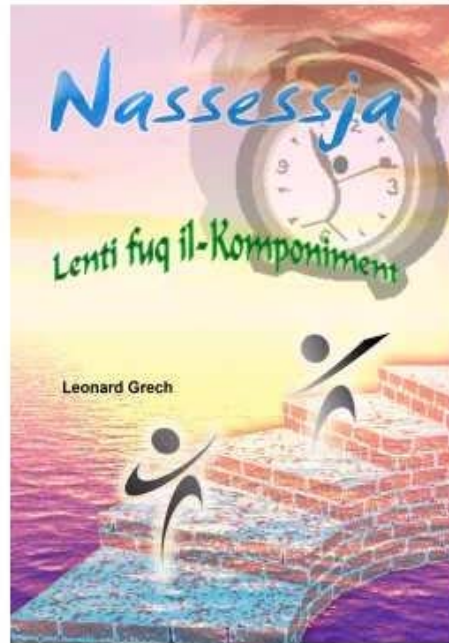


## Teaching and learning material for Year 5 and Year 6 pupils

by Leonard Grech

(This article was first published in *The Sunday Times* on 30 Oct. 2005)



It is said that every picture tells a story. Perhaps this is very true with regard the front cover of a forty page long booklet entitled *Nassessja* (I Assess) that has just been published by the Educational Assessment Unit.

The Curriculum Department of the Education Division felt that it is high time to produce teaching and learning material to help Year 5 and Year 6 pupils to acquire a most fundamental skill, that is the ability to assess one's own work. This skill of self-assessment is in fact an integral component of formative assessment, which puts the child at the very centre of the learning and teaching process.

The protagonists in the illustration are two figures standing one above the other on a flight of steps. One is making an effort to go up a step while the other is offering a helping hand. This could represent a situation that is very similar to what takes place in the classroom on a daily basis. Our children try to improve their performance with the help of those around them, whether parents, teachers or other educators, at times even classmates. It is not an easy task and in fact, very often, both learners and educators have to struggle to achieve their target, that is their learning intention. This ‘struggle’, which involves risks, is aptly depicted in the illustration by the water surrounding the stairs, and the lack of a handrail or banisters.

It is a fact that everything connected with education is very complicated. Indeed it is truly so with reference to learning. Learning takes **time**, and demands **effort**, considering that children have to understand concepts that are occasionally very complicated. The notion of time is appropriately represented by the clock. A happy child with open arms makes up the hands of the alarm clock. Could it be that the artist, Joseph Paul Camilleri, chose the alarm clock to wake us up to the need of realising the great significance of the ability to assess one’s own work?

It is a fact that various learning situations could have been used to help pupils develop the above mentioned skill. In the present case the Educational Assessment Unit focused on the ‘Composition’, an item which carries a very high mark in any language examination.

In the first part of the publication (which incidentally is in full colour throughout) the pupils are given very practical tips as to how they can improve their writing skills. Like so many other things in life, writing involves effort, perhaps, as the saying goes, 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration. Even the clever Hermione in the magical world of Harry Potter has to study and work hard in order to improve her performance. So pupils are advised on the different aspects of the composition – namely understanding the title, writing with an audience in mind, thinking of an enticing introduction and an effective conclusion, developing original ideas, using well constructed paragraphs, choosing appropriate verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and paying attention to punctuation.

In the second part of the booklet the reader is presented with three authentic compositions written by Year 6 pupils. By means of challenging questions based on the points described in the first section, the pupils are encouraged to assess somebody else’s work. In fact they

are even invited to suggest a mark which in their opinion should be awarded to the piece of work that is being presented. This exercise prepares the pupils to what they are challenged to do in section C.

In the third section the young readers are asked to choose one of their own compositions and evaluate it vis-à-vis the fourteen different points dealt with in section A. Pupils are advised to give marks to their own work. Then they are asked to choose an area of the composition, for example the conclusion, and try to make it better. As their final task the pupils are requested to assign a new mark to the new version of their own work.

One interpretation of the picture on the front cover is that the two figures represent the pupil and the educator. But could it be that the figure on the upper stair is the learner himself or herself? Perhaps as a result of his or her acquisition of the skill of self-assessment the pupil moves forward and standards are raised! It is hoped that this publication, which will be distributed for free, will help to bring about this desired effect.

---

(Mr Grech is an Education Officer at the Educational Assessment Unit.)