

	Diskors ta' I-Istudenti	Strengths and Weaknesses of Small Islands	Trade Schools in Gozo	Theses by Gozitan Students
Profile: Joe Xuereb, sculptor	Aspects of Health of the Gozitan people	Tourists in Gozo	Il-Gwardjani Lokali	Book Profile: The Maltese Migrant Experience
Book Profile: The Placenames of the coast of Gozo	Mini-Medicine in Gozo	Poems	Typing Maltese Characters	Front Cover

Illiteracy rate in Gozo is considerably less than in Malta, in spite of the recent report that illiteracy in young children in Gozo leaves something to be desired. In this context one cannot but comment on the accelerated stuffing of children of tenderest ages under the misnomer of education. In spite of all the harping by prelates, politicians, and educationalist of all sorts, mothers will be mothers and insist that kindergarten should be the place of formal schooling and the home merely a shorthand for homework.

When one reads about the education system in Hungary and Sweden where education starts at the age of 7, one cannot but mourn the loss of childhood in our kids. The irony is that these very countries boast of the best education by the age of 12. Starting early, before the child is ready for concepts relating to literacy and numeracy can actually increase the illiteracy rate. Mothers Beware!

Evidence supporting this idea comes also from Switzerland, where major subdivisions by language lead to philosophical differences in educational practice. The French-speaking children start their education early, while the German-speaking ones start it late. By their teens there is certainly no evidence that the former have any advantage over the latter.

So how can we justify our sado-masochistic exercise of robbing our

children of their childhood because of preconceived ideas about what education they should have?

It's not as if this practice is problem-free. Already there is evidence accumulating to show that early indoctrination leads to increased rather than decreased illiteracy rates. Already we are seeing physical defects, such as scoliosis, in children who spend too much of their time lugging loads of books rather than engaging more profitably in sporting activities. The goal towards which we seem to be speeding lemur-like is the Japanese system where competition is so extreme that mothers will become capable of murder. A case in point is the horror story of a two year old child who was murdered by the mother of another two year old because she achieved a better result in the test. Could anything be more gross, distorted, less conducive to a balanced educational result than striving for high educational achievement at the age of two?!

Parents should be educated to the need that the way to open up the mind of their children, to get the best of the world they live in, and to be eventually in a position to compete successfully in this rat race we call our education system, is to stimulate their minds through constant interaction. To wonder at nature, to behold the beauty surrounding us, to teach them to appreciate the splendour of the imagination by sitting down with them to read a fairy tale that blows their imagination in multiple directions, to appreciate music and the harmonious vibrations that bring messages of a different kind to their innocent ears. It is this, rather than learning the alphabet or the robotic ability to regurgitate the multiplication table on demand that will best prepare the young mind.

What children between 3 and 6 years need more than anything else is paternal care and stimulation which instils an interest in the world around them, and not a formal education

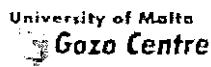
It is in the very early years that the groundwork is laid for future development. This accounts for language, where the first two years of life are fundamental. It accounts for music, where for instance, absolute pitch can be obtained only if one is exposed to music by the age of 5. And presumably it applies also for laying down the framework for our future outlook on life.

Children between 3 and 5 years of age should be attending kindergarten type schools where they can learn socialising habits. It is my suggestion

that if homework has to be given, if academic exercises are insisted on, then maybe it is the parents, and not the children who should be at the receiving end. The problem is to educate the parents in the need for allowing children to grow at their own rate, and not to stunt their development through early indoctrination.

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