Yi (Sifu).

Methodology of the Evaluation Process

As members of the Department of Counselling, we usually embark on research which focuses directly or indirectly on quality of life and empowerment. This focus also guides our decision making process when concluding to accept or reject a research project. McLeod (2003) poignantly notes that there is a social responsibility in research “that transcends the academic discipline of a profession to which the researcher belongs. The ultimate moral justification for research is that it makes a contribution to the greater public good, by easing suffering or promoting truth” (p.175). This social responsibility has guided us throughout this research process.

Philosophical Background

The embedded philosophy and *raison d'être* of the researchers of this evaluative research is that education should be holistic and inclusive, as this enables students to become more self-confident, more independent and fully included in society. Holistic and inclusive approaches enable students to participate effectively in their community, and work toward a better Quality of Life for self and others (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Milani, 1967). We hold the value that healthy communities must include responsible citizens who are capable of fending for themselves and proficient enough to remain balanced in all aspects of their lives (Falzon & Muscat, 2009). Theories and models of education and quality of life that inform this project include: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Erikson's psycho-social model, Dewey's theories of education, Milani's and Freire's models of education, Universal Design Learning, Vygotsky Socio-Cultural Theory of learning alongside theories regarding ADhD, Dyslexia and challenging behaviour (Bender, 2004; Hanfman & Vaker, 2012; Lerner, 2004; Milani, 1967; Rose & Meyer, 2002; Saurin, 2015; Turnbull et al., 2010; Vygotsky, Smith & Tomlinson, 2003).

Root (1993) supports Weber's early 20th century concept that values cannot be eliminated from any aspect of the research process and outcomes. What we choose to investigate is influenced by the very values we want to advance. This concept has never been disputed and continues to be considered relevant (e.g. Clifford, 2005). Our value system reflects our political alignment towards values of inclusion, empowerment and quality of life, which have been the underpinning factors guiding us to accept this research project. Our political alignment in a context of equity is evidence-based on literature and research findings that reveal that students thrive when they are understood and respected (Au, 2007; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Hanfmann & Vakar, 2012; Moll, 1992; Piaget, 1973; Singer & Revenson, 1997; Vygotsky, 1987). Co-author Falzon (2012) notes that:

'The concept of truly including everyone in the classroom needs to be viewed as a value within political, cultural, educational and emotional paradigms. Inclusive education has been on the manifesto of all our local political parties for a number of years, but how this is understood and implemented is a different issue. Malta is a nation of paradoxical experiences: we live on a small island yet our houses are larger than most European homes; we are considered a catholic and kind nation yet do not easily accept people from different nationalities and creeds; we have been independent for over 45 years, yet at times still think with the mentality of a colony; we have had inclusive education for over 18 years, yet still have a selective system which streams children from the age of ten, whether officially or unofficially. The changes we need to make are as much structural and practical, as philosophical, affective and individual. We need to address the values, attitudes, pragmatics and approaches which prevent children from

being part of the learning process at the level of policy and politics and within classroom practices' (p.127).

Conceptual Framework of the methodology

This evaluative research project is trying to construct a belief related to the effectiveness of the YEP. This belief is shaped by the experiences and values of the team, as well as social forces that the research team have observed as professionals in the field and in their personal lives (McLeod, 1999). This places the research team in the Social Constructionism Paradigm. A major focus of Social Constructionism is to discover how people and groups of people participate in the creation of their perceived social reality and experience. This philosophy involves looking at how social phenomena are created, organised, institutionalised and traditionalised by communities. Socially constructed reality is an ongoing dynamic process where reality is reproduced by participants, based on their interpretation, their knowledge, their culture and their experiences. Researchers are actually challenging themselves to take the position of not being sure or actually not knowing, in order to try to find ways to become more knowledgeable of the theme (Gergen, 1999). The perceived objective reality is constructed by the personal and social interactions of each individual, where people are interacting, aware that their perceptions are related and intertwined, and therefore common knowledge is re-experienced and reinforced (Schwandt, 2000). Further, with regard to procedure of choice of research design, we felt that we continuously had to be faithful to the main theoretical perspectives underpinning this research, our value system and our departmental dream for social equity, empowerment and inclusion for all.

Bricoleurs within Social Constructionism. Given the context and objectives of this research, we concluded that the best approach is to utilise bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) in an attempt to produce a “pieced-together, close knit set of practices that produce solutions to a problem in a concrete situation” (p. 3), whilst also trying to understand the phenomenon in the context of the local culture. We are aware that this research is an interactive process shaped and influenced by our histories and backgrounds.

We understand that this research may yield data which can be powerful and act as agents for change in our country, but we also understand that this research is not value-free. This collage, hopefully in the best interest of the (Youth) students of our country, is affected by our history, which, together with the results of the triangulated research tools, will help us create new images, understandings and interpretations of the phenomenon under study. We have attempted to connect parts to a whole in an attempt to glean meaningful relationships. One must not forget that this research is first and foremost a “case-study” of the YEP. Using Thomas's (2011) definition of Case Studies:

“Analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame - an object - within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates” (p. 512).

This case study attempts to assess youth's and their parents' and educators' opinions and experience of the effectiveness of the YEP. The research team deemed

that the most appropriate design was the use of a mixed-method approach. Yin (2009) notes that, in data triangulation, the use of “multiple sources of evidence” allows for “converging lines of inquiry” leading to findings and conclusions that are “likely to be more convincing and accurate if [they are] based on several different sources of information, following a corroboratory mode” (p. 115). He claims that this type of triangulation allows for better construct validity since the same phenomenon is being addressed through multiple measures. In this context, Yin's (2009) argument gains more weight. When we were deliberating on the best methodology to address the research question, we felt, and still believe, that triangulation would help us get a clearer picture of the situation. Langdrige (2004) notes that “possibility of triangulation where multiple perspectives [are used,] enables us to truly understand the phenomena in question... By taking different perspectives and using different methods we get the possibility of greater understanding of the topic” (p. 256). Denzin (1989), like Yin (2009), also refers to this as data triangulation. Thus, the research question: How effective is the YEP? begged the need for a mixed methodology approach.

Apart from the nature of the research question and the need to give a voice to participants and their families and educators, we perceived the inclusion of qualitative methodology as vital to the research question. Even though this evaluative research does not utilise emancipatory research and is more traditional, we as researchers felt that its sentiments were echoed in our work. Oliver (1992) explains that trust, respect, participation and reciprocity should underpin emancipatory disability research. A major focus of this report was to perhaps start a dialogue among policy makers and governing powers. Therefore, in the context of this study, we felt that it would be more conducive if qualitative research methods were used to give understanding and

meaning to the participants' experiences and to emphasise and present the voices (Falzon, 2012) of the participants and their parents and educators. On the other hand, given that the audience of this report and in light of our philosophical and moral drive to enact change in our environment, we understood the need to add power to our findings. Quantitative data would act as a means of adding power and recognition to these experiences.

The qualitative approach. The use of qualitative methods emphasise the data's voice as this is open-ended, inductive and facilitative of new insights. It also ensures that the data's focus on meaning is not imposed upon by pre-set deductive hypotheses as is carried out in quantitative methods (Langdrige, 2004). Further, qualitative research allows researchers to research in-depth and in as natural an environment as possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It also allows for exploration of a detailed phenomenon using voiced participants' personal experiences, whilst allowing for reflection by and reflexivity in researchers. The processes of qualitative research also leads to professional and personal growth (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & McCormack Steinmetz, 1991; Mason, 1996).

The quantitative approach. The use of quantitative methods were used in order to statistically analyse the school examination reports of participants. This added another dimension to the evaluation and also ensured that we respected and addressed those still sceptical of qualitative research. As Hayes (2000) notes:

These two approaches to science are both reflected in modern psychological research. There are psychologists who stick rigidly to one side or other of the debate; but psychology is a pretty pragmatic discipline, and most psychologists

are eclectic – that is, they use a mixture of approaches depending on what seems to be most suitable. (p. 8)

In effect, triangulation is being used. Social Constructionism agrees that objective reality can “never be captured” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5). Flick (2000) argues that triangulation should not be regarded as a research tool or as a strategy for validation, but as an “alternative” to validation in order to understand better the phenomenon being queried, adding richness and depth to the research (Denzin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As such, this combination of research methods will hopefully be perceived as adding rigour, validation, depth and breadth to the investigation and the research question. In essence we are trying to triangulate by attempting to make sense of the statistical data – the examination results and the analysis of the two focus groups in order to try to glean and “tease out the many layers of meaning” (Langdrige, 2004, p. 316) that either research on their own might miss.

The Research Tools

The mixed-method approach was then manifested in the research tools: (a) two focus groups - one with the participants and another with the participants' parents (b) analysis of written testimonials; (c) statistical documentation analysis of the participants' school reports (d) qualitative analysis of previous testimonials and questionnaires provided by parents, educators and the youth. The decision to use these research tools was based on philosophical, professional, emotional and political issues as explained above. The statistical inputting of all data from the school reports was carried out by two members of the research team and double-checked in order to ensure accuracy. Data were first input into an excel sheet, and then coded for input into IBM Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The next section presents the Focus groups in detail.

The focus groups (FGs). Sprenkle and Piercy (2005) describe qualitative research as something that begins with a hunch (the research question) and, like an onion (participants' contribution), layers (researchers' analysis of data) are peeled away until the researcher gets a closer look and understanding of the phenomenon. It is a process of elimination and an acceptance to understanding what the phenomenon could be. Participants and researchers are both active participants, and this helps the knowledge to be co-constructed by both parties, whereby the data that emerge are a reflection of the experiences among the members as a group. Open-ended guiding questions help generate views and perception at a cognitive level, and elicit values and attitudes on an affective level. Kamberilis and Dimitriadis (2005) refer to FG research as a key activity where "pedagogy, politics and interpretive" inquiry work together and "inter-animate" each other. They regard this research tool as efficient as it enables the generation of a lot of data in a relatively short time; due to the issue of group dynamics. The data also allow "powerful interpretive insights" which by definition cannot be produced through interviews due to a lack of group dynamics. Furthermore, they argue, FGs help elevate individual memories to "historically sediment collective memories and desires." They argue that this was perhaps why FGs have been conducive to research involving problem posing or solving, and perceive this research tool as "magnifying glasses" - a peep into the secret of "truths". As a research tool FGs also allow researchers to be self-reflexive even within the complications of "representation, legitimation and praxis" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) conclude that so long as researchers are aware of this complexity,

“opening up to the unfinalizable complexity and heterogeneity of ‘others’ within FG interactions is at least one way of travelling down these roads” (p. 906).

Silverman (2010) presents arguments put forward by “some qualitative researchers” that FGs may be perceived as an “artificial” research environment engineered to create data as requested by the research question. This perspective was kept in mind throughout the data collection process. Silverman (2010) explains that an alternative would be to use data which occur “naturally”. This led us to reflect a lot on the validity of the research tools chosen.

The FGs guiding questions were informed from the literature and were designed to explore with the FG participants any effects, if any, exposure to this programme had. We felt it important to use open-ended questions (Krueger, 1998a), as “open-ended responses are not restricted by the category choices of the researcher, as are the responses to closed questions” (Kronberger & Wagner, 2000, p. 299).

Apart from ensuring that questions were open-ended, we also took care to avoid dichotomous questions, both when preparing the questions and during the FG sessions. We encouraged participants to think back on their experiences, offered opportunities for reflections and tried to always move from the general to the specific (Krueger 1998a). In line with Krueger’s suggestions (1998a), we also included ending questions as well as a final question asking whether we missed anything or whether they wanted to include anything else. The written guiding questions were prepared in English, and in Maltese (Appendix D) and both languages were used interchangeably throughout the FG sessions.

Logistical planning for the focus groups. After ensuring that a strictly opt-in procedure had been used, the office contacted the parents who had sent in the

consent form to agree on a date convenient for them and their children. Ms Josette Ciappara helped us with this logistical part of the project. When contacted, parents were again informed that they and the youth would be audio- recorded during the focus groups and that their responses would be transcribed and then destroyed following the study. Via phone, and in written format, they were also informed of the voluntary nature of their participation, and it was explicitly noted that they could withdraw from the study at any point. They were also informed that all transcriptions along with the analysis chapter would be made available to them for review. Both Maltese and English were used interchangeably throughout the sessions which enabled participants to accurately and explicitly express their experiences. Confidentiality was of utmost importance and was respected throughout. This is further discussed in the Ethical Considerations section below.

Managing the focus groups. In managing the FGs, we followed guidelines found in the literature (e.g. Creswell, 2007; Gaskell, 2000; Greenbaum, 1998; Krueger, 1992; Krueger. & Casey, 2000). In line with recommended FG sizes, the two FGs averaged eight to ten participants. Research indicates that smaller FGs (four to eight people) ensure that all members can participate fully. Kruger (1998b) suggests that one should plan to over-recruit by at least 25% to make up for no-shows and unavoidable absences and this was again employed, in fact we had initially tried to recruit 14 youth. The environment for the FGs was chosen by the participants themselves as detailed below. This ensured that the environment would be comfortable, non-threatening, and conveniently located. FG's were held on dates and times that were convenient for the participants (Gaskell, 2000; Greenbaum, 1998).

The skills of being a good moderator was always reflected upon. All team members have extensive experience in facilitating groups and in processing experiences, and therefore found it easy to facilitate, to moderate and to ask probing and clarification questions as necessary, apart from employing empathy (Egan, 2009; Nelson-Jones, 2008). Time was allotted for moderators to familiarise themselves with participants. It was noted that participants were quickly at ease in the group as they previously knew each other. This helped the FGs to be based on a relationship of trust, openness and candour. We were also mindful of the importance of keeping the groups focused and on track in order to ensure maximum participation and feedback. (Krueger, 1998b; Gaskell, 2000)

We began each FG by thanking participants for coming, reminding them of the aims of the study and reiterating the purpose of the FG by referring to the information letter and the consent form that had been sent to them. We again reminded them that we would be audio- recording the session and that the recording would be destroyed when the research was complete. The equipment was tested with the group to ensure that it picked up the voices of all participants. We discussed ground rules for the session such as saying their names before speaking, not interrupting each other, nonverbally indicating that they wished to speak so we could take note using a first-come-first-served basis, and gaining agreement from the participants about the progression of events. We also indicated the duration of the focus group (60-90 minutes), how the data would be used and that they would be sent the transcript prior to analysis and then the findings chapters to read and approve. Before the first question, we again reminded participants of the importance of responding in an honest and open manner.

We reassured the group that we were not looking for 'correct' or 'specific' responses and that we valued their voices, experiences and descriptions.

During the FG sessions, probing was used to encourage elaboration on thoughts and feelings in order to address underlying assumptions and beliefs (Creswell, 2007). We also ensured that silent members were drawn out, and particular attention was given to participants' body language which was processed accordingly. Throughout the session summaries were used to ensure that we were understanding correctly and to give opportunity for further clarification and elaboration. Such incidences also gave the participants opportunities to open up to further valuable discussions (Langdridge, 2004).

At the end of each FG session, we asked for additional feedback regarding any issues they felt had been missed or omitted, or if there was anything else they wanted to address that they thought might be valuable. We finished each session by thanking the participants and telling them exactly when the audio recorder was turned off. Usually informal conversations on the session continued for about 30 minutes, during which time refreshments were served. After the participants had left we wrote notes that included general impressions about the participants' behaviour which we thought valuable for the research process.

Pre & post conference questionnaires. Before the commencement of each seminar each parent and youth were asked to fill in questionnaires to gauge the reasoning for joining the group and motivations and expectations for the sessions. In some cases these motivations and expectations varied across sessions while others remained constant. After each seminar each parent and child were again asked to fill in questionnaires to ascertain the extent to which their expectations had or had not been met. This also assessed changes as reported by the parent and child.

Examination results. In order to determine if any significant changes were experienced in terms of academic performance each participant was asked to submit examination results from academic years 2010-2015. This allowed for a basic assessment of improvement across subjects, years and throughout the seminars. All information was treated as confidential and all materials were returned to the parents once the data was compiled.

Testimonials. After each seminar, the seminar organisers had asked the youth, their parents and their educators to provide written and videotaped testimonials on their perceptions of the outcome of the seminars.

Validity and Credibility of the Research Tools

The crux of the matter with regard to validity and credibility in this research is the following: are the results valid enough to allow for recommendations for better practices? Within the context that the ultimate truth is a “chimera”, one can argue that there is not one ultimate method which is a “royal road to ultimate knowledge” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205). Guba and Lincoln (2005) note that commitment requires researchers to be as faithful as possible to the voices of respondents and participants. This is what adds validity to research. They refer to the importance that one should give to “processes of interpretation” as opposed to the methods themselves. They refer to two levels of rigour that one should respect: positivistic rigour focusing on method application, and interpretative rigour focusing on how the research data are presented, interpreted and discussed. In the context of our research question, background, agenda and choice of research design, it was important that we continuously be aware of both levels of rigour and to be loyal to authenticity both on a quantitative and on a qualitative level. Practitioners of positivistic and post-positivistic social inquiry

are the most critical of validity, because any action on the part of researchers thought to potentially stabilise objectivity or introduce subjectivity results in bias. Ultimately, validity is an issue of ethics and integrity (Lather, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Creswell (2007) refers to a number of procedures that can be used for validation and reliability. These include peer review, experience in the field, triangulation of data, clarification of bias, and auditing and reflexivity. Cho and Trent (2006) appreciate that validity and reliability are important factors particularly when adopting a mixed-method approach. With regard to the quantitative research tools, these are enhanced by being faithful to the procedures required. With regard to qualitative research, one then refers to terms such as authenticity, trustworthiness or validity. In fact, Guba and Lincoln (2005), interchange the term authenticity with validity and proposed an authenticity criteria (1989) as set out in Table 1 overleaf.

In his critique of qualitative research Bryman (2008) discusses four main validity weaknesses. He cautions that qualitative research (a) may be too subjective, depending on the researchers' views; (b) may be possibly tainted by close relationships with research participants in the data collecting process; (c) may lack reliability as it is difficult to replicate due to lack of structure and the researchers' pivot role in the data collection process; (d) reflects generalisation challenges due to sample sizes and may lack transparency of the research process. These weaknesses may in themselves be a factor for richness. Ultimately, whether the research is quantitative or qualitative, it all boils down to the issues of ethics, morality and loyalty to the data.

Table 1. The 1989 Guba & Lincoln Authenticity Criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 2005)

Fairness	'A quality of balance; that is, all stakeholder views, perspective, claims concerns and voices should be apparent in the text. Omission of stakeholders of participant voices reflects, we view, a form of bias.' (p. 207)
Ontological Authenticity	Raising level of awareness by individual research participants
Educative Authenticity	Raising level of awareness by listeners for social or organisational purposes
Catalytic authenticity	Prompting action from participants
Tactical authenticity	Researchers training participants, if participants so desire
Ontological Authenticity	Raising level of awareness by individual research participants
Educative Authenticity	Raising level of awareness by listeners for social or organisational purposes
Catalytic authenticity	Prompting action from participants
Tactical authenticity	Researchers training participants, if participants so desire

Using the literature in this section as a guideline, we address credibility and validity as directly related to this research. The major concern of the results of this study is whether these are valid enough to allow for recommendations for better practices. Within the context that the ultimate truth is a "chimera", we felt committed to be as faithful as possible to the voices of respondents and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Ethical Considerations

Wiles, Heath, Crow and Charles (2005) note that principle-based approaches to ethics in research involve "adherence to moral principles" which include autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice. We adhered to issues of ethics, rigour, validity, reliability and trustworthiness throughout the research process. We follow faithfully the principles and code of conduct of the American Psychological Association

(2002, 2010). These principles were adhered to at every stage of the data design and collection. Participants were always free to make their own informed decisions about participation in the research (autonomy). The research did not inflict harm in any way throughout the process (non-maleficence). It is our belief that this research should benefit others, particularly children (beneficence) and all participants were treated with equal respect during, and within the research process (justice). Ultimately, our responsibility goes beyond the academic and must incorporate a caring attitude in order for us to continuously be faithful to why we want to research.

Procedure-wise, the literature presents six ethical principles to be addressed and implemented when carrying out research - informed consent, lack of deception, right to withdraw, debriefing, confidentiality and accuracy (e.g. Eisner & Peshkin, 1990; Breakwell, Fife-Schaw, Hammond & Smith, 2006; Christians, 2005). These were all followed and implemented, also within the context of insider research, as discussed above (Northumbria, 2011). From a legal perspective, we also had to follow procedures as decreed by University of Malta's Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

Research Participants and the Selection Procedure

The population sample included 12 to 16 year-old youth who had attended at least three seminars. To ensure a totally fully-informed opt-in decision-making process procedure, an information letter, in English (Appendix E) and Maltese (Appendix F), including all necessary information about the evaluation research project was sent to the youth who had attended at least three seminars and to their parents. The circular clearly explained in both languages that criteria for participation included:

- a) The willingness of the parents and students to participate in this research by attending one focus group each.

- b) Acceptance of the parents to share all school reports and psychological assessment with the researchers.
- c) Acceptance that all previous written and audio-recorded testimonials may be used for this research.
- d) The right to withdraw at any point during the research, even though the consent form would have been signed (Appendix G and H), in which case the data would not be used

Further, it was again made clear verbally during the data collection process and in the information letters and consent forms that all personal data and documentation would be confidentially kept by the research team and returned to the families after the completion of the research. Whilst in line with the ethical requirements of the University of Malta, they were advised that all raw data would be destroyed within one year of the completion of the research.

The participants. All Focus Group participants were youth who had participated in at least three YEP seminars and their parents. We also used written or previously recorded testimonials of these youth's educators, whose permission we also had. There were eight participants in this study. The profiles of participants span across AD(h)D, Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD) and SpLD/LD, which mainly included profiles of dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. Some of the participants had multiple coexisting profiles - co-morbidity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), while others exhibited difficulties with attention, which affected social and academic learning, skills and performance. Table 2 below gives a detailed description of the profile of abilities and challenges of each of the participants.

Table 2. Profiles of Participants

(Names of participants have been replaced with fictitious names for anonymity .)

Amy attended the seminars with her mother who described her as “very intelligent, very self-confident, helpful, creative, but stubborn”. Her psychological reports indicate a 124 Global Conceptual Ability (GCA) (verbal IQ 129, Non-Verbal IQ 108, Spatial IQ 122, and Special Non-Verbal IQ 177). She described her daughter as “very creative” enjoying crafts, drawing, drama and singing. The marital separation has affected Amy. Her mother notes that “she feels that she is in a disadvantage in life for being in the type of family and is always asking why this has happened to her and sometimes even blamed herself for it!” Amy’s mum enrolled her in the seminars as the result of the continuous conflicts with her brother, her heightened sense of skill and achievement and so that she might appreciate her brother and her life “How shall I unite the family again? How shall I make her understand that I love her the same way as her brother but that her needs are different from his? How shall I make her appreciate her brother in her life and stop competing with me?”

John who has a profile of SpLD (Dyslexia) attended the seminars with his mother. His psychological reports indicate a GCA of 121 (verbal IQ 118, Non-Verbal IQ 120, and Spatial IQ 114). His mother reports that he is good at crafts, painting drawing and swimming. He is a quiet boy but likes to talk a lot. He was enrolled due to his poor attention, huge difficulty with reading and writing and fluctuating self-confidence.

Although **Oscar** participated in the Youth Focus Group, we did not have any background information about this youth, apart from his school reports which are discussed in the results section.

Kieran has a profile of ADHD and attended the seminars with his mother. His psychological reports indicate a 95 GCA (Verbal IQ 96 and Performance IQ 94). His main interests are football and drama. His mother describes him as “caring and lovable but at the same time...impulsive and aggressive due to his moodiness.” She was mainly concerned about how he can handle his anger. “I would like to get help in how my child can get out of this problem and control his anger as this is affecting our family.” He was a victim of domestic violence which has contributed to his current problems. “Parents were separated since he was four years of age and he was being abused by his father”.

Liam is described as “a joker” by his mother and attended the seminars with her. His psychological reports indicate a 94 GCA (Verbal IQ 95 and Performance IQ 93). He was enrolled in the seminar due to his difficulties with concentration in school. He is interested in football and drama. He faces some difficulties in school, requiring “repetitive learning to succeed”. He is easily distracted and needs a lot of visual stimulation and repetition.

Senan, who has a profile of ODD and ADhD, attended the seminars with his mother. His psychological reports indicate a GCA of 114 (verbal IQ 139 and performance IQ 110). His mother reports that "he plays the violin and loves it. He also excels at every sport he tries. He's also a great speller & conversationalist". She describes her son as being "sweet, annoying, hyper [and] on the go all the time, very interested in everything, funny and stubborn". His mother expressed an interest in him learning how to remain "more centred and less defiant and oppositional, to know how to keep friends and to reach his full potential."

Mario has a profile of ADhD and SpLD and attended the seminars with his mother. His psychological reports indicate a GCA of 111 (verbal IQ 102, Non-Verbal IQ 108, and Spatial IQ 117). His mother reports that he is "creative and understands the theory of science", also he is a "very good swimmer, knows how to draw with pencil (although he does not give credit to this)". He grasps mathematical and scientific concepts very easily. She describes him as "Calm, respectful, obedient, intelligent and lovable, absent minded, a teaser, polite, creative and close to himself". Mario's mother indicates that the separation of her husband and self has "confused him [Mario] a lot. He was enrolled in the seminars as he suffers from "bone aches due to stress and tension" and his mother hoping that the sessions would help to reduce the pain. Her major concerns is helping him to sleep better and to improve their relationship "How should I deal with Mario to make him to go sleep at the right time without having to yell and getting angry with him? This is closing our days on a negative note and I end up not sleeping well for having said harsh words and he being sorry for what he had done". His mother notes that he started to take Ritalin in 2010 and it has had a "positive effect on him both academically and socially".

Noel who has a profile of ASD & ADhD combined with SpLD (Dyslexia & Dyscalculia) attended the seminars with his mother. His psychological reports indicate a Global Conceptual Ability (GCA) of 80 (Verbal Intellectual Quotient (IQ) 70 and Performance IQ 93). His mother reports that he has a keen eye for detail and has a very good memory. He is particularly interested in planes, cars and trucks and any type of transportation knowing all the details about them. In his case history report, being alone and ceiling fans were highlighted as his main stressors. His mother describes him as "caring", being "concerned about what's happening around him". According to his mum he is "an intelligent boy, with hobbies that mirror those of adults while at the same time having social skills similar to those of "an 8 year old." Noel's mother's main concern is how she can help her son "How can I help my son to control his tantrums and improve his social skills?" The family lives with Noel's grandparents and his mother feels that some of his tantrums may be the result of his living circumstances.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the same ethical procedure and considerations expected and explained above. Different strategies were used to analyse the quantitative and the qualitative data.

Analysis of the Qualitative Data

Langdrige (2004) cautions, that “[Although] coding is creative, [but] it should also always be consistent and rigorous, there is no room for sloppiness here anymore than in the statistical analysis of quantitative data” (p. 267); whilst Bogdan and Biklen (2003) conclude that “particular research questions and concerns generate certain categories in so far as certain theoretical approaches and academic disciplines suggest particular coding systems” (p. 161). These are the two main principles we have used to choose the type of analysis for the Focus Groups and the restraints we as researchers imposed on ourselves to truly represent the voice of the participants. Smith (1997) argues that such methodology allows researchers to peep inside texts in trying to “unravel the meanings” of participants’ “accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the texts” (p. 189). The aim was to allow participants to describe their experiences in as much detail as possible, and to allow the research team to enter their world. Therefore, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was deemed most appropriate as it best addressed the research agenda. The use of FGs allowed us to explore the experiences of the participants and to gain an insight into their world in order to identify aspects and themes of their experiences. The idiosyncratic approach adopted by IPA studies the experiences of individuals in depth, in order to try and glean meaning and possibly make suggested generalisations for the benefit of society (Langdrige, 2004).

The transcripts were transcribed verbatim (Express Scribe, 2009) and the process for analysis involved five main steps: (1) transcribed transcripts were first read in order to make general notes about thoughts of meanings of the text. (2) Themes were identified as chunks representing patterns of meaning. Given our experiences and possible biases, we tried to remain as open as possible to making alterations to themes and associated meaning throughout this stage of the process. As discussed above, we had to be careful not to impose meaning. (3) Clustering themes and forming hierarchies led to a summary list with super-ordinate and subordinate themes together with related verbatim quotations. (4) Following this first reading process, the summary list of themes was modified accordingly. (5) This occurred consecutively for all transcripts (focus groups and written or previously video-taped transcripts) until all data were generated and cohered into one main summary list with main, subordinate and related themes, together with verbatim quotes in order to capture the meaning and the voices of all participants. This allowed us to create master themes, constituent themes and the relevant quotes which evidence the master themes. Various themes associated with the research question emerged. Rich data was+

. collected from the transcriptions.

Smith and Eatough (2007) explain that researchers should be “guided” not “governed” by the guiding questions. Apart from this five-step process, we also adopted the process of “epoche” as defined by Husserl (1931; as cited in Creswell, 2007). This approach involves putting aside one’s presumptions and biases. In order to respect “epoche”, in order for us to become immersed in the content, transcripts were read repeatedly allowing us to adopt the “epoche” approach and understand better the perceived experience of the participants. This led us to consciously try to describe

factually the transcript such that derived interpretations and meanings would be the voice of the participants. Common patterns were documented, reanalysed and categorised in appropriate themes in an attempt to voice the core meaning of the participants' experience.

Sim (1998) notes that it is difficult and misguided to attempt to "infer an attitudinal consensus from Focus Group data" (p. 345), and one should be cautious to elicit themes and not be bound by the hierarchical importance of data collected. Whereas hierarchical importance was not an issue in our interpretation of the data, our concern was the total consensus of opinions among participants, with regard to themes. Where to fit quotes which could be put in two or three themes was also challenging. At times we included quotes in more than one theme in order to respect the complete voice of the participants. Alternatively, we analysed what seemed to be the most important messages in the extract and then categorised accordingly.

Analysis of the Quantitative Data

For the purpose of the analysis process, the raw data gathered from school reports were converted into quantitative data. These were first inputted into an excel sheet and then transferred into SPSS by the statistician. The aim of this analysis was to elicit any statistical difference in examination marks. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages; means and standard deviations) were used to measure the sample statistics while statistical inference was used to make generalisations about the population parameters. This was carried out in two ways; either by computing the 95% confidence intervals of the mean marks or by conducting hypotheses tests to assess significance between mean marks. Graphical displays were produced and statistical tests were carried out using the facilities of SPSS (version 22).

One of the tasks was to compare mean marks obtained by students in different subjects and in different year groups. Since the groups included more than two clusters of students the One Way ANOVA test was used to compare mean marks between the school subjects and also between the distinct years. This is a generalisation of the two independent sample t-test, which can only compare mean marks between two groups. The null hypothesis specifies that mean marks are comparable between the groups and is accepted if the p-value exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. The alternative hypothesis specifies that the mean marks differ significantly between the groups and is accepted if the p-value is less than the 0.05 criterion. The Tukey post hoc test was used to compare mean marks between pairs of groups. When several means are tested pairwise, the probability of finding one significant pair by chance alone increases rapidly with the number of pairs. It is inadvisable to compare each pair of means by using the Independent samples t-test because the t-statistic assume that only one test will be performed, when in reality several tests are performed. To correct for multiple comparisons SPSS provides several multiple comparison procedures to protect from identifying too many differences as significant when they are not. Two frequently used pairwise methods are the Bonferroni and Tukey post hoc tests. When the number of comparisons is large, the Tukey procedure may be more sensitive in detecting differences; when the number of comparisons is small, the Bonferroni method may be more sensitive.

The level of significance is the probability of making a Type I error. Reducing the level of significance to a lower value will decrease the probability of a Type I error but would increase the probability of a Type II error. For this reason a 0.05 level of significance was employed and which is mostly used in literature. For graphical

representations, scatter plots were used to display relationships between two continuous variables; clustered bar graphs were used to display associations between two categorical variables and error bar graphs were used to display 95% confidence intervals for the actual mean marks for each subject. The internet site <http://www.dimensionresearch.com/resources/calculators/ztest.html> was used to test the significance between two proportions by Z scores and corresponding p-values; while the sample size calculator found in <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm> was used to calculate the sample size given the confidence level, margin of error and population size.

Reflection

It was very important to clearly document the methodology of this evaluation report to address transparency and credibility. This section presented the philosophical framework, political alignment and value systems which guided us to accept the research theme, the methodology and research tools, and the conceptualisation, logistics and mechanics of accurate and faithful inputting, presentation, interpretation and analysis of data. This chapter has also allowed us to try, as ethically and critically as possible, to be aware of the benefits and the pitfalls of the research design. Ultimately, we have tried to be faithful to the basic responsibility of the researchers obligation and moral responsibility to try and present a profile of results and recommendations for the betterment of the community and in respect of the truth; and to remain close to the ultimate aim of research: a quest for a better world and good quality of life (McLeod, 2015).

The Findings

This findings section is divided into two parts. The qualitative findings will first be presented, followed by the quantitative data. These will then be discussed to elicit conclusions and recommendations. It should be noted that, participants always referred to positive effects of these seminars, even when challenged to narrate any negative experience they only referred to a need to always hold such seminars as live-ins and referred to a need for great care when choosing the venues and the timetable of events. In fact, Senan's mother commented: "I love coming here it always feels so right, I love the energy and positivity of the wonderful team and other parents and I feel renewed and like I'm on the right path." She describes the whole experience as "special".

Both the youth, their parents and their educators saw the seminars as an opportunity to help with difficulties in everyday life and at school. The major motivations for enrolment in the seminars were lack of concentration; uncontrolled tantrums; poor social skills; uncontrolled emotions; pain due to stress; poor patterns of sleep; poor executive attention; poor memory skills; poor interpersonal relationships and an overall desire to improve academically and socially. Over the course of the seminars improvements were noted between sessions and although many of the initial issues were still present, parents noted changes in their children. Parents reported feeling happier, more relaxed, gaining more insight and understanding of themselves and their children and similar effects were reported by the youth. They also noted that such positive effects are not just momentary but long term.

<p>L-effett li jhállilek wara s-seminar ha jibqa' . Però mhux ha jibqa' daqs eżempju kif spicča u għaddiet ġimgħa baqa' u baqa' sew però eżempju meta tgħaddi dik il-ġimgħa ha jonqos ... Imma xorta tinnota dik id-differenza - ara qabel is-seminar u ara issa sentejn kif qegħdin issa llum. Tara differenza u tibda taħseb li vera nbdilt minn xi haġa (Kieran)</p>	<p>The effects of the seminar stay with you after the seminar, but it will not stay with the same intensity as it would right after the seminar But it stayed with me as weeks passed by even though the intensity may lessen. You still note the difference from before I attended the seminar and now two years later as I am today. You see the difference and you truly understand that you have changed. (Kieran)</p>
<p>L-effett jibqa' hemmhekk imma l-progress ma jibqax għaddej. Imma l-effett jibqa' hemmhekk...thallha <i>continuous</i> il-ħaġa u nsemmu wkoll hija ehh l-<i>environment</i> li konna qegħdin ġo fih (Oscar)</p>	<p>The effect stays but the progress is not as fast paced as right after the seminar, but the effect does stay on.... It is continuous and what to mention is that the environment we were in helped my experience (Oscar)</p>

The Emergent Themes

Table 3. Main Emergent Themes

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
1.0 Self- Concept, Self Esteem and Self Confidence	
2.0 The Group Experience	The live-In impact yielding solidarity Detaching yourself from everyday life Shared Experiences
3.0 Communication, Social relationships and Interaction	Family Friendships Communication and social behaviour
4.0 Personal management of emotions	
5.0 Academic performance and achievement	
6.0 Relaxation and Focusing Techniques Exercises	The Lotus position The Open Position Hand Rubbing' Visualisation
7.0 Logistics	

Themes were elicited from the two focus groups - one with the youth who experienced these seminars and one with their parents; written testimonials from the

youth, their parents, educators and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs); and information provided in pre- and post- seminar questionnaires, all of which yielded rich and poignant data. Table 3 presents a summary of the main emergent themes.

Theme 1- Self-Concept, Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence. Self-concept refers to the ways in which one comes to understand oneself internally and represent oneself externally. According to Baumeister (1999), one of the most important aspects of self-concept is self-esteem which is made up of our beliefs about ourselves. In light of this, Crocker, Brook, Niiya and Villacorta (2006) suggest that self-esteem “has the qualities of both a personality trait and a psychological state”. They believe that one’s average level of self-esteem is stable over time but that momentary levels of self-esteem can vary as the result of success or failure and in relation to good or bad experiences. Prior to the commencement of the seminars most parents noted patterns of low self-esteem, and a lack of self-confidence among the youth. For Noel being in the spotlight resulted in low levels of self-esteem. His mother reported that he “loses all his confidence... he doesn't like to be in the centre of attention” especially if “he needs to participate in school concerts or wear costumes...as he thinks he will be ridiculed”. Likewise Liam’s mother was concerned that “when someone shouts at him he loses his self-esteem”. Similarly John’s mother reported fluctuating self- confidence “Sometimes good/sometimes bad”. Senan’s mother reported that he managed to portray an image of self-confidence however he “actually has quite a low self-esteem”. On the other hand Amy’s mother narrated that Amy’s self-confidence was “very high”, however she noted that Amy constantly felt she was not the best and that she “feels that they [the educators] prefer other students to her and so she is vying and craving for their attention by constantly doing cards and things to give to them. This takes place

even in other after school activities she takes part in (girl guides, M.U.S.E.U.M. choir which she has now quit).

Fluctuating feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence among populations similar to these participants is not a new phenomenon. In fact, there is an abundance of literature to support this (Bandura, 1997; Burden, 2008; Humphrey, 2003; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002; Riddick, Sterling, Farmer, & Morgan, 1999; Riley, & Rustique-Forrester, 2002). Baumeister (1999) highlights that self-esteem does not make people “richer, smarter, better liked or more successful” but the emotional implications of low self-esteem make it a “valuable resource” (p.263).

Following the seminars there was a notable increase in feelings of self-worth and self-confidence and many of the participants had an increase in self-understanding. Both Mario and Amy reported feeling more aware of their strengths and difficulties, Michael noted that he was “gaining more self-confidence” and was experiencing a sense of contentment “I am more content and aware of my strengths”. Mario’s progress was also reflected by his mother who noted “he feels good too ... about himself, and he is ok wearing braces”. Noel who had exhibited issues around being the centre of attention and low self-esteem also made progress. His mother noted that after the seminars he was able to “understand that everyone has (different) problems and no ones' ridiculing others”. John' mother also reported that following the seminars he had more self-belief stating “he believes more in himself”.

Leary et al (1995) concludes that self-esteem increases as the result of social inclusion, indicating that being accepted by others and proving personal competence can all result in an increase in self-esteem. Intervention such as counselling (Falzon & Camilleri, 2010) and engaging in group experiences (e.g. Antonelli, 2014; Bandura,

1997; Burden, 2008) have been shown to elicit positive effects on self-esteem and self-confidence similar to those noted by the participants. Wei Ling Yi's approach focuses on strengthening "inner equilibrium and holistic inclusiveness", through a variety of methods (Yei Ling Yi, 2012).

Theme 2 - The Group Experience. The concept of the benefits of the small group experience and the space to share is expressed by students during Personal and Social Development (PSD) sessions in schools (Bezzina, Falzon, & Muscat, 2015; Camilleri, Caruana, Falzon & Muscat, 2012; Falzon & Muscat, 2009a, 2009b; Muscat, 2006).

The youth particularly emphasised the experience of being together, sharing common challenges and having the time and space to talk and focus on one thing for five days. They specifically referred to the fact that the 'live-in' added to the impact of the experience. The authors are finding similar results with a group of youth with dyslexia they have been following for the past four years (Antonelli et al., 2014; Falzon & Camilleri, 2010). These youth with dyslexia, like the youth in this study, emphasise the importance of sharing in small groups. In a context where soft skills are becoming an invaluable asset in terms of careers and quality of life, opportunities to develop these skills are essential (Akroyd, 2005; Birdwell, Grist & Margo, 2011; Granger, Durlak, Yohalem & Reisnerl, 2007; Hoffer, 1982; Robinson, K, 2009; Winterbotham, Adams & Kuechel 2001). In fact these dyslexic youth have taken the initiative to start their own 'Dyslexia youth group' which they are leading in order to, as they put it, 'help others with profiles like ours.' The subthemes that have emerged from this theme include: the live-in impact yielding solidarity, detaching from everyday life and the shared experiences.

The live-in impact yielding solidarity. This theme was mostly expressed by the youth. The fact that they were together for 24 hours, sleeping and eating together fostered a sense of solidarity. They in fact compared live-in and non-live-in seminars and insisted that all such seminars should be live-in as it enriches the experiences and the learning process, as well as creates a strong feeling and sense of solidarity. For example, John noted:

Minn dik il-gimgha li għamilna hemmhekk, tara li mhux waħdek għaddej minn dawk l-affarijiet

Spending that week together made us realised that we are not alone passing from such experiences

During the seminars John also noted the seminars offered a space to talk and to reflect “at home I am sometimes angry, here I can calm down, [and] I have no conversations at home”.

Detaching from everyday life. Youth explained that a live-in experience allows participants to detach themselves from their everyday life and focus on the task at hand. It must be noted that even in local professional training courses (for e.g. the Undergraduate course for Social Workers, 2015; the Master's courses for counselling, 2016) live-in training is carried out specifically for this reason. Oscar narrated:

Ikollok iktar ħin barra mir-realtà jiġifieri, ħa, kif konnha qed nagħmlu ma nafx eżatt x'ha jiġri, kellna ħamest ijiem norqdu hemm, qegħdin barra mir-realtà, allura iktar tiffoka fuq dil-ħaġa... ħa tiffoka fuq din l-esperjenza u b'hekk jiġifieri turi d-differenza, once li tiġi fir-realtà tibqa' hemm.

You have time out of the reality of your life. We would not know what exactly was going to happen but we have five days sleeping there, out of everyday reality so we have more time to focus on that thing only... focusing on this experience such that you can assimilate the difference, and this is carried over to your everyday reality

The majority of the youth indicated that they were very happy to be away from home and to be interacting with other children. Participants also indicated that having time together in a closed environment strengthened the bond between parent and child.

Shared Experience and support. Youth-participants and their parents noted that the opportunity to share experience was extremely valid as they understood that they were not alone. Likewise, Antonelli et al. (2014) note that:

The youngsters [in their study] were relieved that they found others with similar experiences, and this gave them the power to resolve their anxiety about their profile, to accept their challenges and limitations, and to be able to express themselves with class peers and tutors (p.12)

Further, Scott (2004) carried out an extensive meta-analysis of research findings and suggests that such social support is a tool to feel stronger and more in control. John noted that although he didn't really like the seminars, he had really enjoyed being with the other children, enjoyed helping out and enjoyed the positive feedback. Senan's mother noted that they enjoyed how everyone came together to "support" one another and to "share their knowledge and experiences".

Research findings indicate that children with SpLD tend to be isolated (Glazzard, 2010), misunderstood and at times laughed at (e.g. Gerber et al., 1990; Humphrey & Mullins, 2002b; Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002). It would appear that having the opportunity to share their experiences with others who could relate to and understand their situations was extremely beneficial to the growth process.

Theme 3: Communication, social relationships and interactions. Several studies indicate that profile such as ADhD, dyslexia and SpLD do not only affect the academic aspect of an individual's life. In fact, they may also affect other aspects of a person's life and in some cases lead to repercussions in terms of relationships e.g. with and between parents and siblings as well as family and marital dysfunction. Such challenges change as children are growing and become more prominent at different stages. (Burden, 2008; Harpin, 2005; Karande, Mahajan, & Kulkarni, 2009).

Although in general all participants had some areas of interpersonal relationships that were strong, many of them had issues related to peers and individual parents. Interpersonal relationship looked at the relationship among peers, educators, parents and siblings. Most participants exhibited some difficulties in terms of interpersonal relationships, communication and daily interactions. These difficulties varied across participants with some finding difficulty making and keeping friends, some reported frequent disputes with parents and siblings while others had negative experiences with educators.

Family. Research suggests that in families where one or more persons have profiles that echo those of the participants, issues arise as the result of misunderstandings, lack of information, stress and frustration both at family and individual levels (Sicile-Kira, 2008; Cortiella, 2011, 2014; Reichman, Corman, & Noonan, 2008; Ryan, 1994). Youth noted that prior to the seminars they experienced problems within the family, especially with their siblings. Noel reported that on the one hand he got on well with his parents but his relationship with his sister was fraught with arguments and that they "fight a lot". Likewise, although close to both parents, Kieran tended to "confide more" in his mother. His relationship with his brothers was also close but his

mother noted that when his “mood is bad” they tend to fight a lot. Michael and Amy experienced problems with their siblings, Mario argued a lot with his sister, with his mother reporting that “[Mario] is hurt because he feels that his sister does not love him”. Similarly Amy’s mother noted that Amy “does not integrate well with her brother” and this situation “is taking the peace of our family life” Amy also exhibited patterns of defiance within her relationship with her mother “She does not accept my help even when she asks for it”.

The general impression was that family relationships had improved following the seminars. For example, Kieran reported that he was having less arguments with his mother and his brothers. John felt his relationship with parents and siblings got better, while Noel wanted to “start obeying [his] parents and sister more” and that his relationship with his mother had improved because they had “more trust for each other”. Amy’s mother described her attitude as “more in control and less competitive” towards her as a mother. Amy also highlighted that she was able to “communicate more” with her mother and understands her brother “a little bit more”. Her relationship with her brother was improving because they were trying to “help each other”. She also stated that she had a “better attitude towards others”, being “more tolerant of others”.

Friendships & peer groups. Peer relationships play a very important role in the development of children, they contribute to both social and cognitive development which, in turn, affect how well we function as adults (Hartup, 1992). Children who experience difficulties in relation to their peer relationships tend to exhibit hyperactive and oppositional behaviours and aggressive outbursts and they are also more likely to be less sociable (Boivin, 2005). There is also a body of evidence to suggest that poor

peer relationships arise as the results of poor social skills, poor communication skills and the subsequent rejection that arise (Bender, 2004; Lerner, 2004).

The youth reported difficulties within their peer groups. Mario is reported to have a good group of friends whom he is “honest and helpful” with (mother). However, his mother also indicated that bullying is an issue her son experienced “sometimes he says he is bullied by his peers”. After the seminar he reported that he had made more new friends. Senan’s mother described her son as finding it hard to maintain friendships and having difficulty “how to stop once wound up”. Kieran reported his friendship with peers as ‘so-and-so’. Senan’s mother highlighted that his peers “put up with him” and Noel’s mother reflected that he does not have a lot of friends but “has classmate he gets along with”. Amy’s mother expressed concern about her patterns of friendship highlighting that although she has a lot of friends “they may feel bullied by her way of expressing herself...feeling superior”. Kieran’s mother reported that he has “one good friend that he does everything with.” Senan’s mother reported that he “always gets rejected by children his age.” Oscar noted that his friends had also observed a change in him:

Shabi, qabel ma mort għidtilhom ħa nipprova nieħu dal-kors u hekk għax għandi bżonnu.....lura wara t-tmiem tas-seminar mort u qaluli wiċċi kemm qisu qiegħed hekk iktar ileqq, *relaxed*, iktar hekk iktar anke il-mod kif bdejti inkellimhom bdejti iktar nidħaq jġifieri nidħaq mhux qisu... hekk eħe iktar pożittiv eżempju tkun iktar ferħan, eżempju jekk serqulek il-wallet sewwa, tipprova... appuntu jekk il sieħbek serqulu l-wallet tipprova tikkalmah u hekk dak it-tip toqgħod tagħmillu biex hu jidħaq ukoll (Oscar)

Before I went [for the seminar] I told my friends that I would be trying to attend this course because I needed it. Then after the end of the seminar I met them and they told me that it is as if my face were shining more, relaxed and that I had also changed the way I was speaking to them and was more cheerful and more positive. For example I was happier, for example if someone steals your wallet or if your friend's wallet is stolen you try to calm down and you discuss these tips so that they laugh with you. (Oscar)

Communication and Social Behaviour. Poor patterns of communication and social behaviour contribute to increased difficulties among individuals who have profiles of SpLD and LD (e.g. Baker & Ireland, 2007; Kirk & Reid, 2001; Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993). The youth narrated difficulty with their day-to-day social interactions. Noel's mother expressed concern about his inability to distinguish between "a close friend and a fake friend", identifying his social behaviour as having "lots of room to improve". She was also concerned about his lack of boundaries between strangers and people he know "if he wants to ask something he just asks anyone, even strangers". Amy's mother indicated that Amy has a habit of telling lies "although this has improved very much during these last few years". Amy also had issues with being corrected describing her social behaviour as "quite satisfactory until she is corrected".

Once again, after the seminars, improvements were noted among participants. Noel noted feeling better about himself and having more friends, whilst his mother reports that he began to "cooperate more and is also much better socially" Amy reported that she was experiencing a "better attitude towards others", being "more tolerant of others". Oscar, Kieran and John noted:

Mhux motivazzjoni biss, anke il-mod kif tikkomunika ma' ħaddieħor - tkun iktar irrilassat jiġifieri ehh per eżempju ma' XXXX kont għamilt żmien jiena l-futboll ma tantx jogħġobni għamilt żmien kont jiena stess ngħidlu ejja mmorru nilgħabu logħba flimkien *just* biex nieħu l-komunikazzjoni miegħu għax naf li bil- futboll ħa nibbondjaw iktar tifhem? Jiġifieri tgħinek ukoll kif tmur mas-soċjetà, bħal ma għidtlek hija xi ħaga spiritwali u mhux fisikali. (Oscar)

Not only motivation but even the way you communicate with others. You are more relaxed, for example I used to attend Football with XXXX and for quite some time I never really liked the game. Then I myself used to ask him to go and play a game together just so we could communicate with each other because I know that I can bond through football. So this seminar helped you socially, as I told you, it is something spiritual not physical (Oscar)

Ma kontx niflaħ noqgħod nofs minuta hemm

I could never stand still for half a minute. It

hekk. Żgur għini inżid il-paċenzja u anke dat-tip ta' seminars għinuni nikkalma. (John)	surely helped to increase my patience and the seminars helped me calm down. (John)
Qabel biex naqtawha bejnietna jew konna nispiċċaw nagħtu...u hekk imma issa aktar ġejna għal kliem ħafna iktar...għadna nagħtu ta toħodnix ħażin. (Kieran)	Before we used to fight in order to settle an argument, but now we use words much more often. Don't misunderstand me, we still fight sometimes. (Kieran)

Narratives from the focus groups, testimonials and questionnaires clearly indicated that communication skills, social relationships and social interactions improved after the seminars.

Theme 4 – Managing Personal Emotions. Emotional regulation and appropriate emotional responses play a crucial role in important processes such as memory, perception and attention (Geller, 2005). Many of the emotional challenges that are faced by those with profiles of attention and learning challenges are the result of the frustrations and lack of understandings within their social environment (Burden, 2008; Burden & Burdett, 2005, 2007; Falzon & Camilleri, 2010; Ryan, 1994; Rustique-Forrester, 2002). Emotional regulation is a problem that we all face from time to time but certain profiles face difficulty as the result of neurological differences, lack of opportunities to practice social skills, sensory differences, processing differences and histories of negative experiences from ongoing rejection (Geller, 2005).

In the pre-seminar questionnaires, parents and youth noted that the main emotional challenges experienced by their children were anger, confusion and low mood. Kieran, Amy, Senan and Mario are described as having confused and mixed emotions. Kieran personally believed that his emotions affected him as the result of “puberty”. Senan's mother indicated that her son's emotions are “all over the place”. Similarly Mario's mother reported that he tended to be “confused” and Mario himself

reported feeling down “once in a while”. Noel, Kieran and Amy reported patterns of uncontrolled anger. As discussed earlier Amy's relationship with her brother was quite unhealthy, one of the comments her mother made was “she is unable to show him any emotions”. Noel mother reported that: “When something goes wrong he immediately loses his temper and starts shouting or throwing the objects that are not working....He knows that he's doing the wrong thing but that is his first reaction”.

Participants noted that after the seminars they noted more control over their behaviour:

<p>Apparti, tajt daqsxejn sforz iktar, imma bħal ma għidtlek l-istress tiegħi beda jġi iktar ikkontrollat qed tifhem, u qiegħed iktar kalm u hekk. (Oscar)</p>	<p>Besides putting in more effort, as I said before I started managing my stress. I understood my stress and now I am much calmer. (Oscar)</p>
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Further, Kieran reported feeling better “a little bit happier than I was before”. John felt more “relaxed” and his attitude was “less angry” and he experienced less “arguments” following the seminars. His mother also noted that his “anger calmed down”. Amy felt that her feelings had changed “I was trying to keep calm and patient” and after the seminars she was left feeling “calmer”. Noel's mother felt that although he had made improvements he still needed to “work on controlling negative emotion”. Senan's mother described his behaviour as still very challenging; however she was able to highlight changes that have occurred. The extent of the behaviours has lessened “now he doesn't hurt children much anymore - only sometimes but this is a good, great change for me”.

Theme 5 -Academic achievement and performance. Academic self-concept (ASC) refers to individuals' views and perceptions of their ability in the academic sphere (Niehaus & Adelson, 2013; Polychroni, Koukoura, & Anagnostou, 2006). One of the

major difficulties that the participants faced was in relation to school and academic achievement (e.g. Bender, 2004; Loe, & Feldman, 2007; Shaywitz, 1998). The 'Big-fish-little-pond effect' model (Marsh, 1987) explains that the ASC is influenced by the social comparison that person engages in. Marsh and Mara (2008), show that ACS is highly influenced by the academic achievement of peers and negatively correlated to the academic achievement of their peers. This is because dyslexic persons can feel at a disadvantage to their counterparts and leads to a negative ASC. Burden (2008) states that "in a society such as ours, where literacy is a highly valued skill or commodity, a perceived inability to acquire that skill is highly likely to have a negative effect upon any individual's conception of themselves as competent" (p. 188-189). Further, Burden states that when one has a negative ASC, one has a tendency to attribute academic failure to one's abilities rather than to other factors. Zeleke (2004) meta-analysis reveals that 89% of studies conclude that children with dyslexia possess a lower ASC. meta-analysis on academic Self-Concept.

Likewise, participants and their parents referred to lack of concentration, poor memory skills, specific subject related difficulties, difficulties with completing homework and a lack of attention. Noel's mother was particularly concerned about his "short attention span which was affecting school" she highlighted that "during lessons he lacks attention especially if the subject is not of any interest to him". His mother highlighted problems with homework and a specific difficulty with Math: "for him the calculator can help him and it's enough". He completes his homework in ten minutes at the most and "when he knows he has a lot of homework he starts panicking that he doesn't know how to do the HW. Although Kieran had initially enjoyed the experience of going to school his mother highlighted that this has changed recently "when he

started school [he] was very interested but after the family therapy things are getting worse again". Kieran's difficulties lie in English and Maths. He said his achievement is "bad [and he would] love to improve". His mother indicates that in general his concentration is good but "when it comes to reading he loses concentration". Liam's mother indicated specific difficulties with reading and writing and that he is "unable to do homework by himself.....Amy she is very good in writing and so her favourite subjects are English and Maltese", however her difficulties lie in maths which she "hates". Her mother explained that she "does not understand the concept of it although she is highly intelligent, she is getting worse results every year that goes by since she believes that she is good enough and does not want to study in any way even refusing any rewarding attempts".

In terms of academia participants reported a marked improvement in all areas throughout the seminars. In between sessions there were noted improvements – "Noel has improved a lot in all the lessons". Senan's mother reports that the situation at school has improved. He is "much better at school". Amy also made progress, she noted that she "understands things more easily and can work faster" feeling more "concentrated". Noel's mother noted that her son is paying more attention. There has been an improvement academically "from this year every teacher gave me positive feedback that he has improved in his work and participating more during lessons". His concentration needs more work but has improved and his memory has shown a lot of improvement "especially during class".

John was trying to concentrate more in class utilising the techniques learned in the sessions, "he is trying to sit properly to understand more". He also exhibited

improved memory and his mother felt that he had improved overall in terms of his development. Nathan noted that “Sifu helps me pay more attention during lessons. Some of the participants demonstrated marked increases in academic achievement. Amy’s maths skills improved immensely “now she understands the maths concepts....it is astonishing the way she now works [out] maths problems she will ask for guidance but is not stubborn to get help”. During the focus groups some of the long term effects of the sessions were shared:

<p>Is-sena l-oħra <i>Physics</i> minn 58 dis-sena tellajtu 81, <i>Biology</i> minn 58 tellajtu 85... it-talks kollha insejnihom imma fis-sens li l-affarjiet mhux ħa tgħid eżempju affettwawk u tarhom jaffettwawk eżempju jien naf il gimgħa d-dieħla ngħid “Il-istra kemm nbdilt u hekk; iktar matul iż-żmien taraha. Per eżempju jien rajt li nistudja waħdi milli nistenna l-ommi tgħidli studja għax naf li jien qed nagħmlu għalija. (Oscar) NB: <i>The actual marks for Physics and Biology changed from 50 to 85 and from 30 to 80 respectively.</i></p>	<p>Last year, My <i>Physics</i> mark was 58 and this year I increased the mark to 81, <i>Biology</i> it was 58 and I increased it to 85... We may have forgotten the content of the talks but the experiences are still affecting us. For example next week I may say: “My goodness how much I have changed”. You will see the difference more as time goes by. For example I have seen myself able to study alone, not needing to wait for my mother to tell me to go and study because I know that I am doing it for my own good. (Oscar)</p>
<p>ma nbidillix il-qari tiegħi .. imma qisu dak matul iż-żmien spiċċa nbidel, ma' l-ewwel <i>seminar</i> ma nbidilx...bil Malti.....qabel <i>English</i> kont kollox fuq is-60s kont inġib, issa fuq l-80's. (Mario)</p>	<p>My reading ability has not changed but whereas I did not see any changes after the first seminar, as time passed I saw a difference in my <i>English</i> mark –from the 60s but now it is in the 80s. (Mario)</p>
<p>Jekk għandek problema biex tistudja, problema biex tikkonċentra, tgħinek. Nista' ngħidlek jien għax jiena problema biex niffoka u hekk. Bil-fors irrid nipprova niffa' rasi hemm... irrid naqta' kollox milli nagħmel u tgħinek ħafna. Ma nafx eżatt kif nispjega, però, tgħinek. Plus li tgħinek ħafna wkoll jekk temmen eżempju jekk int ma ħassejtx dan. Hawn rajtha bla sens il-ħaga għax taf li inti rnexxielek allura ma tagħtix kas. (Kieran)</p>	<p>If you have difficulties to study, to concentrate this helps you. I can tell you that I had concentration challenges. But now I know I have to concentrate I have to unfocus everything else and this helps you a lot. I cannot explain to you exactly what we did but it helped. Further, it helps you a lot if you believe that it will work because if you do not you will see the experience as nonsensical and then not apply yourself. (Kieran)</p>

Theme 6 - Relaxation and Focusing Techniques Exercises. Youth and parents noted that throughout the seminars, youth were given an opportunity to learn new strategies and techniques which helped them improve behaviour management and concentration. Parents, youth and educators reported that these techniques really helped the youth focus better, maintain a state of calm and also helped them manage and understand their emotions and behaviour:

L-iktar li nagħmlu <i>relaxation</i> u dan nikkalmaw it-tempra u biex ikollna <i>communication</i> aħjar. (Liam)	we do mostly relaxation and this calms down our temper and to do better communication (Liam)
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Kieran was asked about changes in himself and he replied “my mind is clearer. I can see something more different”. Specific reference was made to four techniques which participants still use periodically: (1) The ‘Lotus Position’, (2) The ‘Open Position’, (3) ‘Visualisation’ and (4) ‘Hand Rubbing’. These techniques are described in detail in Appendix H, and fall within the YiXue practice (Yi Qi Zhi Neng Bao, 2012).

The techniques discussed by the youth and their parents, which will be elaborated on below, find their origins in Eastern Philosophies. The Wei Ling Yi methods are specifically based on Chinese philosophy and YiXue Culture which take a holistic approach focusing on the balance between Yin and Yang and the movement of Qi (Yi Qi Zhi Neng Bao, 2012). Yin refers to the intrinsic, internal processes at an individual level, while Yang refers to the extrinsic processes that impact upon the individual (Yi Qi Zhi Neng Bao, 2012). These holistic concepts are similar in nature to the holistic approach taken to wellness in counselling theories. The contemporary wellness movement which was founded by Dr Halbert Dunn (Fetter & Koch, 2009; Hattie et al., 2004), describes wellness as a holistic concept of health, since our perceptions of the outer world are

inextricably linked with the concepts and emotions fixed in our minds (Dunn, 1959).

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory (EST), which is utilised extensively in counselling, posits that all human growth and development is affected by many factors at multiple internal and external levels (Crobsy et al., 2011).

In the context of the YEP, whose specific focus is on learning and growth, Yin represents individual purpose, potential, and uniqueness and Yang represents the learning environment, in terms of access, equity and availability of education (Yi Qi Zhi Neng Bao, 2012).

It must be noted that each of the techniques utilised in the YEP have been specifically developed by Master Yei Ling Yi, and although they are similar to eastern philosophies in their philosophical underpinnings and pedagogies, they are however intrinsically different. The youth more often than not could not pinpoint in detail what exactly it is that Wei Ling Yi did to help them feel better. Therefore, reference will be made to similar techniques in order to give grounding to their perceptions. Participants did however refer to a positive effect on three levels (a) learning and performance (b) behaviour control, attention and concentration (c) solidarity and support with and from each other.

<p>ma nafx eżatt nfiehem. Eżempju inti din ħa tħossha iktar meta inti ħa tkun hemm iktar... meta iktar tesperjenzha tifhem iktar x'inh u jġiri. (Oscar)</p>	<p>It is difficult for me to explain. You will feel it more when you are there...the more you experience it the more you understand what is happening. (Oscar)</p>
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Meditation. The practice of meditation involves focusing on an image or a sound, or even your own breathing, which effectively "exercises" the focusing part of your brain (DeGraff, 2012). The youth referred to the positive effects of the meditation employed in the programme, making specific reference to two techniques: the 'Lotus Position' and

the 'Open Position'. Oscar explained that the 'Open position' really helped him concentrate and calm down. Kieran felt that the techniques were very beneficial stating that they "really worked". He felt meditation was relaxing "but I didn't want to stay for that long". Amy felt "restored" after the meditation, while John noted that the meditation helped him to "stay focused". Mario felt that meditation was "very helpful" as it helped him to feel "relaxed and better". However, some participants did not find the exercises beneficial, Noel noted that he found the mediation difficult saying "I don't like lotus" and he did not foresee himself using the techniques in the future.

The Lotus Position and the Open Position. The 'lotus position' and 'open position' are specific techniques that have been developed by Master Wei Ling Yi for use in the context of the YEP. However the ideologies and philosophies have been adapted from similar techniques employed in Eastern Cultures for thousands of years. The use of meditation and breathing exercises are responsible for activating the part of the brain associated with short-term memory and attention span, whilst balancing poses increase concentration (Hariprasad, Arasappa, Varambally, Srinath & Gangadhar, 2013; Kauts & Sharma, 2009). Research suggests that such practices can help expand children's attention span and more specifically meditation has been found to thicken the parts of the brain responsible for decision making, attention, and memory (e.g. Sahasi, Mohan, Kacker, 1989; Milada, 1994; Pettinati, 2001).

The National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) have been investigating meditation in a range of areas including: relieving stress in caregivers for elderly patients with dementia; reducing the frequency and intensity of hot flashes in menopausal women; relieving symptoms of chronic back pain; relieving asthma symptoms and improving attention-related abilities (alerting, focusing, and

prioritising). In 2007 a NCCAM-funded review (NCCAM, 2008) of scientific literature concluded that whilst some evidence suggesting that meditation is associated with potentially beneficial health effects exists, the overall evidence was inconclusive and there is need for more rigorous research before firm conclusions can be drawn. We concur with this and consider this report as further body of evidence for such alternative non-traditional techniques.

Visualisation. *Another technique which was experienced during these seminars and which really helped the youth was the use of visualisation.*

<p>ma nafx kif kien jgħidilna eżatt...taghlaq għajnejk u tiftagħhom.. Jigifieri kien jgħidilna meta tiffukaw u tistrieħu toħroġlok it-<i>third eye</i>. (John)</p>	<p>I do not know the exact name for it – you close and open your eyes...he used to tell us that when we focus and are rested our third eye comes out. (John)</p>
<p>Jekk inti eżempju, jiena milux qgħdt fuq l-Arriva u peress li biex immur l-iskola rrid immur in-Naxxar u hekk bilfors irrid nipprova nirrilassa sewwa u kont qed ngħijja dan l-aħħar. Qabel ma bdew l-eżamijiet u spiċċaw kelli bilfors anke minħabba l-istress tal-eżamijiet kelli bilfors noqgħod quddiem u m qar għalaqt għajnejja u hekk.. U somehow għenitni ħafna għax mbagħad meta mort kelli moħħi ffukat fuq dak it-topic li kelli nagħmel u hekk u għenitni ħafna. (Kieran)</p>	<p>For example, a short time ago I was on the bus and because to go to school I had to go to Naxxar and so I really need to try and relax well and lately I used to get tired. Before examinations started and finished I had to do this relaxation to decrease examination stress. I needed to stay at the front and at least close my eyes. This really helped me a lot and I really focused on the topic at hand and this really helped me. (Kieran)</p>

The methods through which visualisation was employed are once again specific to the YEP. However, in western culture there is an abundance of research on cognition, learning and memory which mirrors the importance of visualisation both for helping one to relax and calm down and for memory storage and retrieval (e.g. Amin, 2005; Ellis & Howard P, 2007; Van Wijk & Van de Wetering, 1999). In western culture this technique is referred to as Graphic Organisation of Information (Barnekow, 1998; Bromley, DeVitis, & Modlo, 1995; Buzan, 2010, 2013a,2013b;. Drapeau, 1998; Dunston, 1992; Johnson, 2000; Moline, 1995), and in a local context Buzan's (2013 a,b) Mind Maps, seems to be most

popular with educators. The use of visualisation as a tool for increased attention and memory function is supported in the literature which is flooded with the positive use of visualisation for relaxation, better performance and storage and retrieval of memory (e.g. Amin, 2005; Ellis & Howard P, 2007; Van Wijk & Van de Wetering, 1999).

Rubbing of hands. Participants referred to the positive effect of the rubbing of hands, even though they noted that they did not know how it worked:

Mbagħad hemm <i>rubbing of hands</i> li... u ovvjament jekk ha jgħidhomlok ħa tgħid bla sens ghax inti trid tesperjenzaha biex tifhimha. Biex tiriġlassa, iva eħe imma ma tantx tista' tfehma, hijama tistax tifhimhom x'inhija. (Mario)	Then there was the rubbing of hands, and obviously when you hear him talking about it you think that it is nonsense. But you really need to experience it to understand... to relax, yes but you really cannot understand what it is and cannot explain it well. (Mario)
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Mario noted that it works because:

Lili kif spjegatli, kienet qaltli għax aħna f' ġisimna [hemm] nervituri u nervituri f' ċertu postijiet jistgħu jaffettwaw postijiet oħra. Eżempju hawn min kieku wegga' <i>nerve</i> hawnhekk jibda' juggħu dahru. (Mario)	She had told me that we have a lot of nerves in our body and nerves in certain places can affect other parts of the body. For example, you can hurt a nerve in a part of your body and your back starts hurting you. (Mario)
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As outlined in Appendix I, it would appear that the youth are in fact referring to the Yi Qi Mi Dai Gong. This technique involves the use of rice bags to stimulate acupuncture points of the body (Yi Qi Zhi Neng Bao, 2012). Once again this is a specific technique developed by Master Wei Ling Yi, however its philosophies appear to be echoed in the doctrines of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The Chinese discovered 100 meridian points which, when stimulated seem to produce a healing effect (Ortner, 2013). These Meridian points are central to the ideologies of several eastern treatments including acupuncture. Acupuncture has been used for the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of illness for over 3000 years (e.g. Lee, LaRiccia & Newberg, 2004a; 2004b; Ortner, 2013) and it has been successfully used for the treatment of stress, inflammation, anxiety, depression, insomnia and numerous other conditions that affect individual

wellbeing (e.g. Lee et al., 2004a; 2004b; Ortner, 2013). “Acupuncture has adverse effects, like any therapeutic approach. If it is used according to established safety rules and carefully at appropriate anatomic regions, it is a safe treatment method” (Ernst, Strzyz & Hagmeister, 2003, p. 93). In a context where Acupuncture uses needles, research available indicates very rare occasions of negative side effects such as infection. (Ernst et al., 2003). Further, hand-rubbing seems to fall within a subset of acupuncture – acupressure. Lee et al. (2004a) explains this as:

Several manipulative techniques are closely related to acupuncture. For example in acupressure either fingers or an instrument with a hard, ball-shaped head are used to stimulate acupuncture points.....Each of these techniques is believed to have advantages and disadvantages, although these typically have not been completely evaluated using a classic western research paradigm (p.14).

In recent years western and eastern practices have come together to form a hybrid approach, aimed at increasing healing, known as Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT). EFT is derived from TCM and is informed by modern psychological theory. Tapping is a needle-free technique which is derived from acupuncture. It has been proven to be effective for the management of pain relief, childhood traumas, weight loss, body image issues, and addressing fears and phobias, (Ortner, 2013). The benefits of tapping lie in its simplicity. It can be utilised by anyone and can be self-administered making it an empowering tool.

The benefits of these techniques seem to lie in their non-invasive nature. Often times they are less expensive and less time consuming than more traditional techniques and can be applied to a wide variety of situations (Ortner 2008).

Theme 7 – Logistics. Overall the general experience and feedback were positive and it would appear that the seminars were a success. There were however some points that were highlighted in terms of the logistics of the seminars. There were times in which some of the youth felt bored and there were some exercises that were not so easy for them to complete. However, in each of these cases the overall experience was noted to be positive.

Activities. Noel reported feeling “good and happy” having enjoyed the swimming, bonfire and games. He also highlighted that he found most of the exercises easy to do, however he did note that there were times that he felt bored. Similarly Kieran found some difficulty in terms of waiting around “I didn’t like sitting down without doing anything”. John found activities relaxing and easy. On the other hand due to his poor concentration Mario found some of the sessions “boring and difficult to concentrate in”. However, Mario did note that he enjoyed the group aspect and spending time with his friends. As the seminars progressed Mario didn’t find them as helpful sometimes feeling “bored and uninterested”. Amy also found difficulty with some aspects of the sessions she noted that she found some sessions very long and in particular “memorising” was difficult. She also found it hard to meditate as she was easily “distracted by others”.

Live- in schedule. *As noted in Theme 2, the youth criticised the non-live- in seminars and felt that the live- in seminar were more fruitful.*

Timing. Youth noted that at times sessions were too long. This was also commented upon by the parents.

Quantitative Results

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages; means and standard deviations) were used to measure the sample statistics while statistical inference was used to make generalisations about the population parameters. This was carried out in two ways; either by computing the 95% confidence intervals of the mean marks or by conducting hypotheses tests to assess significance between mean marks. Graphical displays were produced and statistical tests were carried out using the facilities of SPSS (version 22).

One of the tasks was to compare mean marks obtained by students in different subjects and in different year groups. Since the groups included more than two clusters of students, the One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare mean marks between the school subjects and also between the distinct years. This is a generalisation of the two independent sample t-test, which can only compare mean marks between two groups. The null hypothesis specifies that mean marks are comparable between the groups and is accepted if the p-value exceeds the 0.05 level of significance. The alternative hypothesis specifies that the mean marks differ significantly between the groups and is accepted if the p-value is less than the 0.05 criterion. The level of significance is the probability of making a Type I error. Reducing the level of significance to a lower value will decrease the probability of a Type I error but would increase the probability of a Type II error. For this reason a 0.05 level of significance was employed. For graphical representations, scatter plots were used to display relationships between two continuous variables; clustered bar graphs were used to display associations between two categorical variables and error bar graphs were used to display 95% confidence intervals for the actual mean marks for each

subject. The internet site <http://www.dimensionresearch.com/resources/calculators/ztest.html> was used to test the significance between two proportions by Z scores and corresponding p-values; while the sample size calculator (<http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>) was used to calculate the sample size given the confidence level, margin of error and population size. When one looks at the mean scores of each child, one does not note any significant differences. This is however most likely due to the low number of scores available to be statistically analysed. When we analysed each youth's marks for each subject by year, differences in mean marks were not found to be significant. Again, a plausible reason could be that the sample of participants is too small to get statistical significance. However, when one compiles all the scores across the years, significant difference are observed (Appendix J).

The Tukey post hoc test was used to compare mean marks between pairs of groups. The Tukey Post hoc test is essential to compare the overall mean marks between any pair of academic years. Each overall mean mark is computed by averaging the marks of all students in all subjects in a particular academic year. When several means are tested pairwise, the probability of finding one significant pair by chance alone increases rapidly with the number of pairs. It is inadvisable to compare each pair of means by using the Independent samples t-test because the t-statistic assumes that only one test will be performed, when in reality several tests are performed. To correct for multiple comparisons, SPSS provides several multiple comparison procedures to protect from identifying too many differences as significant when they are not. Two frequently used pairwise methods are the Bonferroni and Tukey post hoc tests. When the number of comparisons is large, the Tukey procedure may be

more sensitive in detecting differences; when the number of comparisons is small, the Bonferroni method may be more sensitive (Camilleri, 2006; Freund, 2001).

Table 4 shows that the overall mean mark in 2013/2014 was significantly lower than the corresponding mean marks in 2011/2012, 2012/2013 and 2014/2015.

Year	No of students	Mean	Std. Deviation
2008/2009	15	57.33	24.327
2009/2010	15	60.93	23.402
2010/2011	37	54.46	22.456
2011/2012	60	58.38	19.548
2012/2013	64	55.77	18.508
2013/2014	48	44.25	18.567
2014/2015	55	54.35	18.397

$F(6,287) = 2.879, p = 0.010$

The significant drop in the overall mean marks from 2012/2013 to 2013/2014 and the significant rise from 2013/2014 to 2014/2015 is clearly displayed in the error bar of Figure 1 below. The 95% confidence interval of the overall mean mark in 2013/2014 is disjoint from those of 2011/2012, 2012/2013 and 2014/2015.

It is as if the seminar yielded better long-term effect as right after the first seminar the marks generally decreased but then when the seminars took place for a second time, the students in general did better. This seems to imply that the students' performance was statistically better after the seminars. The significant drop in the overall mean marks from 2012/2013 to 2013/2014 and the significant rise from 2013/2014 to 2014/2015 is clearly displayed in the error bars of Figure 1. The 95% confidence of the overall mean mark in 2013/2014 is disjoint from those of 2011/2012, 2012/2013 and 2014/2015.

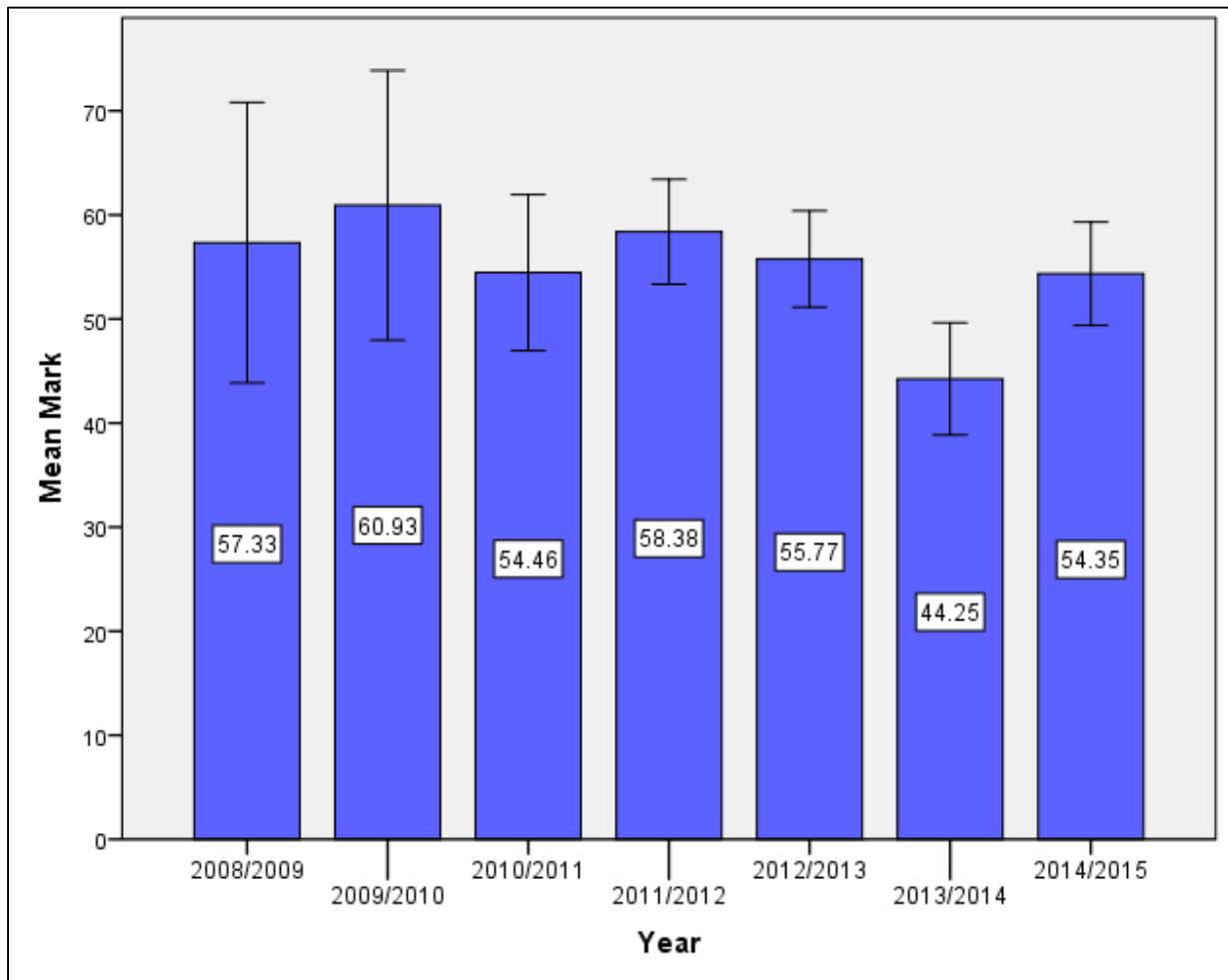


Figure 1. Mean Marks across Years

Appendix I depicts the individual difference in mean scores across years for each of the participants.

Reflection

In light of the seven themes that emerged from this study and the statistical analysis it can be concluded that the YEP is comprised of a comprehensive programme which focuses on individual growth and learning within the context of the lived environment. The focus of the programme would appear to be based on the values of empowerment, through personal healing and growth. If one refers to practices common in the Western world, one can conclude that YEP shares its values with the

fields of psychology and counselling and fall within the realm of what Passarelli (2008) refers to as mind-body medicine. Mind-body methods and interventions utilise the mind to bring about change in the body.

The overall positive effects which were voiced by the participants can also be found in research in other contexts where similar philosophies and pedagogies have been utilised. Humphrey, Lendrum, Barlow and Wigelsworth (2013) report on an evaluation of a programme called Achievement for All (AfA) that was designed to improve outcomes for students with SpLD using a number of interventions including academic assessment, tracking and intervention, structured conversations with parents, and provision to improve wider outcomes such as behaviour and positive relationships. Their impact analysis evidences that AfA, carried out with over 4000 participants, had a significant impact.

Trout, Lienemann, Reid and Epstein (2007) carried out a review of 41 studies on the impact of non-medication interventions of students with ADHD. They note that a broad range of traditional and non-traditional interventions have been used to improve students' academic outcomes, yet systematic lines of research were clearly missing from this study. They stressed that although there is some indication of positive effect, there is significant limitations in the literature which lead them to be able to elicit few conclusions about intervention effects and generalisation. They note that there is need for further systematic research to determine which intervention methods hold most promise. We feel that this paper has much to offer in terms of addressing the lacuna in research in the field.

Conclusion

The present study suggests that youth following YEP improved their attention, addressed their behaviour in positive ways, had more control and management over their emotions, improved concentration and thereby enhanced their wellbeing. Further, the statistical analysis of their examination results support this perception as their academic achievement improved significantly after their participation in the series of seminars. This suggests that the techniques learned need time to be processed in order for them to be adapted to one's learning profile and imply the need for more than one seminar over time.

All of the techniques that the youth referred to offer an alternative to more traditional and conventional approaches to SpLD and LD and the voices of the Youth and their parents and educators do not include any mention of possible harm. For example, handrubbing, which is an off-shoot of acupunctures is backed by a good safety record when compared to other standard methods (Lee et al., 2004). Further, eastern techniques such as meditation and the lotus position are considered to be safe for healthy people (NCCAM, 2007).

Recommendations

Recommendations yielded from the data include further implementation and research.

Implementation:

- The organisation of similar seminars including residential ones;
- The organisation of such seminars for parents and educators ;
- Participants attending such seminars must attend more than one seminar;

- The inclusion of YiXue methods within physical education, Personal and Social Development (PSD) and drama as there is opportunity for students to express themselves;
- The inclusion of awareness of such methods in Initial teacher training;
- Presentation of such data to policy makers and all possible stakeholders.
- Awareness and explanation of YiXue methods with all stakeholders

Research:

- Action research for YEP programmes in order to help build the required body of literature for such experiences;
- Comparison of effects of YEP programmes with other programmes (e.g. AfA);
- International research in a variety of cultural contexts;
- Explore the use of YEP with diverse populations.

Final Note

It must be noted that in our culture such Eastern non-traditional techniques are often viewed with scepticism because they are considered non-scientific. However, anecdotal evidence needs to be given its due weight. If such experiences were positive and non-harmful to this group of youth, should one not at least attempt to repeat such programmes? As Kieran noted:

*One needs to believe in what one is doing
in order to be on board...
You must not come to observe in a scientific manner,
but must come and see it in simply a human way
and go along with it.*

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Appendix A**Kai Zhi Neng Seminars July & Nov 2012
Parents' Testimonials****Noel (Profile of PDD)**

This is the change I've seen in [my son] Noel during this seminar: After the oppositional behaviour he had during the July seminar (Marsaxlokk), I lost hope. But when he started school again things started changing. He was participating more during lessons and paying more attention, he also started doing his homework hassle free.

During the IEP I got positive feedback from the educators which for me it gave me hope that after all the seminar was beneficial. Before we went to the last seminar (Suncrest) he was against it as he didn't want to talk to Sifu since he's Chinese and he couldn't understand him. But after we arrived and settled down Noel met Sifu at the restaurant and he was overjoyed that he met him again. In fact from then on he started following Sifu everywhere, he wanted to have breakfast, lunch and dinner with Sifu and Joyce, and he wouldn't wait for me.

Also he attended all the sessions that Sifu did with the kids and participated in all the practices and exercises. He bonded a lot with Sifu which for me it was a great improvement from the July seminar. He told a short story to the parents during one of our meetings with Sifu which he never did. At the colourful event he came out and showed his drawings and explained them too. This week Noel is doing Math homework without any complaints; his History teacher was asking them question about the topics they've done so far and he replied all the questions and Noel was very happy about it. He also had a test in Science and his LSA told me that he did all the test and concentrated very hard to do his best. It was a big change which for me was of great satisfaction and now I'm looking forward for the next seminar.

(Mother)

John (Profile of Dyslexia)

From last seminar in July [my son] John showed great improvement especially in school. His self-esteem increased. He started to do his homework on his own and believes that he can perform better. He increased his school achievement and shows more will in his attitude. His concentration span increased and he pays more attention. He shows development in his social competence and in the relationship to his parents. (Mother)

Norbert (Profile of PDD)

[My son] Norbert has shown huge improvement after the first Zhi Neng seminar compared to his starting position. His level of English and his perception of language increased. He starts to write with a biro and works more on his own. He is able to concentrate more. On the communication level he understands more. He is more attentive to communication and asks a lot of questions. After first time seminar he also tries hard to interact with his peers in his class. He improved his handwriting. He does his homework on his own. He is more concentrated during his Homework and his educators told us that he is more concentrated during his lessons as well.

(Father)

Corienne (Profile of ADhD/Oppositional Disorder)

I have seen some progress with the homework. She is trying to do it on her own without discussion. She is now coming home from school on the bus on her own. And even from the local centre she goes from the centre down to the church where she is in the choir. She phones me from there. On the whole I have seen progress. (Mother)

Dominick (Profile of PDD/non communicative) & Bjorn (Profile of PDD/Communicates)

These are some positive things that I saw in Dominick and especially Bjorn one and a half months after attending Sifu's seminar.

Before, Bjorn was a shy boy and closed in himself. After 2 weeks we saw a very good improvement, he talks to most of the people, plays with the other children and his communication improved a lot. He tries to talk more and makes some sentences as well. His concentration improved a lot too and he tries to do some handwriting as well, but at this stage he needs help to do his homework. He also tries to undress alone, before he did not make it.

Dominick did not show as much improvement, but he is a happy boy and his communication improved and tries to say some words.(Mother)

Kai Zhi Neng Seminars February 2014 Students' Testimonials

Student - Oscar Form 3 - Since the last YiXue seminar I have done great progress. I have become more self-confident, I am more focused during lessons. I understand situations better and I am more compassionate. I look forward to the next seminar as it is fun and interesting.

Student - Kieran Form 5 - Since I attended the seminars with Wei Ling Yi I notice a lot of change in my life. I am seeing school in another way. Instead of lack of studying, talking and arguing, now I am studying as hard as I can. I try to learn more. Because I also attend private lessons I tend to be tired and sleepy at school. But this does not stop me

from trying my best. During my “free” lessons I also go to some educators who offer extra lessons as revision. I am also doing all my homework regularly. I have been seeing so much difference in me. I became peaceful though I still have some anger issues. I was surprised to see such good marks in my annual exam results of Form 4. They were much higher than I expected. However Maths and Physics are still in a low grade, but I am not going to give up. All of my educators comment on my improvement and I am proud of that. All these courses, school and private lessons bring the man that I should have been a year ago. I feel a lot smarter and more confident and more organised. My mum is proud of me and of the progress I am doing and that is my goal to reach.

Student - John Form 3 - Il-korsijiet li attendejt ma' Wei Ling Yi għenuni mhux biss fl-iskola fejn għall-ewwel darba din-s-sena skolastika qed inġib marki għoljin hafna f'suġġetti bħall-Maths, Inġliż, Malti u Physics iżda ukoll mal-ħbieb. Permezz tal-eżercizzji li tgħallimt kiber il-kuraġġ fija biex insaqsi xi ħbieb noħrog magħhom. Fortunatament qaluli iva u gimghatejn wara morna ngħumu flimkien. Din is-sena skolastika bdejtha bit-tajjeb għax bdejtt immur bir-rotta ma' sħabi l-godda. Fil-brejk ikolli ma' min noqgħod mhux bħal qabel kont noqgħod waħdi u kont niddejjaq l-iskola għax kont bla ħbieb. Thank you lil kull min għinni nasal fejn wasalt.

Kai Zhi Neng Seminars February 2014 Professionals' Testimonials¹

Teacher of Physics of Kieran

Kieran has matured a lot since last year. He is motivated during the lessons and he always does his work. I am very pleased with the improvement he shows in concentration, focus, social skills and attitude towards his colleagues and at school.

LSA of Noel Form 3

Noel is a very friendly sweet and caring boy. He has a good knowledge on vehicles especially planes and cars. He is very energetic, talks endlessly and very moody. Most of the time he refuses to follow the lesson and prefers to do something else. His attention span is very short. He is unable to sit for a long period of time, writes carelessly with no spaces in between. His homework is always done. He is stubborn and tends to focus on a task when he is promised a reward. At the beginning of the scholastic year he had a tendency to open the lockers in the corridors. He would often repeat engine sounds. Throughout we saw a slow development but after these Christmas holidays I witnessed a huge improvement in Noel. He does not do these strange sounds any more or very

¹ Participants have consented to not change their names, so long as this is for educational or research purposes

very rarely and he does not bother with opening lockers any more. He no longer stays on his own in the yard playing with his toys which he would never share. This year he is spending more time playing and interacting in the yard. He integrates well with his classmates and peers. A positive thing that I appreciate in him is that he is developing a very caring and sensitive attitude towards his schoolmates. He still finds it difficult when it comes to rules and to voice his opinion in front of the whole class.

LSA Student of John Form 4

John is a cheerful, active and sensitive student with many interests. He is really supported at home. The relationship with his family is good and both parents are concerned about his progress in education. At the beginning of this scholastic year, there were several times where John's moods varied from time to time. When he used to be in a bad mood, he preferred staying on his own so that no one could interrupt him. He used to come to school without any enthusiasm for lessons or to succeed in tests. When prompted by the LSA to focus on a task, he never took any notice. His attention span was very short and he also suffers from dyslexia. Also, when educators gave homework, he never wrote it on the diary. The LSA needs to prompt him in doing so. However, throughout this scholastic year, I, being his LSA, am seeing certain progress in him.

Since December he started to show certain positive changes. He developed more confidence and self-worth. His attitude towards educators and students ameliorated a lot and he has also made several new friends which are not in the same class. During lessons, he started to pay more attention and is also participating frequently. He also asks questions when he does not understand. John obtained very good results in some tests he did, and there were also times where he got the highest mark of the class which I could say that it is a very good sign. Obtaining these results he felt very proud and built a lot of self-confidence. Furthermore, the relationship between John and I has improved very much. He started talking to me without any secrets and when he has something that disturbs him he discusses it with me.

Appendix B**YEP Programme Profile**

“The method is to allow the children to be happy.”

(Wei Ling Yi, Malta 2012)

Methods used in the field of learning

The Yi Qi Zhi Neng seminars: 'Zhi' stands for knowledge and method and 'Neng' stands for capabilities and latent potentials. Thus the aim of the Yi Qi Zhi Neng seminars is to develop the potentials of children and improving their performance at school.

The Wei Ling Yi method includes special exercises which vary from movement exercises for the body and exercises to enhance focus, brain work, social behaviour, communication, alertness, regulation of the heart, intuition, and good morals. These include performing sitting exercises, meditation, teaching without words, memory exercises, memorising for life and special methods for easy learning. These exercises are aimed to increase intelligence, lead to higher awareness and unfold latent potentials in students. In turn the children develop self-confidence and find inner rest and peace of mind.

Furthermore the Wei Ling Yi method generates an energy field based on the force of the YiQi during the seminars. The positive outcomes of the exercises are manifested as soon as this energy field is established. When the children reach a state of relaxation and well-being, positive information can be transmitted. It improves health, regulates the organs and harmonises the immune system. The level of self-esteem, intelligence and virtue can be raised. The more harmonious the Qi field is the better and the greater are the effects. The children learn to participate, concentrate on the teachings and internalize the registered knowledge, to save it and to repeat it.

Integration of students with impairment and special conditions

The strategies for the complete integration of children with disabilities and impairment lie in Master Wei Ling Yi's special abilities resulting from years of training and cultivation. It is through this method that he can help these children and also increase their learning potentials.

From the medical point of view the children's problems are often referred to as ADD, ADHD and the Asperger Syndrome etc. In Chinese one speaks of a special disturbance in the nerve information. It is a blockage in the functional units of nerves and meridians, the energy channels in our body. This blockage affects the true self of the child. If this blockage is serious it affects not only the physical or emotional levels within the child but also the psyche, which reveals itself in different kinds of disorders and syndromes.

Due to such blockages these children experience a lot of discomfort, emotional problems, headaches and difficulties in concentration. For this reason the first task is to

open the meridian system, so that the Qi can flow harmoniously. The Qi is the hidden power to raise the life energy level. By this, performance in school, social consciousness and the overall vitality can be regulated and improved.

These Zhi Neng seminars primarily aim to aid and strengthen the children's physical and emotional well-being. They release tension along meridians and vitalize the flow of life energy, the qi, and blood, activating self-healing powers, preventing illnesses and leading to physical healing.

The children are taught simple exercises which will help them clear their blockages in the meridian and the nervous systems, open up their hearts and also improve their concentration, focus and develop better social skills. Each child is expected to benefit according to his/her ability and needs.

Master Wei Ling Yi views the parents as the best educators for children. When parents and children attend the seminars simultaneously the parents learn exercises for the amelioration of their physical health and their emotional balance. A harmonious environment (Qi Field) can be generated where the children can develop positively. Master Wei Ling Yi is able to open the hearts of children and adults so that it becomes possible for them to develop their full potential and enhance a harmonious family life.

YiXue Culture Theory

YiXue presents itself as a new culture of life with a holistic approach in a modern world characterized by a technology and information based civilization. "Yi literally means **"one"**. It stands for the **"1"** of origin, the wholeness and is the basis of all being. Hence YiXue stands for the culture of the One.

Following a four step process of unblocking, balancing, becoming/being sincere and becoming/being holistic, the exercises aim to improve and support the health of the whole physical body.

As already mentioned, this four step process releases tension along the meridians and vitalizes the flow of the Qi, the life energy, and blood, activating self-healing powers, preventing illnesses and leading to physical healing. At a later stage, these processes also serve to open and strengthen the heart to stabilize the emotional balance. In a third stage they help develop the inner child so that the hidden potentials inside the participants can be awakened.

The Yi Qi Zhi Neng and its relation to YiXue

The Yi Qi Zhi Neng is the **Educational Science discipline** within the YiXue teaching system. Master Wei Ling Yi developed this new Educational Science in view of the particular demands children are confronted with in the present information era. It is taught in the **Yi Qi Zhi Neng seminars**. These seminars promote the evolvement of children's full potentials. These seminars aid the physical health, performance at school, promote a good social attitude and the development of consciousness.

According to Wei Ling Yi 'education' means to support children in the development of their capabilities so that they can achieve their aims. In order to do that, it is very important that body, heart and mind are healthy and in harmony with each other. On one hand the substantive well-being of the children and the offer of knowledge are important. Likewise is the development of emotional and mental competences. When children are encouraged in both areas they will become honest, respectful humans and can therefore take their place in life.

Wei Ling Yi's method and teaching is based on the work with the YiQi and the Qi. It includes as a holistic educational system the development of the entire personality of the child. It is designed towards the simultaneous development and regeneration of body, heart and mind. The health and stability of the child form the basis of the YiXue education. They are strengthened through specific exercises and energy work. The children's life energy increases, and both cerebral hemispheres get activated. Moral standards and virtuous behaviour are encouraged and developed; vitality, the joie de vivre and self-esteem increase while health improves. The seminars also raise the parents and children's awareness of how they can work together with the Qi, the life-energy.

"The development of latent potentials enhances human wisdom and is the best way for studying new educational methods." Wei Ling Yi

The impact of YiXue on today`s educational system

Education has stepped into a period of transition. Current reference systems are dissolving and new reference systems with modern methods are required in order to respond and react appropriately to the challenges of global change.

The YiXue Educational Science opens a new perspective on education in the future. It offers a totally new approach in the field of learning, in order to contribute to the development of a modern education and improve "school and teaching". The development of virtue, good health and wisdom represents the central aspect in this YiXue educational system, different to the performance concept that still forms the basis of many regular school systems.

If we see the children in their totality in addition to developing a healthy body and getting a good education, having access to their intuition and unrealized talents, they will become upright individuals and will be able to fulfil their aims and visions. The children develop a firm character as well as a keener and merciful mind.

In this way the educational system will yield better results in performance, which will be healing for the individual, parents, families, schools and society in general and eventually the world in which they live. Thus the YiQi Zhi Neng method could bring about potentially far-reaching implications with regard to the progress of educational reference systems.

Appendix C**Profile of Master Wei Ling Yi**

Grand Master Wei Ling Yi comes from a distinguished Chinese family which has been cultivating healing techniques for generations. His mother Bai Zi was his most important teacher and she instructed him since his earliest childhood on the basis of the guiding principle: „Virtue (De) is the mother of Gong (abilities)“. Virtue means a pure heart and a sincere mind.

In 1993, Wei Ling Yi founded the first International Qigong University in China, of which he was also the Principal. The World Qigong Head Office Association elected him President and since 1995 he has been teaching in Europe and in the USA. As the President of the “World Qigong Congress” he contributes significantly to the exchange and fusion of eastern knowledge and western sciences.

For more than fifteen years Grand Master Wei Ling has been delivering teachings and knowledge in seminars and courses of the Lotus Academy in German cities including Berlin, Munich, Bremen, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Kiel, Freiburg amongst others as well as in Malta, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden as well as in the USA. For the past twenty years Master Wei Ling Yi has also been researching the YiXue educational methods.

In the year 2010 Master Wei Ling Yi founded the YiXue-Education Centre near Dresden, Germany. Most of the YiXue special courses for prevention of illness, healing, mental, spiritual and physical well-being as well as for the elevation of the spiritual and intellectual potentials are held at this centre.

Appendix D**Guiding Questions for Youth, Parents and Educators Interview guiding questions for the Youth (English)****Interview guiding questions for the Youth**

1. Can you explain what you learnt during these seminars?
2. How have the seminars affected you?
3. Describe aspects of your life which have benefitted from these seminars, Why and how?
4. Describe aspects of your life which have not benefitted from these seminars, why and how?
5. Describe aspects of your life which have not changed after your experience at these seminars, Why and how?
6. Would you recommend these seminars to others? Why?

Interview guiding questions for the Parents

1. How have the seminars affected you as parents?
2. Describe aspects of your life which have benefitted from these seminars, Why and how?
3. Describe aspects of your life which have not benefitted from these seminars, why and how?
4. Describe aspects of your life which have not changed after your experience at these seminars, why and how?
5. Describe aspects of your child's life which have benefitted from these seminars, why and how?
6. Describe aspects of your child's life which have not benefitted from these seminars, why and how?
7. Describe aspects of your child's life which have not changed after your experience at these seminars, why and how?
8. Would you recommend these seminars to others? Why?

Interview guiding questions for the Professionals

1. Have you seen any changes in your pupils following these seminars? How?
2. What has not changed in your pupils following these seminars? How?
3. Describe how you have benefitted from these seminars why and how?

4. Describe have you not benefitted from these seminars Why and how?
5. Would you recommend these seminars to others? Why?

Guiding Questions for Youth, Parents and Educators Interview guiding questions for the Youth (Maltese)

Interview guiding questions for the Youth

1. Tista' tispjega x'tgħallimt f' dawn is-seminars?
2. Kif affettwawk dawn is-seminars?
3. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajtek li bbenefikaw minn dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
4. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajtek li ma bbenefikawx minn dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
5. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajtek li ma nbidlux wara dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
6. Tirrikmanda s-seminars lil ħaddieħor? Għaliex?

Interview guiding questions for the Parents

1. Kif affettwawk dawn is-seminars bħala ġenituri?
2. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajtek li bbenefikaw minn dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
3. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajtek li ma bbenefikawx minn dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
4. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajtek li ma nbidlux wara dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
5. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajjet it-tifel/tifla tiegħek li bbenefikaw minn dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
6. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajjet it-tifel/tifla tiegħek li ma bbenefikaw minn dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
7. Iddiskrivi aspetti ta' ħajjet it-tifel/tifla tiegħek li na nbidlux wara dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
8. Tirrikmanda s-seminars lil ħaddieħor? Għaliex?
- 9.

Interview guiding questions for the Professionals

1. Rajt xi bidliet fl-istudenti tiegħek wara dawn is-seminars? Kif?
2. X'ma nbidilx fl-istudenti tiegħek wara dawn is-seminars? Kif?
3. Iddiskrivi kif ibbbenefikajt minn dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?

4. Iddiskrivi kif mabbbenefikajtx minn dawn is-seminars. Għaliex u kif?
5. Tirrikmanda s-seminars lil haddieħor? Għaliex?

Appendix E**Circular to parents of students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD/LD)**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The Yi Xue Life Cultivation Malta Association is presenting a programme for students with SpLD/LD between 2014 and 2016 in Malta. This method, introduced by Wei Ling Yi and his Teaching Team based in Nossen, Germany, aims to enhance students' potentials and abilities for learning. It is suitable for students of all ages, origins and religions, abilities and challenges. Furthermore, in collaboration with the Department of Counselling within the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta, and the Ministry for Education and Employment through its directorates, this programme will also be researched.

This Programme is called the YiXue Education Programme (YEP) and consists of five live-in seminars of four to five days each. During each seminar students have to be accompanied by at least one of their parents/guardian. The seminars will include separate workshops for students and for parents as well as for both together. For this Research Project 20 to 25 students with a profile of SpLD attending both upper primary and secondary levels (ages 10-16) may apply.

All parents and students interested are invited to attend an information meeting on at _____. Students will be selected on the basis of how willing they and their parents are to participate, on their commitment to attend all of the five live-in seminars, and at least one parents'/guardians' commitment to support them throughout the time-frame of the project in order to enable the researchers to measure precisely the effect of the seminar experience. Participation in this project requires continuous support of the parents, and regular practice of exercises taught during the seminars, as well as attendance to monthly follow up meetings.

The procedure also includes a psycho-educational assessment at the start and at the end of the five seminars. The final selection of students will be carried out by the research team, taking into consideration the research framework and the dynamics of the group. Children who do not fit within the criteria set will not be selected. If the amount of applicants exceeds the number required, students shall be chosen by a ballot. In the case of non-participating students all personal documentation shall be returned to them. All students' personal data will be confidentially kept by the Association and will be made available only to the professionals involved in the Research. Likewise, all audio and audio-visual interview recordings will be confidentially handled.

Those interested in participating have to provide the following documentation during the introductory meeting

1. The Students' assessment reports (By a psychologist or an SpLD Specialist)
2. A photo of both the student and the accompanying parent-s/guardian-s.

If interested kindly contact the Project Co-ordinator, Ms Josette Ciappara on 79704577 or via e-mail on josetteciappara7@gmail.com.

Joseph Agius
President
Yi Xue Life Cultivation Malta Association

Josette Ciappara
Vice-President
Yi Xue Life Cultivation Malta Association

Date: _____

Appendix F

Ċirkulari lill-Ġenituri ta' studenti b'diffikultajiet speċifiċi fit-tagħlim (SpLD/LD)

Għeżież Ġenituri/Kustodji,

Il-Yi Xue Life Cultivation Malta Association qed torganizza Proġett ta` Ricerka għal tfal b'diffikultajiet speċifiċi fit-tagħlim, jigifieri studenti li qed jesperjenzaw SpLD/LD, fil-perjodu mill-2014 sal-2016, u li qegħdin hawn Malta.

Dan il-Proġett ta` Ricerka, imsejjaħ Yi Xue Education Programme (YEP), li għandu s-sapport tal-awtoritajiet edukattivi, kemm bħala Ministeru, kif ukoll bħala Dipartimenti, ser isir bil-kollaborazzjoni tad-Dipartiment tal-Counselling li jiffirma parti mill-Fakultà għat-Tisħiħ tas-Socjetà għal dik li hi ricerka.

Il-Proġett ser ikun imqassam f`hames seminars ta` bejn erba' jew hamest ijiem kull wiehed. Matul dawn is-seminars l-istudent/studenta jridu jkunu akkompanjati minn tal-anqas wiehed mill-ġenituri jew min jiehu hsiebhom. Kull seminar ser ikun fuq bażi ta` "live-in" u jinkludi workshops għall-istudenti magħżula u separatament, għall-ġenituri tagħhom, kif ukoll, sessjonijiet għall-istudenti u l-ġenituri flimkien. Dan huwa metodu speċjali introdott minn Wei Ling Yi, flimkien mat-tim speċjalizzat tiegħu. Dan it-tim hu bbażat f`Nossen il-Ġermanja. Il-metodu huwa ntiż biex jgħin studenti ta` etajiet, ħiliet, razez, reliġjonijiet, u orjentazzjoniet differenti. Il-Programm YEP ser ikun offrut għal bejn 20 u 25 studenti bi profil ta' SpLD, li jattendu l-iskola primarja jew sekondarja u li għandhom bejn l-10 u s-16-il sena.

Ġenituri/kustodji u studenti nteressati li jkollhom aktar informazzjoni huma mistiedna jattendu għal-laqgħa li ser issir nhar il - ġewwa

Il-kriterji tal-għażla jinkludu a) kemm huma lesti bħala ġenituri u uliedhom li jipparteċipaw f`dawn is-seminars; b) kemm huma lesti li jattendu l-hames seminars kollha u ċ) l-impenn ta` mill-inqas wiehed mill-ġenituri/kustodji li jibqa' jagħti s-sapport tiegħu/tagħha matul iż-żmien kollu tal-programm biex b`hekk it-tim tar-riċerka jkun jista` jagħmel il-valutazzjonijiet tiegħu dwar l-effett tat-taħriġ li jkun sar matul is-seminars. Għalhekk il-parteeċipazzjoni tirrikjedi li l-ġenitur/Kustodju irid jagħti s-sapport tiegħu u jipprattika mat-tifel jew tifla l-eżerċizzji li jkunu tgħallmu fis-seminars, kif ukoll li jieħdu/jehodha għall- "follow-up meetings" ta` kull xahar li jsiru bejn seminar u ieħor.

Il-proċedura tinkludi wkoll assessjar psiko-edukattiv fil-bidu u fl-aħħar tal-hames seminars. L-għażla finali tal-istudenti. L-għażla finali tal-istudenti sejra tkun f`idejn it-tim tar-riċerka. L-għażla tikkunsidra l-oġġettiv tar-riċerka u d-dinamika tal-grupp. Studenti li ma jilhqux l-kriterji tal-għażla, ma jiġux ikkunsidrati u dokumenti personali tagħhom jiġu rritornati minnufih. F`każ li jkun hemm aktar studenti milli rikjest, tigi użata l-polza.

Kull informazzjoni miġbura permezz ta` kwestjonarji, intervisti rikordjati b`modi awdjo, awdjoviziv jew kwalunkwe mod ieħor, ser tkun użata biss, b`mod kunfidenzjali u għall-iskop ta` riċerka edukattiva minn professjonisti involuti f`dan il-Proġett. Meta jiġi l-laqgħa hawn imsemmija, min hu nteressat irid iġib miegħu:

1. Assessment Report tal-istudent/studenta. (minn psikologu jew speċjalista tal-SpLD/LD)
2. Ritratt kemm tat-tifel/tifla kif ukoll tal-ġenitur/kustodju li se jakkumpanjahom.

Dawk interessati għandhom jinfurmaw lill-Project Co-ordinator Ms Josette Ciappara fuq 21825225 jew 79704577 jew b`e-mail fuq joseffeciappara7@gmail.com.

Appendix G

YiXue Educational Programme (YEP)
Consent Form of parents/guardians (One Consent Form per child)

I/we hereby agree that my/our
 child _____ under my/our custody
 and I/we

_____ as
 the parent/s/guardian/s participate in the YEP. I understand that this means that we have to attend five live-in seminars, do the necessary exercises between seminars as agreed upon during the programme, regularly and continuously, and attend monthly follow-up meetings. I/we am aware that this programme's effectiveness is being researched and that we will be participants in this research. I/we are aware that this involves observations, interviews, focus groups and questionnaires, as well as audio and video recordings. I/we are also aware that our/my child will have a psycho-educational assessment at the start and at the end of the five seminars by a warranted psychologist either provided by the research team, or by a warranted psychologist we ourselves suggest. I/we am aware that the team has a fixed price for the fee of this assessment and its report.

I/we agree to the procedure of the selection process of the participants:
 "Students will be selected by the research team, taking into consideration the selection criteria and the dynamics of the group. Children who do not fit within the the criteria set will not be selected. If the amount of applicants exceeds the number required, students shall be chosen by a ballot." I/We are aware that personal and research data will be confidentially kept by the research team and will be made available only to the professionals involved in the Research and YEP. Likewise, all audio and audio-visual recordings will be confidentially handled. I/we understand that my/our child's name will remain anonymous at all times throughout the research process. I/we understand that we can withdraw from the research at any moment without the need to provide an explanation. None of our data will then be used in the research. I/We confirm that we have attended the initial information meeting and that we will be sending the questionnaire that needs to be filled in by the school to Ms Josette Ciappara.

Name of Student

Signature

Name and ID of parent/ guardian

Signature

Name and ID of parent/ guardian

Signature

Date: _____

Appendix H**Basic Exercises of the YiXue Culture****Yi Qi Mi Dai Gong – The Rice Bag-Gong**

The Rice Bag is one of the basic methods of the YiXue Culture, with this patented Rice Bag we tap and stimulate acupuncture points of the body. This tapping technique opens any blocked energy channel as well as rids toxic substances.

The Sitting on the Lotus

This is a form of meditation for the receipt of the original cosmic energy, the Yi Qi. It calms the heart and the emotions.

The Lotus Standing

This basic exercise is to get rid of illness information and to build up energy. It regulates and protects the cardiovascular circulation.

Mantras

By Sound waves the “Empyrean chants” support the effects of the exercises and lead to a harmonious balance of Yin and Yang in humans and their environment.

Xiang Qi Fa

In traditional Chinese Medicine, the Fragrance-Gong corresponds to the medicinal properties of herbs. By continuous exercises one can receive the fragrances of nature which are beneficial and can be utilised for one's own health.

Appendix I

Table 5. Kieran Mean Scores across Years

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Form 2	11	44.73	16.00
Form 3	11	36.73	14.28
Form 4	13	38.23	15.97
Form 5	13	44.15	12.37

$F(3, 44) = 0.900, p = 0.449$

Table 6. Liam Mean Scores across Years

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Year 4	5	46.40	8.414
Year 5	6	53.33	4.803
Form 1	12	38.67	15.558

$F(2, 20) = 914, p = 0.078$

Table 7. Noel Mean Scores across Years

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Year 4	5	28.00	10.89
Year 5	5	38.40	12.90
Year 6	5	23.00	9.30
Form 1	11	54.82	21.39
Form 2	11	55.73	10.60
Form 3	10	25.60	13.46
Form 4	5	44.80	20.14

$F(6, 45) = 6.774, p < 0.001$

Table 8. Oscar Mean Scores across Years

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Year 5	5	84.20	11.48
Year 6	5	86.60	6.19
Form 1	11	71.82	12.99
Form 2	11	74.55	10.32
Form 4	13	73.54	8.28

$F(4, 40) = 2.802, p = 0.038$

Table 9. John Mean Scores across Years

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Year 5	5	72.80	13.918
Year 6	5	60.20	17.513
Form 1	11	56.64	14.299
Form 2	11	57.82	13.578
Form 3	12	45.17	17.087
Form 4	13	49.85	13.789
Form 5	13	49.85	16.471

$F(6, 63) = 2.565, p = 0.028$

Table 10. Mario Mean Scores across Years

Year	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Year 4	5	71.20	12.008
Year 6	5	70.40	11.950
Form 1	11	76.18	7.922
Form 2	11	70.64	11.439
Form 3	11	51.73	22.096
Form 4	12	58.08	10.816

$F(5, 49) = 4.841, p = 0.001$

Appendix J

Table 11. Difference across years

I) Year	(J) Year	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	P-value
2008/2009	2009/2010	-3.60	7.236	0.999
	2010/2011	2.87	6.066	0.999
	2011/2012	-1.05	5.721	1.000
	2012/2013	1.57	5.685	1.000
	2013/2014	13.08	5.862	0.282
2009/2010	2014/2015	2.99	5.772	0.999
	2008/2009	3.60	7.236	0.999
	2010/2011	6.47	6.066	0.937
	2011/2012	2.55	5.721	0.999
	2012/2013	5.17	5.685	0.971
2010/2011	2013/2014	16.68	5.862	0.070
	2014/2015	6.59	5.772	0.915
	2008/2009	-2.87	6.066	0.999
	2009/2010	-6.47	6.066	0.937
	2011/2012	-3.92	4.142	0.964
2011/2012	2012/2013	-1.31	4.093	1.000
	2013/2014	10.21	4.335	0.222
	2014/2015	0.11	4.214	1.000
	2008/2009	1.05	5.721	1.000
	2009/2010	-2.55	5.721	0.999
2012/2013	2010/2011	3.92	4.142	0.964
	2012/2013	2.62	3.561	0.990
	2013/2014	14.13	3.838	0.005
	2014/2015	4.04	3.699	0.930
	2008/2009	-1.57	5.685	1.000
2013/2014	2009/2010	-5.17	5.685	0.971
	2010/2011	1.31	4.093	1.000
	2011/2012	-2.62	3.561	0.990
	2013/2014	11.52	3.784	0.040
	2014/2015	1.42	3.644	1.000
2014/2015	2008/2009	-13.08	5.862	0.282
	2009/2010	-16.68	5.862	0.070
	2010/2011	-10.21	4.335	0.222
	2011/2012	-14.13	3.838	0.005
	2012/2013	-11.52	3.784	0.040
2014/2015	2014/2015	-10.09	3.320	0.041
	2008/2009	-2.99	5.772	0.999
	2009/2010	-6.59	5.772	0.915
	2010/2011	-0.11	4.214	1.000
	2011/2012	-4.04	3.699	0.930
2014/2015	2012/2013	-1.42	3.644	1.000
	2013/2014	10.09	3.320	0.041