

## *Children's mastering of the information society: A Maltese contribution*

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### **Abstract:**

This paper discusses the impact which media, in particular television and computer, have on the lives of children. It argues that the type of influence which these media have depends on many factors such as age, socio-economic background and upbringing, and hence any effort to address this issue must be specific to the target audience it is hoped to reach. In Malta, like in many other countries, media education is considered an important element in the development of the child. The National Minimum Curriculum (1999) gives media education its due importance and discusses it as one of the fourteen objectives which are “intended to contribute to the best possible formation of every person so that good Maltese and world citizens can be produced” (p.47). This paper gives an overview of a media education programme which is currently being implemented in some schools and argues that, by helping children acquire media literacy skills, educators would be empowering them and giving them skills by which they can share in the riches of the information society.

## Introduction

- **A study of more than 5,000 children living in 23 different countries found that the average 12 year old spent 3 hours a day watching television (Groebel, 1999).**
- **Some “hard core” Internet pornography companies are now even listed on the Nasdaq stock exchange (Morias, 1999).**
- **Playing violent video games increases aggression in males and females, in children and adults, in experimental and non-experimental settings (Anderson & Bushman, 2001).**
- **Internet was estimated in 1999 to have 2,000 on-line sites aimed at children offering games and other content that preached religious and racial hatred (Martinez, 1999).**

The above facts and others pose the much debated question, “Should the children be protected from the media?” Some countries, like the United Kingdom, have initially taken this position but some years later moved on to one which considers protection as outdated and propose that children should be encouraged to develop media literacy. Other countries are still taking a somewhat protectionist approach. Our position in this paper is that media education helps children and young people become better discerning users and producers of media products. This position is supported by several studies, for example Singer, Zuckerman & Singer, (1980); Lauri, (1991); Austin & Johnson, (1997); Hobbs & Frost (1999); Piran, Levin & Irving (2000); Hobbs (2001) and Scharrer, (2006). The results of these studies show, amongst other things, that media literacy increases students’ analytical skills, make students more aware of biases in news broadcasts, make students more cognizant of the persuasive strategies of advertising and reduce the internalization of unhealthy messages put forward by different media.

Media, especially television, videos, DVD’s and the Internet are major socialization agents complementing, and often competing, with the work of parents and teachers in the upbringing of children. Parents no longer have a major say about what is good and bad behaviour, appropriate language and stylish clothes. The messages given by parents compete with those given by popular actors on television, chat mates on the Internet and idols in music videos. These same messages “shape young people’s attitudes and values about acceptable behaviour, their perceptions of what kind of society they live in, their place in society, and their expectations of the future” (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995, p115). They tell children what is common sexual conduct and appropriate gender roles. They set the norms of society.

## Age and Cognition

One of the factors that influences the way in which children understand media messages is the level of cognitive capabilities of the child. These abilities, in turn, have implications for how children respond to these messages both on an emotional level (i.e. what attitudes they form) as well as on a behavioural level (i.e. how they react).

When we use the term 'children', we are talking about an age group which spans many years. Children between the ages of 1 and 4 differ in cognitive abilities from those between 5 and 7 who in turn are very different from children between 8 and 12. The way these age groups react to the same media message is very different. For example scenes featuring an evil stepfather who is trying to poison his stepchildren might be very upsetting to a 9- or 10- year old because the scene could happen in real life. It is only in adolescence that they start using probabilistic thinking. A teenager is less likely to be disturbed by the scene of the evil stepfather, reasoning that the majority of stepfathers in the world are not murderers (Strasburger & Wilson, 2002).

Teenagers and adolescents have most of the skills required to understand the manifest content of the message as well as the subtext. They are aware to different degrees about the ownership of media organizations and their biases. This does not however, make them immune to their messages. Hence it is still important for adolescents to become acquainted with persuasion techniques used by producers and the influence the messages can have on their attitudes.

The way children respond to a media message is also influenced by the culture of the child as well as by the environment the child is brought up in. A child living in an environment where most couples living together are married will read the North American soap operas in a different way from a child in North America. Several studies also show that members of different ethnic communities read the same text differently (Liebes, 1986).

### **The Information Society**

One of the profound changes we have witnessed is the sheer proliferation of media outlets and technologies in some countries. Over the past two decades, the presence of the media in our homes, schools and leisure centres have increased dramatically. Digital TV and possibilities of interactivity are a recent addition to the mediasphere. In many western countries one television set in one house is a thing of the past. The Internet has outdated the concept of space since we now have access, generally a two-way access, to different web sites all over the world. Modern day iPAQs provide us with a telephone, Internet, email, radio set, TV set, mobile disco and a mobile office. The media are more and more becoming a personal piece of equipment which we wear rather than have in our homes. An inventory of different media available in an average middle class house in the West and of the time devoted to their use will most probably surprise even its owners. This ubiquitous presence and use is challenging the way we perceive and organize the world, our family relationships and our personal life. We must be conscious, however, that this does not apply to all countries and all citizens in each country. The digital divide is a reality which is increasing the gulf between the information rich and the information poor in the same country and between one country and another.

The Euro Mediterranean region is an example. Table 1 shows the big difference between the North Mediterranean (South Europe) and the South Mediterranean (North Africa) in the number of people who have access to television and the Internet. If the whole region is then compared to other parts of Europe one discovers more differences. For example the penetration of Internet users as a percentage of the population is higher

than 50% in many countries like Austria, United Kingdom and Germany and even higher in countries like Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands.

Table 1: Percentage population penetration of television and internet in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Country	% Population Penetration of TV (2003)	% Population Penetration of Internet (2005)
Malta	70.3	31.2
France	57.4	42.3
Italy	52.2	48.8
Spain	40.2	35.8
Gibraltar	35.9	23.4
Croatia	27.1	52.0
Greece	23.8	33.9
Albania	19.6	1.0
Libya	12.7	2.7
Egypt	9.9	6.0
Algeria	9.5	1.5
Morocco	9.5	3.4
Tunisia	9.1	6.2

Source: nationmaster.com and internetworldstats.com

It is clear from the above table that not all children have equal access to electronic media and similarly not all children are equally skilled. Some countries are much more advanced than others and therefore the question of whether children are well equipped to master the media is complex because it differs from country to country, from one age group to another and also from the socio-economic grouping the child belongs to. In order to be in a better position to understand the influence of the media in children's lives in different parts of the world, there must be a concerted effort to identify the impact of different cultural norms on possible media effects and the differences between world regions with a highly developed media landscape and those with only a few basic media available (Groebel, 1998).

Perhaps more than studying the similarities and dissimilarities between the children of one country and those of another one can study the differences and similarities

between the information rich children – independently of their country of origin – with the information poor children.

### **The need for media education**

“Media education is concerned with teaching and learning about the media” (Buckingham, 2001a, p. 2). It enhances people’s understanding of the media culture that surrounds them. It seeks to enable individuals to make informed decisions, and encourages an active and critical participation, in a media saturated world. Media literacy refers to the knowledge and skills that learners acquire from media education. Ofcom defines media literacy as “the ability to access, understand and create communications” (Ofcom, Nov 2004, p.4). Apart from increasing the individuals’ understanding and enjoyment of how media operate, it also gives the opportunity to people to be producers of media, in their own right (Buckingham, 2001b). The empowerment of children, the enhancement of their media experience and their protection should be three strategic objectives of media education. .

Twenty years ago, Masterman (1985) was already arguing that media education is essential, as the world is increasingly being dominated by mass media and communication technologies. He recommended that media education should be regarded as a priority, due to “the high rate of media consumption and the saturation of contemporary societies by the media” (p2). This argument is even more true today. The upcoming generations need to be media literate to be able to meet the demands of the future and to understand the power the mass media.

### **Media Education in Malta**

Different countries have reacted to needs brought forward by this new environment by setting up programmes of media education as part of their schooling system. In Malta we have been active since the beginning of the 1980’s in the building of a media education programme. Presently thirty-five Church schools – twenty at primary level and fifteen at secondary level – teach media education as a subject which forms part of their regular curriculum. It is formally taught in Grades 4, 5 and 6 of the primary level (ages 8 to 10) and Forms 1 and 2 of the secondary level (ages 11-12). Almost 80% of church schools teach media education.

Books have been specifically written for primary (Grech & Dandria, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) and secondary level (Borg & Lauri, 2003, 2004). A workbook format is used for the primary level. These workbooks are low on information but very rich in activities and exercises. The secondary school books follow a textbook format with a lot of information but with a considerable amount of individual, group or class activities. The latest editions of the text books for the secondary level have been radically revised. “Exploring Media Languages” is used in Form One while “Exploring the Media Landscape” is used in Form Two.

A very important step was taken in December 1999 when the Ministry of Education approved the new National Minimum Curriculum. Objective 8 of the Curriculum concerns the teaching of media education and outlines the knowledge, skills and attitudes that such a programme should help students acquire (Ministry for Education and National Culture, 1999).

The Maltese programme, like that in other countries, moved away from the protectionist approach that characterised the Eighties to a more investigative approach, emphasising children's enjoyment and empowerment but including information about the harmful effects which some media products may have on children. The programme respects the students' citizenship credentials of the information society and consequently adopts a non-directive or problem posing approach where the teacher takes the role of a facilitator and elder seeker. In fact both the workbooks and the textbooks are very participative and emphasise individual, group and class activities and projects as a way of learning through experience.

The programme has four aspects.

- i. Formal aspect. Familiarise students with the conventions of the language of different media. As a result students will be able to "read" the media.
- ii. Content aspect. Students will be helped to assess critically the message that the media present and be able to judge the values and life styles portrayed.
- iii. Societal and organizational aspect. Students learn that media messages are produced by organizations with definite ownership structures and which operate according to particular production techniques. These organizations work within a society which influences the media while it is itself influenced by the media.
- iv. Production aspect. Students are helped to "write" with the media by being given the possibility and the opportunity to express themselves through their own productions.

Each one of these components has a knowledge, skills and attitude dimension. Students are helped to acquire the information and skills they need about each aspect to be able to acquire a discerning and positively critical attitude towards the media.

In the following section we will discuss some areas of the Maltese programme in the light of relevant literature. The areas are:

1. Media literacy and production;
2. Content: (i) Advertising; (ii) Offensive material;
3. Media use: Internet use, chatting and gaming.

Each of these three sections will include a reference to the curriculum, reference to the literature and reference to the Maltese media textbooks by Grech & Dandria (2003 a,b and c) and Borg & Lauri (2003, 2004)

### *1. Media literacy and production*

#### The National Minimum Curriculum

Media literacy or the understanding of media languages as well as production are included under the headings of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Students are expected to acquire "basic skills in using equipment, techniques and materials connected with different aspects of the media; the production of simple media items; use of the

computer and Internet facilities” ( p.58). Students will also be taught “basic skills in writing letters, reports and investigative stories; writing simple TV and radio scripts and expressing oneself through the use of the computer” (p.58). The Curriculum also asks for “appreciation of the aesthetic value ... and a critical attitude towards the media” (p.59).

### Literature about media literacy and production

Media literacy assumes that the ordinary concept of language, both spoken and written, can be adapted to all media, including the visual media, and that one can therefore speak of media languages. There are some who do not accept this notion but the majority of researches in the field believe that each medium has its language.

Messaris (1994) says that images are a source of aesthetic delight but do not make up a language. He believes that one does not have to learn the basic conventions of the visual media. In his opinion our innate ability to see the visual world is easily translated into the ability to read the visual field of film and television. Messaris though concedes that there are some media dependent conventions that have to be learnt but these can be learnt rather easily. Monaco (2000) in similar vein says that film is not a language but has many of the characteristics of a language.

On the other hand, many other researchers believe that media languages exist and, as a result, it is possible to speak of media literacy. These writers speak of the language of film (Arheim, 1958), the language of television (Tarroni, 1979), the language of newspapers (Reah, 1998), the language of magazines (McLoughin, 2000) and the language of radio (Crisell, 1986).

In this perspective media literacy is not only considered to be a legitimate subject but as an educational discipline that has become an essential prerequisite for responsible citizenship (Zettl, 1999). Some organisations, because of their brief, emphasise moving images when they discuss media literacy (Media Literacy Statement, Department of Culture, Media and Sport (UK) 2001; Ofcom, 2004). Others, quite rightly extend the term to include print as well as still images (Kirwal, Learmonth, Sayer, & Williams, 2003). Though differing on what media to include under their definition of media literacy, Ofcom and Kirwal, agree to include in their definition of media literacy both the ability to ‘read’ and to ‘write’ (or produce) media messages. Kirwal et al. consider as part of media literacy “the ability to ‘write’ media texts, increasingly using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) such as desk-top publishing, authoring multimedia packages, video filming, photography and digital editing”(Kirwal et al., 2003, p.5).

Media languages, like other languages, are learnt by children in a spontaneous way as a result of their observations of their media saturated environment and their use of the products of the same environment. Buckingham (2005) documents the abundant literature about how children’s understanding of the language of television develops from a very young age. His survey shows that the fundamental vocabulary of camera movements and positions, shot transitions and editing conventions, are fairly well understood by most children by the age of four or five. He also documents literature showing how formal media education in schools promotes, encourages and helps the self directed learning that children do. Moreover, media productions by students are

considered to be of particular value to develop both a more in-depth critical understanding of the media as well as an exploration of students' emotional investment in the media. Bazalgette, Bevort & Savino (1992), outline the different media education strategies used in several countries in different continents with particular emphasis both on the "reading" and the "writing" aspects. Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett (1992) give different accounts of practice in different media at different levels including the nursery school level. The BFI publication *Moving Images in the Classroom* (2000) emphasises media education in cinematic language which it calls "cine literacy". Buckingham (2003) explores at some depth different methods of teaching production techniques and concludes that "practical, hands-on use of media technology frequently offers the most direct, engaging and effective way of exploring a given topic. It is also the aspect of media education that is most likely to generate enthusiasm from students" (Buckingham, 2003, p.82).

### The Maltese media books

The Maltese media books give paramount importance at all levels to these aspects of media education. The primary level workbooks focus on the "reading" aspect of media products. A section on picture stories in all three workbooks provides students with a good introduction to the conventions of visual language. Editing, shots and camera work are three of the skills introduced in the television sections. Basic elements of newspaper and radio language are also introduced.

The Form One book is totally dedicated to media language. After a general introduction the book has different chapters on the language of television and cinema, the language of newspapers and magazines, the language of radio and the language of the Internet. Individual, group and class activities form a basic part of the book. Students are invited to build a web page, produce a radio programme and a magazine among many other projects. Such production or "writing" skills enhances children's understanding of the media and the pleasure that they get from different media. Moreover, students feel empowered as a result of their "reading" and "writing" abilities.

These sections about media language can help children:

- "read" the language of cinema and television (Grade 4, p. 12ff; Grade 5, p.10 ff, 23ff; Grade 6, p.1ff, 21ff, Form 1, p.11ff)
- "read" the language of newspapers and magazines (Grade 5, p. 14ff, Grade 6, p.12ff, Form 1, p.33ff)
- "read" the language the radio (Grade 4, p. 33ff, Grade 5, p. 33ff, Form 1, pp. 51ff)
- "read" the language of the Internet (Form 1, p. 61ff)
- understand the different conventions used by each medium (Form 1, various);
- understand that the way a language is used has an effect on what is normally considered to be the content (Form 1, p.20-21);
- learn that the techniques and technologies used by each medium influence the language of that medium (Grade 6, p.33; Form 1, p.34);
- understand the similarities and dissimilarities of the languages of look alike media e.g. cinema and TV, newspapers and magazines (Form 1, pp12-13, 34);



- be able to produce their own media products (Grade 6, p34; Form 1, p.21, 49, 50, 68).

## 2. Content

### The National Minimum Curriculum

Media content is an important part of Objective 8 of the National Minimum Curriculum. It looks at content from the perspective of the relationship between media and society and also within the parameters of media organizations. The Curriculum states that school curricula are expected to impart knowledge of the media's interpretative aspect (e.g. stereotypes) and the skill of sifting through and analyzing what appears in the media, including advertising. It strongly emphasizes the development of a critical attitude towards the media and the development of a selective attitude regarding media consumption based on a system of personal values.

While emphasizing this critical attitude as a personal reaction to media content, the Curriculum recognizes that certain content is regularized by legislation and can also be censored. Students are expected to learn about these as well.

Research shows that out of all media content special attention is given to advertising, portrayal of violence and sexual content. As a consequence they are considered by many to be a must in all media education programmes. The Maltese programme follows this trend.

#### 2.1 Advertising

##### Literature about Advertising

The overt and latent effects of advertising may not seem dangerous, yet the subtle consequences of advertising include an increase in parent-child conflict (Lee & Brown, 1995), an influence on the self-esteem of the child (Stice & Shaw, 1994) and contribute to more materialistic attitudes (Greenberg and Brand, 1993). Advertising propagates the idea that the possession of a particular object or the consumption of a particular food is essential for obtaining success and happiness (Wulfemeyer and Mueller, 1992). Not only does advertising target and shape children's attitudes towards products which would otherwise not been salient in a child's life but it also inculcates in children the belief that the more possessions one has, the greater is his or her personal worth.

Another important concern is that advertising contributes to a preoccupation with physical appearance, especially among female teenagers. Advertising images feature thin and attractive models and pass on a clear message that one has to be thin to be beautiful. Paediatricians and psychologists have noted a marked increase in eating disorders and claim that the media, in particular advertising, are partly responsible for this increase (British Medical Association, 2000).

### Maltese media books

Different aspects of advertising are discussed in all the five media education books used. The Workbooks for Grades 4, 5 and 6 discuss advertising in the section on television while the workbook for Grade 5 also discusses it in the newspaper section. Advertising features briefly in the newspaper and radio section of *Exploring Media Languages*, the book used in Form 1. The most extensive coverage of the subject is given however in the book for Form 2, *Exploring the Media Landscape*.

These sections about advertising can help children:

- Understand that advertising is very important financially for all the different media (Grade 5, p.31; Form 2, p.59-62)
- Learn the 'language' and tools of persuasion (Grade 6, p29; Form1, p.57; Form 2, p.58, 63)
- Understand the structure of the advertising industry (Grade 5p30; Form 1, p48; Form 2, p64)
- Learn about their rights as consumers (Form 2, p.67)
- Use the same persuasion techniques to create counter-ads (Form 2, p.65);
- Learn that advertising messages also promote lifestyles (Form 2, p.66, 68)
- Learn about the positive aspects of advertising (Form 2, p.68)
- Learning about adverts through producing adverts (Grade 5, p.20; Form 2, p.60).

### 2.2 *Offensive Content*

#### Literature on offensive content

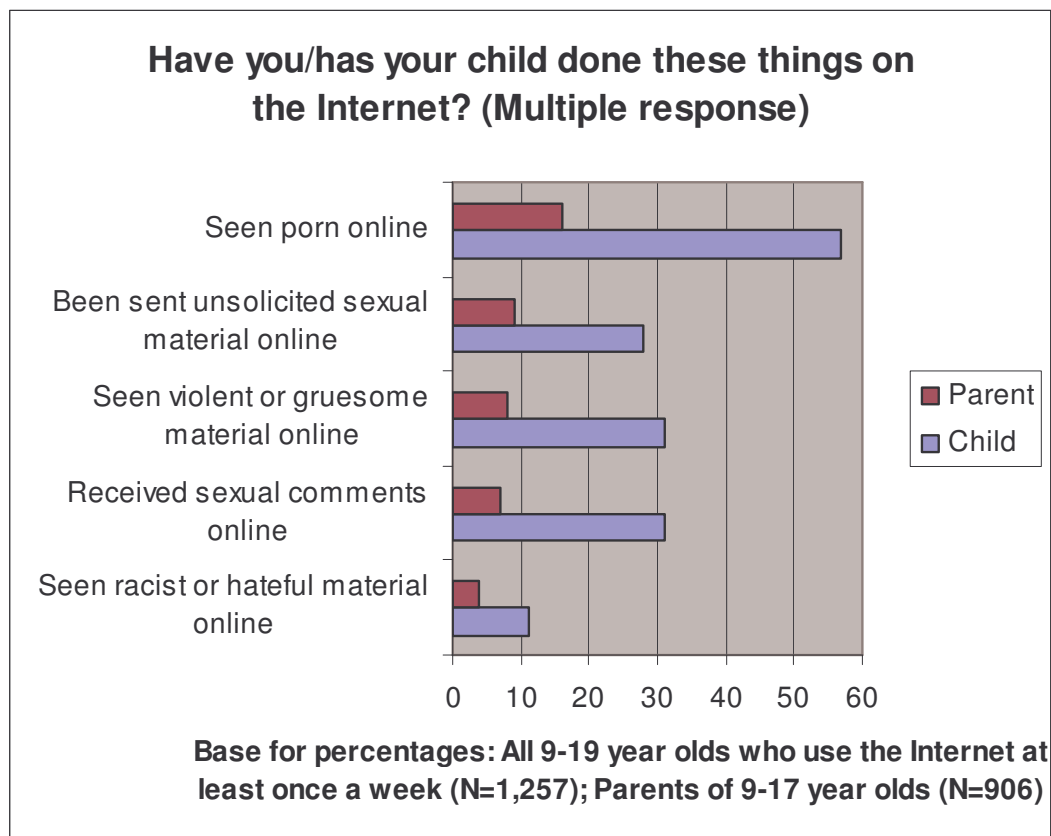
There is strong agreement among social scientists that extensive exposure to media violence and pornographic images can foster insensitivity in individuals who may even develop attitudes condoning aggressive behaviour. (eg. Smith and Donnerstein, 1998). This is even more so for children who are living in a violent family environment or a violent neighbourhood.

Children and adolescents are exposed to media depictions of violence and pornography in prime time drama commercials, news, song lyrics, music videos, video games, computer games and Internet. Whereas, two decades ago, the problem concerned mostly children who intentionally sought out aggressive or pornographic material, now the problem is much wider because many children are coming across antisocial and offensive sites on the Internet while doing their homework. In a recent survey commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council, Livingstone & Bober, 2005, report that among 9-19 year olds who go online at least once a week, more than half (57%) have seen pornography online. It is interesting to note that only 16% of parents of these same children think that their child has seen pornography on the Internet. In a similar study carried out in Malta by the National Statistics Office (2005), 34.4% of the sample under study (n=3,231) had been exposed to one or more types of online material related to violence, racism, vulgar language and nudity (NSO, 2005, p.61).

The research by Livingstone & Bober, 2005, shows that most porn is viewed unintentionally. In this study involving over 1,500 children and young people, 38%

have seen a pornographic pop-up advert while doing something else, 36% have accidentally found themselves on a pornographic website when looking for information, 25% have received pornographic junk mail by email or instant messaging, 10% have visited a pornographic website on purpose, 9% have been sent pornography from someone they know and 2% have been sent pornography from someone they met online (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Things children do on the Internet



Source: Livingstone & Bober, 2005.

#### Maltese media books

Media content is mainly discussed in Form 2, though news and advertising are mentioned in all the media books used. Chapter 3, “The Influence of the Media”, discusses different aspects of media content. It is within this context that pornography and violence are studied.

These sections about pornography and violence can help children:

- Understand that use of media have good and bad consequences (Form 2, p.30-40)
- Learn that exposure to pornography and violent material can lead to ‘copy-cat behaviour’ (Form2, p.30-40)
- Help students understand that violence is never a solution (Form 2, p.39)
- Realize that programs, movies and video games are always selling attitudes, modes of thinking, and behaviours (Form 2, p.31)
- Develop critical thinking (Form 2, p.38-39)

- Learn about desensitization (Form 2, p.39)
- Become aware of the negative effects of pornographic and violent material (Form 2, p.38-39)
- Recognize stereotyping (Form 2, p.32-37)
- Become aware of censorship used and guides published to help making the right choices (Form 2, p.40).

### 3. Media use

#### National Minimum Curriculum

The National Minimum Curriculum, with regard to media use, says, *inter alia*, that a selective attitude should be developed regarding media consumption and that a critical attitude should be developed towards media content. Objective 8 aims to help students strike a balance in the choices they make between educational programmes and others which provide entertainment. The use of computers and Internet is highlighted. The National Minimum Curriculum says that students should have “knowledge of the Internet”; and that they should be skilled in the “use of the computer and Internet facilities as: (i) a vehicle for using the media, (ii) a unique medium in itself.”

#### Literature on Internet use, gaming and chatting

Research and information seeking have been made easier thanks to the Internet. The same can be said about communication with all types of people through chatting or even phoning using its facilities. Children do benefit from these positive aspects but it is easier for children to fall in the trap of using the Internet to fill their time at the expense of other more important tasks. Research points to lower grades in schools, poorer interpersonal relationships and irregular eating patterns to mention just three examples (eg. Griffiths and Hunt, 1998 and Putnam, 2000).

According to statistics cited in Marketresearch.com, 2005, the worldwide market for videogame consoles, peripherals and software was estimated at 28.8 billion dollars in 2001. Moreover a 2001 review of 70 top-selling video games revealed that 89% contained violent content. The same can be said for computer games played on the Internet. In video and computer games, the child is much more involved than in film viewing. Loftus and Loftus, (1983), point out that, in gaming, the player has a more active role. He or she need to be very attentive to coordinate visual attention to motor actions, has to make decisions and is in command of what actions to take. The child is totally immersed in a “virtual reality” and hence the effects of violence may be more dangerous.

Moreover, Griffiths and Hunt (1995, 1998) talk of a minority of children who are prone to addiction. These would typically exhibit negative behaviours such as not doing homework, getting poor school grades, irritability and annoyance when unable to play, sacrificing social activities and even stealing money to buy and play video games. Putnam, 2000, explains that computer mediated communication encourages people to spend more time alone, talk online with strangers, sometimes giving personal details and forming superficial relationships at the expense of deeper face-to-face discussion and companionship with friends and family.

Another latent effect of chatting is that of language use. Grammatical, capitalization and spelling errors are not only acceptable, they are expected in online communication (Turkle, 1995). Teachers have already noted that some children use this language even when writing formal essays.

### Maltese media books

At the primary level the Internet is only referred to in the Grade 6 workbook. It is treated in some depth at the Form 1 textbook; in fact a whole chapter is dedicated to Internet language and use. This chapter also discusses, among others, search machines, e-mail and chatting. The Form 2 textbook has a number of references to the internet especially in the introduction, the part on advertising and the chapter about the influence of the media on us.

These sections on internet use help children:

- Acquire knowledge of basic Internet language (Form 1, p. 62-64)
- Understand basic uses of Internet (Grade 6, p.31; Form 1, p. 65-67; Form 2, p.11)
- Be familiar with the positive and negative use of chatting (Form 1, p. 67)
- Be familiar with the positive and negative use of gaming (Form 2, p.11)
- Develop in children an awareness of risk and a sense of self regulation (Form 1, p. 67)
- Be aware of the commercial potential of the Internet (Form 2, p.62)
- Provide valuable skills that can be applied to most of life's decisions (Grade 6, p.31; Form 1 p.65 ff)
- Encourage schools to produce a web page (Form 1, p. 68)

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have argued that children and young people need to be conversant with the languages of different media and become producers of media in their own right. This can be facilitated through media education. Media education is not teaching through the media and should not be confused with educational technology or educational media. Media education helps students learn media languages, develop a critical attitude towards the media and the messages they give, and make them aware of biases in media productions. . Children, like every individual or group who tries to master a language, need help to learn the skills necessary for survival in the information society. This is why formal media education programmes are important. Objective 8 of the National Minimum Curriculum is very clear about the aims and objectives of media education. However, as Buckingham (2001) rightly points out, “well-intended documents and frameworks are worthless without trained staff to implement them” (p.13). Media education should therefore be included in all teacher training programmes and be available as part of teachers' ongoing professional development. Because media education is so vast and so complex, it cannot be taught and learnt in a fragmented way. As Buckingham suggests, media education should be taught in a coherent and systematic form and must be seen as an essential component- indeed, a prerequisite – of modern citizenship (p.2). Trained teachers and empowered students can help assure that our media saturated environment will enhance human dignity and serve all human persons not just media owners and controllers..

As Diedre Downs, co-founder of the Downs Media Education Centre pointed out, “If information is the coin of the realm, only the media literate will share in the riches” (Downs, 1994).

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