

# CONTROVERSIES IN EDUCATION

## eEurope and e-Education

Joseph Giordmaina

“The European Union is confronted with a quantum shift’ – resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy”

### The Lisbon Meeting

The Council of the European Union has just held a special meeting on 23-24 March 2000 in Lisbon to agree on a new strategic goal for the Union ‘*in order to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy*’. In the Presidency conclusions<sup>1</sup> it is stated that the European Union is confronted with ‘a quantum shift’ – resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy. The EU is also concerned with the fact that more than 15 million Europeans are unemployed. One of the solutions to the challenge of both this ‘quantum shift’ as well as to unemployment is education – a specific kind of education – one which focuses on information technology.

Such a vision of things to come has important implications as to whoever is involved in the planning and implementation of educational programmes in Malta, both within and outside schools<sup>2</sup>. What the EU is telling us in very simple terms is: *invest in IT*. There are jobs in demand, but these are in specific areas, mainly in information technology.

There is possibility of economic growth – but this is of a new kind: *e-economy*. All citizens must have the ability to live and work in an information society; one simply cannot afford to be IT illiterate.

For this reason the European Council calls member states to:

“ensure that all schools in the Union have access to the Internet and multimedia resources by the end of 2001, and that all the teachers needed are skilled in the use of the Internet and multimedia resources by the end of 2002”.

### Implications for Malta

The education authorities are aware of the importance of IT in schools. A well thought out programme for the introduction of computers is still being implemented. This year in the primary level we have reached year 4, while programmes at the secondary level are continuously being ameliorated. Focusing on the primary school, it is evident that the computers are in class, but whether they are being used or not and how, is a different matter.

For it seems that we have managed to place in schools the hardware, but it has had little, if any, impact on the kind of teaching being

carried out in the classroom. The Division, as far as I know has never commissioned a study to analyse the impact of IT in schools, but from informal chats I have with teachers, as well as from what I see in the classrooms it seems that:

- Teachers are not integrating IT in their lessons. Some use computers as time-fillers – sending those who finish early to do something – just like doing a ‘workcard’ in the past. Consequently students who work at a slower pace never manage to have access to computers

- Some children are kept from using the computers as punishment.

- Monitors are not used for lesson presentation, using simple software like PowerPoint etc. They are mainly used as large screens for video viewing.

- Teachers see the use of IT integrated in their lesson as too time consuming. Teachers feel that they have a lot to do: an over crammed syllabus which they can hardly cover: using traditional methods of teaching; IT is an added burden which they can do without

- Teachers are not well trained to use IT in the classroom. A three day course in June and another three day course in September is definitely not enough. Nor, possibly are the Certificate and Diploma in IT in Education courses run by the Faculty of Education for the Education Division. The MUT’s insistence that training of teachers should take place in those specific time frames is in practice hindering the professional development of teachers. The use of peripatetic teachers (only to be found in Malta) is commendable.

- Teachers also seem to favour drill and practice software, or software that resembles books, like match, fill-in, etc. Software that is more open-ended, like kid-pixs for example is not that popular.

- Teachers leave their laptops at home.

- Teachers do not create their own resources, or simply use the computer to create a chart or a flash card

- Most teachers still do not seem to have an idea of how to teach in groups, with one group working on one task while another group working on another. In most classrooms one sees whole class teaching all the time – with the computers (at least) covered with plastic at the back of the class.

Of course these are some of my impressions, meant to bring about a discussion on whether or not this is the case, and if so, how such problems can be solved.



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. His interests  
include Inclusive Education  
and Education in  
Correctional Facilities. He is  
currently reading for a Ph.D  
in England.

# MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITY



## Change

One important aspect all EU documents refer to is the rapid rate of change. Unfortunately we do not seem to appreciate that things are changing so fast around us. When was it the last time books were changed in schools? We still use *id-Denfil*, the *Pathway* and the *Basic Maths* books. How can it be that nobody does anything about this! We still use traditional modes of teaching, of class and school management. Change has to take place in our schools, and at a much faster rate. This involves great risks, but the alternative is to live in a time warp. The next big change in schools is going to be the introduction of Internet. How is the Education Division preparing for the introduction of Internet in schools (apart from installing the hardware)? Hopefully, just as the Division provided teachers with laptops to familiarize themselves with IT, it will now provide Internet access free of charge. Students should also be offered Internet access from home at a lower rate.<sup>3</sup> A study of the number of homes, who own these, and what use is made of them should also be commissioned by the Education Division in order to have a better understanding of the local situation. In Europe 12% of households are connected to the Internet, which means that around 20% of the population have online access.

The eEurope document is recommending that:

### By the end of 2001

- All schools should have access to the internet and multimedia resources
- Support services should be made available to all teachers and pupils
- Access to Internet/multimedia in public centres is to be made available, including in less-favoured areas

### By the end of 2002

- Teachers should be equipped and skilled in the use of Internet/multimedia
- Pupils are to have access to Internet/multimedia resources in their classrooms

### By the end of 2003

- All pupils should be 'digitally literate' by the time they leave school.

Let us hope that we as teachers can come up to this agenda. **Your comments on how we can best go about this are greatly appreciated – and will be considered for publication in the forthcoming edition of *Education 2000*.**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Press release; Lisbon (24/03/2000) – Nr:100/00

<sup>2</sup> The idea that 'learning can no longer be limited to schooling' is further discussed in the Green Paper 'Living and Working in the Information Society: People First'. COM(96) 389.

<sup>3</sup> This is a recommendation made by eEurope: An Information Society for All (Brussels 08/03/2000) COM (2000) 130 final

“All pupils should be 'digitally literate' by the time they leave school”