EDUCATION 2000

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF MALTA**

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE EDUCATION DIVISION

- Teaching of Reading
- History Teaching
- Information Technology
- Assessment and the SEC
- Parents/Teachers
- English Language Teaching
- Pupil Profiling
- The use of OHP's
- Mathematics in Form II
- Educational Software Review
- M.Ed Theses
- Science Education
- Language Teaching
- Education Students' Opinions
- Teaching the Hearing Impaired
- Prison Education

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A message from the Minister

A big thank you to all those who have brought about this publication. I am particularly happy that the Faculty of Education and the Education Division are working together on this project.

I hope that this publication will celebrate examples of good practice in our schools. There is a lot to improve in our education system. However, I feel that we are not sufficiently aware of the commitment of our heads, assistant heads and teachers to give a future to our children.

Evarist Bartolo

Evarist Bartolo
Minister for Education and National Culture

Cover photo: *Andrea,* by 4th year honours communications student **CHRIS FARRUGIA**

EDITORIAL *Charles Mifsud*

Here we are at last with *Education 2000* which takes the place of **Education**. The main changes are that *Education 2000* is a teachers' journal of a practical nature published by the Faculty of Education in collaboration with the Education Division. It strives to present research knowledge which is readily accessible to practitioners. It recognises also the validity of practical knowledge which is generated by common sense and conscious speculation. We hope to achieve this by offering a wide range of short articles which cover a variety of issues and subjects at the various levels of the Maltese educational system. This issue features articles about the introduction of IT in our Primary schools, the teaching of reading in the early years, the teaching of various subjects at secondary level and tackles issues like pupil profiling, special needs, etc.

There is now widespread interest in how knowledge generated from research and practical experience might influence school and classroom practice. However, one needs to recognise that teachers work within complex personal, cultural and situational settings, which shape and constrain how knowledge is interpreted and generated. The big question is how research results can be made available to teachers. This could act as a means for changing their way of working in the classroom. Lack of appropriate staff development is sometimes blamed on academic language, inaccessible reports, or unmotivated in-service trainers. It is, therefore, important to find out how knowledge should be formulated in order to be well-received and used.

The reflective process

The reflective process is gradual. It sometimes leads to new actions; sometimes it legitimises what has already been carried out. People like research results that support their own positions and dislike those contrary to their own interests. The context or situation within which the teacher works is significant for the attitude expressed by teachers and their ability to develop and renew. Tradition provides teachers with a language and way of looking at the world, which, in effect limits their ability to innovate and to use a range of possible actions. However, teachers' reflection on their work eventually may lead to new ways of thinking. Teachers can be seen as practical reflective actors who develop greater awareness while practising their profession.

The general problems that teachers are forced to deal with in their work are due, in part, to the explicit and implicit contradictory nature of the goals of teaching, as well as to the material limitations that confront them. In addition, their problems are caused by the creation and shaping of new and different teaching technologies. In our government schools in particular there is a huge shortage of textbooks and teaching materials, and often what is available is unsuitable for both teachers and pupils. It is clear that the Government will have not only to give more support to maintaining school buildings, but assist in the supply of equipment and development of materials. There is a serious need to provide effective and efficient methods of tackling the backlog of untrained teachers. The use of various alternatives to training teachers needs to be identified and considered for implementation. There is a need to improve the quality of teacher education in such areas as curriculum and materials development, teacher assessment and mixed-ability teaching.

Reflection in action

The main aim of this journal is to support Maltese teachers who wish to reflect upon their teaching in a systematic fashion. We hope that this process will encourage them to share their experiences with other colleagues. The notion of reflective teaching stems from the Deweyian notion of 'reflective action' which he contrasted with 'routine action'.

'According to Dewey, routine action is guided by factors such as tradition, habit and authority and by institutional definitions and expectations. On the other hand, reflective action involves a willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal and development. It implies flexibility, rigorous analysis and social awareness.' (Pollard and Tann, 1991)

Collaboration is called for between teachers and others involved in the educational enterprise so that theory and practice develop from each other. The separation of academic and practical spheres of activity, which has existed for many years, has been wasteful and has resulted in many lost opportunities to improve the quality of educational provision and practice in Malta. Such a publication can open up a dialogue and initiate curiosity, but at the end of the day, it is the teacher concerned who must have the will to change.

Pollard, A. & Tann, S. (1991) *Reflective teaching in the Primary School,* Cassell, London

THE TEACHING OF READING

Gaby Privitera

The ability to read is an essential skill for all who live in societies where print can be seen ; that is, in most societies of the world. In everyday life, reading is vital for us to get around and understand where we live. At school, knowing how to read is the basic tool for all other academic learning. The child's ability or inability to read affects learning in all other school areas, such as: arithmetic, social studies, Maltese, English and science in the primary school. As Stones (1976) put it, "When a child becomes a fluent reader s/he is no longer directly dependent upon the teacher or other adults for language experience. Through reading s/he extends his/her knowledge of the physical world, of society, of human relationships, and of his/her cultural heritage."

So how does one go about teaching reading? Many people ask this question. However, the answer is not simple because there are many methods one can use and which method/s to adopt depends on a number of factors. Teaching reading methods depend on the person being taught and his/her mental ability, the age, the level one has reached and difficulties already encountered in trying to read and the learner's interest in books. As Hall (1976) suggests accordingly, "before any formal instruction in reading is begun, it is important that children develop a desire to read." This is called Reading Readiness.

Therefore, getting to know the child's likes and dislikes is fundamental and only books from within his/her areas of interest must be used. There would be no sense in giving a book of trees to a child who has no interest in them. This will only make the learner hate books even further.

Intervention study

For my intervention I chose to teach Paul, a ten-year old, energetic boy who liked cars and animals very much. I did my best and supplied him with a number of car books and Spot the dog story books (see list of childrens' books) with lots of colourful pictures and flaps to open and close whilst reading.

Apart from adapting the right book to the reader, another task is to establish the approximate level of reading competency reached by the individual. In other words, how far has the pupil progressed on the road to becoming a fluent reader?

For this purpose I based myself on Reason & Boote's (1984) approach which covers two aspects of learning, namely Visual Word Recognition (VWR) and Phonics. The term VWR refers to the reader's constantly increasing number of words recognised automatically at sight, while phonics is the global heading for the ability to work out the pronunciation of words from a knowledge of sound/symbol relationships. I chose this approach because I

Table 1 : Stages in Learning to Read

Stages	Visual Word Recognition	Phonics
I. Pre - Reading	a) Matches sight words. b) Matches letters. c) Points at letters or words on request.	a) ' I - Spy '. b) Auditory sound blending. c) Rhyming words. *PAUL: STAGE I/II*
II. Beginning to Read	Reads at least 100 words fluently from initial books of reading schemes. *PAUL: HIGH STAGE II*	Reads and spells : a) Single letter sounds b) Consonant - vowel - consonant words, e.g., cat.
III. Intermediate	Extensive sight vocabulary from the middle sections of reading schemes.	Reads and spells : a) Consonant blends. b) Consonant digraphs. c) Vowel digraphs. d) Silent ' e '.
IV. Basic Reading Skills Have Been Mastered.	Reads all commonly used words. Has completed reading schemes.	Reads and spells more advanced phonics : a) Silent initial letters. b) Longer word endings. c) Polysyllabic words.

(adapted from Reason & Boote, 1989).

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> **"There would be no sense in giving a book of trees to a child who has no interest in them. This will only make the learner hate books even further."**

felt it was systematic and organised in structure and so very simple to follow.

Table 1 (based on Reason & Boote's approach) presents a framework for assessment of reading competency and places the two main headings across the top of the page. These aspects of reading are then subdivided into four rough stages. The reason for having two separate headings is that a child may have developed one aspect at the expense of the other. There may be an over-reliance on phonics so that a higher stage, say Stage III, has been reached in the other area. Thus, the purpose of the assessment is to pinpoint the level reached by the child under each of the two main headings.

The skills to be acquired under the two main headings are summarised in Table 1.

Analysis

Using Reason & Boote's (1989) strategies, Paul proved to be at a high Stage II with regard to VWR, but was still stuck between Stage I and Stage II on a phonics level. He was able to recognise familiar/sight words from easy readers such as rat, gas, sat, wed, pig, six, on and dog. However, he was not a fluent reader in these either. Paul paused to sound out words which were not in his sight vocabulary, such as fen, dam, kin, lop, dun, clem, cram, trap and twig. He did not have an extensive enough vocabulary to enable him to be placed in Stage III but on the other hand he was well above the level for Stage I. He could match some letters, show me a word, and even most letters without hesitating.

However, he had more weaknesses, which was why he had not moved beyond Stage I. When he was asked to read out particular single letter sounds he was not always very confident and correct. He confused the letter m with n and b with d. Paul read lan instead of lam, and an instead of am. He found further difficulty in reading initial consonant blends that contained the letters m, n, b and d. For example, sm, sn, dr, and br. So, smog was read as snog, smot instead of snot, dred instead of bred, brip instead of drip. For final consonant blends ld, nd, mp, weld was read as welb, temb instead of tend, bump instead of dump. Nonetheless, Paul did not confuse the four letters m, n, b and d in sight words, namely end, and, land, bad, good, mad, dog and lend.

After detecting Paul's reading difficulties I immersed myself in the actual task of teaching reading.

As a qualitative piece of work it comprised thirty individual sessions of twenty minutes spread over a period of three months. The teaching methods I adopted were a mixture of phonics and paired/shared reading.

In other words, phonics refers to the method of recognising new words by relating a sound (phoneme) with the equivalent written symbol

> *"Shared reading involves hearing a story read aloud while the child focuses on the printed word. This technique provides children with the opportunity to enjoy any books which interest them even those which are too difficult."*

(grapheme). It emphasises the fact that words are made up of letters and that letters in various identifiable combinations symbolize sounds, either words or part of words. At the beginning, words would be monosyllabic to simplify the task for the child (Kirk, 1978, p.109). Later on, combinations of syllables and more complicated phonic rules which are essential for the composition of interesting material would be introduced. The number of these complicated rules and phonic irregularities need not be very great in the early stages but as the child's vocabulary grows then s/he can be introduced to more and more of these words. Eventually, when the child becomes really fluent, s/he will read words at a glance stopping only to analyse words that are unfamiliar (Stones, 1976, p.204).

The paired/shared techniques consist of the parent or helper and the child reading aloud from a book of the child's choice. They read in chorus and the helper does not stop to correct the child's mistakes. They continue to read together, the helper or child pointing at each word as it is read, even when the child can manage only a few words in the text. The helper adjusts the pace of reading according to the child.

Paired reading involves two sets of instruction. In the first, reading together, the parent and child read each word aloud together. If the child struggles or hesitates for more than five seconds with a particular word, the helper says the word, and the child repeats it. The second set of instructions is followed when the text has sections that are easy enough to be read independently. Then the child signals to the helper to remain quiet and reads alone until a difficult word is encountered. The helper again models the word for the child and they continue to read together until the child feels ready to read alone.

Shared reading involves hearing a story read aloud while the child focuses on the printed word. This technique provides children with the opportunity to enjoy any books

"Learning to read may be likened to climbing a mountain; there are several possible routes to the top."

which interest them even those which are too difficult. (Reason, 1989, p.109)

Teaching reading proved to be not only a laborious procedure, but also a time-consuming process (though not time-wasting!). Even though progress was not immediately felt, results were positive. Paul did improve especially on the phonics level. From a stage I level he progressed to a lower stage II level and this is because he started recognizing more letter sounds involving the letters **b** and **d**, **m** and **n**, and also managed to read consonant blends such as, **bl**, **br** and **dr**.

With regard to visual word recognition since Paul was already at a high stage II level, I do not think he can be placed at stage III. This is because his amount of vocabulary in his lexical store cannot be called 'extensive'.

The 'paired/shared' approach was fundamental to the boy in order to practise WITH words from his lexical store (i.e. words they have already come across) and to build-up this lexical/semantic store. Also, the 'whole-word', 'paired/shared' approach was vital in order to move the

child closer to 'real' reading. In real reading situations children are presented with books with paragraphs made up of words and sentences. After all, when we read we do not have words split into phonemes and onsets or rimes.

Research suggests that people assume that all children who are making steady progress will have reached a similar level in both columns (i.e. phonics and visual word recognition). However, as we have already observed this was not so with both cases. Paul whose phonic skills were weaker tended to rely excessively on guessing from the context or on waiting for me to supply the words he could not read.

As much of written English does not fit the phonic rules, I felt it was important to encourage flexible guesswork and I usually did this by pointing at the picture which related to the written word. In addition, immediate visual recognition of words was received by continued practice through paired/shared reading.

Limited projects roles

It must be made clear that children with reading difficulties will not suddenly make miraculous progress as a result of a short reading project, like the one I implemented over three months. Limited projects can be used as a starting point to harness resources but, in order to make lasting gains, the children will need to receive help over a longer period of time.

Learning to read may be likened to climbing a mountain; there are several possible routes to the top. Some learners need to take a slow and laborious route while others, more fortunate, can take the quickest one. Our task, as teachers or facilitators, is to guide the learner along the route which we think suits him/her best. We must do this by making the journey as natural and as enjoyable as possible and should aim to help him/her pick up reading without artificial drills whenever possible. I found the mixture of 'phonics' and 'paired/shared' methods to be successful in the improvement of reading for Paul.

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The children's books

The Hungry Puppy (Bitmax Books)
Hop on Pop by Dr. Seuss (Collins)
Cars - Do You Want to be My Friend? - The Very Hungry Caterpillar - Where's Spot? -Spot's Birthday Party - Spot's Baby Sister - Spot Goes to the Park - Spot's First Walk (Puffin Books)
Big Bad Barney Bear - Simpkin (Red Fox Books)
Little Lion (Brown Watson)

Creative history teaching
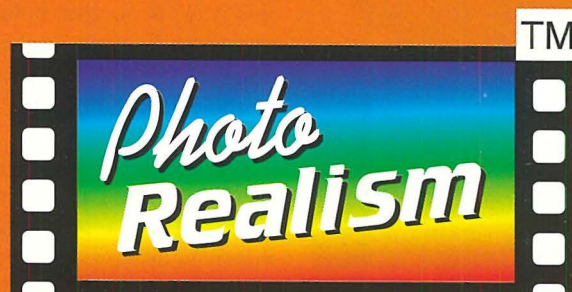
Going beyond historical facts

Yosanne Vella

> **"Should we be aiming for a detailed context full of factual knowledge, which might possibly contain all the past within one history syllabus, so as not to offend"**

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Introduction

There exist many, often divergent opinions on what should be taught in history, what should be included and what should be left out in the contents of a curriculum. For example in 1989 when the National Curriculum was under construction for the first time in Britain, history proved to be one of the most troublesome subjects. The selection of historical knowledge in the programmes of study was criticised of being culturally biased. On the one hand there were those who wanted 'pure' British history asserting British heritage and achievement, while others wished for a more multicultural curriculum emphasizing a pluralistic society. A debate which very soon became politicized and eagerly taken up by the media with such titles as 'Thatcher's Conquest on history in schools'[1] More recently, this time across the Atlantic, a set of new recommendations by the authors of National Standards for United States History triggered off a controversial debate on what students should know about the American past.[2] Apparently National Standards aims to promote the achievements of blacks, Native Americans and women while pressure groups from the right demand that emphasis should be returned to more traditional landmark events like for example Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and the Wright brothers.

Is history a "ready" product?

All this provides quite interesting reading and food for thought; however these arguments are based on the assumption that history is a 'ready product'. It assumes that history is the finished work of historians and for the history teachers and curriculum makers it is just a matter of pushing your favourite topics, for whatever reason, to the forefront of the school curriculum.

This is the traditional purpose of school history, where the main objective for a very long time has been the acquisition of a body of factual knowledge deemed necessary to enrich pupils' minds.

But should we be aiming for a detailed context full of factual knowledge, which might possibly contain all the past within one history syllabus, so as not to offend anyone? Is this even possible? Hardly. No matter how hard you try there will always be historical gaps, whole countries, people and events left out.

The nature of history

To find out the best methodological approach to teach any subject, in this case history, it is necessary to look at the nature of the subject. So first of all one must answer the question 'What is History?'.

The words 'history' and 'the past' are often used to mean one and the same thing, but there is one important distinction between 'the past', which embraces everything that has actually happened, and 'history' which chronicles, investigates, and explains the past. The past is the reality of what actually happened, history on the other hand is an intellectual debate. It is only an interpretation of the past. As Keith Jenkins says:"The past and history in fact float free of each other."[3] To illustrate this point it is enough to mention women's history. For a long time, women have been 'hidden from history', that is systematically excluded from most historians' accounts. And of course not just women but many other groups, people(s), social classes etc. have been omitted because they were not central to the current historical accounts.

Therefore, it would appear, that facts become historical facts when historians decide to make them so. Even when not expressing any judgments or opinions historians are selective by the very choice of the subject they have picked to work on. It is also the historians who decide in what order and context to place the facts and as every journalist knows, to influence opinion in one direction you merely have to select and arrange the appropriate facts. Historians are products of their own culture and society, and subject to their own prejudices and values. The questions historians ask are determined by questions of their society, reflecting the same apprehensions or optimism of the time. E.H.Carr was right when he said that to understand the history we must first understand the historians.[4]

These arguments might seem to lead to the extreme Post Modernist's view that no facts exist in history and there is no such thing as objectivity in history. But this is not true. Very few would argue against the existence of certain basic facts. Separate forms of evidence support these facts so that the whole fits together and a framework is built. There are historical facts but none of it means anything until the historian has gone to work on it. As E.H.Carr says, "To praise a historian for his accuracy is like praising an architect for using well-seasoned timber or properly mixed concrete in his building." [5]. Kitson Clark agrees, talking about factual knowledge, he says: "It is only the framework of fact on which

history can rest, it is not history. History to mean anything must be more than a rehearsal of facts, it must include an interpretation of facts."[6].

What the good historian does is rigorously check, compare and question all known facts and information about the topic he or she is researching.

Then the evaluation process starts, which includes interpreting evidence, explaining, attributing causes, criticism, tracing results and using the imagination.

And it leads not to 'the truth' - historians can come to different conclusions - but to a valid interpretation. In fact in history you can have a situation where different historians are offering various opposing theories on the same subject and they are all regarded by the historical community as perfectly acceptable and their theories are allowed to co-exist at the same time.

Teaching history in the classroom

The nature of history itself, makes it crucial to look at it as a mode of inquiry rather than accumulating knowledge. So if history is mainly concerned with giving valid interpretations, it can be argued that in history classrooms the focus should be on pupils gaining skills that help them to analyse and interpret historical material. If we limit history to merely handing over one fact after the other, we would be missing a key objective of history teaching. After all there is a limit to how much can be retained in one's memory and a large percentage of learned facts are in fact not retained, except perhaps in the mind of working historians. The situation with skills is different, once a skill is learned it can be reused for different situations in the future.

The main objective in history teaching should be skills rather than memorisation of facts. If pupils are to be made aware of the main characteristics of the discipline the classroom situation should create an active learning environment for the pupil, rather than one which presents the teacher as the giver of information.

Creative history teaching as advocated by 'New History' goes beyond mere skills required in analysing causes and effects, what is being suggested is that pupils at school, even at Primary level should be given historical sources and establish or 'discover' the facts for themselves. By historical sources we usually mean facsimile documentary materials but they can also be artifacts or authentic archival filmstrips. By using source materials we are in fact teaching pupils 'the structure of the subject' as expounded by the theories of J.S.Bruner.[7]

It takes years for a historian to become fully

trained in dealing with evidence and to ask school children to do the same might seem inappropriate. But the aim of making children handle evidence is not to turn them into historians.

By looking at and working with evidence the pupil is in no way doing any real historical research. After all when we ask pupils to do experiments in the school science laboratory we are not afraid that their work will hinder the development of science, nor do we expect secondary English essays to have great literary value. Similarly school children are doing history no injustice by handling primary evidence.

M.Palmer and G.R.Batho[8] give an interesting breakdown of skills when using historical evidence in the classroom, although they warn against trying to ensure that every skill is developed in one exercise, it is more important to choose documents of a content and format interesting to the class.

			A. Understanding the documents on
Skills and Abilities	1.	Comprehension	summarising content, und
	2.	Translation	from one form to another, information.
	3.	Selection	of a fact or piece of evider
	4.	Analysis	comparing and contrasting
			B. Applying external crite
	5.	Recognition	of a fact in a context diffe
	6.	Application	linking material with (a) own knowledge and e (b) modern phenomena an
			C. Skills which may utilise either interr depending on age a
	7.	Synthesis	selecting material from sev senting it in some commur
	8.	Inference	explaining problems in the parts of the evidence or to
	9.	Judgment	identifying reliability, bias ther by reference to the co the writer or source of evid

Creative teaching as advocated by 'New History' is not without its critics. It has been accused of putting emphasis on 'meaningless' skills at the cost of factual knowledge. For example Stewart Deuchar accuses 'New History' as "presenting children with little or no historical knowledge one result being a dramatic fall in the amount of history actually taught in schools".[9]

It is true that there were times when teachers in England in their eagerness to promote skills totally abandoned content, and pupils began to be presented with source materials from any historical period without any historical information given at all. One should try to avoid such an extreme rendering of 'New History', after all actual historians never work

"**To praise a historian for his accuracy is like praising an architect for using well-seasoned timber or properly mixed concrete in his building.**"

"...pressure groups from the right demand that emphasis should be returned to more traditional landmark events like for example Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and the Wright brothers."

"What the good historian does is rigorously check, compare and question all known facts and information about the topic he or she is researching."

in a vacuum, but they, also must master the 'facts' first.

But this should not imply that there are no benefits in creative history teaching and one should stick to traditional modes of history teaching. The results of a study carried out by Denis Shemilt[9] in 1981 showed clearly that in both interviews and written work pupils following 'New History', skill based methods, were more successful than a control group following a 'conventional' course of study.

'New History' pupils showed a greater ability in applying forms of abstract thinking and reasoning to historical problems, as well as having a deeper understanding of the subject.

Conclusion

Today, the term 'New History' is hardly appropriate, considering that teachers in England have now been using it as an integral part of their teaching for almost three decades.

This is not however the case for Malta. While the more progressive teachers have started to implement 'New History' methods, there still remain a large number of history teachers who, although perhaps familiar with 'New History' methods, have never actually used them in class.

If one were to imagine a spectrum which represents the evolution of history teaching, Maltese and English teachers would be found in different places.

This puts us at an advantage in the sense that we can learn from the experience of others.

We are now in a better position to implement 'New History' since now we can appreciate the benefits of 'New History' and perhaps avoid its pitfalls.

Endnotes

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2. Elson, John. *History, the Sequel*, *Time Magazine*, November 7, 1994.
3. Jenkins, Keith *Re-Thinking History*, Routledge, 1991.
4. Carr, E.H. *What is history?*, Pelican, 1961. Ibid
6. Kitson-Clark, G. *The Critical Historian*, Heinemann, 1967. See J.S.Bruner's theories in his books, *The Process of Education* (1960) and *Towards a Theory of Instruction,* (1966)
8. Palmer, M. & Batho, G.R. *The Source Method in History Teaching,* Historical Association N.48, 1981
9. Deuchar, Stewart *History and GCSE history,* The Centre of Policy Studies, 1987.
10. Shemilt, Denis. *History 13 - 16: Evaluation Study,* Holmes McDougall, 1981.

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Information Technology in the Primary Classroom

Marilyn Metz

In the first months of the exciting new Maltese initiative in information technology and education, there are many new fields to explore and questions to ask. This short article aims to raise a few issues that seem, to the author, to be worth considering, both in the short term and in the not-so-short term. Through raising these issues, others may well come to light, and it is hoped that an on-going debate can be established, with the general goals of raising awareness, developing effectiveness and supporting teachers and students.

On a day-to-day basis, teachers and students are likely to be addressing very practical issues, such as "How do I introduce the machinery to the children?", "How do I ensure fair use of the machinery?", "How can I introduce a given application?", "What can young children do with a given application?", "What kind of record-keeping and assessment techniques are appropriate?", etc. These are all important questions, and need effective answers so that classroom practice can develop. It is also, however, good to step back a little and to bear in mind the much more general question "Why use computers in schools?". One answer to this question addresses the need for knowledge of and practice with the technology of computers, in order that school-leavers will have achieved the skills needed for them to join an

> ## "Which I.T. applications will be most useful in the classroom?"

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increasingly electronically sophisticated working world. In this case students would be introduced to I.T. applications that will be of direct use to them in their future careers. A second answer emphasises the teaching and learning process itself, recognising the role that computers can play as a teaching and learning tool. In this situation I.T. applications would be chosen on the basis of their effectiveness in introducing curriculum content and developing students' knowledge and understanding in various curriculum areas. These two reasons are not mutually exclusive, and can, in fact, broadly co-exist. I am sure that there are also other, equally legitimate answers to the question. What is important is that educational practitioners give careful thought to the rationale for computer use, and realise that the focus of computer use in the classroom will differ, depending on which dimension of the total rationale dominates at any given time.

Teachers working with young children are much more likely to focus on the role of the computer as a teaching and learning tool. One of the first questions they will be asking is "Which I.T. applications will be most useful in the classroom?". When working with 6-7 year olds and computers, I found it helpful to ask myself the following questions when making decisions about which I.T. applications to select:

1

Can the children do this work as effectively in any other way? It is important to remember that the mere fact that a computer is being used in a classroom does not automatically guarantee that work is being done effectively or that the machinery is being used to best advantage. For instance, programs that offer drill and practice in, say, spelling or arithmetic, may have initial novelty for the child, and may support a child who needs help with written work, but in the longer term they offer nothing that a teacher cannot offer in other forms.

2

Will I be using this application in the same way with the same children in a month's time? An affirmative answer to this question may imply that the computer is being used simply because it is a computer, and not as a tool to develop children's knowledge, skills and understanding. Good classroom practice is oriented towards progress. Of course, differentiation of children's individual needs may mean that the same application will be used

in the same way with different children, or may be used in a different way with the same children, and may thus earn the right to be included as a useful application, along with others. Examples of such an application are those which have specific content (say, letter/ number recognition) but which offer the flexibility of different levels of complexity for the children.

3

Is this I.T. application offering the children the opportunity to be active learners? Many young children have experience of sophisticated electronic machinery in the form of games, where their role is primarily a passive one. They re-act to the electronic environment, rather than take a pro-active role. This re-active role implies that the computer is the "expert" rather than the "expert tool". An expert is knowledgeable and capable in her/ himself; an expert tool needs an active user in order to fulfil its potential. It is arguable that the most potentially productive I.T. applications are those where the user takes an active role. In writing this article using a word-processing package, my role is entirely active. The word-processor cannot have the ideas; it is simply the medium I have chosen. It can assist in the rapid reorganisation of words, sentences and paragraphs and to some extent can help me with spelling, but only when I decide to use these features. In a similar way, a data-base cannot collect the data or make decisions about which fields to create. It can sort, select and classify but only that data which the user has entered and only in a way compatible with the fields the user has chosen. Educational theorists such as Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky have argued that in order to become an effective learner a child needs to be actively involved with what s/he is learning. If we accept these theorists' arguments then any I.T. application used in the classroom must, therefore, offer the child the potential for active learning.

These three questions are, of course, in no way the only important ones to ask, and there are no right or wrong answers to them. They are offered simply as general guidelines. The importance of developing and maintaining consistency within and between schools does, however, mean that the questions could be seen as relevant not only to individual classroom practitioners, but also to managers and administrators concerned with the development of school and national policy.

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND THE 'S.E.C.' EXAMINATION

Ronald G. Sultana

"To what extent are our assessment practices helping children become more motivated to learn?"

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As an educator, my main interest in systems of assessment is to consider the way these succeed - or fail - to facilitate the process of teaching and learning. That is not to say that there are not other (often dubious) uses of assessment - many, for instance, value it since it helps to sort out students into different 'ability' groupings, while others think - often wrongly - that credentials and certificates signal competence to employers, and who are thus better placed to choose appropriate personnel for specific occupational tasks. In my view, the main question to ask when considering assessment is: What range of evaluation techniques can we use to find out whether our students have made progress in learning, and to discover what it is that they have failed to grasp? Of course, the result of such an inquiry is to be in a better position to design teaching strategies that help students move forwards. It also goes without saying that techniques and strategies used must be positive for all students, and do not contradict the essential goals of education by, for instance, engaging pupils in excessive competition, or by extinguishing their motivation to learn.

A rather brave effort has been made in Malta to establish an indigenous examination system that promotes assessment practices which coincide with a progressive educational philosophy, since they privilege achievement over selection, and since they cater for a wider range of students than did, for example, the exclusive General Certificate Examination. It is a brave attempt because the sheer amount of organization that is needed to set up a structure of national examinations to cater for all students finishing their secondary education is overwhelming, particularly for a small state with a limited pool of human resources. Indeed, to my knowledge Malta is the only small state in the world that has gone this way - other countries have either set up regional examination boards, pooling their resources in order to manage the situation better (e.g. the *Caribbean Examinations Council* or the *South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment*), or have, to a greater or lesser extent, remained attached to metropole countries such as the U.K.

The new Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examinations for students completing their fifth year of secondary schooling have now been in place since 1992. In this short article I will outline the effect that these examinations have had (and are likely to have) on educational practice in Malta.

It must be made clear from the very outset that there has been, to date, no full-scale evaluation of the impact of the new examinations on the educational system as a whole. The SEC is too new to allow research to explore the extent to which students - especially those from the low-ability range - are in fact profiting from the opportunity to get useful credentials. Neither are we in the position to know whether standards have been maintained or improved, and whether teachers are adopting different pedagogical strategies anywhere near the extent to which it has been hoped they would. In this context I will therefore report impressions obtained from personnel involved in running the SEC examinations, as well as general feedback that teachers, parents and students provided through letters they wrote to the press. I will also hypothesize on the probable impact that the new examinations have had and will have in the near future given my familiarity with the educational culture prevailing on the islands.

SEC examinations seem to have encouraged teachers to place more importance and attention on course-work as a legitimate component in the continuous assessment of students. More value seems to have been given to project and practical and applied work in a system which is best described as being 'magisterial' in style, with lecturing and note-taking being the most common form of pedagogy. Interviews with different members of the MATSEC Board indicated that, given the strength of the examination culture in Malta, where teachers teach - and are expected by students and parents to teach - with exams in mind, then a change in the mode of assessment has an important 'backwash' effect and influences teaching methodologies. To give two examples, the SEC stress on practical laboratory work has led to the establishment or better resourcing of laboratories in a number of local schools, given that log books detailing experiments make up part of the total assess-

"We need to evaluate the extent to which more effective teaching is taking place"

ment in science. Similarly, language teachers have had to give more importance to oral and aural work, with some schools introducing 'spoken English' as a discrete slot on their timetables. Pedagogical experiments in one area, such as language teaching, have influenced the teaching styles adopted in other subjects, and the fact that the course-work contributes to the final assessment of students has placed teaching methodology at the centre of the debate on education. There is the hope that teachers will now be induced to privilege modern and interactive methodologies in the classroom, though of course one cannot tell the extent to which this shift has taken place before full scale evaluative research has been carried out.

Since syllabuses are set locally, educationalists have been able to include elements of Maltese and Mediterranean culture and realities across most if not all subjects, and in some areas, such as environmental studies, social studies and history, the subject matter revolves almost totally around Maltese concerns. This is crucially important not only for political and ideological reasons, but for educational ones as well. Students can more easily relate to the curriculum if this resonates with themes and concerns they encounter in their everyday life, and learning is more likely to happen when there is a connection between schooling and students' frameworks of relevance.

The wider range of assess-

ment techniques - including short-answer questions, structured questions, essays, practical tasks, an aural/oral component, and an internally school-based component - ensures that different skills are, in fact, given importance. In addition, the internally assessed school-based component encourages 'the setting of relevant tasks, allows the candidate to choose the best from his or her work, allows more direct guidance from the teacher, and enables the teacher to contribute to the process of assessment' (SEC Brochure, p.10). The new examinations have therefore presented teachers with a unique opportunity to fulfill one aspect of a professional role which has long been denied them.

An important regulation which represents a break from the past refers to the fact that 'only candidates who complete their studies in Form V or who have reached the age of 16 years by 31st December [of the year in which s/he sits the examination session] will be allowed to register for the Secondary Education Certificate Examination' (Regulation 6.1). One of the advantages of a locally-controlled examination system has been the identification of strategies to counter educationally debilitating practices, such as the spacing out of examinations, starting from Form 4 and occasionally from Form 3, in order to ensure passes. As the editorial of one of the newspapers remarked, greeting positively the new regulation in an article captioned 'Examination Mania':

'The major preoccupation of many of our secondary school students on being promoted to Form IV is how many...examinations they are able to 'get out of the way' in order to have their year in Form V as plain-sailing as possible. They home in on five or six subjects, priming themselves up with extra doses of private lessons (in some cases from their own teachers at school), aided and abetted by their parents who are willing to pay what is necessary for their offspring to collect as many...passes, and at the highest marks possible, to ensure entry into the Sixth Form, and eventually to University, or to the labour market...The change in rules should bring back some sanity to secondary schools, both State and private, where teachers and students in the upper two forms - completely unmotivated because the passes have been obtained anyway - face serious disruption and are in effect under-utilizing, or rather wasting, the educational system's resources' (*The Sunday Times*, February 26, 1995, p.14).

Another positive effect of the SEC examination has been the extension of the range of curriculum subjects offered to students. In principle, the MATSEC Board has to react to curricular initiatives in schools, so that if a new course of studies is offered to students in a particular school, then the latter can ask the examining Board to prepare an SEC paper in that subject. Previously, schools based their

curricula and syllabuses, not to mention teaching strategies, with an eye on GCE requirements. With the new system, schools can be much more proactive in the development of curricula, syllabuses and pedagogy.

While there is still a definite reliance on the U.K. for textbooks, there has been a new phenomenon in the past few years which saw local educational authors and publishing entrepreneurs investing in the production of high quality texts in a large number of curricular areas. Since these texts are tailor-made to SEC and Matriculation specifications and requirements, they prove to be a valuable resource for teachers and students alike, and more of them are being published from year to year.

In short, therefore, the new examinations have given Maltese policy-makers the opportunity to be more autonomous in establishing an organic and holistic vision for educational practice on the islands; they have encouraged the development of curricula and textbooks that take local culture and realities into account; they have expanded the professional roles of teachers, who are partners in the assessment of their own students; and they are likely to modify the traditional and deeply engrained pedagogical culture of magisterial lesson delivery. They have effectively put a stop to a massive annual hemorrhage of foreign currency that Malta could ill-afford to service, and have, moreover, achieved credibility among parents, teachers, students and employers, and are exchangeable on the world market of credentials.

This is no mean achievement for a micro-island with limited human and material resources. The next challenge that now needs to be faced is the monitoring and improvement of current practice through systematic evaluative research, as well as the professional development of staff and personnel involved. We need to be in a position to know, for instance, whether there have been changes in the pedagogical styles adopted in the classroom, and what is facilitating such changes as well as what is obstructing them. We need to evaluate the extent to which more effective teaching is taking place, and how new forms of assessment are impacting on the learning process. Are new teaching styles being used to cater for the different learning styles and needs of different pupils? We also need to ask the extent to which teachers are being supported in the new roles that the SEC examinations demand of them. What in-service training do they need? How can we best deliver that? How is curriculum construction and development dove-tailing with new assessment strategies? To what extent are our assessment practices helping children become more motivated to learn? These and several other questions need not only to be asked, but also to be answered if one's interest in assessment practices is motivated by a genuine commitment to the educational commitment of students.
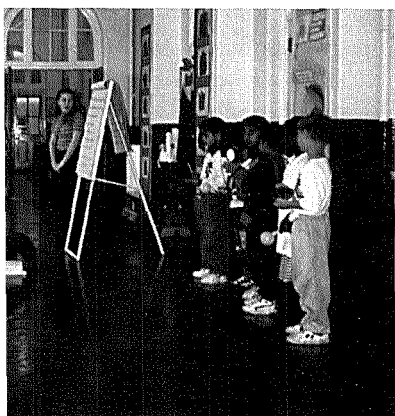
Il-Prattika tas-Sħubija fil-Livell Primarju

Carmel Borg

"Nemmen li l-akbar osservaturi tat-tfal huma l-ġenituri u m'għandix dubbju li jekk nisimgħuhom se joħorgu b'ideat tajbin."

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Is-Sensiela

Sikwit nisimgħu u naqraw dwar il-bżonn li l-ġenituri jipparteċipaw aktar fil-proċess edukattiv. Implikazzjoni ewlenija ta' din l-għajta hija li l-għalliema u l-ġenituri għandhom jaħdmu aktar flimkien għall-ġid tat-tfal. Din is-sensiela ta' artikli qed tinħema bil-ħsieb li tlaqqagħna ma' prattika lokali u barranija li għandha l-għan li tkattar il-kultura tas-shubija billi ssaħħaħ il-linji ta' kommunikazzjoni bejn l-għalliema u l-ġenituri.

Nittamaw li dawn l-artikli, imżewqin bil-kontribuzzjonijiet tagħkom, iqanqlu aktar interess fil-kunċett tas-shubija, u jgħinu lil dawk li għadhom ma jafux minn fejn se jitilqu.

Dan l-artiklu se jiffoka fuq strateġiji ta' kommunikazzjoni li għandhom l-għan li jintroduċu lill-għalliema u l-ħidma tagħhom.

Qabel tibda l-iskola...

Il-ħidma ta' l-għalliema li jridu jistabilixxu rapport pożittiv mal-ġenituri tat-tfal tal-klassi tagħhom ġeneralment tibda xi jiem qabel l-ewwel jum ta' l-iskola. L-għalliema jistgħu jvaraw il-ħidma tagħhom f'dan il-qasam permezz ta' ittra qasira ta' introduzzjoni. Din l-ittra għandha sservi biex l-għalliema: jintroduċu ruħhom mal-ġenituri; ifakkru lill-ġenituri meta se tibda l-iskola; u jistidnuhom biex fil-jum imsemmi jiltaqgħu magħhom.

Man-nota li tintbagħat lill-ġenituri, l-għalliema jistgħu jibagħtu ittra oħra qasira lit-tfal. Kemm il-ġenituri kif ukoll it-tfal jieħdu pjaċir ikunu jafu li l-għalliema prospettivi huma entużjasti dwar il-klassi l-ġdida li se jgħallmu.

Wieħed jistenna li qabel tibda s-sena, l-għalliema diġa' jkollhom it-tagħrif meħtieġ dwar it-tfal tal-klassi. Dan it-tagħrif jista' jwassal biex jiġu identifikati problemi partikulari fil-klassi. Hawnhekk ukoll, l-għalliema jistgħu jaħdmu id f'id mal-ġenituri.

L-ewwel kuntatt ma' familji bi tfal bi problemi jista' jagħmel differenza kbira fil-livell ta' koperazzjoni li l-għalliema se jsibu mill-ġenituri għall-bqija tas-sena. Hawnhekk, telefonata tista' twitti t-triq għal azzjoni pożittiva.

Jista' jagħti l-każ li ġenituri ta' tfal bi problemi għandhom storja ta' telefonati negattivi, fejn l-iskola tikkomunika magħhom biss meta jkun hemm xi problema. L-għalliema għandhom jinqdew b'telefonata ta'

introduzzjoni biex iserrħu moħħ il-ġenituri li din id-darba l-istorja se tkun waħda differenti. Għalhekk, l-ewwel telefonata trid tkun waħda pożittiva, b'messaġġ ta' rieda tajba u dispożizzjoni lejn ħidma komuni għall-ġid tat-tifel/tifla.

Minħabba n-natura sensittiva tat-telefonata, ikun meħtieġ li wieħed jippjana t-telefonata sew. L-ewwel kliem jew frażijiet se jħallu effett kbir fuq il-kumplament tal-konversazzjoni. Tajjeb infakkru lill-ġenituri li aħna qed inċemplu għax ve:ament jimpurtana mit-tfal, u nixtiequ li s-sena li tkun se tibda tkun waħda ta' suċċess għal uliedhom.

Is-sensittività lejn il-ġenituri hija kruċjali. Nissuġġerixxi li nħallu 'l-ġenituri jitkellmu huma dwar il-problema, aktar milli nibdew aħna bil-litanija ta' problemi. Mistoqsija bħal "kif mar it-tifel is-sena l-oħra?", tista' twassal biex il-ġenituri jirrakkuntaw l-istejjer li għaddiet minnhom il-familja. Fi ftit kliem, huma l-ġenituri li se jmexxu l-aġenda ta' l-ewwel telefonata.

Nisimgħu lill-ġenituri

Għalkemm jista' jkollna ħafna ideat dwar x'jista' jsir, tajjeb li nisimgħu lill-ġenituri dwar x'jaħsbu li jista' jsir biex uliedhom jkollhom sena ahjar. Għandna tendenza li nippatoloġizzaw lill-istudenti u 'l-ġenituri tagħhom. Inharsu lejhom bħala falluti, u allura ftit li xejn għandhom x'joffru.

Ma naħsibx li dan hu l-każ. Nemmen li l-akbar osservaturi tat-tfal huma l-ġenituri u m'għandix dubbju li jekk nisimgħuhom se joħorġu b'ideat tajbin.

Importanti li waqt il-konversazzjoni tagħna nuru lill-ġenituri li s-support tagħhom huwa kruċjali, u allura t-telefonata ta' introduzzjoni mhux se tkun l-ewwel u l-aħhar telefonata. Nistgħu naghlqu l-konversazzjoni tagħna billi nħeġġu lill-ġenituri jkomplu jikkoperaw magħna halli t-tfal ikollhom sena ahjar minn dik ta' qabel.

L-ewwel jum...

Fl-ewwel ġurnata ta' l-iskola nistgħu nibagħtu ittra oħra mat-tfal li permezz tagħha mhux biss nistiednu lill-ġenituri jżuruna, iżda wkoll nispjegaw il-pjanijiet tagħna għas-sena. L-aktar ingredjenti importanti ta' ittra bħal din huma:

● ma ntawlux, paġna tkun biżżejjed
● it-ton għandu jkun wieħed pożittiv u entużjażmanti
● infakkru li l-edukazzjoni tat-tfal hija frott il-ħidma komuni. Għalhekk, il-koperazzjoni tagħhom hija kruċjali.
● Nesprimu sens ta' fiduċja fis-suċċess prospettiv.

Ma' din l-ittra, nistgħu nibagħtu kodici ta' dixxiplina għall-klassi, u kopja tal-politika li se naddottaw rigward ix-xogħol tad-dar. Il-kodici u l-politika se jkunu s-suġġetti li se nitrattaw fl-artiklu li jmiss.

English Language Teaching Projects

L ast year a number of students from the Faculty of Education followed an intensive two-week course in English Language Materials Production and Methodology at the University of London Institute of Education. The course was designed by Dr Charles Mifsud of the Faculty of Education and Angela Hobsbaum and Peter Hill of the University of London.

The students were involved in lectures, 'language across the curriculum' and 'reading and writing' seminars, materials development workshops and school visits. They participated in sessions dealing with Information Technology in ELT and book-making workshops at the British Library. At the end of the course the students organised ELT projects that reached high levels of creativity as attested by their London tutors.

The students had the opportunity to work in a number of schools in East London. They discussed educational and language matters with their professional counterparts in schools and worked with children in classrooms. The exchange of ideas was very rich and benefited both sides.

The social programme included visits to a number of sights and museums in London, a river cruise from Richmond to the tune of South African music and dance and a day trip to Cambridge that included a tour of the colleges and punting on the river Cam. The visit was made possible through the financial assistance of the British Council and had the support of the Faculty of Education, the British High Commission and the International Office of the University of Malta.

In this issue we are featuring some of the ELT projects that were organised by some of the students (now teachers) in a number of London schools.

The Malta Sightseeing Board game

Fiona Cilia & Joanne Xerri

Target learners:
Year 4 and Year 5 pupils

Objectives:
The Malta sightseeing board game can be played by two to four people. The aim of this board game is to motivate children to learn through play. Children can practise language skills such as asking and answering questions, putting words in order to form sentences and filling in the blanks.

How to play the game:
Each group will have a turn at throwing the dice and the group with the largest number starts by following the marked footsteps around London. Stopping on a coloured footstep means that the player will pick up a card according to the colour of the footstep.

For example, if the player ends up on a red footstep s/he will pick up a red card and follow the instructions of that card.

The game consists of four different coloured cards.

Red cards: These have instructions such as: "Stop to take some photographs. Miss one turn."

Green cards: The green card sends you for a ride on a Malta bus. One could be lucky and move forward or very unlucky and must return to where s/he started from.

Blue cards: The blue card is a specific question regarding the place the player is in.

Yellow cards: The questions on the yellow cards are flexible. The teacher can adapt the questions according to the topic being dealt with by the class.

This board game can easily be adapted to any locality, say where the particular school is situated.

Food and Drink in Ancient Egypt

Josephine Milton & Gaby Privitera

Target learners:
Year 6 / Form 1

Aims:
To make students aware of ancient cultures and traditions so that they can compare them to modern cultures that they are familiar with.

Objectives:
To practise the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Resources:
● Papyrus chart depicting ancient Egyptians hunting and fishing for food (This can be produced during an Arts and Crafts lesson).
● Illustrated handouts describing different types of food and drink, and how these are produced.

Start the lesson with a brainstorming session requiring students to describe and discuss the papyrus chart and then list the vocabulary. From the information given students can come to their own conclusions about what the Ancient Egyptians' diet consisted of. Handouts of passages and illustrations are handed out to be read silently by the students. The students are split into groups and given flashcards. The students take one each and match the printed word - for example **trellis** - to the illustration depicting the named object, and then find the sentence/s that contain the said ord. Therefore, aided by the illustrations and sentences students will try to explain what the term on the flashcard means.

In order to enhance their comprehension students are asked to re-read the passages. After having discussed the chart and passages the students should have a clear idea of what Ancient Egyptians used to eat and drink, and thus they can now compare that to what they eat at home.

Using the papyrus chart and papyrus bookmarks we would generate a discussion about the material they are made of and be able to feel the texture of papyrus. Students can then experiment with the hieroglyphic alphabet by writing their names on pieces of papyrus. This would then be followed up by the writing activity handout as a last activity.

Joanne Xerri B.A., P.G.C.E.

Fiona Cilia B.A., P.G.C.E.

Josephine Milton B.A., P.G.C.E.

Stephania Brincat B.A., P.G.C.E.

Rachel Portanier B.A., P.G.C.E.

Myths and Monsters

The theme chosen by Rachel Portanier and Stefania Brincat was that of *Myths and Monsters*. Each of them designed a set of activities revolving around the stories of King Arthur and Odysseus respectively. These activities were designed for Grade 6/Form 1 pupils.

Odysseus

Stefania Brincat

Illustrations

The adventures of Odysseus are obviously too long to be dealt with in one project. I therefore decided to focus on the episodes where Odysseus meets Polyphemus the Cyclops and Circe the enchantress. The first thing I did was to hunt through various children's editions of Odysseus to find the most eye-catching and powerful illustrations of these episodes. This is because I feel that different illustrations of the same story can constitute an activity in itself. The procedure is as follows. The pictures are photocopied (colour and all), enlarged and laminated. They are then stuck onto the board using blu-tack, and the students are encouraged to describe the scenes illustrated in the pictures and hazard guesses as to what the story they are depicting is. This exercise in prediction will hopefully stimulate their interest and increase their motivation. It also functions as a lead-in, so that the students are prepared for the reading exercise that follows.

As teachers, we should try and help our students react to narrative texts and encourage a critical response to them

Focus on Understanding

After the students have read the episodes (which they can do at home or during lessons, depending on the teacher's aims) some comprehension-type questions are necessary to check their understanding of the story. I therefore tried to formulate questions that would help me to realise whether my pupils have understood the plot of each episode or not. These questions are reproduced here:

Excerpts from the worksheets *Odysseus*

Why do Odysseus and his men go up to Polyphemus' cave?

Why do you think Odysseus tells Polyphemus that his name is No One?

Circe the Enchantress

How did Odysseus and his crew arrive at Circe's island?

Focus on Grammar

Narrative texts often prove a valuable resource to the language teacher, and can be used to revise or present a variety of grammar points. The text I chose about Odysseus and Polyphemus, for instance, contains a lot of dialogue. I therefore formulated this question and inserted it in the worksheet:

Rewrite the marked passages in the story, changing all direct speech into indirect speech.

Naturally, I could have focused on other aspects of grammar such as verbs, prepositions, or punctuation. It all depends on what the text has to offer and on the teacher's aims. All these activities, in fact, may be adapted to suit almost any text, at almost any level.

Focus on Description

The Maltese secondary school syllabus (1995) requires Form 1 students to write "coherent paragraphs" describing "people and things". With this requirement in mind, I included a question in my worksheet that focuses on description:

● What did Polyphemus the Cyclops look like?

● Write three adjectives describing his character.

Encouraging a Personal Response

As teachers, we should try and help our students react to narrative texts and encourage a critical response to them. The tender age of my pupils requires this reaction to be a simple one, and the question I formulated was the following:

Do you like Odysseus? Why?

The word "Why" is important here as forces the pupil to think about the reasons behind his/her reaction to the hero of the episodes.

Creativity and Media Transfer

The last two activities I thought of are possibly the most demanding for the pupil, as they require good writing skills and a measure of creativity on their part. The first asks them to imagine that they are Odysseus, stranded on Circe's island. What Odysseus must do is write a letter to his wife, Penelope, explaining why he hasn't come home yet. The pupils are asked to draw a picture to go with the letter. I saw this activity being done in one of the schools we visited during the course: Marian Richardson Primary School, in London's East End. The creativity of the pupils was really wonderful in both the writing and the illustrations. Some pictures, for instance, consisted of maps of Circe's island and the letters were either loving or full of loving excuses.

The second activity is more difficult. It requires the pupils to get together in small groups and rewrite any episode they choose as a script. They will then have to act it out in front of the class. This activity, of course, would be spread over a series of lessons and would require much help from the teacher. The skills involved, however, are manifold. In order to write the script the pupils must summarise it mentally, argue over what is to be included and what is to be left out, rewrite it in dialogue form and finally act it out.

The Legend of King Arthur

Rachel Portanier

Reading for enjoyment and general understanding

The plot of King Arthur revolves around a group of stories, each having the potential to be exploited as a separate story in its own right. In order to promote interest and motivate students, I thought it would be a good idea to adopt the jigsaw reading approach. An episode or story, say Arthur's success in pulling the magnificent sword out of the stone, could

be divided into three parts, A, B and C. The students would be asked to read through their part, answer the questions (which would ideally move from the factual to the interpretative so as to promote personal response and evaluation) as a group, and list the main points of their extract.

Setting a context, inferring and predicting; building confidence in communicative skills; encouraging personal responses; media transfer

Each group should then prepare a mini-presentation. The presentation should consist of the main details of the group's chunk of the chapter and the students' prediction of what came before and/or after their part of the chapter. Students could also be asked to read their favourite paragraph aloud to the rest of the class, explain why they found it interesting, and provide an accompanying illustration.

Accountability

To improve the quality of group work, an accountability factor could be introduced where each group is questioned by the other groups. Alternatively, the teacher could tell the students that they are being graded on both their individual commitment as well as their co-operation as a team.

Adaptability

I feel that the jigsaw method approach to reading is highly recommendable since it may be used for practically any subject which involves reading (Social Studies, History, etc.). Moreover, it adds life to rather boring texts which students are reluctant to read at home. Finally, it may solve problems for those teachers who do not have enough texts for everybody.

Head start or lead-in activity

As a warming up exercise, illustrations from the reader *The Legend of King Arthur* could be provided. In groups, students are invited to make intelligent guesses about the plot of the story - Who is the man? Do you think the sword is important in the story? Who is Merlin?

Prediction and discussion are exercises which stimulate and motivate children by making them eager to learn about the story.

Sharing the best in life

Pupil Profiling

Charles Mifsud

Both locally and abroad the system of streaming is considered universally to be a very unjust system of selecting pupils on the basis of end-of-year exams. However, locally there has not been much discussion of what could be the possible alternatives to this undesirable system. In this brief article we present the system of 'profiling' as a more just alternative for the assessment of pupils' achievement in school. At this stage where a number of pupil profile systems may be piloted at the various levels of the Maltese educational system these systems need to be promoted as being complementary to the existing assessment procedures rather than as outright substitutes.

> **"There is an increasingly explicit concern that schooling is not bringing about the outcomes it sets for its students."**

Whilst it is generally accepted that subject-based external examinations are a major means of ensuring quality control amongst educational systems, there is now a ground swell of opinion amongst both educationists and, to some extent, parents and pupils who feel that there is a need for a more comprehensive and curriculum-integrated approach to assessment. There is also an increasingly explicit concern that schooling is not bringing about the outcomes it sets for its students.

The Criticisms of Public Examinations

The criticisms of public examinations are long-standing and well-known. Examinations are frequently inaccurate (as a result, for example, of marker fatigue or markers' subjective preferences) and they may not be a valid measure of what a pupil can really do (he or she has had an off day or has bad handwriting, for example). They can only measure a small sample of educational achievements; they encourage intrinsic motivation rather than the desire to learn for its own sake. They encourage and are deeply associated with an educational process which discourages co-operation between students and emphasises individual competition. Maltese teachers, like their counterparts in other countries, complain frequently that the existence of such external examinations narrows what they can offer to students in curriculum and pedagogy. Worst of all, the aggregate examination grade may conceal vital differences between different kinds of competencies that a pupil may have acquired.

The Impediment to Change

Why then do we persist in relying heavily on formal examinations in the face of such strong arguments against them? There is the question of legitimacy in the selection process, and the need for objectivity to militate against bias and injustice in the allocation of life chances. There is an important need for face validity in the procedures used, and for reliable identification of what has been achieved and of specific inadequacies. There is also the selection function, which requires some basis for discrimination between candidates, a high degree of reliability, some measure of predictive validity and legitimacy which makes the whole process acceptable by the larger society. It is because external examinations are the best means so far devised of meeting the criteria of comparability, reliability and legitimacy that they have enjoyed such continuing popularity. Despite their negative effects on the learning process and their inefficiency in providing the information employers really want to know we have come to 'over-depend' on examinations. Exams haunt the lives of the large majority of our children and their parents..

The Objectives of Schooling

The objectives of schooling are frequently conceptualised in terms of, for example, the acquisition of self-knowledge; the development of inter-personal skills; the development of maturity; emotional and moral awareness; the development of academic skills; an enthusiasm for learning; a respect for society, human rights, etc. All too often, however, people do not develop self-awareness and they see no connection between education and life. Their self-image and self-confidence is steadily eroded by the repeated experience of failure and condemnation, and they are encouraged to rely on teachers to teach them rather than on themselves as learners. Entering school as enthusiastic and active enquirers, all too often they become passive and apathetic, uninterested and lacking in initiative and self-discipline. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the instrumental, extrinsic orientation induced by qualification inflation and excessive competition.

The Need for Change

Our educational system has been for many years dominated by external-exam certification procedures. Although over the years there have been repeated attempts to introduce more comprehensive and relevant assessment procedures, these have had little impact on the examination monopoly. Previous failed attempts to do away with examination procedures, public concern about educational standards and professional inertia have militated against change. More recently, however, major structural changes in the economy and related policy developments have

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stimulated interest in assessment procedures for accountability and efficiency. The range of approaches currently being explored are not mutually exclusive.

Changing the bases for assessment

The traditional methods of exams are too crude and global and mask individual differences. By making fuller, more detailed use of the information about performance in subjects that we already have, we can give more recognition to the fact that, at all levels of ability, different students are developing in different ways. Any educational institution must increasingly be able to demonstrate that it is fulfilling

All too often people do not develop self-awareness and they see no connection between education and life.

the aims that it has set for itself. The major purposes that assessment procedures have to fulfil need to meet the needs of pupils, teachers and 'consumers'.

Alternative forms of assessment

The structural changes in the economy of this country are now making possible a genuine alternative approach to assessment which is capable of improving both the curriculum and communication functions of assessment. The principles on which this innovation is based may be summarised in terms of:

- *reinforcement* of the learning process
- *respect* for learners,
- *relevance* for action.

Under reinforcement are subsumed the curriculum functions of a new kind of assessment philosophy, which emphasises diagnosis of a student's strengths and weaknesses, conceptualises learning as an interactive process that emphasises mastery and achievement rather than norm-referencing and failure. These principles together make up what is now receiving increasing attention as the formative function of assessment.

Under respect comes a concern for open and collaborative relations between teachers and pupils, in which it is recognised that only by engaging with pupils will they come to a personal commitment and respect for their own learning. This mutual respect is taken to be the best basis for motivating both teachers and pupils.

The relevance dimension relates more to the communication function of assessment, and the provision of information about skill, aptitudes and capabilities which will be useful for pupils, their teachers and their families, and for potential consumers of such records. Thus we are talking about an approach to assessment which is novel, both in content and procedure, and is both formative and summative.

Profiles and Records of Achievement

Such an assessment procedure has become known as 'profiling' - an approach to recording which results in the production of a 'profile' record. A 'profile' is not in itself a form of assessment. Nevertheless, the production of a profile depends upon the provision of appropriate assessment information and in practice the two stages are often inseparable. A profile is essentially derived from a separation of the whole of an assessment into its main parts or components. It is often used synonymously with the term 'record of achievement', although this is normally used in a narrower sense to describe school leavers' documents which may include the results of a variety of examinations, graded tests and other assessments and information about a student, compiled by teachers and/or students and covering the total educational progress of the student.

The arguments for this profiling initiative are expressed in terms of the mutual benefit that would accrue to both students and their future employers from better means of school reporting, and also the impact that such a process would have on pupils' motivation during their passage through schooling itself. In other European countries, profiles and records of achievement have been used with immense success at all levels of the educational system and in different areas; e.g. technology education, and in as diverse settings as the training branches of police forces and airline companies.

A Word of Warning

It is profiles and records of achievement which are the most significant in threatening to break down the barrier between the cognitive and the affective domains in both curriculum and assessment terms. It is their very challenge that also makes profiles and records of achievement the most high risk initiative. Careful monitoring will be required to ensure that the rationale for the new procedure is indeed drawn out of its practice. It demands careful scrutiny and presents a most fertile ground for change. Public acceptability can no longer serve as a sufficient criterion for the acceptability of assessment procedures. The elevation of educational concerns to a position of prime consideration is long overdue.

MEDIA WORKSTATION

THE OVERHEAD PROJECTOR

Gorg Mallia

> **"The intention of this series of short articles is to help the teacher with the *use* of media: to examine its worth, lacks and, overall, what it can add to his/her lessons."**

GORG MALLIA
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Possibly the most common (where available) piece of equipment to project visual aids is nowadays the overhead projector.

First of all, for those few who have no idea as to what overhead projection is, Heinich *et al*'s definition is proffered:

Projection by means of a device that produces an image on a screen by transmitting light through transparent acetate or a similar medium on the stage of the projector. The lens and mirror arrangement in an elevated housing creates a bright projected image over the head or shoulder of the operator.

(Heinich, *et al*, 1996, p.413).

The intention of this series of short articles is to help the teacher with the **use** of media: to examine its worth, lacks and, overall, what it can add to his/her lessons.

The OHP, for example, has two clear main advantages:

1. Daylight projection. There is no need for any form of blackout unless there is strong direct sunlight on the screen.

2. When using it, the teacher faces the class. There is no need to turn his (/her) back: no need to stand at the back of the room. (Romiszowski, 1988).

To which can be added that it is lightweight and portable; easy to operate; materials are easily available and in abundance and can either be self-prepared or bought ready in pre-prepared packs; and it helps the teacher be better organised in his/her plan as transparency preparation creates and guiding regimen for the lesson.

Basic guidelines on the effective use of the OHP (summarised from Ellington & Race, 1993) are:

● Make sure the projector and screen are placed in such a way as to be seen by ALL the members of the class or group, say in the corner of the room, away from other possible media;

● To avoid one or more types of the KEYSTONE EFFECT (i.e. a distorted image with one side, normally the bottom, tapering), make sure the axis of projection is at right angles to the screen, both on the horizontal and on the vertical planes. Tilt the screen, if need be, or the machine, to make sure you're all right in this;

● For all the class to be able to see, utilise all the screen if possible, by adjusting the distance between it and the OHP, and make sure you've focused correctly;

● Check to see that the platen and head lens surfaces are clean to avoid reduction of brightness and image clarity.

There are two basic types of OHP's: (i) the **transmissive** type, with the light from the lamp transmitted through the glass stage (or platen) and transparency, and (ii) the **reflective** type, with the light from the lamp reflected off the mirrorlike stage.

OHP's come with roughly two platen shapes: the square platen that was popular some years back, and the more user-friendly A4 shaped platen being produced today. The problem with the square platen is that parts of the sides of a horizontally generated A4 transparency are not projected, while areas of image-less light project at both top and bottom. A cardboard mask for the latter is suggested, and for the former, either (i) that the middle part only of A4 sized transparencies be used, or (ii) two images be produced to utilise fully the space afforded by the (relatively expensive) transparency, and a cardboard square be used to cover up one side of the image at a time.

OHP software also comes in two forms: (i) *the continuous roll*, excellent for creating supportive display material during the lesson itself, using water-based OHP markers that can be bought at most stationers. If the lesson is not to be repeated, the transparency can later be wiped clean for reuse; (ii) *the single transparency*, a more flexible form that can be used both in the manner of (i) and also for creating images that can be stored and reused.

The OHP can be used instead of a chalk or white board, instead of a magnetic or felt board (project silhouettes of objects), as a flip-chart, and, of course, as a projector of pictures. Heinich *et al* (1996) suggest a few ideas (at times applied to the Maltese example by the present writer):

Art: primary and secondary colours;
Drama: stage lighting explanation;
Language arts: colour coding of nouns, verbs, etc.
Literature: various forms of poetry compared;
Music: three-part harmony, with different coloured notes for each part;
Mathematics: fractions - circles and squares cut into pieces;
Library skills: floor-plan of library and its main components;
PSE: a CV plan, a blank cheque, a job application, etc.
Geography: map measurements;
Science: magnetism - show silhouettes of iron filings aligning to poles of a magnet.

And so many other possibilities (Green, 1982).

TEACHERS' COMMENTS ON THE FORM 2 MATHEMATICS SYLLABI

Michael Buhagiar

Introduction

My personal teaching experience suggests that at secondary level the mathematics syllabi are generally overloaded to such an extent that they are hardly ever adequately covered. Consequently, teaching is dominated by the notion of covering as much of the syllabus as possible, even if superficially, in time for the all important exams. The NMC approach certainly requires well-designed syllabi (see *Cockcroft Report*, 1982, paragraphs 449-451) which permit the individual students to work at their own pace on topics which they can understand - a far cry from what I suspect we presently have in Malta.

> **" At secondary level the mathematics syllabi are generally overloaded to such an extent that they are hardly ever adequately covered "**

This paper sets out to examine whether the limiting effects of the syllabi as experienced by the present writer are more generally felt. In particular, a group of form 2 mathematics teachers from different schools were invited to share their views on the subject.

Methodology

Between the 12th and the 14th July 1995 an in-service course was organised by the Education Division for teachers of mathematics in the state and private sectors currently teaching at form 2 level[1]. The course was attended by 25 participants. At the end of one of the sessions the teachers were asked to fill in a questionnaire based on a 3 or 5 point Likert-Scale. Participating teachers were guaranteed both anonymity and confidentiality. One of the participants chose not to respond. Of the 24 respondents, 8 taught in junior lyceums **[JL]**, 12 in area secondaries **[AS]** and the remaining 4 in either church or private schools (hereafter referred to as private schools **[CP]**). Present writeup offers only partial analyses of the collected data limited to teachers' comments on the syllabus according to the type of school.

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Results

When viewing teachers' comments on the coverage of the syllabus , it is interesting to note that 88% of all the teachers report that it is either difficult or very difficult to finish the syllabus in time. None of the 24 respondents finds the full coverage of the syllabus easy or very easy to achieve. 88% of the junior lyceum teachers and 83% of the area secondary teachers report difficulty to various degrees in finishing the syllabus. All private schools teachers (100% in the difficult range) are experiencing problems as regards the coverage of their respective syllabi.

Teachers were also asked to express their opinion regarding the effect of the syllabus on students' mathematical understanding (see table 3). 71% of the teachers report that students' mathematical understanding suffers due to the prescribed syllabi. All private schools teachers and three-fourths of junior lyceum teachers are of the opinion that students' understanding is suffering because of the syllabus. Area secondary teachers seem a bit less pessimistic: while 58% claim that students' understanding is suffering, one-third of these teachers are of the opinion that the effect is negligible.

Present data suggest that the vast majority of teachers consider that the present syllabi ought to be revised. The overall percentage in favour of such a revision is 75%. While some (25%) think that a revision of the syllabi may be due, none of the teachers are of the opinion that there is no need. It should be noted that it is the junior lyceum teachers (100%) who are the most in favour of a revision. Corresponding figures for private schools and area secondary teachers demanding a revision are respectively 75% and 58%.

75% of the teachers report that they find the teaching of their syllabus either quite or very stressful. Apparently, it is the junior lyceum teachers who are the most stressed in this regard. As much as 75% of these teachers report very stressful experiences. The bulk of the other groups of teachers are in other categories. For instance, 75% of the private schools teachers and 42% of the area secondary teachers sustain that they find it quite stressful to teach their syllabus. Another 42% of the area secondary teachers only mention average stress.

Given the right to choose only 13% of the teachers involved would prefer not to teach at form two level. While 54% of the teachers would like to keep the same form, the remaining 33% are undecided what to do. It is interesting to note that all those who prefer not to teach any further at form 2 level are junior lyceum teachers. Private schools and area secondary teachers are apparently more willing to keep the form. The percentage of teachers willing to teach again at form 2 level is 75% for both private schools teachers and for area secondary teachers.

Discussion

All the results in the previous section and the comments hereunder are to be taken with utmost caution. Not only is the sample not random and representative,

but the items of the questionnaire are by no means exhaustive enough of the topic at hand[2]. Again, the analysis undertaken is very limited. It is advised that the reader takes this paper for what it is worth: namely, an indicative piece of research which definitely calls for future more vigorous investigation. In spite of all these limitations the present study still has its own merits. For instance, the sample size (referring here only to state schools) is more than adequate as the state schools teachers in this questionnaire represent the bulk of the state schools teachers teaching at this level [3].

It is evident that teachers at form 2 level are experiencing great problems when it comes to the coverage of the syllabus. Present findings suggest that this problem is shared by all irrespective of the type of school in which one teaches. Again, most teachers think that the syllabus is negatively affecting their teaching, something which is felt mostly by junior lyceum teachers. Although the majority of the teachers express fears that students' mathematical understanding may be suffering because of the syllabus, teachers in area secondaries are less pessimistic on this point. Teachers' responses also suggest a desire on their part to see a revision of the current syllabi. While, junior lyceum teachers are very determined on this point, the minds of the area secondary ones are less made up. Stress caused by the syllabus is another problem which form 2 teachers have to live with. While the majority of teachers, irrespective of the type of school, report stress, it is the junior lyceum teachers who are apparently the most vulnerable in this area. However, in spite of the above findings, the vast majority, given the chance to choose their classes, would still not rule out teaching at form 2 level again.

The results in this paper suggest general trends which are worth discussing further. For instance, junior lyceum teachers emerge from present findings as the most negatively affected by the syllabus. They are the most dissatisfied with their teaching methods, very much aware that students' understanding is suffering, the most in favour of changes in the syllabus, the most under stress and the least willing to keep teaching at the same level. On the other hand, present data show area secondary teachers in a more positive light. Their responses suggest that they are the least negative group of teachers regarding the effects of the syllabus on their teaching methods and on students' understanding. And although their majority are in favour of changes in the syllabus, a substantial number of them are undecided on this issue. Not only do they emerge as the least stressed but they are also the most willing to keep teaching this form. It is very hard to comment on the private schools teachers given their small number. However, one may hazard to comment that present data appears to suggest that private schools teachers usually lie somewhere in between the two positions taken by the other groups.

Conclusion

Although teachers' perceptions of the syllabi seem to vary according to the type of school, the overall picture is rather unacceptable. Teachers' responses are generally negative and one can generally say that positive responses are conspicuous by their absence. This paper undoubtedly suggests that the limiting effects of the syllabi as experienced by the present writer are also being felt by other teachers, namely Form 2 mathematics teachers, across the whole spectrum of schools. The present study, inconclusive as it is, does sound a warning. Teachers, even if informed and willing, are basically not in a position to translate the NMC's recommendation into sound classroom practice due to the severe limitations imposed by the syllabi. However, further investigation is recommended. Should future more scientific investigation replicate the present findings, positive action, along the lines suggested by the *Cockcroft Report* (1982), ought to be taken immediately in order to improve on the current syllabi. On a more immediate level, I feel that educators entrusted with the announced revision of the NMC stand to gain by keeping in mind the present teachers' comments.

Notes

(1) The in-service course was held according to the agreement between the Education Division and the Malta Union of Teachers (see Agreement 1994).
(2) For instance, it would have been interesting to ask the teachers if the syllabus matches the ability of their students, or whether or not it is a balanced syllabus.
(3) Information provided by the education department.

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> **"Junior lyceum teachers emerge from present findings as the most negatively affected by the syllabus"**

> *It is evident that teachers at form 2 level are experiencing great problems when it comes to the coverage of the syllabus*

"JUST GRANDMA AND ME" IN THE YEAR ONE CLASSES

Norman C. Borg

One of the pages of Just Grandma & Me

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Reading Software

Most reading software nowadays follows the 'Living Books' approach rendered popular by the Brøderbund software series, with the following typical elements. The story is presented in short paragraphs, each paragraph appears in one page (screen) accompanied by a detailed illustration. As soon as the page appears, the paragraph is read through by the narrator, with the words highlighted in the process. Clicking on an object at the start of the sentence enables the child to listen to the reading more than once. Very often there is also the option of switching from one language to another. This is only part of the story. The characters in the picture are animated and the rest is 'acted out' before the next page is displayed.

Usually there are two versions of the story: 'Read To Me' and 'Let Me Play'. 'Read To Me' goes through the whole story, in which case the children will just have to sit back, watch and listen.

In 'Let Me Play' the children will have a more active part, as they will be able to go back and forward through the pages. In this mode, most of the background objects in the page can be activated by clicking on them. This will activate an event which has nothing to do with the story itself, but which is usually quite entertaining. Given the chance, the children will spend hours exploring by clicking on every minute object in each picture.

Application: Different Ways of Using Reading Software

One of the Brøderbund titles listed above is currently in use in the Year 1 classes in state schools. *Just Grandma and Me* has a very simple storyline, but the theme, basically a day at the beach, is directly relevant to the children's everyday experience, presenting through text, pictures and animation objects and situations which can easily make part of a simple *conversation*. This is important as we should use the software as a vehicle towards *spoken* as much as written English. The point is that although this is supposed to be *reading* software, we are here dealing with other skills than just reading: listening, and self-expression.

The pages contain little text, just like in any other traditional reading book addressed to this age range. However the opportunities for striking lively conversations are enormous, especially because of the sound, speech and animation presented. The teacher's main aim when using this kind of software, therefore, should be that of monopolizing *all* the possible options on offer. The two main methods of going about it are:

Know the software inside out. Try to discover all the possible hidden elements in every page in the 'Let Me Play' mode. Relate these to particular curriculum objectives and use only a couple of these in every session. Even the two cartoon sequences in the Credits section can offer some fun and room for discussion!

Let the children *discover* the story (and all those entertaining hidden elements) for themselves, monitor their reactions and observe their comments. Something they say may just as well be a good starting point for a particular topic. The 'Read To Me' section can be opted for later on.

Suggested Activities

Discussing Events in "Let Me Play" Mode Observe their comments while seeing the events. Observe which event they will click on the most. Some events will certainly interest them more than others, and they will continually click over them to watch them over and over again. The older classes may be asked to write sentences or paragraphs about these events, but for children in Year One, simply asking them questions to help them use their imagination and encourage self expression should be enough. Taking the first page of the software *Just Grandma*

And Me, for instance (Fig. 1): upon a particular click by the user, a bee alights on the character (introduced as Little Critter) and eventually flies off the screen. Little Critter's reaction is that of fright. Questions at this point may be: *Where do you think has the bee gone? Are you afraid of bees? Why do you think was Little Critter afraid of it?*

> **"The first step should be that of going through the software thoroughly before presenting it to the children."**

Encourage them to give comments about the characters, the way they move, the way they speak.

Discussing the Story

This may not necessarily be conducted after the children have gone through *all* of the program. Rather, try to stimulate their imagination by asking them to try and continue the story before they actually turn the page. Example, on page one Little Critter and his Grandma are waiting for the bus. *What happens when the Next Page arrow is clicked?*

Discussing the Characters

Encourage them to give comments about the characters, the way they move, the way they speak. *What is special about Little Critter? Do you like Grandma? How are they dressed?*

Word Recognition

The narrator reads the paragraph through as soon as a new page is displayed. Although the words are highlighted along the narration, this may be too fast for the children to follow, especially in the early months. Word recognition may be achieved through another method. In this software, every word can be clicked individually, and the computer reads it back. Concentrate on a few key words only, from a selection of pages at a time.

Initial repetition drilling may be possible with the whole class, with the software displayed on the large classroom monitor through the teacher's laptop. Pinpoint the key words, click for the narrator's readout and then ask the children to repeat, on an individual basis. This of course is definitely not going to take just one session, and at this point one cannot simply go through all the pages available at one go.

Once repetition drilling is considered sufficient by the teacher, the next step should test the children in recognizing the words before listening to them. Challenge some of the children in each group (or in the whole class using the large monitor) by pointing at a word on screen and asking them to read it. Then, click on the word and let them listen. Train them to discuss each other's way of reading certain words: the computer is always there to give them the right feedback.

Once the children get used to the activities they can be left in groups to experiment on their own. Basic sentence construction may

also be possible through the clicking of individual words. Let the children make the computer read their own sentences by clicking on words in different sequences, creating logical or nonsensical sentences. Observe their reactions.

Additional teaching aid material should be used to complement the computer activities, of course. Reproduce the key words on flashcards. If there is the software available, produce poster-size printouts of one or two of the pages. With suitable software and a decent colour printer this is quite possible. *Print Shop Ensemble III* or its cut-down version *Print Shop Deluxe III*, for instance, enables you to make poster-size images (larger than the normal A4 sheet) which can be hung up on the walls as charts. This program has been provided by the Division to all Year One classes. In a future article we will discuss the creation of poster-size images with this software.

Other Activities

Many other activities not directly related to reading and word recognition can be set up using the software, specifically aimed at enhancing self-expression. Elicit the pupils' comments about the story's sound effects, for instance. Encourage the children to draw scenes or characters from the story. Play short animated sequences without sound, and encourage the pupils to put in their own dialogue and invent other 'versions' of the story. Use the story background to launch a project: *At the Beach*, for instance. The graphics in the program represent an open book with pictures, like a photo album. A good idea is that of creating the children's own photo album entitled *We Went to the Beach*.

Beyond the Software

Vocabulary may be enhanced by going beyond the set number of words presented in the software. In connection with the photo album activity mentioned above, one could get the children to mention other relatives than just Grandma, and introducing other related words such as *Father, Mother, Brother, Sister, Grandpa, Aunt, Uncle, Cousin*.

Conclusion

Most teachers will be able to develop other activities with this software package beyond the ones suggested here. The first step, though, should be that of going through the software thoroughly before presenting it to the children. It is quite obvious that such a package on its own is not enough to develop reading skills and self expression. It should be used in conjunction with the other software packages already available, but it should also be complemented by similar packages which should gradually be introduced in the classrooms.

San Michel
TABLE WATER

naturally
pure
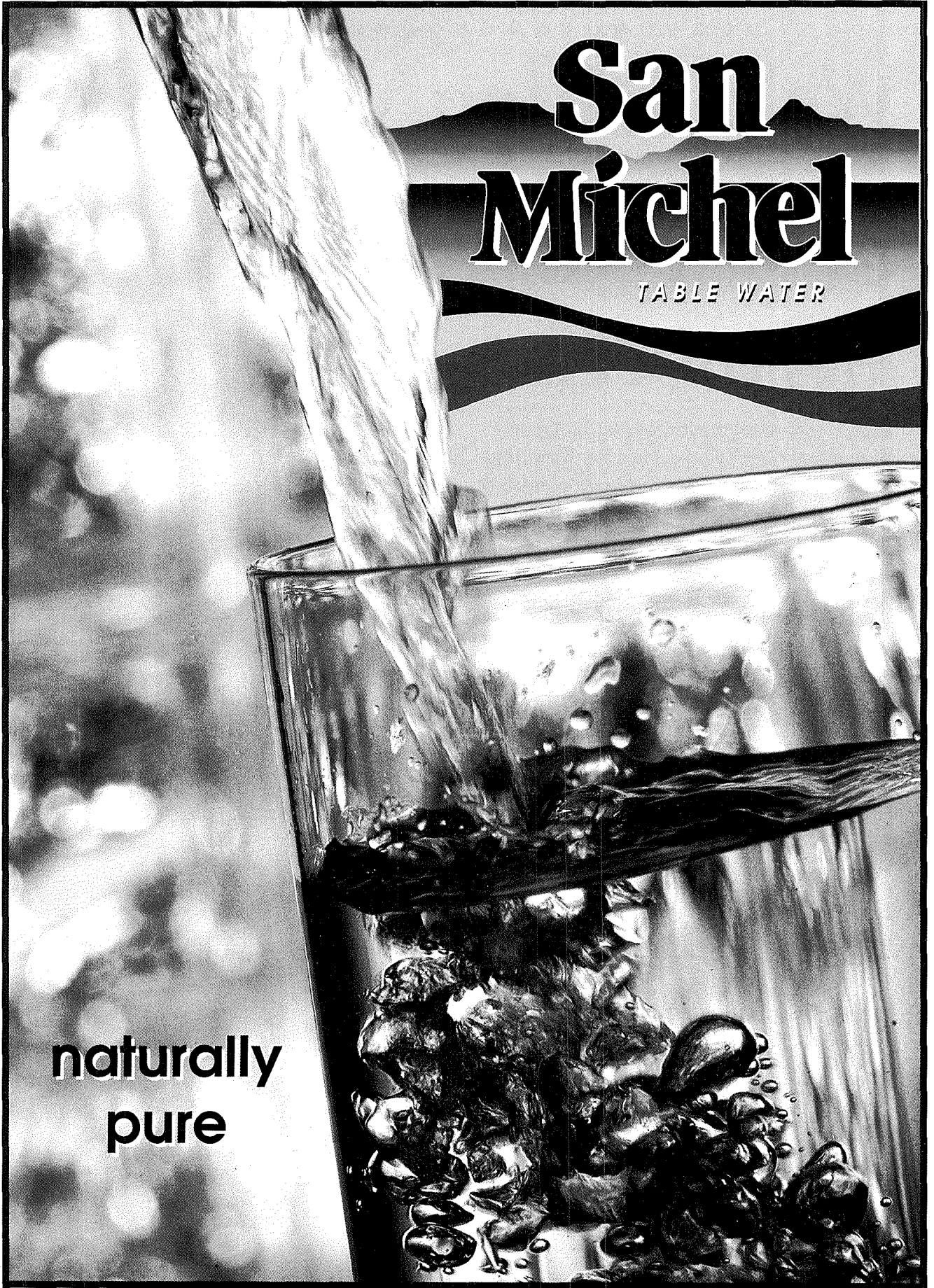
Master of Education dissertations - 1996

In this issue we are featuring a synopsis of the abstracts of MEd dissertations presented to the Faculty of Education in 1996. These can be consulted as reference material.

"Economics is compatible and contributes to the aims of the Maltese Primary School Curriculum"

"The importance of the political involvement of teachers as responsible and guiding members of the learning community"

Fundamentalism, Pluralism and Education: A Euro-Mediterranean Perspective

Maria Callus

Fundamentalism and pluralism have overpowered the contemporary social, political, and economic life of the Mediterranean regio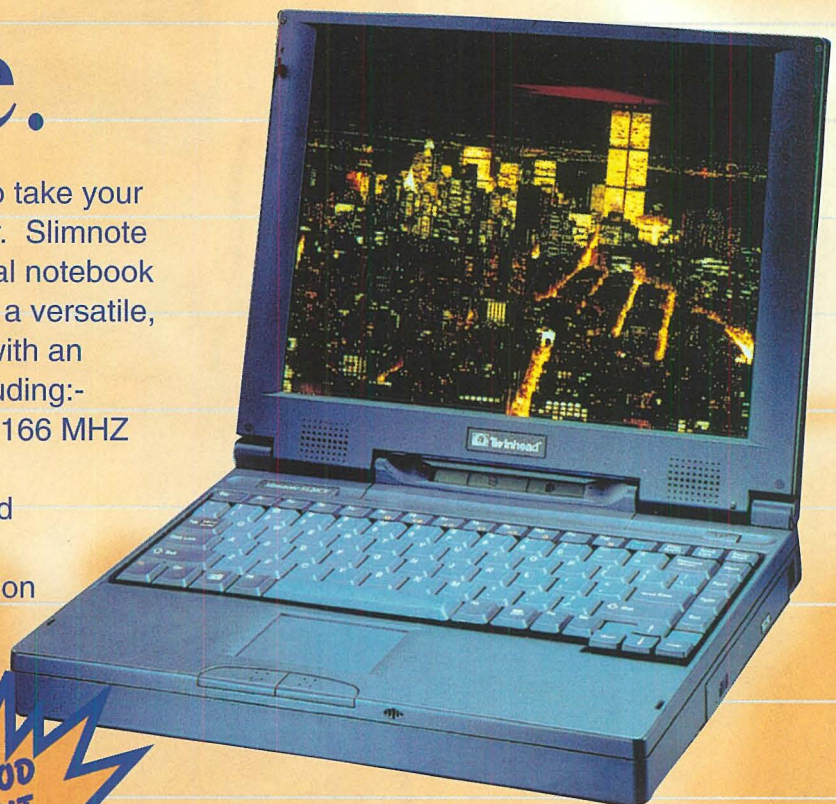n. The former is usually perceived to be an expression of the South and pluralism to be the narration of the North. However, the main argument of this dissertation is that there is a fusion of these two paradigms in every state of the Mediterranean region and that they are not strictly bound to one area.

Infusing Economics into the Primary School Curriculum

Christopher Fava

This study argues that economics is compatible and contributes to the aims of the Maltese Primary School Curriculum and that economic concepts and ideas can be imparted to and learnt by nine and ten year old children in a curriculum based on the teaching of separate subjects. It set out to investigate whether the selected economics content can be effectively taught through the use of an experiment. The conclusions of the study provide evidence that children can grasp economics concepts.

Textual Selves: Girls' Subjectivities in the Secondary School

Clarissa Fleri Soler

This dissertation focuses on the influence of school discourse in English Literature lessons upon secondary school girls' subjectivities. An ethnographic case-study of a Form Four grammar school class is carried out within the framework of Interpretative and Post-modern Feminist conceptions.

Emancipatory Education and Political Action

Simone Galea

This study, built upon a critical and a emancipatory theory of education that sees conscientisation as the first step in the process of empowerment, gives a critical account of the changes in our socio-political culture and points out to the contradictions of teaching as a professional activity. It draws upon the theories of Freire and Habermas to focus on the importance of the political involvement of teachers as responsible and guiding members of the learning community. This dissertation thus has the emancipatory interest in identifying the enablements and limitations of the local, political and educational systems and in outlining the possible actions that educators can undertake to advance democratic changes in our society.

English in Physics: The influence of English language proficiency on Maltese students' attainment in Physics at Advanced level

Martin Farrell

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate what influence different aspects of English language proficiency, including writing skills, word understanding and text comprehension can have on attainment in Physics at Advanced level. Two hundred Physics students, attending Malta's main and largest sixth-form participated in the study. It was found that only a small percentage of students obtained lower grades as a consequence of their inability to articulate their ideas in meaningful and clear English.

Education in an Opening Market

Immanuel Mifsud

Some students of Maltese policy-making refer to the parallelism which lies between the economic and social policy developments brought about by the Nationalist Party since 1987 and those which have taken place in the West. This is located within the New Right ideology which has spread all over the West in the 1980's. Through interviews with some of the main actors in the political, economic and educational scenarios, and through detailed examination of relevant documents, the dissertation concludes that there are in fact some significant similarities between Maltese policy-

making and the New Right ideology, although there are marked instances of contradictions, particularly in educational development.

Policy-making trends in education: 1987-1994

Karen Mugliett

This dissertation investigates which actors are initiating and generating policy in the field of education in Malta, and how their discursive practices are affecting the policies in education, whilst leaving other problems at bay. It focuses on the trends pursued by the Nationalist government and the Malta Union of Teachers in the process of policy formation. It tries to establish the type of relationship this government has formed with the Malta Union of Teachers. Importance is given to the powerful role of both Minister and Union within education.

Safety Education in Maltese Primary State Schools

Carmen Muscat

This dissertation studies safety education, that is the need to educate individuals to take healthy risk decisions and to prevent accidents. It focuses on sixty-six primary state-run schools, the study reveals that safety education is scarce. Significant results were obtained for sex and regional differences in safety education. The poor attitude to safety is also reflected in the primary schools' physical environment. There is a high prevalence of serious accidents amongst primary school children, especially for the boys.

Critical Perspectives on Travel Education

Tanya Muscat

This dissertation examines the post-war development of travel as a leisure activity. Futher investigation is carried out on the prevalent 'consumer culture ideology' and postmodernism and how these affect this industry and its consumers - the tourist.

This study profiles the Maltese tourist during the temporary displacement abroad, especially in Europe and problematises the Maltese tourist's particular socialised forms of life as s/he positions his/herself between the 'us'/'them' dichotomy. Finally the study proposes the introduction of a leisure travel education at the primary level through critical pedagogy to be carried out in a non-hierarchical teacher/student relationship based on the proces of dialogue.

Getting them on while keeping them in: Education and the Politics of Incarceration - A Maltese Case-Study

Joseph Vella

This study explores the curious marriage of the punitive and educative elements in prisons and particularly at the Corradino Correctional Facility (Malta). The theme that permeates this work is, that the punitive element tends to marginalize and even co-opt those initiatives such as the educational, psychological and others related with the welfare of inmates, making them participant in the exercise of control and power. It aims to expose the conflicts that invariably exist between punishment and education and to attempt to resolve this conflict.

An Evaluation of Physics Practical work carried out in Secondary schools

Paul Xuereb

This study investigates the different aspects relating to Physics practical work in secondary schools. These include facilities, teachers' characteristics and distribution, teachers' aims for doing practical work, the type and extent of practical work that was carried out before the introduction of the Secondary Education Certificate and beyond; setting and management of practical sessions, assessment procedures; and the constraints affecting practical work. It was discovered that most schools have the required minimum equipment for periodic practical sessions. The least equipped are girls' private schools.

The language of the Italian Media and its contribution towards the spontaneous acquisition and journal learning of Italian in Malta.

Sandro Caruana

This research work set out to examine secondary school students' aural comprehension of words and phrases/sentences selected from Italian television programmes, as well as their oral proficiency in the language. A quantitative analysis is carried out. The results are presented in the light of the foreign and local literature in the field. A linguistic analysis is also carried out to determine which words and phrases/sentences of the Italian media Secondary school students comprehend better than others.

A Curriculum History of Domestic Subjects in Malta

Lorraine Portelli

By their very nature, domestic subjects are linked to the cultural heritage and the socio-economic conditions of the country in question. Topics such as needlework, basic hygiene, nutrition, home management, domestic science and home economics, which all form part of the broader field of studies known as Domestic Subjects, were included in the Maltese school curricula in an attempt to improve the general conditons of local society. This thesis traces the historical development of the teaching of domestic subjects in Malta.

TEACHING TIPS

MAKING RECYCLED PAPER

Deborah Chetcuti

DEBORAH CHETCUTI, *B.Ed (Hons.), specialising in Biology in 1989. M.Ed in Curriculum & Instrucion at McGill University, Montreal in 1992. Currently reading for a Ph.D in Education at the Nottingham Trent University. She taught science related subjects in secondary schools for a number of years.*

We Use Trees to Make Paper

It takes about 20,000 trees to make the Saturday edition of a big-city newspaper. That's more than a million trees in a year - and more than 22 000 000 kg of Carbon dioxide! Recycling paper saves trees from being cut down.

SAVE TREES BY USING LESS PAPER!
SAVE TREES BY RECYCLING!

What you need

old newspapers
hot water
starch
food colouring
bowls, beakers, dish
wire netting

What you need to do

1. Tear up the newspapers into tiny bits and pieces and put them in a bowl.
   Add the hot water and soak the paper for about fifteen minutes.

2. Use a bowl to tear up the paper into even smaller pieces (use your hands).

3. Add a spoon of starch to give strength to the paper and a few drops of food colouring if you want to end up with coloured paper.

4. Place the wire netting which you have cut into squares at the bottom of a shallow dish and spoon the paper mixture on to the netting. Cover with another piece of wire netting and squeeze out the excess water.

5. Put the netting with the solid mixture on to some newspapers, cover with other newspapers and press hard with a book or something heavy.

6. Allow the mixture to dry for a few hours and then remove from the wire netting. Now you have your recycled paper which you can use to make cards, write letters or simply for decoration.
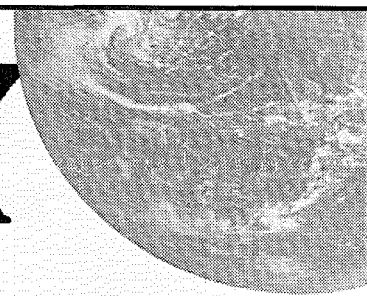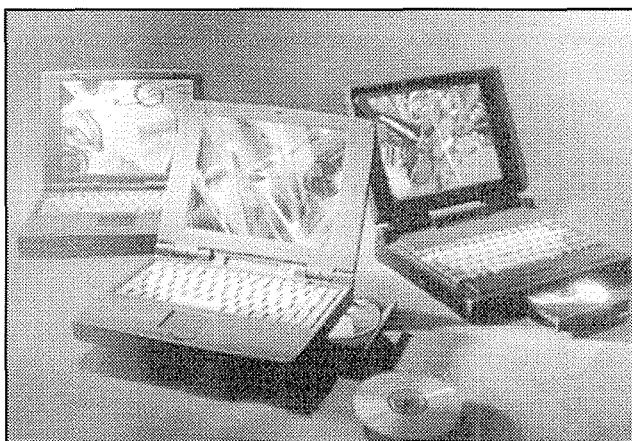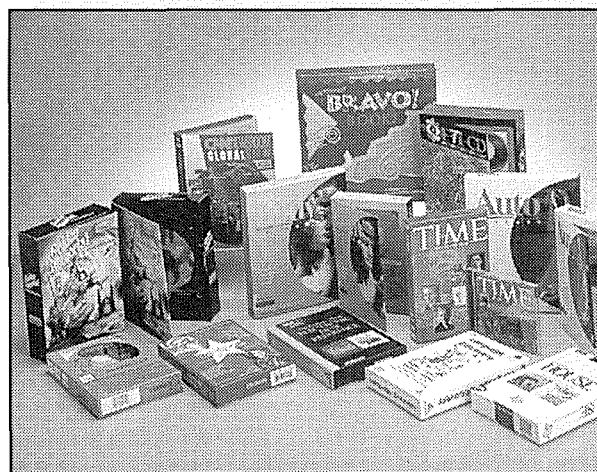
Into the 21st Century

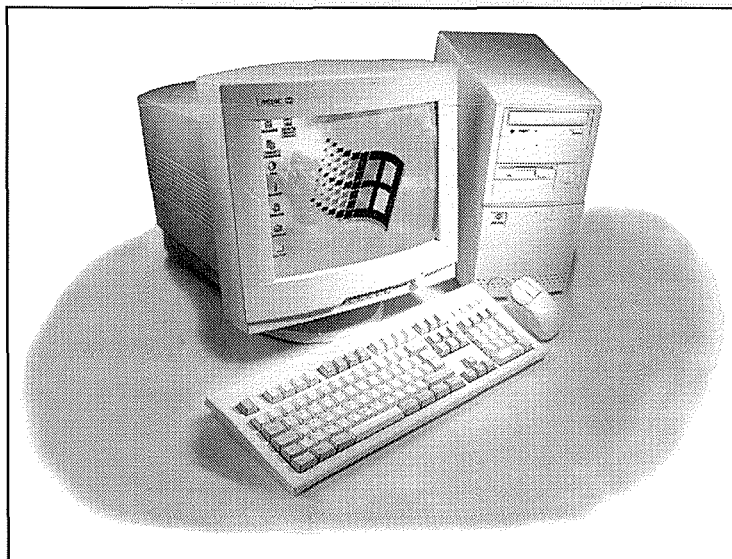# Science Education in Schools

Jan Harding

> **"All young people are entitled to a solid foundation in science to prepare them for living in the 21st Century, which will be increasingly dominated by science and technology"**

JAN HARDING Ph.D
is currently an equal opportunities consultant and chairperson of GASAT (Gender in Science and Technology). She is a member of the fawcett Society Education Committee, external examiner at a number of Universities and an elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

In the middle of September, 1996, just before schools reassembled, an interesting event took place at the University of Malta. About one hundred teachers and administrators who had some responsibility for science education came together in a Forum to discuss the present state of, and future possibilities for, science education in Maltese schools. The Forum was sponsored by the Malta Chamber of Scientists, the Faculty of Education and the Education Division.

I was one of three science educators from Britain sponsored to the Forum by the British Council. We found that many of the issues identified were similar to those encountered in Britain a few years ago: the perception of science as formal and difficult (and so not appropriate for primary pupils or the less academic); the retreat from science by girls by girls post 16; the strong gender stereotyping of vocational education; the demands of competing sciencees with ever-expanding syllabuses; the lack of confidence of primary teachers to introduce science in their classrooms and the unpopularity of physics post 16.

The entitlement aspect of science education

All three visitors emphasised the entitlement aspect of science education, that all young people were entitled to a solid foundation in science to prepare them for living in the 21st Century, which will be increasingly dominated by science and technology. As citizens in a democracy they will need to be prepared to participate in debates about the use of science and technology and to contribute through them to the national economy. In Britain a 'broad and balanced' science curriculum is in place for all pupils from 5-16. For most 14-16 year olds this leads to two subject equivalents in the General Certificate of Education.

It was agreed that the extent of science is such that complete coverage is not possible. Foundations must be laid to facilitate life long learning and laid through enjoyment and stimulation of interest leading to commitment.

This requires abandoning the dominance of conceptual structures in initial presentation of topics and starting from the current interests and concerns of young people.

Elizabeth Whitelegg continued this theme in her workshop presentation of the post 16 Supported Learning in Physics project, while I demonstrated to chemists how the components of a formal chemistry syllabus can be rearranged to fit into a modular course starting from the concerns of adolescents.

Dr. Susan Tresman outlined, in a plenary session, the project she directs from the Open University in Britain to support primary teachers in their task of implementing the science of the National Curriculum and expanded on the project in a workshop. Three hundred teachers are currently involved in Britain and the project materials are already in use in several states in Australia. As Malta moves to a National Curriculum, with a primary science component, there are plans to collaborate with her project also in Malta.

Low female representation in science and technology

From my background of many years of research into the low representation of girls and women in science and technology, I shared insights I had gained on the conditions that are likely to encourage girls to continue to study and work within science and technology. In Britain, choices in vocational education continue to be gender stereotyped and this area is the focus of my present work and campaigning.

Papers submitted by the British Council contributors will be available through the Malta Chamber of Scientists.

We were impressed with the commitment and concerns expressed by the Maltese teachers we met. As changes are contemplated they need a more effective organisation through which to make their views known. We wish them well as they contend with change and developments in science education into the 21st Century.

A questionnaire on language learning

Paul A Attard

Teachers need to know well their students as learners. However, they generally do not have the time to do so, especially in secondary schools. The following questionnaire can help teachers to get to know their students better, discover their self-perception as learners, their attitudes towards teaching and learning, and their study habits. While answering the questionnaire, the students are made to think, however summarily, about themselves, their likes and dislikes, their attitudes and habits and the way they study and learn.

Language teachers may wish to use it exactly as it is or, preferably, adapt it to their particular situation and needs. They should replace "this language" in the questionnaire by the language being taught, for example, English, Italian, French, etc. Teachers of other subjects may adapt the questionnaire to suit their particular subject. It would be beneficial if teachers were to discuss as many of the answers to it as possible with their students both individually and as a class.

The questionnaire was partly developed by a group of participants during a Workshop on *"Learner autonomy and self-directed learning"* held at the Council of Europe's *European Centre for Modern Languages* in Graz, Austria.

It would be interesting to hear from teachers who have used the questionnaire with their students. *Education 2000* is willing to publish some of the observations made and results obtained together together with teachers' comments on their students' answers.

> **"Language teachers may wish to use this questionnaire exactly as it is or adapt it to their particular situation and needs"**

Please note that when reproducing the questionnaire for use, writing and ticking space should be enlarged for better effect

***Paul A. Attard** , Assistant Director of Education, Planning and Research , for 20 years Head of Department in a Technical Institute, pioneering Teaching English for Specific Purposes. Was Director of Studies for the Council of Europe Workshop on language and culture awareness held in Malta in 1996,*

Main objectives of the questionnaire

In relation to students' learning of a language, to find out:
● their self-perception as learners,
● their study habits, likes and dislikes, and
● their attitude towards the learning of a foreign language

Students' name: .... Age: ...... Form: ....

Answer all the questions in the following questionnaire.
Fill in and tick in (x) as appropriate

A. General questions

1.   Do you think you generally do well at school?
        Very well   Well   Satisfactorily   Poorly   I don' t know
2.   **Do you think you can do better?**   Yes   No   I don' t know
   If no, why? ....
   If yes, how? ....
3.   **Name three subjects you really like?**
   a..
   b..
   c..
4.   **Do you like working:**
   alone?   Yes   No   Not so much   I don' t know
   in pairs?   Yes   No   Not so much   I don' t know
   in a group?   Yes   No   Not so much   I don' t know
   with the whole class?   Yes   No   Not so much   I don' t know
   individually with your teacher?   Yes   No   Not so much   I don'   t know
5.   **How do you feel when you are asked to:**
   read aloud in class?   I like it   At ease   Uneasy
   speak aloud in class?   I like it   At ease   Uneasy
   write on the board?   I like it   At ease   Uneasy
6.   **How do you feel when:**
   you do not know the answer to a question? ....
   what do you do to find the answer? ....
   you make a mistake? ....
   what do you do to correct it? ....
7.   **How much time do you spend:**
   doing your written homework every day?   ___ hours   ___ minutes
   studying on your own at home every day?   ___ hours   ___ minutes
   watching television every day?   ___ hours   ___ minutes
   reading (newspapers, magazines, books)   ___ hours   ___ minutes
8.   **What activities outside school are you interested in?**
   a. ....
   b. ....

9. **What do you like to**
   learn about? ....
   read about? ....
   write about? ....
   speak about? ....
   listen to? ....

10. **What would you like to be/do when you leave school?** ....

B. Questions related to language learning:

11. **Why do you think you need to study this language?**...

12. **Are you doing well in this language?**
    Very well   Well   Satisfactorily   Poorly   I don' t know

13. **How do you compare your work with that of your classmates in this language?** (name the language)
    Better   Equal   Worse

14. **Do you find learning this language:**
    Easy   Not so easy   Dif ficult   Very difficult
    Why? ....

15.1 **Do you like the way you are taught this language?**
    Yes, very much   Not so much   Not at all
    Why? ....

15.2 **Do you think this language could be taught in a better way?**
    Yes   No   I don' t know
    If yes, how? ....

16. **Do you find the textbook/s you use to learn this language helpful?**
    Yes   Not so much   Not at all
    Why? ....

17. **While learning this language, do you find:**
    reading   Easy   Not so easy   Dif ficult   Very difficult?
    listening to and understanding   Easy   Not so easy   Dif ficult   Very difficult?
    speaking   Easy   Not so easy   Dif ficult   Very difficult?
    writing   Easy   Not so easy   Dif ficult   Very difficult?

18. **How could you improve each of the following skills?**
    reading: ....
    listening and understanding: ....
    speaking: ....
    writing: ....
    learning: ....

You may refer to the use of books, magazines, radio, television, videos, computer, teacher, friends, tourists, in answering the above questions.

19. **How useful do you find the following activities in learning this language?**

doing grammar exercises	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
doing vocabulary exercises	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
doing language games	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
writing a letter	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
writing a composition	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
reading a text	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
reading a book	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
listening to audio cassettes	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
watching a video	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all
using a computer	Very useful	Not so useful	Not useful at all

20. **In learning this language do you use**

a grammar book	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never?
a dictionary	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never?

21.1 **Do you read on your own:**

books	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never?
magazines	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never?
newspapers	Regularly	Sometimes	Rarely	Never?

21.2 **Do you use the library**   Regularly   Sometimes   Rarely   Never?

22.1 **Do you watch television programmes in this language**
    Regularly   Sometimes   Rarely   Never?

22.2 **If you watch television, which two programmes do you like best?**
    1...   2...

23. **Do you ever use this language outside school?**
    Regularly   Sometimes   Rarely   Never?

24. **When / where do you think you may need to use this language?**
    ....

25. **Do you think you will need this language when you leave school?**
    Yes   No   I don' t know
    If yes, in what way ....

OPINJONIJIET

Joseph Giordmaina

Din is-silta li ġejja hija parti minn diskussjoni li jiena kelli ma żewġ studenti li qegħdin fil-kors tal-B.Ed(Hons) ta 'l-ewwel sena. Bħalissa dawn l-istudenti jkunu qeġħdin iduru l-iskejjel biex jieħdu l-ewwel impressjonijiet tagħhom fuq xi tfisser li tkun għalliem.

Novembru 1996

**JG: J. Giordmaina
S1: Studenta ta'
l-ewwel sena
S2: Studenta oħra
ta' l-ewwel sena**

> **"Ma jafx jaqra; kuluri ma jagħrafhomx. In-numri ma jafhomx. Trid taqbad u toqgħod tgħidlu kollox int"**

JOSEPH GIORDMAINA
*B.Ed, B.A., M.Ed.,
lectures in Philosophy of
Education, Philosophy for
Children and Critical and
Creative Thinking at the
Faculty of Education. He
is also currently involved
in the Diploma in
Inclusive Education.*

JG   Tajjeb, mela għiduli ftit dwar il-klassi li qeġħdin fiha

S1   Hija *year 3*, b'population ta' 24 jew 25

JG   Innutajtu jekk hemmx xi 'slow-learner' f'din il-klassi?

S1   Iva, hemm wieħed ħandikappat.

JG   Hemm tifel bi bżonnijiet speċjali. X'għandu differenti mill-ohrajn?

S1   Hu mhux 'physically handicapped' - imma *mentally*. Fil-fatt għandu tmien snin u qiegħed fl-ewwel sena. Kien f'*pushchair* - imma issa qiegħed jimxi

JG   X'inhi l-problema li hemm?

S1   Ma jafx jaqra; kuluri ma jagħrafhomx. In-numri ma jafhomx. Trid taqbad u toqgħod tgħidlu kollox int; il- *one* bhas-suldati. Trid toqgħod tgħidlu kollox. Il- *one* biss jaf, u kultant jithawdu. *Mentally* jaf in-numri minn *one* sa *ten*, imma ma jafx jiktibhom.

JG   X'inhi l-idea tagħkom dwar tfal bi bżonnijiet speċjali fi klassi normali?

S1   Itellef. Għax, bħal dan it-tifel...id-dar imdorri jagħmel li jrid. Jgħid lit-*teacher*: Miss ejja 'l-hawn, *teacher* ejja issa, ejja 'l hawn. Anke lili, beda jgħidli hekk. U jekk ma ttiehx dak li jrid jibda jibki. Imma jtuh anke *fits*.

JG   X'jiġifieri?

S1   Jintelaq ma' l-art, jagħti ma' l-art, jagħti bis-sieq, jagħti mal-hajt b'saqajh, b'idejh, b'rasu.

JG   U t-tfal l-oħra tal-klassi, x'jagħmlu?

S1   Ħeqq..it-tfal jibdew sejrin: Ara, miss x'inhu jagħmel. U jibdew jidħku bih ukoll.

JG   Taħseb li t-*teacher* għandha xi ammont ta' stress fuqha?

S1   Iva hux. Lit-*teacher* idejjaqha

JG   Imma t-*teacher* għandha facilitator?

S1   Imma l-*facilitator* Kindergarten Assistant. *All right*, għamlu xi ħaġa fuqhom .. fuq tfal hekk; imma anke hi stess qalet li hi mhix tajba għal mieghu. Għax ma għandhomx fejn jitfgħuha għamluha mal-ħandikappat. Meta niżel ma' l-art ma kinitx taf x'se tagħmel bih. Kelli ninżel jien mieghu.

JG   Jiġifieri din mhix tagħmel xi kors ta' facilitator hux?

S1   Hi għamlet kors ta' Kindergarten Assistant, kors ta' xi sentejn, u tefgħuha hemm.

JG   Int ukoll għandek tifel *with special needs* fil-klassi fejn qiegħda?

S2   Iva. Għamel xi sentejn fil-kinder imbagħad tela' fil-Year 2.

JG   Jiġifieri ma għamilx *Year One*?

S2   Le. Poġġietu *Year 2* mill-ewwel. Miegħu għandu *facilitator*. *Eye-contact* ma tantx jagħmel. Meta tgħajjat miegħu jhares. Idur mal-klassi; imma l-*facilitator* tgħinu ħafna. Tgħallmu l-kuluri, *matching*, tieħu ħsiebu. Hu qiegħed fuq il-pillolli. Daqqa jiġi fil-ħdax u nofs, ma għandux hin fiss. Ġieli jkun qiegħed jiddejjaq u t-*teacher* toħorgu mill-klassi u tieħdu ġo kamra apposta. Ġieli jagħmel PE magħhom. Imma lanqas ballun ma jżomm sewwa. Idejh dejjem ponn. Lanqas il-lapes ma jżomm.

JG   Li kieku kellek issaqsi lill-għalliema tieghu: Kieku kellek iżżommu fil-klassi lil dan it-tifel, Iżżommu jew le? X'taħseb li tirrispondik?

S2   Naħseb hi tippreferi li tgħid le. Mhux għax ma tridx tgħinu, imma għax itellef lill-oħrajn. Għax hu qiegħed sempliċement hemmhekk biex jintegra mat-tfal.

JG   Il-*facilitator* taħdem mat-tfal l-oħra?

S2   Le, mieghu biss qiegħda.

JG   It-tfal l-oħra tal-klassi x'jagħmlu?

JS2   Jidħku bih. Hi tgħidilhom tidħkux bih, għax dak ma jistax jitgħallem hekk, bħalkom, imma għalxejn. Xorta jidħku bih.

JG   Intom li se tibdew bħala *teachers*, meta tmorru *teaching practice*, kif sejrin tharsu lejn din il-ħaġa, taħsbu li taffetwakom, tippreferixxu li ma jkollkomx tfal bi bżonnijiet speċjali?

S1   Jekk ma jkollniex tfal ħandikappati aħjar...aħjar ikunu kollha l-istess.

JG   Aħjar għaliex?

S1   Għax aħjar ikollok it-tfal kollha normali. Iktar tista' tgħallimhom. Inkella jkollok *facilitator* miegħek. Hekk forsi tagħmel xi ħaġa.

X'inhuma l-kummenti tiegħek? Fejn hu post tfal bi bżonnijiet speċjali? Min huma dawn it-tfal? Għandek xi esperjenza li tixtieq taqsam ma' għalliema oħra? Għidilna kif taħsibha.

Tista' tgħaddi l-fehma tiegħek billi tikkuntatjana b'wieħed min dawn il-modi:

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Ma hemmx għalfejn tgħidilna ismek, imma napprezzaw jekk tgħidilna xi ħaġa fuq il-klassi u skola li qiegħed titkellem fuqha.

FACILITATING COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT IN HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN

THE DILEMMA OF CHOOSING THE MODE(S)

Helen Grech

"Whether a hearing impairment becomes a disability or a handicap depends on whether functional communication skills develop early enough"

HELEN GRECH *is a qualified speech therapist. She pursued postgraduate studies in Educational Audiology at Manchester University. She is co-ordinator of the Communication Therapy Division at the Institute of Health Care, University of Malta*

Children with hearing impairment are a diverse group in terms of degree, cause, type, age of onset and age at identification. Among the adverse effects of such a sensory impairment, the development of verbal communication skills seems to be the most crucial. Whether a hearing impairment becomes a disability or a handicap depends on whether functional communication skills develop early enough and whether these skills develop in a deviant manner.

Researchers, clinicians and educators have always been concerned in trying to minimise the drastic effects of hearing impairment. Speech therapists and educational audiologists in particular are currently putting their efforts in reducing factors that may lead to various types of communication disorders in the hearing impaired. One approach which is currently being practised in some countries is to try and meet the three crucial factors for verbal language acquisition in hearing impaired children. These being:

- early identification
- appropriate and consistent hearing aid fitting (when/where applicable)
- guidance and counselling to parents

Research data is now indicating that given that these factors are met, verbal language acquisition would develop along normal or slightly delayed patterns (e.g. Robinshaw, 1996; Cole, Oshima-Takane and Yaremko, 1994)

Early identification

Bench (1992) commented that it is universally agreed that for adequate verbal language acquisition it is important that a child be exposed to speech in his/her first two years of life. Ling (1988) indicated that progress tends to be more rapid if attention is given to the development of speech communication in early infancy. This puts a lot of pressure on early identification of hearing loss. Hence, the earlier a child is identified with a hearing impairment, the more likely he/she is to develop verbal communication skills up to his/her maximum potential.

How early is early?

In this day and age, it is not unusual for an eight week old infant to be fitted with hearing aids. This is successful provided there is a good universal or selective neonatal screening service; and there is close professional monitoring. Though this was perhaps considered too idealistic in the past for the Maltese Islands, yet given the current resources available locally, a screening service and appropriate management following early identification can be implemented provided the available tools are put together to plan and implement an effective strategy.

Appropriate amplification

The aims for appropriate fitting of hearing aids include consistency of input, development of listening task and enhancing the development of the more natural mode of communication, that is the naturalistic verbal approach. (Incidentally this does not deprive the child from acquiring sign language as a second language.) However, it may prevent him/her from developing a handicap. Sign language acquisition as a first language could be limiting the child's opportunities for social interaction. Appropriate fitting and consistent use of hearing aids should not be considered as too idealistic locally. Qualified professionals are now available who are able to provide a good back up service for the local hearing impaired population.

Parental guidance and counselling

The professionals concerned are responsible in meeting the needs of the hearing impaired client and his/her immediate family. Hence they are responsible in helping parents of newly identified hearing impaired children to go through the grieving process without leaving negative repercussions. Empathy, unconditional positive regard and genuineness are among the professional skills that need to be practised with such clients and their respective carers.

The process of 'coming to terms' with the child's condition seems to be related to the quality and degree of input parents give to their hearing impaired children. Guidance and management may take different forms and may be required by different professionals at different stages of the hearing impaired child's development. For example, speech therapists are qualified to come up with an assessment of the communication skills of the hearing impaired child. They may help in planning intervention strategies on the child's:
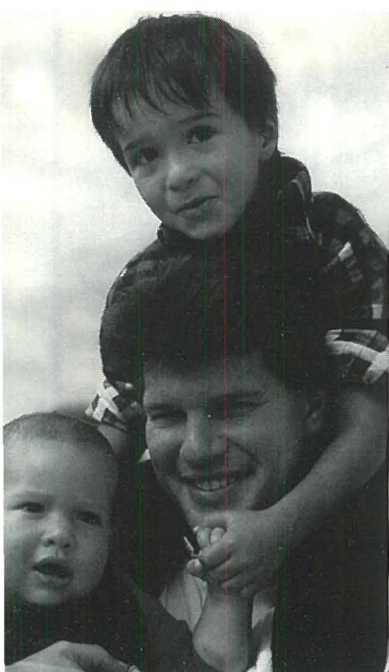
- ability to understand communication
- ability to put words together
- use of voice
- development of listening skills
- development of metaphonological/lip pattern awareness
- development of skills for interaction
- speech intelligibility (Steward, 1995)

> **"The local Speech Therapy service has expanded in the past year by three hundred per cent."**

The local Speech Therapy service has expanded in the past year by three hundred per cent. Considering this increase in service provision plus taking into account that there are currently twenty-eight other trainee speech therapists who would hopefully join the work force in the near future, the local Speech Therapy service should now meet the needs of a greater number of communication disordered which may include those with a hearing impairment.

Would an alternative mode of communication (such as sign language) be a better option to speech communication?

Mogford (1988) reports that only between four to ten per cent of the hearing impaired children have hearing impaired parent(s). The majority of the hearing impaired are therefore exposed to the spoken language. It is now clearly indicated through clinical research data that the input that the child receives is a strong determining factor in his/her success of developing effective communication skills.

> *Only between four to ten per cent of the hearing impaired children have hearing impaired parent(s)*

- Consistency is important for language acquisition. Most hearing impaired children are consistently exposed to spoken language (via home environment; school environment). Hence introducing them to a sign language as their first language may not be providing enough consistency and opportunities for them to acquire language skills.

- It is widely known that hearing adults using sign language usually use this without mastery and consequently provide an incomplete input to hearing impaired children. Besides, their signing would be influenced by the structure of spoken language (Mogford, 1988). This may not be beneficial to the hearing impaired receiver.

- Besides, learning sign language will only begin after identification of the hearing impairment. So there will still be an initial delay in language acquisition.

- Spoken language is the language of society. Sign language users are automatically cut off from the hearing world.

Conclusion

Considering all the above factors, the only hearing impaired individuals who may seem to benefit from acquiring sign language as their first (native) language would be the few odd cases whose parent(s) are hearing impaired themselves.

Meanwhile, given today's technological progress and given local resources currently available (particularly qualified Maltese speech therapists, audiologists, teachers and psychologists) the best communication approach to enhance and facilitate language acquisition in hearing impaired children seems to be the spoken language mode.

This does not impede the possibility that sign language develops as a second language later.

Considering that research data is indicating that on meeting the above crucial factors hearing impaired children are suffering from less drastic delays/deviancies in their spoken language (e.g.; Robinshaw, 1996; Cole, Oshima-Takane and Yaremko, 1994) and considering that Maltese sign language is still in the process of developing, spoken language seems to be the more logical approach for most hearing impaired children.
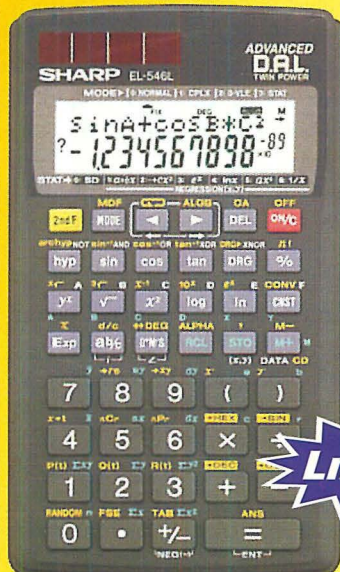
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photo: **Lorraine Abela** B.A. (Hons.) *Communications 4th year*

THE OVERHEAD PROJECTOR

> **"Using the OHP inefficiently actually detracts from your lesson. Using it well enriches its communicability."**

Transparencies can be produced: (i) by hand - better for a cheaper reproduction of colour; (ii) photocopied from opaque originals that you can compile yourself (please, not directly from books - nothing more untidy than having page numbers out of sequence, or figure numbers that make no sense out of context), (iii) printed directly by laser or ink-jet printers - and here make sure the transparency CAN be used with these, or it'll melt in your machine.

If text is to be used, lower case printing should not be smaller than 4mm (excluding ascenders and descenders); upper-case: roughly 8mm.

Useful display techniques: (i) *Progressive disclosure:* covering up all or part of the material on a transparency and progressively revealing it; (ii) *Use of overlays:* using different transparencies to slowly build a complete image.

Using the OHP inefficiently actually detracts from your lesson. Using it well enriches its communicability.

Oh yes, and don't forget to SWITCH OFF the OHP when not using it. It's hum and brightness is a sure way of keeping your students' attention away from you and what you are saying.

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Education behind bars

We are here referring to the educational needs of inmates at Corradino Correctional Facility. The Faculty of Education, Ministry for Home affairs and the Prison Authorities have recently embarked on a programme to improve the educational standards of inmates at Corradino Correctional Facility

We spoke to Mr. Joseph Giordmaina and Mr. Anthony Vella, both members of the Department of Foundations in Education, the co-ordinators of the Programme. Asked why they started an Education project at Corradino Correctional Facility, both replied that they have basic beliefs in education, beliefs which propel them to diffuse education as widely as possible. Asked what these beliefs are they pointed out a few:

- education is not fixed to a particular age - it is a lifelong process
- education is not fixed to a particular set of subjects - it is a lifewide process
- education is not tied up to a particular site or institution - it can take place anywhere
- education is a good in itself - the more educated the public is, the better it is for society.

Corradino Correctional Facility is an ideal site for an educational programme because:

- there are people who have missed out on education - and are now motivated to learn
- there are different educational backgrounds - from illiterates to inmates with degrees, so sharing and support is possible between the inmates themselves
- inmates value education in the belief that it can offer

them a second chance in life
- inmates have plenty of time which they can dedicate to education.

But what are the main aims of such a programme? For Vella and Giordmaina the Educational Programme should seek to develop:

- the educational level of the inmate - from basic literacy and numeracy to a higher academic level;
- the vocational education level of the inmate (through specific courses e.g. carpentry, hotel-services, gardening, construction etc.)
- values education - specifically the development of particular attitudes towards a number of values e.g. the value of life, liberty, etc.;
- leisure education - creative arts, sports, hobbies, cultural courses and activities;
- life-skills - cooking, repairing skills, problem-solving skills;
- social skills and social knowledge;
- Physical Education/Sport.

And how is education at Corradino Correctional Facility different from that given at school?

For a start, it is the inmates' needs that determine the content of the lessons and not the other way round. Unfortunately at school more importance is given to the syllabus than the

Education can offer inmates a second chance in life

needs of the child. At the Corradino Correctional Facility the courses are negotiated with the inmates. The facilitator identifies and structures the course with the inmates. Generally the groups are small - between six and eight inmates at a time. Courses offered are of a short duration, and are offered periodically.

One has also different problems from school, for example you have inmates who cannot make it for the lesson because they have to attend at court or for other reasons. Even the timetable - days and hours of tuition are negotiated between facilitator and inmates. There are to be no annual courses, but modular courses that are repeated from time to time.
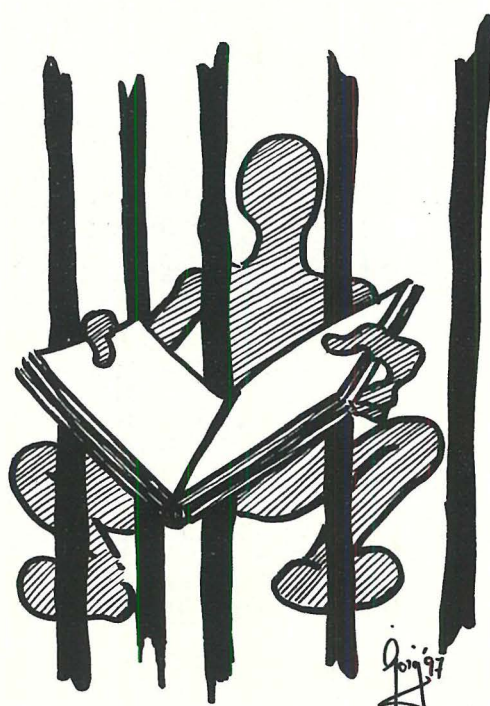
Why are these teachers called "facilitators"? For the simple reason that their role is to facilitate learning. We have moved away from the idea that there exists a teacher who knows it all, and the idiot who has no idea of anything in the world, and the clever old man/woman explains it all to him/her. The idea is to help self-learning, to guide the learner into developing his or her education.

Obviously the facilitators have important roles. They all have a teaching background, and were chosen after a public call for applications. Most important is the training they are receiving themselves - mainly in adult education methodology. The way you help an adult learner to learn is quite different from the way you help children - one has to, for example, create most of the learning material oneself. It would be foolish to try to teach Maltese to an adult using *Denfil* or *Gojjin*. We have also made it a point that both inmates and facilitators have all the necessary backup in the form of educational needs, such as books, library facilities, computers and printers, etc.

Is there a library at Corradino Correctional Facility? In fact there is quite a large library. Books are always in great demand, especially those written in Maltese. An inmate, with the help of a librarian, is in charge of the library. Inmates also have the possibility of borrowing books from libraries outside the Corradino Correctional Facility.

Asked if they had any final comments to make, the answer was: Yes. One is impressed at the respect inmates show towards those who help them in one way or another. The only problem we envisage is how to meet the demand there is for education. One has also to acknowledge the volunteers who have been going to Corradino Correctional Facility for a number of years and the Prison staff and authorities who always support the facilitators involved.

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