

# EDUCATION

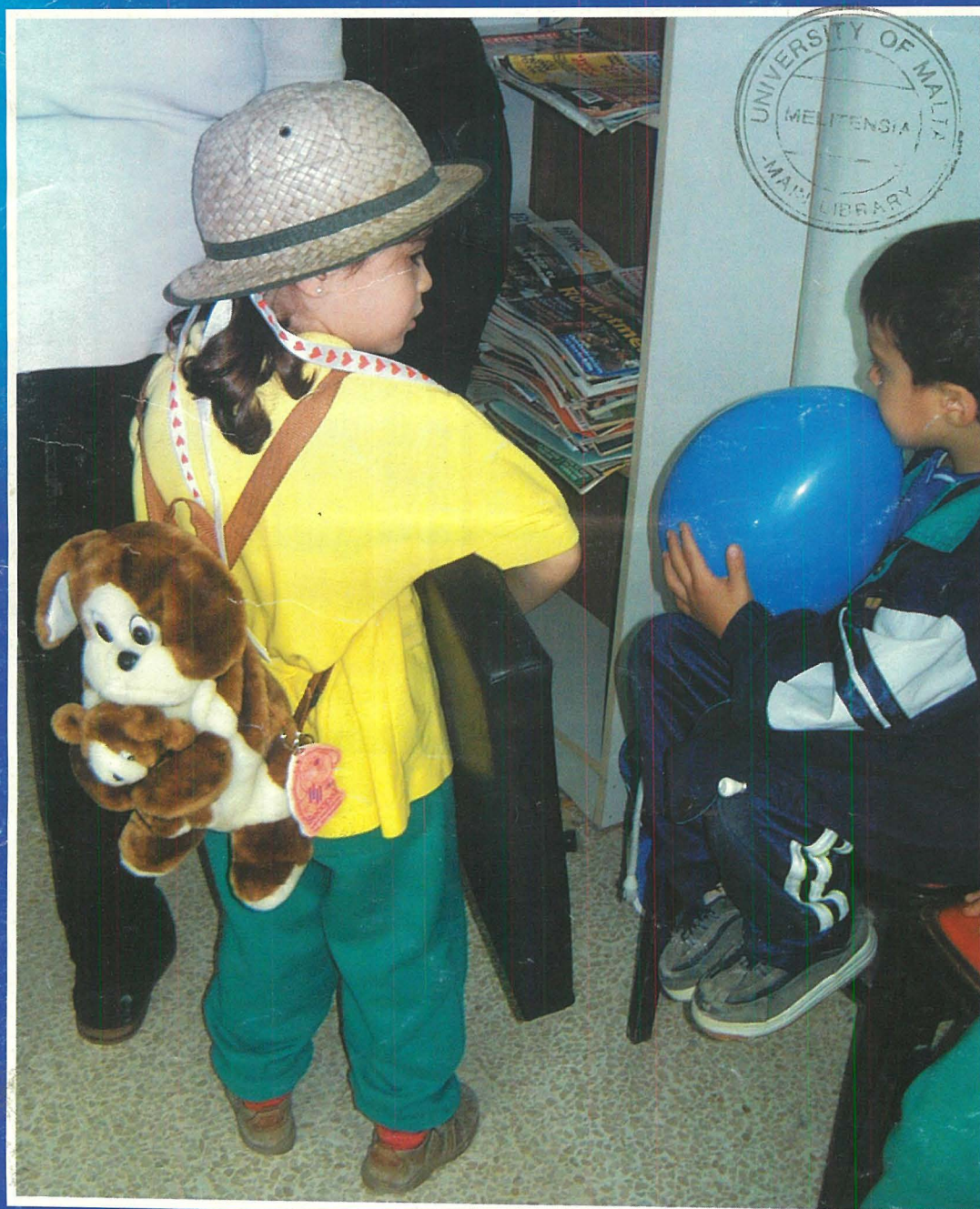
# 2000

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- The Digital Divide
- Adult Literacy Programmes in Żejtun
- Some views about the Maltese Language SECE
- Do the words we use count? Neuro-linguistic programming
- Il-kurrikulu u l-ekwità bejn is-sessi
- Film shows and Primary Education
- Photos for discussion
- Improving the essence of teaching
- Using an Italian newspaper in the classroom
- School absenteeism
- Illustrations in children's books: effect and effectiveness



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Cover photo by Ġorġ Mallia

# EDITORIAL

Charles Mifsud

## The Digital Divide



Attention is being focused increasingly on what has been dubbed the "digital divide" – a term that refers to the gaps in access to information and communication technology (ICT). The stakes are high, as ICT is now integral to the social fabric and is the catalyst for "new economies" to emerge. Exclusion threatens the ICT "have-nots" be they individuals, groups or entire countries. Political awareness of the stakes at issue grows sharply. Education and learning lie at the heart of these issues and their solutions. They are the lifeblood of our 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge societies, and ICT is critical to them. The gaps that define the "learning digital divide" are thus as important as the more obvious gaps in access to the technology itself. Learning is central in the still more fundamental sense that the machines and equipment are useless without the competence to exploit them. Nurturing this competence is in part the job of schools, colleges and universities, in part dependent on the learning that takes place throughout life in homes, communities, and workplaces.

We need to contemplate what measures can be taken to eliminate differences. One can think of three types of disadvantaged groups. Firstly there are students with specific disabilities and those in remote areas where telecommunications are limited and expensive. For these groups, technological and economic solutions are required for access. The second group is composed of women and girls and by some minorities, who find computing too solitary, isolating, and mechanical. To attract females to ICT, software needs to be redesigned to appeal to a wider audience. The image of the computing world needs to be softened and made less antisocial, and computer games need to be made more imaginative and less violent and redundant. The third group is composed of students typically but not exclusively from poor homes and other places on the periphery of society. These students need guidance to take advantage of the new opportunities and resources that ICT provides. The inequalities of concern here derive from both within school and within home differences that influence academic aspirations and capacity for self-directed learning. National policies directed towards closing the digital divide for schooling must attend to all of these contributing factors to be successful.



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# Adult Literacy Programmes in Żejtun

*Charles Mifsud & Josephine Milton*

“Enhanced literacy skills provide such job-seekers with increased opportunities in the labour market”



*CHARLES MIFSUD Ph.D is a senior lecturer and head of the Department of Arts and Languages in Education. His main research areas are language teaching and literacy development.*



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**Rationale**

In September 2000 the ETC, in conjunction with the Paulo Freire Institute in Żejtun and the Literacy Unit, launched a pilot literacy and basic skills programme for adults seeking employment. The rationale behind the programme is that enhanced literacy skills provide such job-seekers with increased opportunities in the labour market. Other identified benefits are enhanced self-esteem and socialisation within the community and the labour market.

## Recruitment of Participants

At the end of Summer 2000, a personalised letter was issued by the ETC to persons on its unemployment list residing in Żejtun, Fgura, Birzebbugia, Tarxien, Zabbar and Paola. This catchment area was identified in view of the fact that the training centre was going to be housed within the premises of the Paulo Freire Institute in Żejtun. The prospective participants were informed about the Programme and its objectives. The Programme was to be offered free of charge and was to admit participants on a voluntary basis in order to ensure adequate levels of motivation.

All those persons who expressed an

interest by contacting the Paulo Freire Institute were called in for an informal interview. Space restrictions and availability of tutors allowed the organisers to accept two groups of eight participants each to follow the Programme. Selection was carried out by the project team on the basis of the basis of a **Checklist for the Selection of Participants**. Consideration was given to the level of motivation and commitment demonstrated by the applicant. It transpired that all the participants were males, between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five. A number of them had work experience while others had in fact never been gainfully employed.

## The tutors

The co-ordination team consists of the director of the Paulo Freire Institute, a youth/social worker seconded to the Institute, a representative of the ETC, and two representatives from the Literacy Unit of the University, one of whom is acting as the academic co-ordinator. The personnel from the Paulo Freire Institute and the academic co-ordinator from the Literacy Unit are on-site for most of the time during the Programme to provide support in tutoring, logistical, social welfare and pastoral matters.

The team of tutors consists of:

- 3 core tutors engaged by the University, one of whom is the academic co-ordinator
- 6 volunteer tutors including a retired head



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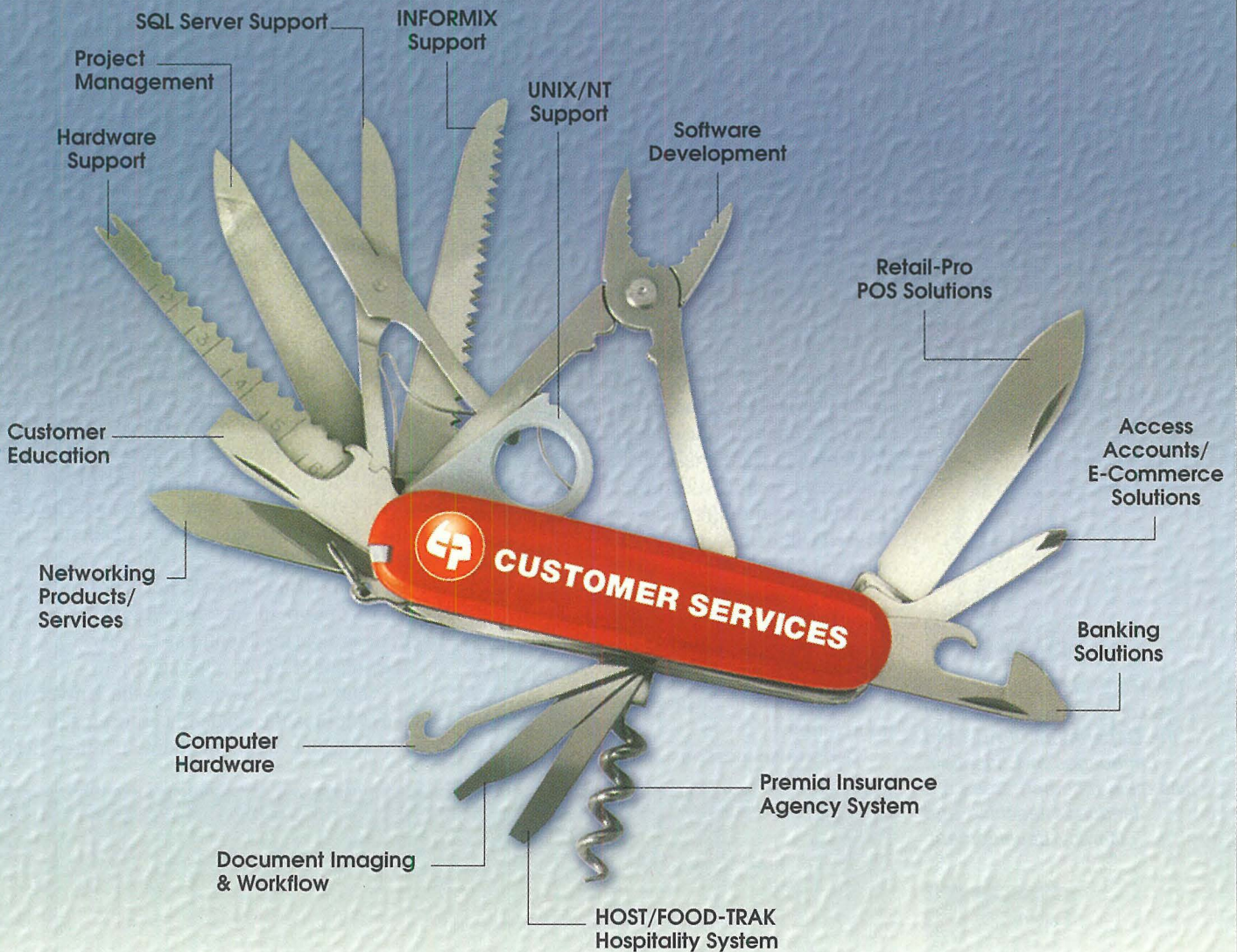




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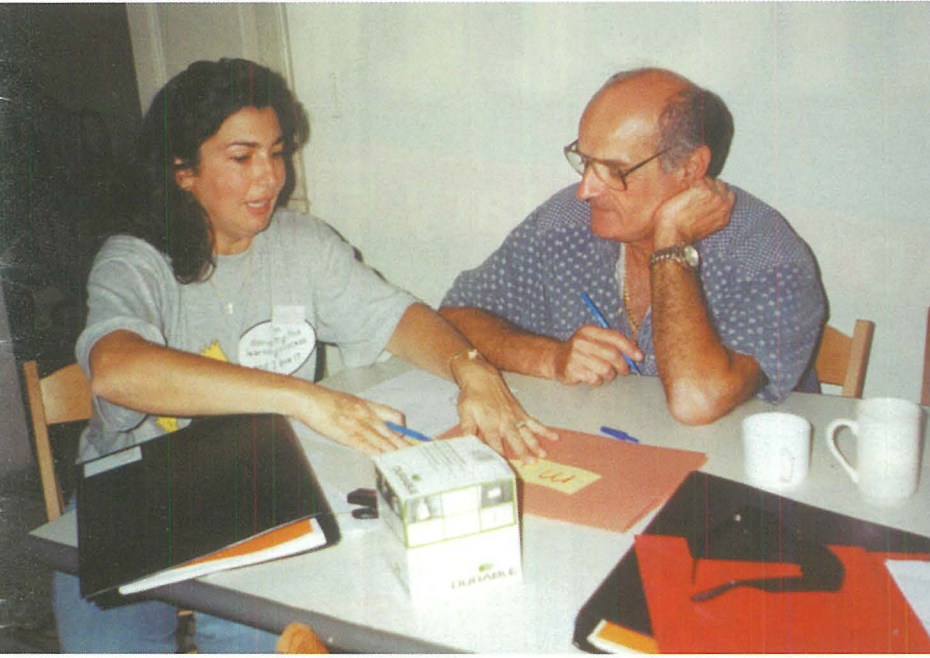
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# Adult Literacy Programmes in Żejtun

of school and teachers and a nurse - 7 volunteer university students who are working on the Programme to fulfil their extra-curricular credit requirement

The availability of such a team of tutors is crucial to the success of the Programme. In this way the course can be of very **high quality** with much of the tutoring taking place on a **one-to-one basis**. This situation allows the tutors



the opportunity to respond immediately and effectively to individual needs.

## The Programme

The first programme has extended over a period of six months, from November 2000 to April 2001. In October the necessary preparations in terms of the design of relevant syllabuses, materials, identification of tutors and participants were made. The course consists of three two-hourly sessions per week for each group. The intention was from the outset to provide a high quality, intensive course on a mainly individual basis.

Following the administration of the **Kwestjonarju għall-Parteċipanti Adulti** the literacy and basic skills needs of each participant were identified. This enabled the project team to design an individual programme for each participant based on the general syllabus devised by one of the core tutors engaged by the Literacy Unit.



photos: Literacy Unit

concluded on page 7



They're Crispy, they're Healthy, they're...

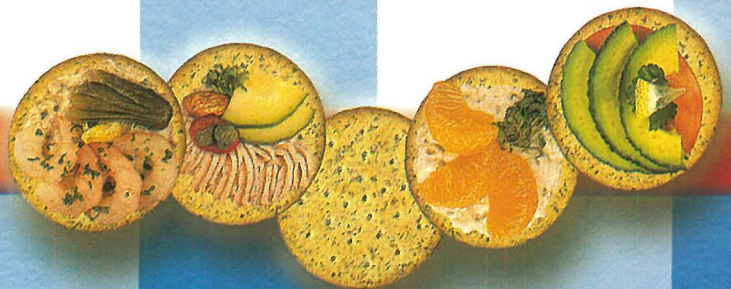
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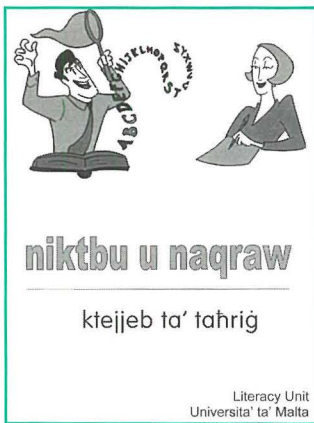
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# Adult Literacy Programmes in Żejtun

*The project team sought to design and adapt local materials suited to the specific needs of the local participants*



*A heightened sense of belonging and community was experienced by all the players in this Programme*

Besides commercial material available from agencies like the UK-based Basic Skills Agency, the project team sought also to design and adapt local materials suited to the specific needs of the local participants. This consists of forms of application, newspaper materials, information and promotional brochures, etc.

## On-going evaluation

In order to monitor progress, ensure continuity and promote on-going evaluation a personal file was established for each participant. A **Learner's Progress Sheet and Description of Lessons** is compiled by each tutor after each session and placed in the personal file of the participant concerned. This provides a brief description of each session, the skills acquired or learnt by the participant, the difficulties encountered by the participant and recommendations for further action. Before the start of each session each tutor consults the personal file of his/her student in order to ensure continuity with previous sessions.

Sessions range from training in basic literacy and phonic skills to practical tasks like applying for a job, preparing for an interview and sending Christmas cards.

A series of planning and evaluation sessions, including a day seminar, for tutors have been held. During these sessions the programmes and progress of individual participants were reviewed and the development of materials and logistical issues were discussed.

One important aspect throughout has been the heightened sense of belonging and community experienced by all the players in this Programme. Levels of interaction amongst participants and tutors have been high. Some of the participants have brought in cakes they have baked themselves on their birthdays to share with fellow participants and tutors.

Up to now this has been an intensive educational experience not only for the participants but for all those involved in the Literacy for Employment Programme.

## KORS TA' VERU

Waqt li id-dar kont qiegħed,  
Ircvejt ittra mill-E. T. C.,  
Biex f'dar Paulo Freire niltaqgħu,  
Ha nitkellmu f'tit flimkien.

F'dar Paulo Freire Itqajna,  
Hawn ġejna mhux bil-fors.  
"Biex titgħallmu xi haġa,  
Għalikom ha naghmlu kors."

Għal dan il-kors bdejna mmorru,  
Studenti Itqajna tmienja,  
Mario, Karmenu, Joe u Kevin,  
William, Mose', Clayton u jiena.

Kien is-sitta ta' Novembru,  
Meta bdejna dan il-kors.  
Kien hemm min beda jifraħ,  
Kien hemm min ha xi xokk.

Biex dan il-kors jintgħamel,  
Xogħol ha hafna minn kulhadd,  
Minn ta' I-E.T.C. u Fr.Edgar,  
Ma' l-Universita' organizzat.

Fr.Edgar id-dar imexxi,  
Dan huwa patri Ġizwita,  
U li ġew jgħallmuna kollha,  
Minn Josephine huma mmexxija.

Josephine bix-xogħol mgħobbija,  
Dejjem għandha xi mpenn,  
Meta ma tkunx tista' tiġi,  
Thalli kollox f'idejn Dorianne.

Għall-kors konna niltaqgħu,  
It-Tnejn, l-Erbgħa, u l-Ġimgħa  
U biex niktbu xi naqra,  
Kien ikollna hafna biża'.

Għall-ewwel konna nistħu,  
Speċjalment mill-imgħallmin,  
Ma domniex b'din il-misthija,  
Għax malajr drajna 'l xulxin.

Meta sew lil xulxin drajna,  
Hadna f'tit tal-kunfidenza,  
Bil-kuraġġ konna mmorru,  
Allavolja bl-influenza.

Għall-ewwel konna mhawdin,  
Kif sa niġu mqassmin,  
Għax studenti konna tmienja,  
Għaxra kienu l-imgħallmin.

Meta bdejna biex nitgħallmu,  
Konna bdejna bl-alfabett,  
Kien hemm min fehem sew mill-ewwel  
Kien hemm min ma tghallem xejn.

L-ghalliema kollha tajba,  
Bħal Dorianne, Victor u Debbie,  
Bjanca, Ruth u anki Anna,  
U dawk kollha li nsejt insemmi.

Kien hemm min ha l-kunfidenza,  
Kien hemm min baqa' f'tit misthi,  
Sakemm drajna naqra sewwa,  
Ġieli hadna xi ġrokk wiski.

Illum itgħallimna sewwa,  
U nehhejna l-misthija,  
Bdejna aktar ma' xulxin naqdbu,  
Nitkellmu aktar bla tbatija.

Ġieli għidna anki storja,  
Waqt li konna qegħdin niktbu,  
Kien hemm min johroġ b'xi wahda,  
Konna kollha nibdew nidhku.

B'dan il-kors tghallimna hafna,  
Kien hemm min itgħallem f'tit,  
Imma xorta nistgħu ngħidu,  
Li minnu hareġ hafna ġid.

"L-ghalliema kollha kontu ġentili,  
u kemm xtaqna bqajna magħkom!  
Tat-tagħlim li għallimtuna,  
f'isem shabi niringrazzjakom."

Jiena ktibt din il-poeżija,  
Ktibtha kif f'qalbi hassejt,  
Għax li ma kienx il-kors għalija,  
Kieku għadni ma naf xejn.

Carmelo Spagnol  
28.03.2001

A POEM WRITTEN BY ONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE ADULT LITERACY PROGRAMME AT ŻEJTON



photo: Literacy Unit



# IS-SALES

Joyce Borg

“L-affarijiet li jkunu għall-bejgh waqt is-Sale ikunu godda u minghajr difett daqs li kieku qed jinbieghu minghajr sale”

Matul is-sena hafna hwienet jagħmlu diversi sales speċjalment wara l-festi jew meta jkun ser jaqleb l-istaġun. Ikollna bosta telefonati mill-pubbliku in ġenerali fejn jistaqsu x'inhuma d-drittijiet tagħhom waqt dawn is-Sales. Ma rridux ninsew li kulhadd għandu drittijiet u dmirijiet, kemm il-konsumatur kif ukoll il-bejjiegh. Għalhekk tajjeb li nitkellmu dwarhom.

Għaliex isir is-Sale? Dan normalment isir fl-ahħar ta' kull staġun fejn il-prezzijiet jiġu mraħhsa biex iħajru lill-konsumatur jixtri prodotti bi prezzijiet inqas milli kienu qabel. B'hekk jinbiegh l-istock eżistenti u n-negozjant jagħmel għall-bejgh l-istock il-ġdid ta' l-istaġun li jkun diehel. Jiġifieri l-affarijiet li jkunu għall-bejgh waqt is-Sale ikunu godda u minghajr difett daqs li kieku qed jinbieghu minghajr sale. Hija impressjoni falza li waqt is-sale jistgħu jinbieghu oġġetti mhux ta' kwalità jew b'difett. Ma tkunx l-ewwel darba li meta nkellmu negozjant dwar oġġetti li nxtara waqt Sale ikollna risposta bħal: *X'tippretendu, dak inxtara waqt is-sale!*

Mela, meta negozjant ikollu xi affarijiet li jkun jaf li huma *seconds, damaged* jew diffettużi jrid jimmarkahom li huma hekk biex il-konsumatur ikun jaf. Imbagħad għaladarba l-konsumatur ikun jaf, jiddependi minnu jekk jażgħilx li jixtri minnhom jew le. Għalhekk il-bejjiegh għandu jagħmel rokna apposta għal dawn l-oġġetti fejn ikun hemm avviż dwar l-istat tagħhom jew b'xi mod jinforma lill-konsumatur dwar il-kundizzjoni tagħhom.

Oġġetti li jkunu mmarkati *seconds* għandhom ikunu tajbin wkoll għall-użu li jinxtraw għalih, kif ukoll għandhom iservu skond il-prezz li thallas għalihom. Tabilhaqq, wiehed jistenna li jonqsu l-aspettattivi jekk jixtri affarijiet *seconds*, imma xorta wahda tistenna li tilbushom u tużahom. L-aspettattivi jonqsu u jiġu riflessi fil-prezz imraħhas. Id-dritt tiegħek għall-kumpens jiddependi skond iċ-ċirkostanzi tal-każ u wiehed għandu jaġixxi b'mod raġonevoli. Għandek dritt tkun taf x'qed tixtri, u għandu jkollok aspettattivi raġonevoli ta' l-affarijiet.

Il-konsumatur huwa fid-dmir li qabel jixtri jżur diversi hwienet sabiex iqabbel il-prezzijiet u l-kwalità. Minbarra l-prezzijiet iqabbel ukoll il-garanzija kummerċjali, għaliex din tista' tvarja għall-istess oġġetti. Inti wkoll tista' tbiddel xi kundizzjoni tal-garanzija bi qbil mal-bejjiegh. Kull tibdil irid isir bil-miktub u ffirmat min-negozjant. Jekk l-oġġett ikun apparat elettriku tagħmel tajjeb li tippruvah fil-hanut fejn hu possibbli. Kun żgur li l-oġġett ma jkunx fih xi difett. Jekk ikun fih difett li tista' tarah waqt li qed tixtri u bl-għaġġla jew



photo: Georg Mallia

bi traskuraġni ma tatgħix każ, ma jkollokx dritt li tibdel jew li tiehu l-flus lura.

Għalhekk, waqt sale id-drittijiet u d-dmirijiet tal-konsumatur jibqgħu l-istess bħal dawk tax-xiri li jsir matul s-sena kollha. Avviżi fi hwienet bħal: “No money refunded”, “Sale goods will not be exchanged” huma hżiena u qarrieqa għaliex jagħtu l-impressjoni lill-konsumaturi li m'għandhomx id-drittijiet li fil-fatt għandhom.

B'mod ġenerali, id-drittijiet tiegħek għall-kumpens jonqsu jekk:

- Il-bejjiegh jindikalek biċ-ċar li l-affarijiet b'xi mod huma difettużi
- Kellek iċ-ċans kollu li teżamina l-oġġetti u sibt id-difetti li setgħu jidhru
- Jekk sempliċement jerga' jibdielek dwar l-oġġett li ma jkunx difettuż, u trid flusek lura m'għandek l-ebda bażi għal dan skond il-liġi
- Qabel tohroġ flusek
- Ifli sewwa l-oġġetti li se tixtri
- Kun żgur li fhimt tajjeb il-garanzija kummerċjali li jagħtik il-bejjiegh
- Itlob ir-riċevuta fiskali
- Jekk m'intix żgur minn dak li se tixtri, l-ahjar li ma tixtri xejn jew staqsi lill-bejjiegh jekk tistax tibdel.
- Tinsieix
- Jekk għandek dritt għal flusek lura, taċċettax il-credit note
- Credit notes mogħtija qabel is-sale ma jistgħux jissarf u waqt sale
- Ftakar li hemm garanzija oħra, dik li tagħtik il-liġi dwar id-difett mohbi



JOYCE BORG DPA, MICA, Uffiċjal Prinċipali, Taqsima tal-Konsumatur u tal-Kompetizzjoni



# Some views about the Maltese Language SECE

*Mario Cutajar*

“How realistic a picture (or accurately a perspective) is the Maltese SECE giving of the students’ language and linguistic competence in the Maltese Language?”

Examinations should not be seen as an isolated activity. They are an essential element of the teaching and learning processes in schools as they provide a framework in which educational objectives may be set and pupils’ progress charted and expressed. Language tests can be an asset because they provide relevant feedback on the strengths of language teaching programme (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Because of the communicative nature of language use ‘*language teaching has developed enormously in recent years ...*’ (Underhill, 1987: 5).

This development has also been seen locally with the inception of the new SEC System of external examinations run by the MATSEC Examining Board of the University of Malta. These exams serve as a benchmark and assess the attainment of 16+ candidates taking them. One such exam is the Maltese SECE and, like all other SEC Exams, certifies achievement in the Maltese Language according to the student’s competence. As this external national exam is considered extremely important by those students seeking post-secondary and tertiary education views of teachers (in State, Church and Private Secondary Schools), lecturers and assistant lecturers, syllabus and paper setters, markers and the chairperson of the Maltese SECE could very well contribute towards the enhancing of the Maltese Language 16+ SEC exam.

The collected data is the product of semi-structured interviews. The interviewees responded to questions that addressed the investigative question: **How realistic a picture (or accurately a perspective) is the Maltese SECE giving of the students’ language and linguistic competence in the Maltese Language?** The responses demonstrate the opinion of the interviewees about:

1. The format/Context,
2. Input/Content and level of the Maltese SECE; that is, whether the aims and objectives of the Maltese SECE, as set by the Syllabus Panel, are being reached when one considers the level of the Maltese Language of the Post-Secondary and University students.
3. Process – the Backwash Effect of the new SEC Examination System in the classroom situation. The time constraints, if any, the teachers have to work within in teaching the Syllabus of the Maltese SECE
4. Reliability of all the components of the Maltese SECE (especially the Oral, the two-

level paper choice and Paper 2) as a means of measuring the achievement of pupils

## Context

The interviewees’ responses express their views regarding the rationale of the whole local examination set-up that strives to reach all candidates, regardless of their abilities, and whose philosophy is to stress positive achievement rather than failure (SECE - **The New Format**, 1994). They also demonstrate the interviewees’ views about the format of the two Papers, the Syllabus of the Maltese SECE, and the rationale of the two differentiated paper system vis-a-vis the Maltese Language.

## Aims and Objectives of the Maltese SECE

Responses demonstrated a diversity of opinion in certain areas, and consensus on other aspects. Very often disagreement was the result of the different roles the interviewees played vis-a-vis the Maltese SECE. There was lack of consensus between the members of the Syllabus and Paper Setters Panel and the interviewees who teach Maltese at Secondary, post-Secondary and tertiary level, as to whether the aims and objectives of the Maltese SECE, so stipulated in its syllabus, were being reached or not.

Three of the four aims of the Maltese SECE concern themselves with the communicative, conceptive and appreciating skills, while the fourth addresses the literary analysis skill. The objective of the exam is to serve as a means of bench marking which is supposed to show that the candidate has a command of the language (in both the written and spoken medium) and that he/she is able to communicate his/her thoughts in good grammatical Maltese. A certificate in the Maltese SEC is therefore intended to show the candidate’s ability in Maltese.

Interviewed lecturers and assistant lecturers of the Maltese Department at the University Junior College and University contend that in many cases the aims and objectives of the exam are not being reached. They are in fact surprised how a substantial number of first year University Junior College and B.Ed. students hold a SEC and a MATSEC Certificate, in the Maltese Language. The interviewees claim that:

- These students make gross morphological, syntactical and orthographical mistakes.



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“It is a known fact that a percentage number of the candidates study Maltese at ‘A’ Level because it is an entry requirement into the law course and not because they have any interest in cultivating and preserving this national heritage”

- They lack the ability to communicate their thoughts coherently in grammatically structured Maltese.
- Many of them find fail to communicate in good Maltese because they come from an English-speaking environment. They allege that:  
“The bottom line is that these students have somehow managed to outwit the system. The interviewees believe that the Maltese SECE is somehow failing to give us a realistic perspective of the students’ abilities in Maltese.”

The interviewed members of the Syllabus and Paper Setters Panels of the Maltese SECE disagreed completely with these views. They claimed that:

- The aims and objectives of the Maltese SECE are being reached as both Papers address language skills.
- As it is a known fact that in Malta a substantial percentage of the population does not give the Maltese Language the priority it deserves, because they frequently converse in English, the aims and objectives of the exam cater for such individuals because the students have to communicate in Maltese both orally and in writing. So if they hold a certificate in Maltese SEC this is enough proof that they have reached the required standards set by the paper setters and markers’ panel.
- They also point out that since 1995, the number of candidates sitting for the Maltese SECE has been showing a steady annual increase. The 1998 Maltese SECE population was 4302, an increase of 25 percent on the 1995 candidates. If so many are sitting for the exam, the implication is that so many are keeping abreast with the language and its literature.
- They also based their arguments on the fact that the large cluster of passes lies between Grade 3 and Grade 5.

“These grades are an indication that the bulk of successful candidates are of average ability. In being successful they are underpinning the fact that the objectives of the Maltese SECE are being reached”.

Finally they stated that although the results show the success of the exam, in no way do they imply that the exam is not open for improvement.

## The Differentiated Paper System

Again this was an issue that led to a diversity of opinion. Many of the interviewees (especially lecturers and assistant lecturers) disagree with the differentiated papers because they believe that a good number of students, who hold a Grade 4 or a Grade 5, assume that they are good enough to study Maltese at ‘A’. They contend that a student who holds a Grade 4 or 5 in Paper 2B or a Grade 4 in Paper 2A

should not be allowed to study Maltese at ‘A’ level, especially if the student obtained a pass mark after a September re-sit. Their opinion is based on a twofold argument:

- a) “We believe that there are too many factors (Oral, Comprehension and Paper 2 marks) that are contributing to a pass mark and a final successful Grade.”
- b) “Furthermore, according to Section 12 of the Matsec Examination Board (1994) publication that Paper IIB ‘is designed for the less academically able candidates’ (SEC Brochure – The New Format, 1994: 8) we feel that a Paper 2B certification is too low a standard for anyone aspiring to further his studies in the Maltese Language.”

It is a known fact that a percentage number of the candidates study Maltese at ‘A’ Level because it is an entry requirement into the law course and not because they have any interest in cultivating and preserving this national heritage. The end result is that these students do not study Maltese but rote learn material to regurgitate it in the exam and manage to obtain the much needed grade. The effect, as pointed out and underlined by Achille Mizzi, is felt years later when these individuals are practising law:

“... the shortcomings in the use of Maltese at University is nowhere more evident than in the law courts where our younger lawyers are discarding Maltese legal terminology...”

“... Maltese is hardly being used by some lecturers in imparting legal jargon to law students...”

(Mizzi, June 25, 2000: 36)

A few of the interviewed members of the relevant boards of the Maltese Language exam support the two tiered-paper format of the Maltese SECE. They contend that this format forms part of the 16+ external examination system that makes the SEC exams accessible to a much larger population than did its preceding G.C.E. exams. The implication is that in making the Maltese SECE accessible to more candidates, Maltese literature is getting the required exposure and contact with about 80 percent of the eligible population of the 16+ exams, rather than with the top 20 percent of the 16 year olds finishing compulsory education (Ventura & Murphy, 1997).

Interviewees who support the two tiered paper contend that the less academically able students who obtain grades five, six or seven are achieving success in a less proportional way. The differentiation in the Maltese SECE and the awarded grades (one to seven) are enhancing the concept of positive achievement. Caroline Gipps (1987) claims that:

“by pitching questions and papers at different levels of difficulty all candidates would be enabled to show what they know, understand and can do. Assessment would



photos: Georg Mallia



interviewed educators. There was consensus about the existing different components of the two papers. All interviewees saw the importance of the components in examining the linguistic competence and language skills of a student.

All interviewees contend that the Oral component definitely needs to be improved in format, content and management. They think that the objectives of the Oral are not being reached because of the content material the student has to read. These interviewed teachers, who had also conducted oral exams, insist that the reading textual content should be chosen with care. It should be primarily appealing, flowing and not pedantic to a point that it will give pleasure to the student in reading it. They feel that there should be better marking guidelines for markers, and better management in examining it.

Some of the interviewees believe that the composition titles need to be more realistic and more student-friendly. They feel that certain essay titles are detached from the world of sixteen year olds. They also insist that the content material of some of the components, primarily the Composition, have an element of inequity. They claim:

*"That some students are weak yet they have to sit for a core paper (Paper I) that is set for all the candidates and expect the less academically able to fare with the average and top students. If we want a realistic mark that reflects the different levels and abilities there should be either a grade Paper I or a different Paper I format and content for those taking Paper 2B."*

Some other interviewees find the Comprehension (second component of Paper I) student friendly but far too short and not challenging enough. The comprehension should not include only recall questions but should include

*thus be a positive achievement and motivation enhanced."*

(Gipps, 1987: 76)

This philosophy of differentiation would allow all the candidates who sit for the Maltese SECE to show what they could do and also allow the inclusion of items suitable for some candidates without distorting the curriculum for others.

## Format of the Maltese SECE Papers

The main structure of the Maltese SECE is that of two papers where Paper 1 is language biased (made up of language components) and is a compulsory element in the Maltese exam. Paper II is a literature paper, but the student has a choice of a harder (Paper 2A) or an easier (Paper 2B) second Paper.

Difference of opinion was again forthcoming on this issue. Those in favour of keeping the existing format the exam based their arguments on a number of reasons, such as:

- They strongly contend that one can truly say that he knows the language when one is also exposed to one of its varieties, the literary register. In understanding literary works one is learning language because a literary piece of work is presented in a grammatical, syntactical and controlled form.
- They maintain that when a student has achieved a successful grade in the Maltese SEC, the implication is that the student has acquired an awareness of Maltese literary culture.
- They strongly believe that having a literature paper integrated with a language paper is not wrong in itself. What is wrong is the way literature is taught in Secondary Schools, especially in State Schools. These interviewees do not blame the teachers, but the curriculum that creates the time constraints they have work in. Because of time constraints and having to teach a vast syllabus in so short a time to a mixed ability class of 25, the approach adopted undermines one of the main objectives of teaching literature: teaching students to appreciate Maltese literary works.

## Input (Content and Level)

Questions addressing this area yielded a barrage of criticism. Even officials on the respective boards of the Maltese SECE admitted that they were not satisfied with some of the content material and how the Oral was being examined by teacher-markers engaged to conduct Orals.

The Content material of the two papers drew a number of critical views from

questions that test different skills, such as inferencing skills. The grammar section shows a step in the right direction because the questions are based on the comprehension passage.

All interviewees agreed that the aims and objectives linked to letter writing are positive. Teaching students about the different formats of letter writing (applying for a job, a letter to the editor, etc) not only prepares them for the exam but also actualizes the concept of life long education.

This consensus, among the interviewees, on the inclusion of the letter component complements the importance teachers attribute to letter writing, as demonstrated by the collected data from the questionnaire.

Finally, the questions addressing the contents of Paper 2A and 2B also drew criticism. All the interviewees agreed that the marks scored by the students for the components of Paper 2 were compensating for any shortcomings that they may have had in any of the components of Paper I. All the interviewed markers agreed that the majority of literary essays were simply a regurgitation of other people's material.

Many of the interviewed educators believed that the objectives linked to the literature paper are not being achieved. They contend that preparing students for a literature paper should not imply teaching them language through literature. The objectives of such a paper should not simply be a lesson on lexicon; that is, giving the meaning of archaic words that have fallen out of use. Students need to be taught the necessary skills of literary criticism. The educators who teach in the post-secondary sector claim that the majority of students are not equipped with literary awareness skills.

All the interviewees agreed that most of the set poems or passages that the students have to study for the Maltese SECE Paper 2 are detached from teenagers' experiences. This develops in the students a dislike for Maltese literature. Finally, almost all interviewees agreed that if literature is to remain the content of Paper 2, then changes have to be carried out to:

- a) Improve the level of the Maltese SECE
- b) Ensure that the rationale of the Maltese SECE Paper 2 will conform with the philosophy of the differentiation policy adopted for the MATSEC exams
- c) See that the contents of the papers will be testing the proper level and thus provide a realistic interpretation of the marks the students score in the exam, giving an accurate perspective of their competence in the Maltese language.

## Process - The Backwash Effect

The opinions of the interviewees (especially interviewed secondary teachers who teach form V students) were concerned with how the new



# The eSchola initiative

“The idea behind eSchola is to give schools a chance to learn together and to learn from each other on the subject of information and communication technologies”

This May, as part of the EU's broader initiative under e-learning, the Swedish Presidency, together with the Commission, the European School Net as well as other private partners, organised an eSchola week. Eschola took place during the first week of May, during the week of Europe Day, which commemorates the Schuman Declaration that gave rise to the founding principles of the European Union as we know it today. It was held during the week of the Schuman Declaration to encourage schools to work together around the themes of European culture and citizenship.

The idea behind eSchola is to give schools a chance to learn together and to learn from each other on the subject of information and communication technologies. This is done through a website that EUN has set up for the particular occasion: <http://eschola.eun.org>. Through this website, schools, teachers and students can share experiences, exhibit projects and organise joint activities, which indirectly also help the spread of good practice and innovation. ESchola should also be an occasion to encourage better public/private partnerships.

There are the five main areas of collaboration:

- Dissemination of good practice, where schools present their experiences
- Travel and learn, where ICT is used towards greater European awareness and active citizenship
- Learning online: online lessons on a number of topics and on-line training courses on introducing ICT in the classroom
- Benefiting from private/public partnerships, where companies are invited to form a partnership with schools for the particular occasion
- Awarding innovation through four main awards: awards for schools, for teachers, for school initiatives promoting European citizenship and for teacher trainers. There are more than 60,000 euros of prizes to be won in cash, travel or ICT equipment. Examples of projects submitted under these headings could include involve the creation of a school website, a set of lesson plans and notes that encourage the exploitation of particular websites, successful school activities with a European content and research results that convince even the most sceptical of teachers to start using ICT in the classroom

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This is a paid message



## Malta's participation

Malta too has participated in this event, which has been coordinated by the Maltese section of AEDE, the European Association of Teachers, and supported by the Ministry of Education and the Malta-EU Information Centre. Schools were invited to become familiar with the eSchola website and to participate in the activities being organised in collaboration with these schools through the website. Maltese schools could also submit their activities and projects under the headings described above for the four awards. Participating schools were briefed towards the end of April. Then, during the week of the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> May, Malta joined the rest of Europe's schools to showcase the innovation and good practice reached in the areas of ICT in Maltese schools.



### For more information on the eSchola and other initiatives:

The Secretary  
AEDE (Malta Section)  
C/o 225B Department of  
Foundation Studies in Education  
Faculty of Education  
University of Malta  
Fax: 32902347  
Website: <http://eschola.eun.org>

### For more information on the elearning initiative and other related EU policies:

Malta-EU Information Centre  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Old University Building  
St. Paul Str.  
Valletta  
Telephone: 25 90 91 92  
Fax: 227580  
E-mail: [euinfo.mic@magnet.mt](mailto:euinfo.mic@magnet.mt)  
Website: <http://www.mic.org.mt>





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# Do the words we use count?

## Neuro-Linguist Programming

*Michelle Caruana Dingli*

“Flexibility of approach is demanded when attempting to conduce more effective communication in the classroom”

The co-founders of neuro-linguistic programming in the early 1970s are two Americans, John Grinder, a linguist and Richard Bandler, then a student of computer science and mathematics. They began to observe common patterns of behaviour and attitudes of people who excelled in the field of psychotherapy. The discipline is defined as an attitude to life, the aim of which is to help achieve intra-personal and inter-personal brilliance.

The ‘neuro’ part is concerned with how we experience the world through our five senses and represent it in our consciousness. The ‘linguistic’ part is concerned with the way the language we use shapes and reflects our experience of the world. The programming part is concerned with training ourselves to think, speak and act in new and positive ways, in order to realize our full potential as human beings. As a discipline it has begun to find its way into the teaching of EFL and also teacher training over the last number of years (Revell and Norman 1997, 1999).

### Metaprograms

The notion of meta programs is based on work originally conducted by Bailey in the 1960s and re-presented later, Rose Charvet 1996. Following this framework we all have preferred and individual ways of expressing ourselves (output) and also of receiving information (input). Therefore flexibility of approach is demanded when attempting to conduce more effective communication in the classroom. The following is framework proposed by Rose Charvet (1996)

#### 1. Internal vs. External

Internal characteristics – people with this preference use their own standards to make decisions and evaluate. They are self-motivated and may resist others telling them what to do. They need time to assimilate information before they put it into practice so that they can judge its value.

External characteristics – people with this preference rely on other people’s judgment and require direction. They know how they have done through feedback from others. They take information as orders have difficulty in deciding on quality in an independent way, and have trouble starting or finishing an activity without outside feedback.



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#### 2. Proactive or Reactive

Proactive characteristics – a person with this preference takes the initiative, jumps into things, bulldozes ahead at times and goes out and gets things done.

Reactive characteristics – this person waits for others to act, considers and analyses indefinitely, needs to fully understand and assess before acting. S/he believes in chance and luck. The chances are that they will wait and respond with caution.

#### 3. Towards or Away from

Towards characteristics – people with this preference move towards their objective or goal. They focus on what they want and like, are motivated by achievements and are good at managing priorities. They have problems recognizing difficulties and negative consequences.

Away from characteristics – people with this preference move away from problems, to be prevented from being attracted to problems that need solving and are motivated to do so. They act in order to avoid negative consequences, are energized by threats.

#### 4. Options or Procedures

Options characteristics – these people are motivated by opportunities and possibilities. They love to create procedures but have difficulty following them. Unlimited ideas thrill them.

Procedure characteristics – these people like to follow set ways and believe that there is a right way to do things. They are interested in how to do things and once they have started something the most important thing is to finish it.

#### 5. Similarities or Differences

This group of people prefers things to stay the same or to change, either progressively or dynamically over time. This is what I like to term the evolution or revolution distinction.



## 2. Proactive/Reactive

- Get going on that and analyze the results to see where it takes you.
- If you feel lucky, why wait?
- Go for it. You'll have time to think about it before our next lesson.

## 3. Towards/Away from

- It is not perfect but you are accomplishing a lot.
- There shouldn't be any difficulty with X if you put more Y into your speech/writing
- By including this in your English you'll reduce difficulties at a later stage.

## 4. Options/Procedures

- There are always many opportunities and you are in a position to choose the right one.
- Describe the procedures you followed and the choices you made along the way in your writing etc.
- After the first two steps in your writing/reading/listening procedure can you think of an alternative direction you might have taken?

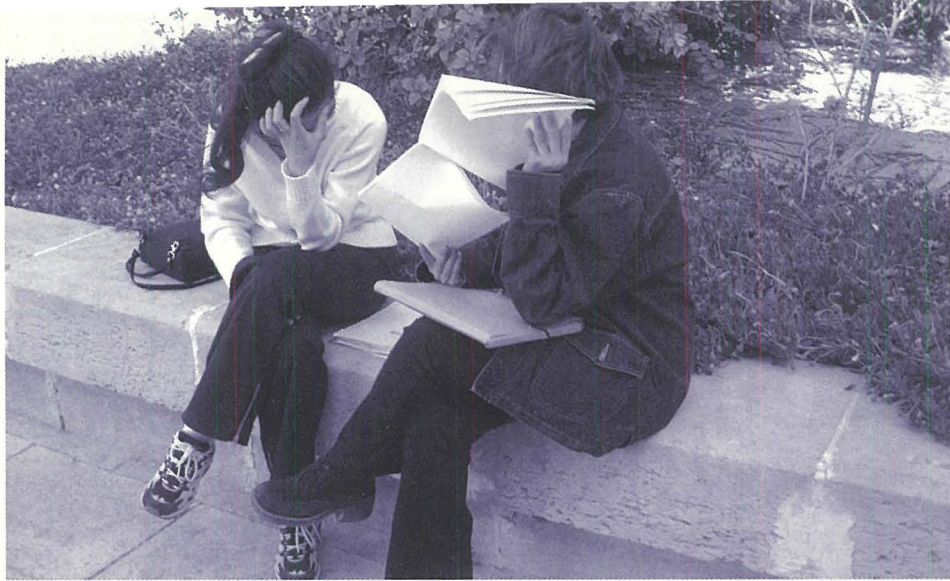
## 5. Sameness/Difference

- Compare your progress this week with last week's. Talk about the similarities and differences.
- Keep doing what you're doing well and try to approach X in a totally different way next time.
- How have you improved since our last lesson?

The above are in no way an exhaustive list of utterances. It would be best if you identified your preferred styles initially so that you are aware from the outset the type of teacher language you are likely to use more naturally and more frequently at an unconscious level. When this has been done it requires special care and attention to cater for other and all styles that exist among our students. The implementation of the above strategies, though simple and basic, may provide the key to unlocking that part of the affective filter wall caused by poor communication and rapport between teacher and students. My experience has taught me that it is well worth the effort.

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**People with away from characteristics move away from problems**

## How does all this relate to classroom practice?

We have two paths to follow. We could both profile each student and match their preferences in terms of the language we subsequently use when speaking to them. Or possibly a more realistic approach is to adapt a more balanced approach whereby the language used would take account of and cater for all possible preferences and variations that exist among our students. A series of utterances/phraseology suitable for the teaching context is suggested below;

### 1. Internal/External

- I would strongly recommend X. What do you think?
- As your language improves you'll make up your own mind about X many teachers think that...
- It is a well know fact, so now you have the information you need to think about it.

**A person with proactive characteristics takes the initiative, jumps into things, bulldozes ahead at times and goes out and gets things done**





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# Il-kurrikulu u l-ekwità bejn is-sessi

*Carmel Borg*

“Il-kunċett ta’ l-ekwità huwa prinċipju superjuri għal dak ta’ l-ugwaljanza u, għalhekk, eqreb lejn il-likk tal-gustizzja soċjali”

## Introduzzjoni

Id-dokument tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali (Ministeru ta’ l-Edukazzjoni, 1999) iqis l-ugwaljanza bejn is-sessi bhala prinċipju bażiku li jqarribna lejn il-kunċett tal-gustizzja soċjali. Il-grupp (2000) li hejja r-rapport dwar “is-Sessi fil-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali” iqis il-kunċett ta’ l-ekwità bhala prinċipju superjuri għal dak ta’ l-ugwaljanza u, għalhekk, eqreb lejn il-likk tal-gustizzja soċjali. Dan l-artiklu għandu l-għan li jissintetizza l-argumenti u l-isfidi ewlenin f’dan il-qasam, kif imfissra fid-dokumenti msemmija, u jissuggerixxi numru ta’ mistoqsijiet li skola tista’ tinkludi fi proċess ta’ awditjar intern dwar l-ekwità bejn is-sessi.

## Il-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali

Id-diskors tad-dokument tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali dwar is-sessi huwa msejjes fuq il-kunċett ta’ l-ugwaljanza. Il-prinċipju numru 11 tad-dokument jafferma d-dritt ta’ l-aċċess ugwali għall-programm bażiku edukattiv:

Is-sistema edukattiva, kif riflessa f’dan il-kurrikulu, għandha tkun imsejsa fuq il-prinċipju ta’ l-ugwaljanza bejn is-sessi fir-rispett shih tad-diversità ta’ bejniethom. Filwaqt li jirrikonoxxi d-differenzi bejn iż-żewġ sessi, u jhegġeg l-affermazzjoni ta’ l-identità sesswali, dan il-kurrikulu għandu jsahhah l-impenn tal-komunità edukattiva biex jiggarantixxi l-istess opportunitajiet liż-żewġ sessi (p.38)

Il-Kurrikulu jindika bl-aktar mod ċar li mhux se jkun hemm għalliema speċjalizzati li se jgħallmu s-sugġett ta’ l-ugwaljanza bejn is-sessi. L-imsieħba li jiffurmaw il-komunità

edukattiva, imnebbhin u ggwidati minn politika ċara, linji gwida u pjan ta’ żvilupp għall-iskola, se jipparteċipaw b’mod attiv u shih fit-twertiq ta’ dan il-proġett edukattiv:

L-ugwaljanza bejn is-sessi mhix tema li l-iskola tista’ tittratta f’izolament, jew f’xi sugġett partikulari. L-ugwaljanza għandha titqies bhala tema interdixiplinarja, li l-għalliema kollha jistgħu jittrattawha mill-perspettiva tas-sugġett tagħhom u jikkumbattu l-preġudizzji kif ukoll joffru mudelli ġodda (p.39)

It-taqsimu dwar l-“Għanijiet Ġenerali” tkompli tikkomferma l-hidma kolleġġjali li trid titwettaq biex jintlahqu l-għanijiet fil-qasam ta’ l-ekwità bejn is-sessi. Taht it-titlu “It-Tishih ta’ l-Ugwaljanza Bejn is-Sessi”, id-Dokument jagħtina hjiel dwar x’tista’ tagħmel l-iskola, fl-oqsma ta’ l-għerf u t-tagħrif, l-hiliet u l-attitudnijiet, biex tkattar il-kultura favur l-ekwità bejn is-sessi.

Biex il-kultura ta’ l-ugwaljanza tkun rispettata, l-iskejjel iridu jaraw li l-għazliet pedagoġiċi, inkluzi l-għazliet dwar il-kontenut u r-riżorsi edukattivi, ma jikkontradixxux dan il-prinċipju. Dan ma jfissirx li l-istudenti għandhom jitpogġew f’kuntast artifiċjali fejn kull ma jaraw u jisimgħu huwa msoffi mill-impurita sesswali. Id-Dokument iqis il-qari kritiku ta’ materjal mill-hajja ta’ kuljum ta’ l-istudenti bhala l-aqwa pedagoġija f’dan il-qasam.

Huwa fatt magħruf li hafna drabi l-istereotipi sesswali u problemi oħra f’dan il-qasam jissawru ‘l hinn mill-periferija skolastika. Għalhekk, id-dokument tal-Kurrikulu jhegġeg lill-iskejjel biex l-istrategija li jaddottaw f’dan il-qasam tkun wahda holistika. Din tfisser li l-iskola għandha sservi



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ta' baži ta' tagħlim għall-ġenituri u għal dawk kollha li jiehdu hsieb it-fal.

## Ir-Rapport tal-Grupp Speċjalizzat

F'Ġunju 2000, il-kumitat ministerjali mahtur biex jipproponi strateġija għall-implimentazzjoni tad-dokument tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali, organizza fis-sala ewlenija ta' l-Università konferenza nazzjonali dwar l-implimentazzjoni. Din il-konferenza serviet ta' inkubatur għall-ideat u vetrina għar-rapporti mhejjija minn gruppi speċjalizzati. Dawn il-gruppi tqabdu mill-kumitat ministerjali biex jipproponu strateġiji ta' implimentazzjoni fil-qasam speċjalizzat tagħhom.

Grupp numru 16 ipprezenta rapport dwar "is-Sessi fil-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali". It-teži ewlenija ta' dan il-grupp (2000) hija li mhux biżżejjed li nipprovdu opportunitajiet indaq għas-sessi differenti. Il-prova ewlenija tas-suċċess ta' sistema edukattiva mnebbha mill-prinċipju tal-gustizzja soċjali hija r-risultati miksuba matul u fi tmiem il-vjaġġ skolastiku. Għalhekk, il-grupp iħoss li l-kunċett ta' l-ekwiwità bejn is-sessi (risultati indaq) huwa superjuri għall-kunċett ta' l-ugwaljanza (opportunitajiet indaq).

Tradizzjonalment, is-sistema edukattiva serviet biex tipperpetwa d-differenzi bejn is-sessi. Minkejja li l-kunċett ta' l-ugwaljanza nebbha ħafna mid-deċizjonijiet fil-qasam ta' l-edukazzjoni, id-dieti skolastiċi differenti u l-għażliet bikrin baqgħu jkarkru d-diskriminazzjoni sesswali. It-tweġiba tal-grupp għal din ir-realtà hija politika ta' ekwiwità mibnija primarjament fuq l-idea ta' programm edukattiv komuni, li b'mod dinamiku jindirizza l-bżonnijiet tas-sessi differenti.

Il-grupp (2000) jipproponi l-kitba mill-ġdid ta' prinċipju numru 11 tad-dokument tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali biex jikkonforma mal-kunċett ta' l-ekwiwità. Għall-grupp, ekwiwità fil-qasam edukattiv tfisser: opportunitajiet indaq fil-qasam tat-tagħlim; l-istess opportunitajiet fit-tagħlim tas-suġġetti u fit-thejjija għal aktar edukazzjoni, xogħlijiet, karrieri u parteċipazzjoni ċivika/politika; aspettattivi għoljin; trattament ekwu; u promozzjoni ta' relazzjonijiet soċjali mibnija fuq ir-rispett.

Il-pjan propost minn dan il-grupp speċjalizzat huwa mifruq fuq medda ta' erba' snin u mqassam fi tliet fażijiet. Fil-qosor, il-pjan propost jinkludi:

l-ewwel fażi:

1. Il-Qafas Legali
2. Id-Divizjoni ta' l-Edukazzjoni
  - Żvilupp professjonali ta' l-oghla uffičċjali tad-Divizjoni ta' l-Edukazzjoni
  - Kull dipartiment fi hċan id-Divizjoni ta' l-Edukazzjoni jhejji *mission statement* dwar l-ekwiwità bejn is-sessi
  - tithejja politika dwar l-ekwiwità bejn is-sessi
3. Deċizjoni dwar politika
  - Tittiehed deċizjoni fil-livell Ministerjali u MATSEC dwar l-ammont ta' suġġetti li l-istudenti jitgħallmu fil-livell sekondarju (tnaqqs fin-numru ta' suġġetti)
4. Holqien ta' post ta' uffičċjal inkarigat mill-ekwiwità bejn is-sessi
  - twaqqif ta' kumitat li jinkludi uffičċjali għolja - *ex officio*
  - identifikazzjoni ta' nies li jaħdmu fil-qasam ta' l-ekwiwità bejn is-sessi, u thejjija ta' direttorju ta' nies li jistgħu jipprovdu tahrig f'dan il-qasam
5. Żvilupp kurrikulari
  - żvilupp professjonali ta' persuni involuti fl-iżvilupp tal-kurrikulu

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**Is-sistema edukattiva, bil-limitazzjonijiet tagħha, tista' tikkontribwixxi fl-iżvilupp ta' soċjetà aktar ekwa**

**“L-irġiel u nisa m'humie x jghixu kuntest soċjo-ekonomiku li jitrattahom b'mod ekwu”**

- linji gwida dwar l-eliminazzjoni ta' l-istereotipi sesswali (l-ewwel fażi)

6. Qafas li jiżgura li l-politika dwar l-ekwità tinfiltra kull programm tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali

7. Il-bidu ta' programm ta' appoġġ għall-iskejjel

8. Tishih tal-prinċipju ta' l-ekwità fil-programm ta' l-istudenti-ghalliema

It-tieni fażi

1. Żvilupp Professjonali

2. Żvilupp ta' linji gwida u kontinwazzjoni ta' l-iżvilupp professjonali ta' kull min huwa involut fl-iżvilupp kurrikulari (it-tieni fażi)

3. Żvilupp professjoanli ta' kategoriji differenti ta' għalliema

- għalliema tal-primarja
- koordinaturi tas-sugġetti
- guidance teachers
- librara u professjonisti oħrajn

4. Kunsilli ta' l-iskejjel

- programm ta' tagħrif
- programm għall-ġenituri

It-tielet fażi

1. Jitkompli l-programm ta' żvilupp professjonali

- għalliema fl-iskejjel primarji (it-tieni grupp)

- għalliema fl-iskejjel sekondarji

2. Twaqqif ta' kumitat li jevalwa s-sitwazzjoni fl-iskejjel

3. Gender Audit

4. Programm għall-ġenituri (it-tieni fażi)

## Sistema ta' awditjar

Skola li trid tibni kultura msejsa fuq l-ekwità bejn is-sessi trid tibda minn analiżi serja ta' fejn tinsab fil-kontinwu ta' l-ekwità. B'sistema ta' awditjar intern, l-iskola tibni l-azzjoni tagħha fuq informazzjoni preċiża. Hemm hafna mistoqsijiet x'wiehed jista' jistaqsi f'dan il-proċess ta' awditjar. Fil-lista ta' mistoqsijiet indirizzati lill-għalliema, l-iskola tista' tinkludi mistoqsijiet bħal:

- meta tipproduċi r-riżors qieghed/qieghda toqghod attent/a biex ma tipproġettix immaġni stereotipati tas-sessi differenti?

- meta tipproduċi r-riżors qieghed/qieghda

tagħmel sforz biex tipproġetta liż-żewġ sessi f'azzjonijiet li jikkontradixxu l-aspettattivi tradizzjonali?

- meta tipproduċi r-riżors qieghed/qieghda toqghod attent/a li tinkludi stampi ta' rġiel u nisa li qeghdin jesprimu firxa shiha ta' emozzjonijiet?

- Ir-riżors li tipproduċi qeghdin isahhu l-idea li s-sessi differenti jistgħu jahdmu flimkien f'kull qasam tal-hajja?

- Fir-riżors tiegħek qieghed/qieghda tinkludi irġiel u nisa anzjani/b' diżabilità attivi?

- Qiegħed/qieghda tagħmel sforz biex tinkludi lista ta' materjal għall-qari supplimentari li tirrifletti firxa tajba ta' rġiel u nisa minn kulturi differenti?

- Kien hemm xi okkażjonijiet fejn stajt intervjenejt b'mod kritiku u għażilt li thalli l-affarijiet għaddejjin?

- Waqt it-tagħlim qatt għaddejnt kummenti jew ċajt li jista' jitqies sessist fil-kontenut tiegħu?

- Tahseb li l-aspettattivi tiegħek ivarjaw minn sess għall-iehor? Jekk Iva, kif?

- Meta taqşam il-klassi fi gruppi, fuq liema kriterji tqassam lit-tfal?

- x'tip ta' kummenti qiegħed tikteb jew tghaddi għall-istess xogħol?

- Meta tikritika x-xogħol, qieghed/qieghda tuża l-istess lingwaġġ mas-sessi differenti?

- Meta tfahhar, qieghed/qieghda tfahhar bl-istess mod u intensità?

- Kif twieġeb għal mumentu emozzjonali negattivi?

- Jekk torganizza attivitajiet waqt il-break dawn jipprovdu l-istess oportunitajiet lill-bniet u s-subien?

- Jekk qieghed/qieghda toganizza xi klabb fl-iskola tiegħek, dan it-tip ta' klabb qieghed ikompli jirriproduċi jew jikkontradixxi l-isterotipar sesswali?

## Konklużjoni

Id-dokument tal-Kurrikulu Nazzjonali jwieġeb b'mod dirett għar-realtà soċjali tal-pajjiż. L-irġiel u nisa m'humie x jghixu kuntest soċjo-ekonomiku li jitrattahom b'mod ekwu. Is-sistema edukattiva, bil-limitazzjonijiet tagħha, tista' tikkontribwixxi fl-iżvilupp ta' soċjetà aktar ekwa. Il-kurrikulu jipprovdi l-aqwa kuntest politiku-pedagoġiku għall-għalliema biex jitransformaw l-iskejjel f'siti ekwi u ġusti.

## Referenzi

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# Film Shows and Primary Education

*Norman C. Borg*

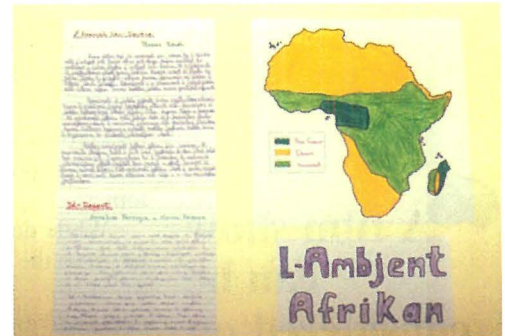
“Film shows can offer a multitude of educational opportunities for children of all ages and educational abilities”

Like any other multimedia experience in the hands of a professional teacher, film shows can offer a multitude of educational opportunities for children of all ages and educational abilities. Taking a class to a film show may be an educational event in itself, but much more can be elicited by the kind of film actually selected as well as the planning involved in organising remote preparation and follow-up sessions. For best effect, make the most out of a film show by actually putting it in the centre of a topic web. In fact, a film show is arguably one of the best vehicles for a thematic approach.

Firstly, the teacher will have to be thoroughly familiar with the film show itself. You should see the film show (preferably more than once) *before* the actual showing with the class. Check whether the film is available in the school video library so that you may be able to view it comfortably at home. Alternately, you can rent it.

Although practically every state primary classroom is nowadays equipped with a video player and monitor, it is still recommended to organise the actual class screening in a cinema theatre. Most cinemas nowadays offer the possibility of group bookings with the option

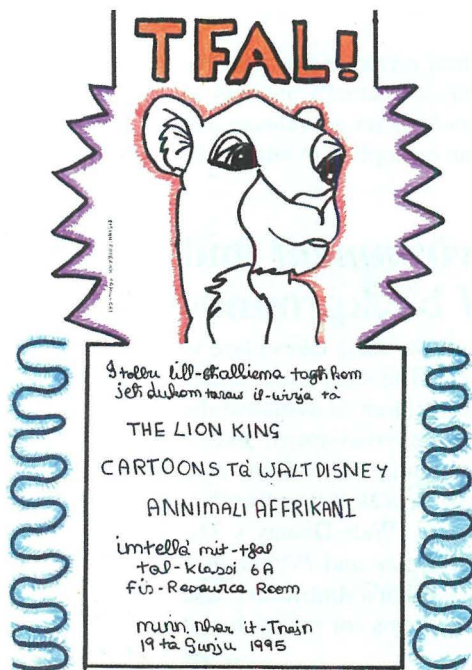
**The poster for the exhibition. It was a time when computers were still not available in schools, but the children's own handiwork is still as effective**



**Some of the children's work as mounted for the exhibition**



**NORMAN C. BORG,** B. A., B. Ed. (Hons), Dip. Ed. (Adm. & Man.) is an Assistant Headteacher at Birzebbuga Primary A. He currently lectures in I.T. in the Primary Classroom to B. Ed. and P.G.C.E. students at the Faculty of Education, University of Malta.



of specific film shows. Check with your nearest cinema for the film shows available before actually planning the activities.

Taking the children to the theatre rather than showing the film in class is more feasible educationally, and definitely more effective. There is nothing better than the large screen to actually hook the children's attention. There are even fewer interruptions than when viewing the film in the classroom. There is a change of atmosphere.

The children have been taken out of the school premises. A theatre screening is a thoroughly *different* experience from a video screening.

The video player and monitor combination in the classroom can then be used for replaying parts of the film for discussion.

During my personal work experience as a Year 6 teacher, I have organised activities based



around film shows. The following example is based around Walt Disney's *The Lion King*. Most of the activities can be applied to any other feature film with only some slight modifications.

## Applying a Film Show to the Primary Curriculum

A film show can be considered on various levels, or *backgrounds*. Each of these backgrounds can serve as an incentive to create activities directly related to specific curricular topics.

While doing these activities, children will be given the opportunity of learning a number of skills, covering various educational *perspectives*.

Making the best use of these *backgrounds* and *perspectives* to combine them into a thoroughly educational event will involve a great deal of planning from the teacher's part. The final outcome, however, will create an unforgettable experience for the children.

### The literary and linguistic backgrounds of *The Lion King*

The most obvious point to start with is the *storyline*. It is the best launch pad for discussion, on a number of levels. How does the story evolve? Make the children recount parts of it. This can be organised individually or in groups. What can be learned from the story? Are there any *morals* worth highlighting?

What about the characters? How do they differ from each other? How can they be described? What kinds of adjectives can be applied to the different characters? Is it enough to categorise the characters as simply either *good* or *bad*?

Make the children aware of the fact that even if the characters are actually animals, in this case, their characteristics are *human*, and that their actions can be applied to humans as well.

### The environment and historical backgrounds

The story of *The Lion King* takes place in the African savannah. The story gives ample opportunity for the children to visualise the background scenes, the environment and its respective flora and fauna. Other films may have a prominent *historical* element rather than an environmental one (Walt Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Pocahontas*, for instance, or Don Bluth's *Anastasia*). Use such backgrounds as items for research and write-ups.

## The technical and scientific backgrounds

*The Lion King*'s 'Circle of Life' theme is ideal for the concept of the food chain covered in the Science syllabus. But there are other points to consider especially where *cartoons* are concerned.

A fascinating aspect which may interest children is the technical way cartoons (and films in general) are created. The use of light and the concept of persistence of vision can be discussed in a superficial way (there is no need to go in great depth, here).

There is a special point about cartoons worth considering, and which can easily be applied to a Mathematics activity. Cartoon films are simply a sequence of drawings shown at a fast speed (usually 25 frames per second). Ask the children to work out how many frames would it take to create a cartoon film lasting 95 minutes.

Check out the duration of a number of cartoon films, and get the children to work these out as well.

## The genre background

When speaking especially of cartoons, this item simply cannot be overlooked. Chances are that the children are very familiar with the more popular cartoon characters (both on TV and the cinema). Of course this may imply that you have to be up-to-date with the subject yourself. You can get the children to gather information about other cartoon films – other Walt Disney features, for instance.

## Backgrounds as topics for teamwork

Divide the class into groups, and assign each group a different background to work on. In the case of *The Lion King*, you can have one team working on the recounting of the story (including drawings as well as write-ups in both *English* and *Maltese*); another working on Animals of the African Savannah; and yet another on Walt Disney's filmography, especially the more recent cartoon features.

Give different responsibilities to the individuals on the team: establish the roles of researchers, writers and illustrators. But give the team the opportunity to decide together the way the project will be worked out. This will help to ensure that you are covering both the *co-operative* (role taking) and *collaborative* (group discussion) aspects of teamwork.

Organise an exhibition in your school's Resource Centre to display the work. The teamwork, as well as the exhibition itself, will enable you to target particular curriculum *perspectives* as follows.

“A film show can be considered on various levels, or backgrounds. Each of these backgrounds can serve as an incentive to create activities directly related to specific curricular topics”



## The creative and social perspectives

Creativity, of course, will be the main driving force behind the project. Items can be as various as models (clay or paper-based), charts, cuttings and drawings. Some of these items will require individuals to work on their own. Still, their work can always make part of a larger group effort. So make sure that every individual is well aware of contributing specific skills in a team.

Although competition may sometimes be effective in particular circumstances, there is no need to introduce it here. Since the teams will be working on different projects, there is no need for any comparisons.

Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that there will be an *audience*, which will be seeing the mounted projects during the exhibition. This should serve as ample incentive to motivate the children to create attractive and as correct a work as possible.

## The research perspective

This is an opportunity for teaching the concept of *surveys* and rudimentary skills in *data collection*. Start off by doing an in-house job. The class can vote for favourite Walt Disney films, for instance, and a graph is drawn out of the results. Other surveys can include the most popular characters in a particular film.

Such an activity can be expanded, however, to cover the entire school. Children can go in pairs around the school to organise similar surveys in other classes. Teachers as well as children can be asked to take part.

The data collected can be presented as tables and graphs on some of the charts that the teams will put up in the exhibition. Graphs can be

drawn in the form of bar graphs or even pie charts (utilising the concept of percentages and degrees of angle). Presentations can be either hand-made or put on the computer and printed out.

## The communicative perspective

The exhibition is an excellent vehicle for developing skills in more ways than one. Children can be handed over the responsibility of organising, promoting and hosting the exhibition, always under your supervision. This is particularly possible with the older year groups (Years 5 and 6).

### Organising

hold some sessions during which the layout of the exhibition can be discussed. Each team can then plan their way of displaying the material.

### Promoting

Get some of the children to design adverts and invitation cards (to individuals, such as the head of school, or even to whole classes) for the exhibition. This is even more possible with the use of *The Print Shop* or any other similar software on the computer. The children themselves will be responsible for handing over the invitations or putting up the posters on the notice boards.

### Hosting

During the exhibition itself, place a couple of children in the Resource Centre as guides for the visiting classes. Make a roster system, so that all children in the class will have the opportunity to take a turn.

## Conclusion

The activities planned around the film show are quite time consuming and will definitely require planning and time management, not only within the closed boundaries of the classroom walls. Apart from the booking of the theatre itself, you will also need to ensure that the school Resource Centre will be available at a stipulated period during the scholastic year. This in itself will render the project even more interesting and motivating, once the children are aware that there are certain deadlines to meet. There are then, of course, other events in the school that will have to be considered. There are two ways of organising the time for project work. The activities can be staggered across a number of weeks. The Midweek period, for instance, can be ideal for a number of the projects.

Alternately, especially where Junior Lyceum classes are involved, the weeks immediately following the exams can be wholly dedicated to the project, and the exhibition timed to take place some time before the annual examinations for the other classes in the school.

## Notes for Contributors

**Education 2000** is a magazine distributed free to all teachers, school administrators, student teachers and other educational practitioners who are interested in the study and development of the various areas of the school curriculum, teachers' professional development and school management. Its main objective is to facilitate the dissemination of research findings, effective practice and teaching and learning ideas. It carries contributions related to education in the primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary sectors. We welcome the following kinds of contributions:

- Reports of research which has implications for the school/classroom situation. (A considerable amount of work in this regard is carried out in the form of dissertations for education degrees. Often this kind of work is shelved and forgotten. This journal will seek to assist in the publication of such work);
- Accounts of school/classroom curriculum-related activities and teaching ideas;
- Discussions of current issues in the teaching of the various curriculum areas and subjects at all ages.

Advice on suitable material in any area of the curriculum and help with the preparation of submissions will be given by the Editorial Board. Articles should not normally exceed 2,000 words. In fact shorter contributions are encouraged. Manuscripts and all bibliographical material should be set out in standard A.P.A. style. The Editorial Board reserves the right to make changes to manuscripts to be consonant with the scope and style of the publication.

**ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL:** Authors are encouraged to submit illustrative material with their articles. Such material (photographs, children's work, diagrams, etc.) should be in its original form and not as photocopies. Copyright permission, when required, is the responsibility of the author. 300 d.p.i. scans of good quality are also acceptable (.jpeg or .tiff formats).

### Contributions should be submitted:

- on 3.5" diskette, containing the original file of the submission (for example Word, Claris documents, etc), and a **rich text format (RTF)** version. Both PC and Macintosh formatted diskettes are acceptable; alternatively, both files may be sent as attachments to this e-mail address: **gmal1@um.edu.mt**.
  - a hard copy of the contribution, including detailed notification of the insertion points of illustrative material, as well as the author's photo and a short biographical note.
  - all illustrative material in a separate envelope, with the name of the author and contribution noted on it. Scans on diskette or CD must be clearly labeled.
- Contributions are to be submitted to *any* member of the Board, or sent to:  
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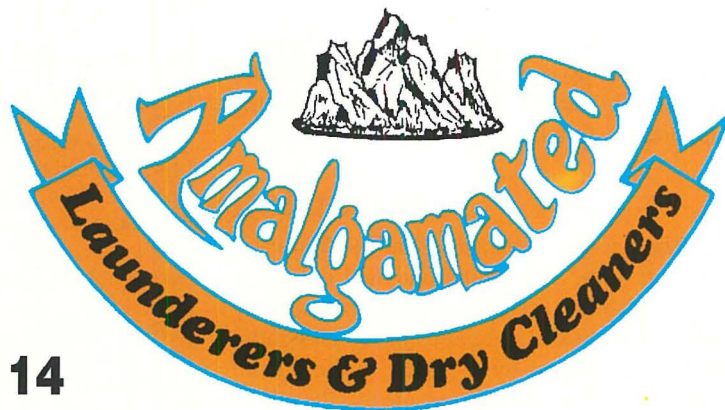
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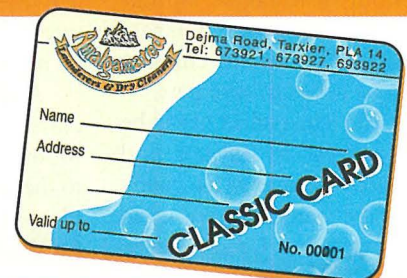
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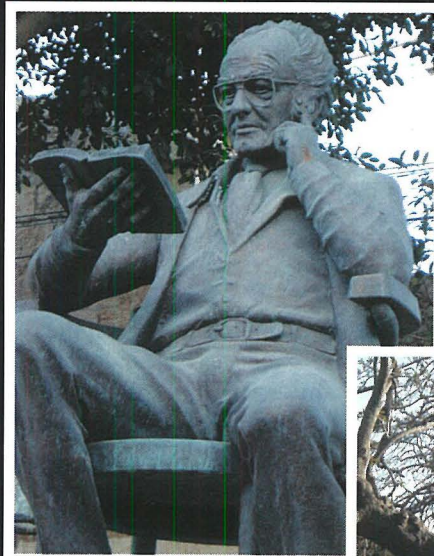
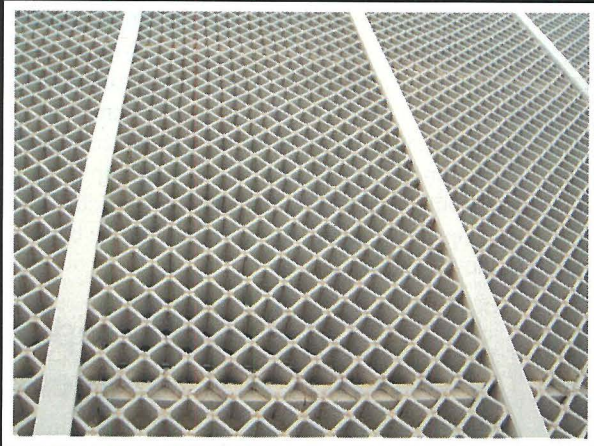
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# Photos for discussion

We continue the occasional series which presents photos that can be used as subjects for discussion or essay writing



Photos by Ġorġ Mallia



# Improving the essence of teaching

*Christopher Bezzina*

“If we really want to improve student achievement, we ultimately have to improve teacher expertise”



**CHRISTOPHER BEZZINA** Ph.D (Brunel), is Teaching Practice co-ordinator in the Faculty of Education, University of Malta. He is the author of a number of books, as well as scholarly articles published in international journals. He is President of The Malta Society for Educational Administration and Management.

Good professional development requires that we constantly analyse what one has tried, what one has accomplished, and then what one must do to make the next attempt more powerful. *If we really want to improve student achievement, we ultimately have to improve teacher expertise.* That is why my argument has always been that if we want to improve the quality of education we are providing to our students (from a small rural primary school to the post-secondary institutions/ higher education institutions we may be teaching in) we cannot neglect the profession that needs to address such developments.

Those who teach, or who lead teaching, have to become better at what they do. And, the only way they are going to become better is by focusing their time and energy on improving their knowledge and skill base. This is not about going to a workshop and being motivated by a speaker. This is about improving the essence of teaching.

One professional development strategy that is absolutely necessary is the use of peer review or visitations. When teachers hear descriptions of a new practice they want to see a teacher doing it – with the same kind of students that they have!! This is where theory is put to the test. I still have vivid memories of the benefits of micro teaching that we enjoyed during university life. These were the sessions in which we shared ideas, put them into practise and discussed our outcomes. And, we did this without ever feeling under scrutiny, under threat of a quality assurance exercise that we may associate it with today! The whole idea then, was to develop insights as to how one can improve ones ways of teaching. That is a process that needs to be addressed even now. It is a practise that has been lost over the years, and one that I feel the Faculty should reintroduce. Not only that, I feel that, given the drive towards greater devolution of authority to the school site and the accountability that is attached to it opening the door to teacher-guided observations is indeed one avenue we should introduce to improve the teaching and learning process.

The focus of the teacher-generated observation model has to be collaboration since the goal is to grow as educators together. Is this not what school-site management is all about? Is this not the ultimate aim of educators – that we constantly review practise in order to address, in the best possible ways, the needs of students?

The teacher-guided observation/ curriculum analysis is a continuously evolving instructional and curricular development programme whose basic tenets are neither radical in practice nor revolutionary in thought. Rather, they recognise the basic needs of teachers as lifelong learners:

- To be treated and respected as professionals
- To have opportunities to grow personally and professionally in a conducive learning environment
- To have the primary responsibility for curriculum review and development
- To feel in charge of the change process
- To experience camaraderie.

Basic principles which are, or rather, need to be found in anyone's profession. We cannot expect to have learnt everything prior to becoming a teacher. In fact, as educators we are constantly in the making as the learning environments we collectively create help us to question our thoughts, our ideas, our practices. As a result we are *learning to be* as Faure back in the 1970s defined it.

## Take small steps towards big changes

It is essential to take, as Sahakian and Stockton (1996) point out, small steps towards big changes. There are innumerable questions that we need to ask and answer. In this way we are actually developing the climate for developments (mental ones at first) to take place. Are we happy with the way things are happening in our schools, with teachers often working in isolation from each other? Are we ready to consider new ways of doing things? Do we want to watch one another teach? Could we become better teachers by learning from one another? How are we going to find the time? Should this be made compulsory? Is this going to be a method of assessing teachers?

These are some of the questions that are raised by educators in general. Questions which need to be addressed if one wants people to grow comfortably with the process. Visitations need to be done for an express purpose. For example, teacher X observes teacher Y because the teacher has a particular way of introducing fractions and teacher X is not particularly confident in that area. It is advised that a teacher should not visit a class for some generic observation. Observations need to be focused. And, teachers should make these visits in groups of two or more. You need to be able to talk with others about what you have seen.



(1988, p.476), feel confident that "teachers are hungry for stimulating educational experiences" then we will do our utmost to create opportunities where teacher empowerment can take place. If we accept the premise that the ultimate power to change is in the "heads, hands and heart" of the educators who work in schools (Sirotnik and Clark, 1988, p.660), and that the school staff is the key to improvement (Birman, et al., 2000; Combs, Miser and Whitaker, 1999; Kessler, 2000) then future school reform policies and practices must reflect such an orientation.

This, in my opinion, is one of the major challenges facing educators world wide: that of shifting from a bureaucratic, top-down model to one which

emphasizes school-site management. Thus, educators at the school level are encouraged to take decision making more seriously and endorse the responsibilities that such devolution entails (Holly and Southworth, 1989; West, 1995; West-Burnham, 1992). If teacher empowerment is utilised properly, members of staff will slowly begin to feel that they are respected and valued as individuals who can contribute in meaningful ways to school improvement. It is a slow process which can be gruelling at times, with its ups and downs, however it is the road worth taking.

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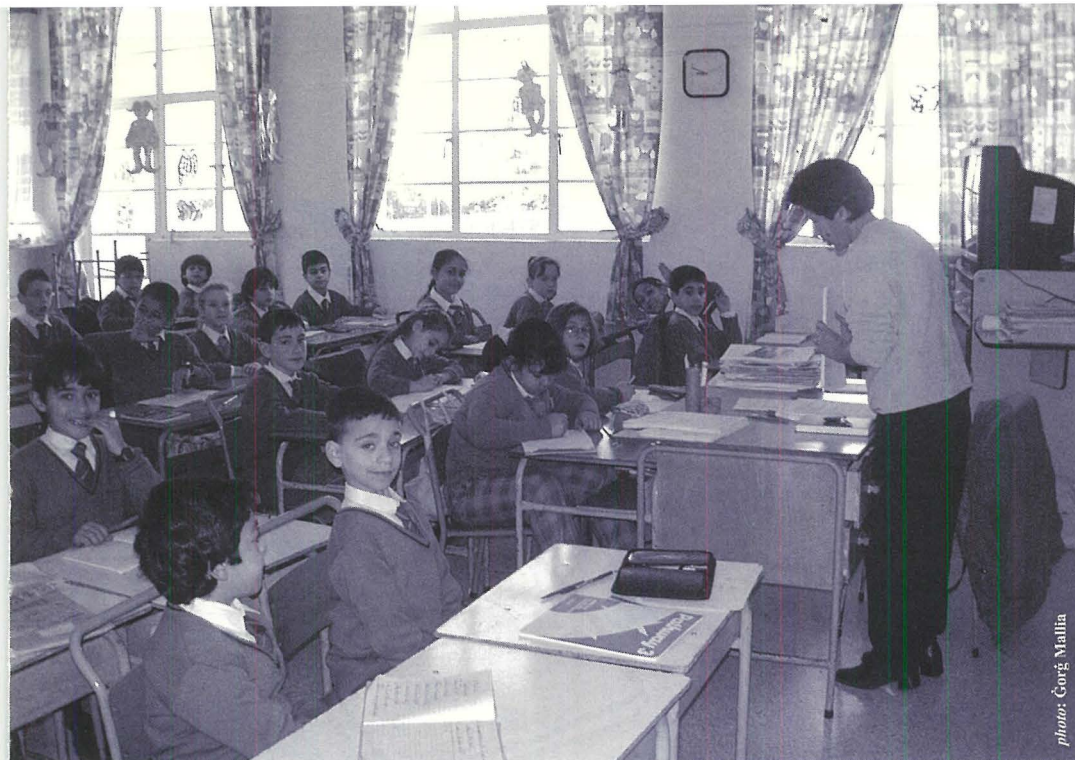


photo: Georg Mallia

**If teacher empowerment is utilised properly, members of staff will slowly begin to feel that they are respected and valued as individuals who can contribute in meaningful ways to school improvement**

Furthermore, there should be a direct connection between the visitation and implementation. When you have seen something, when you have discussed it, understood it well enough, you should put it into practice.

Teachers should also build a connection between the visitation and their attempts to use the new practice. That connection is usually in the form of the practitioner who was viewed and the on the discourse that takes place at, what is usually termed, the post conference session. The conversation among those who made the visit about the quality of the implementation is important. Once this sharing starts to take place systemic professional development is nurtured within the school site.

Apart from the creation of such concentric circles of teacher learners the use of study groups can be a real and possible strategy for professional development to take place in the schools. Schools now have to be organised for the learning of adults. Only in this way can we turn schools into sites of professional learning. Indeed, it is how well the adults are learning that determines how well the students are learning.

Indeed no easy task when teaching is still very much practised in isolation, and collegiality is non-existent for many teachers. As a result, the teacher's own knowledge and attitude towards professional development has been allowed to atrophy. Moreover, research on teacher empowerment reveals that some teachers do not understand empowerment, others do not want to accept the responsibility that accompanies empowerment, and others want to avoid the leadership and power it offers (Herman and Herman, 1993).

However, if we are optimistic that teachers possess leadership qualities, or are willing to learn and commit themselves towards the improvement of the school, and, like Maeroff

**“Are we happy with the way things are happening in our schools, with teachers often working in isolation from each other?”**



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- Notice how *Il Messaggero* highlights a different aspect and gives secondary importance to the event itself.
- Work on the vocabulary used (semantic groups: travelling, city names, legalese).
- Talk about how the Tv reported this news the day before.
- Can we answer all the WH questions by reading only these headlines?

**READING**

Reading is a very important aspect in language acquisition. Choosing a passage for your class is not easy and requires experience from the teacher (do not hesitate to ask more experienced teachers in your school to help you out). I would suggest - contrary to the official school programme (see for example the one for 1999-2000 paragraph 4.3 - imaginative texts for the younger students and functional ones for later years. The same text might not be ideal for all the students in the same class. So it is wise to have a number of texts and let the students choose according to their interests and level.

Be careful not to choose an article that is too long. Also be aware that sometimes the topic could be interesting but the article turns out to be boring especially if it has got too many abbreviations, statistics, difficult or technical words and so on.

**WRITING**

A number of activities could be suggested here.

- From Form III upwards the students may be asked to make points out of an interesting report.
- The students could try to write (keeping to the newspaper format) about something that happened at school or in the village using the adequate tenses (the most frequent tenses used in the *cronaca* are the *Presente*, the *Passato Prossimo* and the *Imperfetto*).
- Prepare a number of photos or pictures and have the students choose one and write an "article" to accompany it.
- For the older classes it might be suggested to prepare a classroom newspaper to report, let's say, the weekly school events.

**Reflecting on the target language**

I have already hinted at how news is reported in the headlines. Actually in each part of the headline no (meaningful) word is repeated. This leads to a number of synonyms that are used or a number of different expressions to refer to the same signifier.

- Using the newspaper headlines we can lead the students to observe how the same meaning can be obtained through different expressions. Let's take the following

headlines as an example (*Il Messaggero*, 13/08/1999, p.13):

**Periodo da incubo per i signori del tabacco: vengono portati in tribunale anche dal popolo che insegnò ai bianchi a fumarlo**

**I Navajo hanno spento il calumet**

**La più grande tribù pellerossa fa causa ai giganti americani delle sigarette**

Dopo molte costosissime sconfitte giudiziarie le multinazionali trovano un altro avversario. Sotto accusa la pubblicità "etnica": i minorenni indiani che fumano sono raddoppiati in cinque anni.

*I Navajo* are referred to as *il popolo che insegnò ai bianchi a fumare, la più grande tribù pellerossa* and *indiani*.

*Le multinazionali* are also *i giganti americani delle sigarette* and *i signori del tabacco*.

If we look at the verb phrases we have *vengono portati in tribunale* and *fare causa a*.

Eventually, and with older classes, we can go on to talk about the choice of words and their connotation opening up the discussion (in Italian) and not limiting it merely to a linguistic exercise.

**To be continued...**

I hope that these observations lead to some sort of debate in the schools amongst teachers of Italian (and not only). Sharing of classroom experiences is a vital exercise to render teaching and learning more attractive and effective.

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“Using the newspaper headlines we can lead the students to observe how the same meaning can be obtained through different expressions”





# School Absenteeism

Mark G. Borg

“The apparent ease with which medical certificates are sometimes produced raises many ethical questions...”

Together with such problems as literacy and bullying, absenteeism from school constitutes one of the greatest threats facing our educational system, as is the case in other countries. In the United Kingdom, for instance, about 24 per cent of secondary school children absent themselves from school for one reason or another; from 3 to 7 per cent are absent for some valid reason.

At a time when all the stakeholders in education in this country are preparing themselves (not without enthusiasm and commitment, it needs to be said) for the implementation of some of the many important reforms contemplated by the National Minimum Curriculum, let us not think or dare hope that the problems that plague the educational system will simply disappear the moment we head along the road of the much-needed and long-awaited reforms. The problems that threaten our educational system, including absenteeism, have been long in the pipeline. Dealing with them will require incessant effort and time.

## What is school absenteeism?

Before taking a closer look at the problem of school absenteeism and the reasons why increasing numbers of students absent themselves from school, it is first pertinent to delineate what we mean by *school absenteeism* and related concepts.

The various forms of absenteeism may be grouped under the umbrella term of ‘school non-attendance’. It is imperative that, in understanding the nature and dynamics of the problem of absenteeism, the various concepts are differentiated. Five concepts or types will be considered:

- *Absenteeism due to sickness*
- *Absenteeism due to playing sick - Malingering*
- *Absenteeism instigated by parents - Parental withdrawal*
- *Absenteeism due to School Phobia*
- *Absenteeism instigated by students*
- *psychological absenteeism (informal mobility)*
- *physical absenteeism (truancy)*



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## ● Absenteeism due to sickness

The student is detained in hospital or at home by his/her parents because he/she is not well due to some malady or indisposition. Most often than not, the student is kept from going

to school on the advice of a medical practitioner who certifies the student’s legitimate absence.

Although this is purely a medical problem, one cannot ignore the effects that long absence from school has on scholastic performance and attainment, even if legitimate. In such cases supplementary support is essential.

Official figures on ‘certified absence’ from school should give a relatively accurate picture of this aspect of the problem. I hardly need to go into the details of why I am using the conditional here. The apparent ease with which medical certificates are sometimes produced raises many ethical questions that do not fall within the remit and purposes of this paper.

## ● Absenteeism due to playing sick - malingering

There are students who avoid going to school by playing sick. Their ruse can be so convincing that their parents are often taken in by this and allow them to stay at home. Indeed, more often than not, these parents go on to inform the school that their son or daughter is not feeling well and, therefore, has to remain at home.

This charade goes on until the parents start becoming suspicious about the sporadic illnesses and decide on consulting a general practitioner. It is surprising how quickly all the lethargy disappears, whereupon the student starts preparing his/her school-bag for the morrow! Clearly, this is not a medical problem, but a social one.

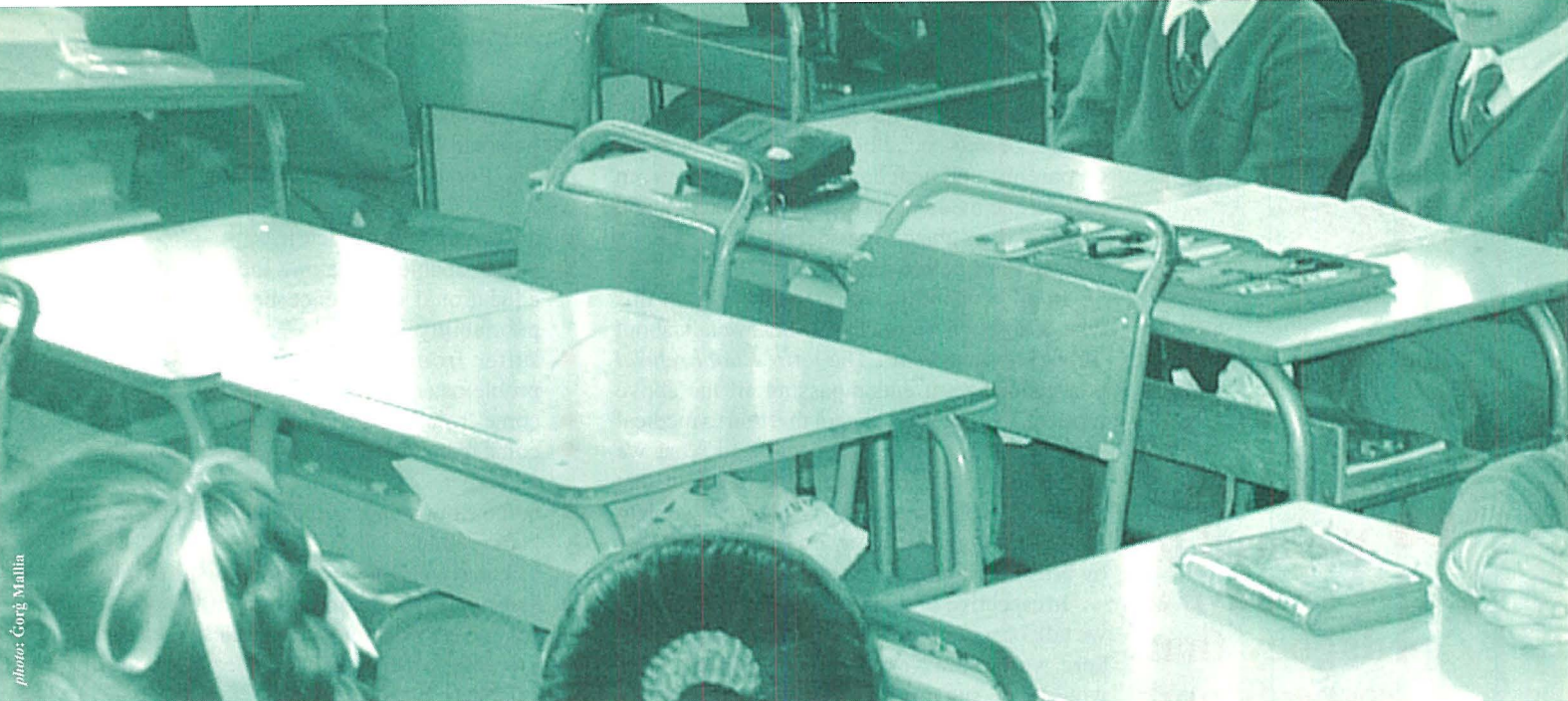
Attempts by the present writer to obtain valid and reliable figures as to the scale of this problem have proved futile. One must bear in mind that a student can be absent up to two days per month without the need of producing a medical certificate or without having parents arraigned at court.

## ● Absenteeism instigated by parents - parental withdrawal

Here, students absent themselves from school because they:

- (a) are encouraged to do so by their own parents; (*Who needs schooling? Education is an utter waste of time? There are better things in life than schooling.*)
- (b) are of help to their parents (e.g. they are kept at home to mind over younger siblings, or to help out mother or father in their chores);





**The problems that threaten our educational system, including absenteeism, have been long in the pipeline. Dealing with them will require incessant effort and time.**

“The student can absent himself/herself because he/she is simply terrified by the prospect of having to go to school on account of someone at school or something associated with school”

(c) are subjected to such utter dejection and abandon at home that their parents do not even bother to take them to school or allow them to do so.

More often than not, such parents have a very poor opinion of education and schooling. They are parents who do not accept the fact that the law of the country protects the right of the child for a proper education - at least until school-leaving age. As such, this type of absenteeism is illegal. Although such parents are normally aware of this they simply do nothing to ensure that their children attend school. Consequently, they are subject to arraignment at court and fines as dictated by law. (It is not uncommon to find parents who would willingly pay these fines because they earn more by having their children help them out.) As with malingering, this is also a social problem.

I believe that a record of the number of arraignments is kept by the welfare section at the Education Division. Hence, we could obtain a very reliable indication of the scale of this particular problem.

### ● **Absenteeism due to school phobia**

This type of absenteeism is due neither to the student's wish to deliberately absent himself/herself from school nor because he/she is kept at home by his/her parents. The student absents himself/herself because he/she is simply terrified by the prospect of having to go to school on account of someone at school or something associated with school. There is nothing that parents or teachers can say or do to convince the student to return to school. This is a psychological problem that requires the specialised help of a psychologist. It is not a medical condition.

It is perfectly normal to come across a number of genuine cases of school phobia in

any scholastic year. Having said that, one hardly needs to point out how common it is for schools to receive medical certificates diagnosing this phobia!

### ● **Absenteeism instigated by students**

Actually, we here find two types of absenteeism. In the first of these, although students are physically present at school they are for all intents and purposes, psychologically absent (*informal mobility*). The second type involves the students being physically absent from the school premises (*truancy*). Let us consider them in turn.

#### **Psychological absenteeism (informal mobility)**

Here the student attends school and remains within the school's premises. However, he/she is 'absent' because he/she does not pay any attention at all or participate in the lesson, or skips certain lessons, or attends some lessons instead of others. The student tries to make his/her life at school as bearable as possible by following his/her own program of lessons. Hence, the student would be avoiding what annoys him/her at school while at the same time refraining from physically absenting himself/herself from school. This is a psycho-social problem.

#### **Physical absenteeism (truancy)**

This involves the student's absenteeism from school without the parents' knowledge, or their permission or encouragement, or without the school's permission. The student either does not go to school altogether or goes to school for the first few lessons and then leaves school to play the truant. In most cases, these students also stay away from home during school hours. That is, they play the truant until it is time to go back home.



In many cases, this social problem leads to a series of anti-social behaviours such as lying to parents and teachers, forges notes from parents and medical certificates, vandalism and stealing, drug abuse, and socially unacceptable promiscuous behaviour.

In all probability, we actually refer to this type of absence from school when we talk about 'school absenteeism'. The term *school refusal* is a generic term encompassing all the above types of absenteeism, except that due to medical reasons. In any case, irrespective to what we are referring to, we would have to admit that the problem of absenteeism is a serious problem that will not simply go away by ignoring it or by brushing it under the carpet.

Irrespective of what we have in mind when we talk of school bullying, the fact remains that here we have a very serious problem. Who would dare suggest that this problem does not constitute one of the major threats to our educational system?

I think we would agree that whereas the problem of absenteeism is acute in some schools, it is minimal in others. Nevertheless, we would be deluding ourselves if we think that the problem is not widespread. Indeed, one would also expect to find substantial differences in the scale and nature of the problem between primary and secondary schools. In this sense, it is not different from the problem of *school bullying*.

Each school shares in the problem. Just as each school varies from another in its share, there are schools that are more effective in their fight against absenteeism than others.

## What are the causes of absenteeism?

Over the last forty-fifty years or so, international research has identified a whole series of factors that, at one point or another, were considered responsible for the problem of absenteeism. Most probably, there is some truth in all these explanations.

Traditionally, the major cause focuses on the personal factors of the student and his/her family. For instance, these include students who:

- are unmotivated to learn;
- are incapable of making the best of their educational experience because of their poor ability;
- suffer from personality and emotional problems;;
- come from broken families;
- come from families where education is not valued;
- come from a deprived and difficult family background.

The early eighties witnessed a shift from attributing this problem to student factors to school and curriculum factors. These include:

- the relationship between teachers and students;
- poor relations among students;
- the negative attitude of teachers on one hand and their unrealistic expectations on the other;
- a negative experience of schooling generally;
- a curriculum that has no immediate relevance to the students;
- a curriculum that has no relevance to the future needs of the students;
- an unsuitable pedagogy employed to deliver the curriculum;
- students' resistance and opposition to an educational system which sacrifices the many for the benefit of the few;
- the inability of the educational system to address the individual needs of students.

## How can we fight absenteeism?

It is not the purpose of this paper to delve much into how the problem of absenteeism can be tackled. However, it is worth considering the following three strategies, widely cited in the literature.

- (a) The formulation of a curriculum that is first and foremost relevant to the student.
- (b) The application of a pedagogy that is suitable for the implementation of such a curriculum.
- (c) The provision of pastoral support to all students.

A careful reading of the National Minimum Curriculum reveals that this proposes those conditions that should enable us to tackle in a systematic manner the problem of school absenteeism. If we really want to provide future generations of children with an education which focuses on the individual – an education which aims at developing to the full his/her abilities and values - then we need to have a pedagogy that respects and celebrates diversity. Only then can we look to the future of education in this country with deserving optimism and confidence.

“ We need to have a pedagogy that respects and celebrates diversity ”

Whereas the problem of absenteeism is acute in some schools, it is minimal in others



photo: Greg Mallin



# Illustrations in children's books

## Effect and effectiveness

*Gorġ Mallia*

“What we have seen with our eyes remains in the mind long after the spoken or written word has been dissipated into the air”

Within pedagogy, visuals are an arbitrary element, but often an important asset. It is an element that instructs through suggestion - an evocation of the familiar within the mind, placed within an unfamiliar context. Conditionally, both are jointly accepted because of their association.

The impact of the visual images cannot be underestimated, not only on the young mind but also on that of the adult. “What we have seen with our eyes remains in the mind long after the spoken or written word has been dissipated into the air” (Whalley and Chester, 1988 p.11).

Here I am proposing a brief **review of the literature** and **commentary** on the nature and effect of illustrations, particularly those to be found in children's books. The idea is to promote awareness of the mechanics of this very important element, providing a knowledge that can help turn its presence into a pedagogical tool.

In an excellent compendium of research done on Visual Culture through comics in America, Wigand (1986) comments that within learning,

Generally it has been found that a visual presentation is superior to an auditory presentation, an audiovisual presentation is not significantly superior to a visual presentation, but it is better than an auditory presentation alone. (p.35).

When dealing with the way we process visual information, he writes that:

Winn (1980) defines image as “a sensory (visual) experience in which there is some similarity between what is sensed by the mind's eye and corresponding percepts, derived from the real word experience by the physical eye” The experience of the image then, is constructed from stored information in the memory and resembles perceptual experience. (p.36)



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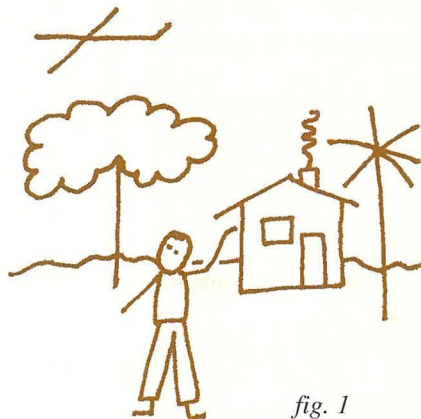


fig. 1

Note *fig.1* taken from Johnson and Johnson (1971).

Though the match-stick rendering necessarily provides stereotypes, the slanting roof of the *house* is culturally tied to those countries where such a construction exists. But, far from restricting the encoding of such a message to these countries, this case lends itself to being an example of how cyclical in nature the acquisition of a visual language is.

Malta is a case in point. By reason of our temperate climate, houses are built with flat rather than slanting roofs. So such a picture **should** not immediately communicate an accurate message of a *house*.

Preschool and early Primary education in Malta often makes use of teaching material that is most commonly of English origin. As a result, the basic stereotype pattern for *house* stored within the child's acquired code for pictorial recognition is often that illustrated here, rather than an ethnically accurate one in which the roof would be drawn flat. If the Maltese child were in fact to be asked to draw a simple house, more often than not the slanting roof would be an item in the drawing.

### An acquired visual code

So a visual code that is acquired, no matter how simple and basic, could have nothing whatsoever to do with the reality surrounding the receiver. It is in fact true that

...despite the richness and diversity of the art created by human cultures around the world, artists everywhere are constrained and stimulated by certain common aims, common problems and common procedures. (Layton, 1981 p.211).

This statement is not universal at all levels, but it can be taken as a very useful working premise.

As a result of this stimulation, certain messages that would be normally difficult to decode because they are outside the individual's culture would be acquired, so to speak, *out-of-awareness*, through constant contact. Then they are assimilated within the individual's code dictionary.

This does not remove culture from being the major stumbling block in cross-cultural communication in general and visual communication in particular. What I am implying is that the visual can cut down on the obstacles and become an easier bridge to cross as it spans the different outlooks. McLuhan and Fiore's (1967) “the rational man in our Western



**'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversation?'**



Illustration: Jemmy Thorne

Culture is a visual man" (p.44) can (within limitations) be extended to cultures beyond the western one - can in fact span across cultures.

But there can be no question about the strength of a visual communications medium created by and operating within one culture and using its codes.

We appreciate and understand most of the implied messages in Velasquez's paintings of his royal patron's family and entourage - but probably not as much on the everyday, familiar level as his seventeenth century compatriots did.

The codes of dress, body-language, interior design, etc; the intimate knowledge of the people portrayed; even an intrinsic awareness of the artistic fashions of the day within which Velasquez was (creatively) working: all contribute to recognisability of the familiar. That is, that the message encoded in the painting must have been more easily decodable by Spanish contemporaries of the same class, than by a Maltese buying a print of it now at the open air market in Valletta.

The fact that the print is actually bought is significant and can be made to back the above claims for the visual spanning of cultures.

But the print could be bought for a number of reasons which probably have nothing whatsoever to do with Velasquez's original intentions and the ones understood by his Spanish contemporaries. The print could have been bought, say, for the quaintness, by 20<sup>th</sup> century, Maltese standards) of the costumes depicted. Possibly for such mundane reasons as the predominant colour scheme fitting a convenient space on a compatibly painted wall. Even that the main characters may be looking in a direction that would not clash with that of the characters in the other prints in the room. All valid reasons on a mundane level, but hardly decoding the encoded message. Noise in the form of the codes transformed by space and time effects.

Still, once the print is on the wall, then a situation similar to that of the child acquiring the code of the slanted roof could result - the costumes, surroundings and over-all message of the painting impinging itself on the awareness of those constantly exposed to it.

The next time that Maltese person looks for a print, it could be possible that the *out-of-awareness* acquisition of the new codes makes the reasons of his search different from the previous ones.

Still - maybe - that same person would not be so eager to get a print of a medicine man's mask from some *African* culture of which he is less aware than that of seventeenth century Spain. But the process is the same and only less, or more effective depending on the degree to which the person is acquainted with the culture in question.

McLuhan's *Global Village* pretty much sums up the state of ethnic culture. Accepted, there is a difficulty in the recognition of the

figurative representation of the unknown by those not educated in the relative codes, but borders have been thinned out by modern media methods and awareness of an individual culture is no longer exclusively restricted to that people living it. So perception of the ethnically *strange* visual image that stems from a culture that is different from the one we experience daily is more possible in today's world with its satellite-linked television coverage than it would have been even a few decades ago.

So, when I speak of visuals within one culture, I also include the huge overlap, which practically encompasses most of the media-dominated world, at the same time keeping in mind that

Overall, research on interpreting pictorial cues and features demonstrates that although some fundamental skills such as object recognition are essentially innate, young children and adults without ample picture-viewing experience have trouble decoding pictorial information that is abstract, complex, or represented in culture-bound conventions - especially when the objects and concepts shown are unfamiliar... In fact, pictures are heavily laden with culture-bound conventions that must be learned if they are to be understood. (Levie, 1987 pp.7-8)

To illustrate the point:

...once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversation?' (Carroll, Purnell Edition 1975, p.15).

That extract from the very beginning of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* competently sums up what most children think about the subject.

## Pictures in books

The visual dimension within literature has always been there for varying reasons, often depending on a book's intended market. Pleasure reading books for an adult market are predominantly verbal, with the illustration on the cover more a marketing gimmick (standing out on the bookseller's rack) than a real aid to cognisance.

By "adult" here I mean the educated norm who reads books for pleasure - the less educated would not resort to books anyway, and those books aimed at basic adult education would follow the format prescribed for a younger market, but with a varied content. The same applies to technical books, but I shall go into the mechanics of instructional design further down.

Goldsmith (1987) writes that it would seem from the literature that in a culture where pictures are a regular feature of the environment, most children are pictorially literate by the time they are about 8 or 9.(p.68)




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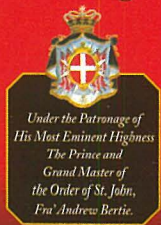
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“**Illustration often helps with rounding off the meaning of the text, producing as complete a communicative exercise as possible**”

**We appreciate and understand most of the implied messages in Velasquez's paintings of his royal patron's family and entourage - but probably not as much on the everyday, familiar level as his seventeenth century compatriots did.**

Stewig (1980) acknowledges the importance of the visual stimulation provided by illustration within children's books, dedicating three chapters in his work specifically to its role.

The first of these, "Studying Book illustration is a detailed examination of artistic techniques and styles, with a special look at the influence of art movements such as impressionism, pointillism, Les Fauves, folk art, abstract art and surrealism - putting illustrations on the level of "high" art, as well as emphasising its importance as an educational tool.

The author writes about the main techniques used in illustration: watercolour, the woodcut, collage, stone lithography and photography - which is limited and non-comprehensive. Although these are popular techniques used for printed reproduction, one must not forget the extensive use by illustrators of coloured inks and air-brushed acrylics that have nowadays become very popular.

Accurate and interesting is his look at the visual elements: line, colour, proportion, detail and space - all of which vary enormously... indeed, from a simple figure in an empty panel, done in black ink in a line the thickness of which does not vary, to an almost photographically realistic rendition in colour giving the most minute details possible to imagine.

Possibly more important to the aims of the present work is Stewig's chapter on "Picture Books" in which he writes:

A picture storybook is simply a book in which the story and pictures are of equal importance. The two elements work together to produce an artistic unit stronger than either the words or pictures would be alone. (p.97).

Apart from the obvious analysis of picture technique, the author takes into consideration other elements that make such books what they are: i.e. shape and size, binding and paper, type faces and page layout - logically, all reflecting as accurately as possible the "feel" of the contents and integrating with them and the visuals to produce as complete a totality as possible.

In his introduction to the chapter "Wordless Picture Books" Stewig backs his case for textless books with referring to the prehistoric caves of France and Spain, Bishop Odo's Lascaux tapestry and stained glass windows - all cases used by comics' historians to make their case for that particular genre. "Why have these ... been so enthusiastically accepted by children and by adults who work with them?" asks Stewig.

There are three elements peculiar to wordless books that make them particularly attractive to young "readers".

First, children today are visually oriented. Television is such a pervasive element in society that when students graduate from high school they have spent more time viewing television than they have spent in school itself. Influenced almost from birth by this medium, children have been unconsciously inculcated with the

importance of the language of images. However, such awareness does not necessarily guarantee the ability to evaluate visual Images. A direct relation exists between children' immersion in television and their acceptance of wordless books.

Second, such books are popular because they are more accessible than other more complex genres. It is not necessary to be able to read or to read well to derive pleasure from following the plot of wordless books. These books tend on the surface at least, to be plot-oriented, and children like action.

Third, wordless books allow wider interpretation of the author's message than is usual in books with words. Children are not held as closely to the author's specific intent when the story is presented in picture form (pp.144-146)

Krasny Brown (1986) gives both the case against and for pictures in books.

Her case against is built on research she quotes that proves that when children first learn to read, pictures will hinder the process, being accepted by the learners as an integral part of the text, which therefore becomes unrecognizable once the visual is removed.

...even when illustrations are carefully related to the text, they may depict diverse, complex story content. When the task is deciphering words, pictures don't always help. If a child comes to a word he or she already knows, then the picture is superfluous. A youngster who doesn't know a word and looks to the illustration for a clue to its identity may be misled by unrelated things in the picture. We begin to see how critical is the relationship between picture and text. (p.34)

Another case against is one she is cautious about: the spoon-feeding of visuals as opposed to the leaving of a blank slate for the child's own creativity. But Dr Brown contends this in the sense that, albeit the truth of this, other images are communicated that the child may use and build creatively upon.

## The case for pictures

The author's case for pictures is, to my mind, much stronger - a three-pronged argument beginning with the obvious: **appeal** - the attraction of the visual that entices the young reader (as her sister's book would have done Alice had it been illustrated). Then there is **reinforcing meaning**:

...that the addition of pictures improves what children remember and understand of stories is well documented. The claim most often researched is: children learn better the story content that appears in both pictures and text.(p .36).

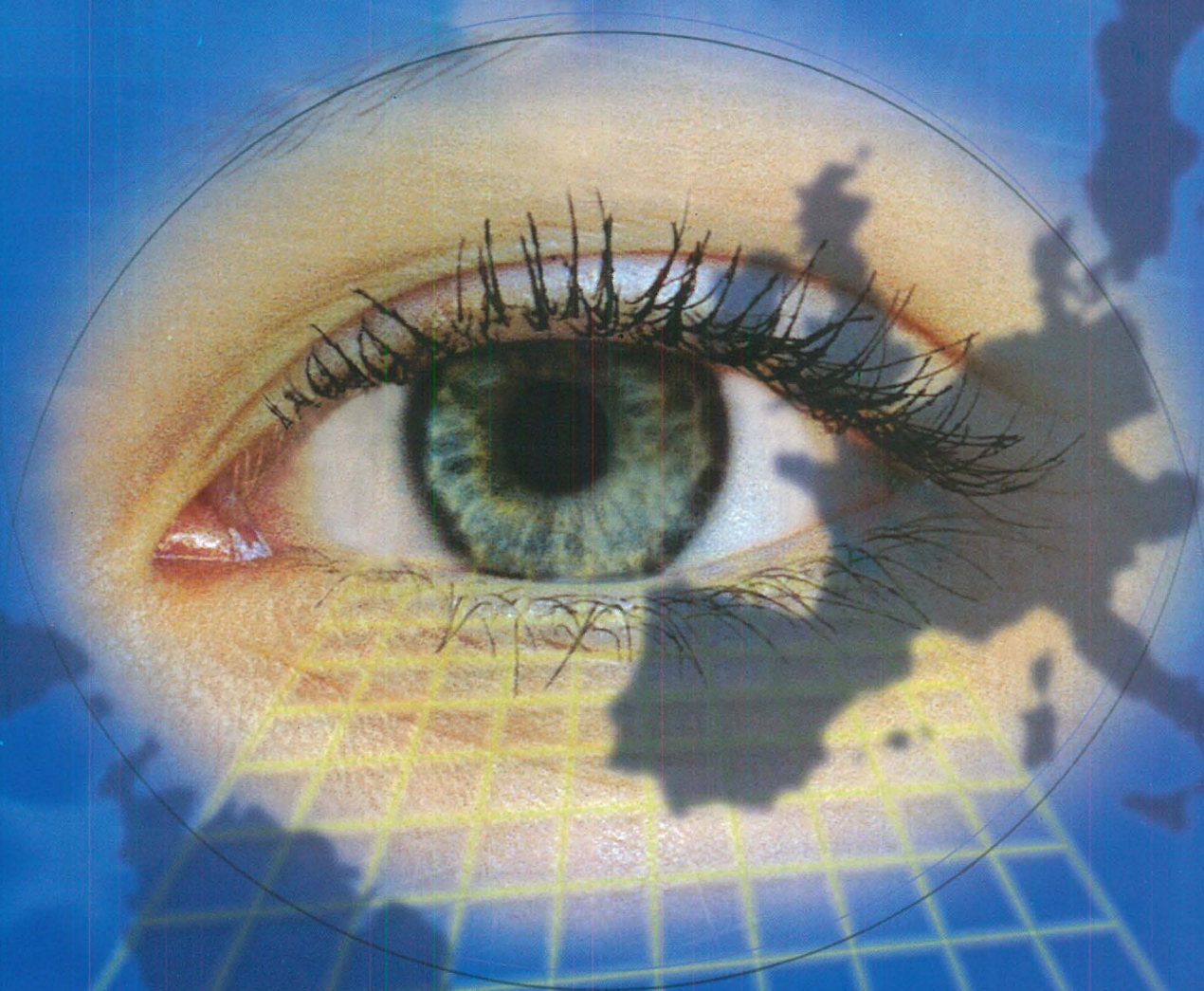
From there she goes one step further: pictures can also be used for adding meaning - those cases in which the visual complements



painting detail: Velasquez



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“There is a purpose for a picture - we are embellishing, or we are enlarging, or we are involving ourselves in some very deep way with the writer of the book, so that the book (when it is finally illustrated) means more than it did when it was just written (Maurice Sendak)”

the text instead of illustrating it, which is a different case all together. This is aptly pointed out by Whalley & Chester (1988),

Pictures' are independent works - they can stand by themselves, or they can be put into books in which they may or may not be relevant. Book illustration is something quite different and cannot properly exist outside its text - artist who forget this do so at their peril. Good book illustration should continue or enhance the narrative of verse that it accompanies. It should not overwhelm it, or contradict it, for the eyes of the child are sharp. Unlike the picture, which often makes its own point, illustration usually forms part of a sequence of events. (p.11)

And what do children prefer when it comes to illustration? At least according to Krasny Brown (1986), testing a set of pictures of the same situation executed in different styles on kindergarten to eleven year olds, primarily children go for realism. The definition of this word within the context, though, has to be taken to be wider than the lexical one - including as close to "realistic" a rendition of the fantastic as possible. For example, if a mouse were to speak, and he was a country mouse, he can't be rendered as a real mouse, but upright in posture and "dressed" in the stereotypical trappings that would represent his station.

### A question of age

The younger children's choice was more varied, while that of the oldest (eleven year olds) the most stable.

Peeck (1987) refers to literature to be explicit about this.

Age differences relevant to motivational-affective roles were observed in a number of early studies and summarized in reviews by Spaulding (1955), Travers and Alvarado (1970), and others. Thus, it was found that young children prefer realistic pictures with colour and relatively simple design, whereas older children and adults prefer more complex pictures, perhaps because of an increased capacity to handle perceptual complexity (Travers & Alvarado, 1970).

Also speaking of picture books in her excellent analysis of contemporary children's literature Egoff (1981) says:

...the genre which seems to be the simplest actually is the most complex, deploying two art forms, the pictorial and the literary, to engage the interest of two audiences (child and adult). Combine these attributes and it is undeniably arguable that the picture book represents the most diverse, the most didactic, and the most debated of all forms of present-day children's literature. (p.248)

The union of the visual with accompanying

text (or vice-versa, depending on emphasis) is spoken of by Egoff as being a powerful vehicle for conveying not just the factual realities of the child's society, but even the more subtle, but just as real insecurities and questions that form an integral part of growing up, or just being a child.

Egoff tends to be rather derogatory when writing of the visual explosion of the sixties. There, the sheer joy of experimenting with different (often non-representational) styles, led to an almost art for art's sake context to the books. The authors tended to forget the actual content and readership. The art (becoming works of art) predominated on what the author describes as "an often mediocre text".

Only where the balance is kept and it portrays the child's world (subtle or obvious) is Egoff really happy. But she goes beyond even that:

The modern picture-book world in general raises the question: Is the picture book any longer only the preserve of the little child? It would seem not. A new market is already commercially viable - adults, teenagers, older children. Perhaps the greatest success of the "new-wave" picture books is the realization that in format and artistry, they are books for everybody." (p.270)

By 'new wave' the author is referring to the new trends not just in picture-book production, but generally in children's literature - i.e. the thematic preoccupation with "experimentation, candor, visual and textual sophistication, social conscience" (Egoff, 1981, p.270) - making the books just as adult oriented as they are child oriented.

In his short history of children's book illustration, Feaver (1977) does not balk (albeit with often implied negative undertones) from treating comics and animated cartoon characters simultaneously with within-book illustration proper. He writes,

Children's book illustration is suspended in this welter of images, occasionally bobbing into fine art waters but more often drifting in commercial shallows. A tiny proportion survives to become classic. The fittest, not necessarily the most deserving. Noddy and Superman remain, unaffected by condemnations of their characters and appearance. Tenniel's portrayal of the Mad Hatter has outlived all others. Peter Rabbit, Mickey Mouse and Babar seem imperishable. Hoffmann's 'Little Suck-a-Thumb', 'Johnny Head-in-Air' and 'Struwelpeter' have remained in print continuously ever since they first appeared in 1845. Edward Lear's limerick personalities have persisted since 1846. Survival depends on continuing demand. (p.9)

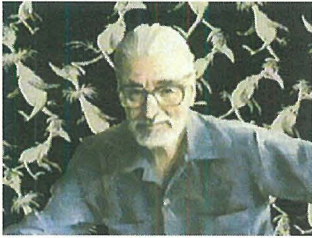
The emphasis in this particular book is on the variety of aims that illustration has. More particularly:

...illustration is more than a means of



Illustration: Maurice Sendak





“A child’s idea of art is a pen-and-ink drawing filled in with flat colour, with no modulation and no subtlety (Dr. Seuss)”

conveying instruction. ‘There must be above all things the power to slide into another man’s soul,’ Mervyn Peake said. The illustrator has to arouse curiosity, set scenes, spark off reactions. (p.24)

Another illustrator, possibly one of the most known and respected in the field today in America, Maurice Sendak, has this to say on the integration of the visual with the text:

...a picture is there, not because there should be a picture there; there is a purpose for a picture - we are embellishing, or we are enlarging, or we are involving ourselves in some very deep way with the writer of the book, so that the book (when it is finally illustrated) means more than it did when it was just written. Which is not to say we are making the words more important; we are perhaps opening up the words in a way that children at first did not see was possible (Sendak, 1977, p.252).

One of the best children’s books writers/illustrators, the pseudonymous Dr. Seuss [Theodor Geisel (1940-1991)] turns the point around,

Schools send me hundreds of drawings each year, and I find most kids draw as I do - awkwardly. I think I’ve refined my childish drawing so that it looks professional. But kids exaggerate the same way I do. They overlook things they can’t draw, the pencils slip, and they get some funny effects. I’ve learned to incorporate my pencil slips into my style.” And, “Technically, I’m capable of doing more complicated things. But every time I try to do something sophisticated in a children’s book, it fails - it doesn’t attract kids. This is due to the fact that I work the way they work. A child’s idea of art is a pen-and-ink drawing filled in with flat colour, with no modulation and no subtlety.” (Cott, 1983, pp.23-24).

So, taking both these authors’ comments together, arbitrary conclusions can be drawn about the role of illustration (and its varying styles) within a medium the primary aim of which is to communicate with a select group of receivers, often with educational (in the very wide sense of the word) intentions.

But there is text which is designed specifically for instructional use.

## Society’s demands

Modern society, built to the tune of gigantic advertising campaigns (as well as to little advertising strategies everywhere) has become extremely exigent regarding the presentation of anything to it. Most children, brought up on the exacting professionalism of television, ad and magazine producers, have had inbred in them requirements that are just as exacting. In this case, the supply has created the demand.

Modern technology, especially the advancement in desktop publishing, helps the individual whose job or desire it is to

communicate in print, to design presentations that are not bland and basic, as was the accepted norm once, but has changed as much as the societal basis has changed on which the concept was built.

Within this dynamic channel, illustration plays an extremely important role. Visuals (including splashed text and strategically placed blocks) are, in fact, the foundations of an effective presentation. Illustration often helps with rounding off the meaning of the text, producing as complete a communicative exercise as possible.

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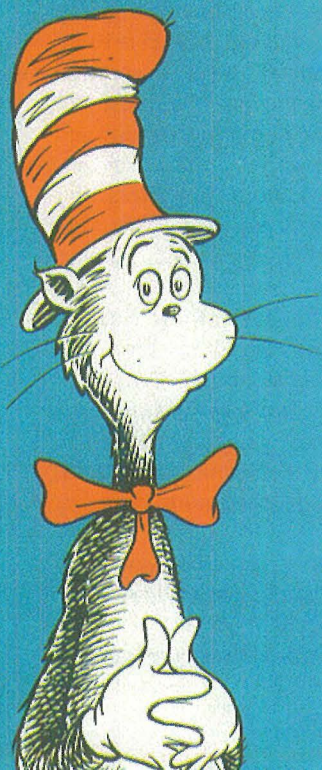
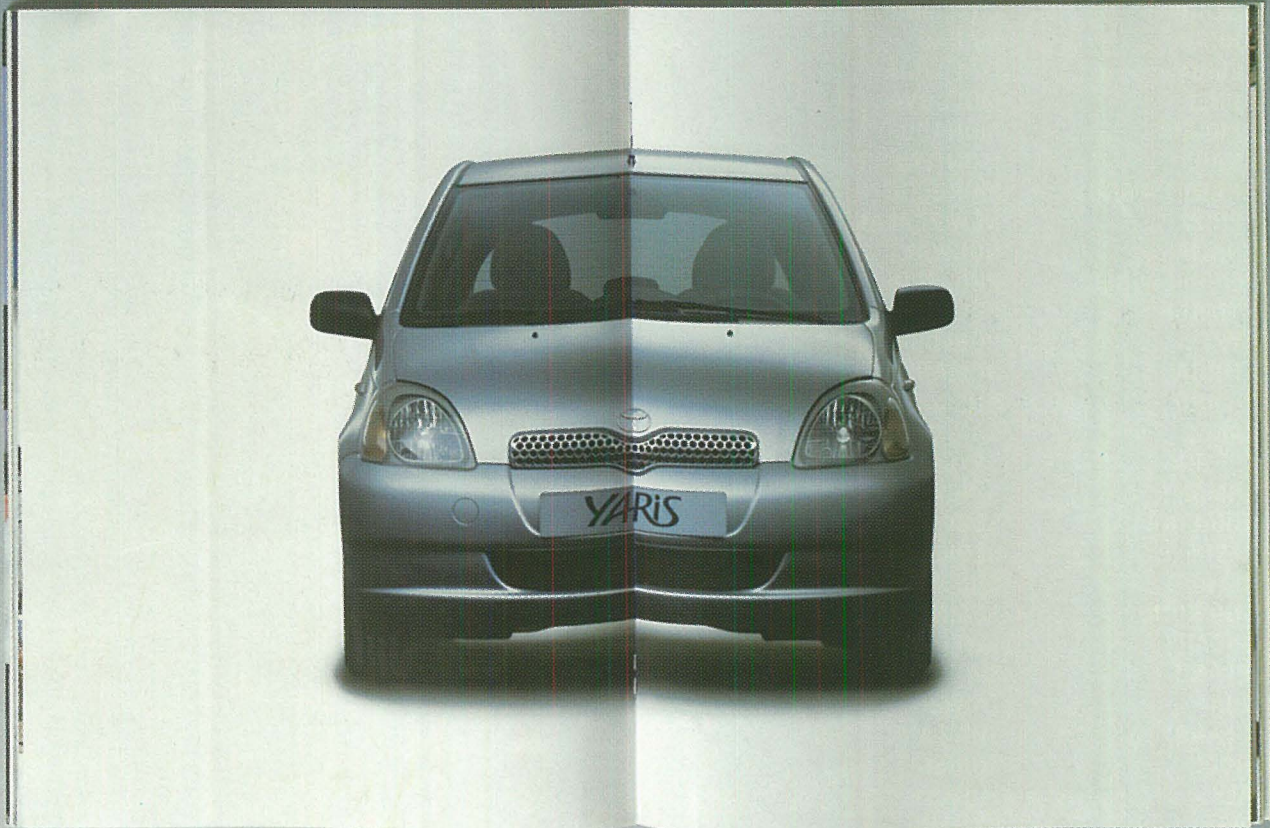


Illustration: Dr. Seuss





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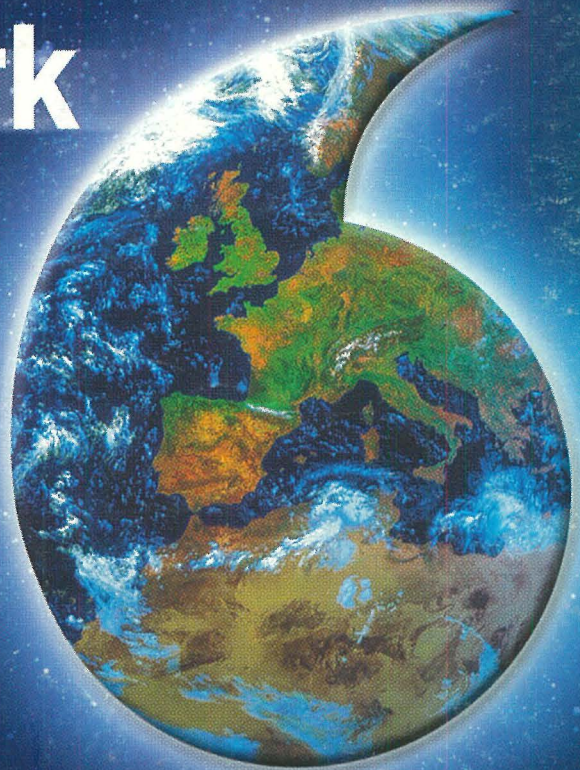


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