

# 'Immersion Project' inaugurated

**O**N FEBRUARY 28, the Minister of Education, Dr Louis Galea, and French Ambassador Didier Desreumaux jointly inaugurated the Franco-Maltese Immersion Project at the Franco-Maltese Centre at the Junior College, Msida. The centre, which forms part of the Curriculum Department of the Division of Education, is co-directed by Education Officer Frank Gatt.

In his address Mr Gatt dwelt on the development of the centre and how the present project came about. Mr Gatt began by thanking all his predecessors who have done a very good job to promote the French Resource Centre during the years it has been operating for the benefit of teachers, students and the public who are interested in French language and culture.

"When I came to the centre as co-director three years ago," Mr Gatt explained, "I had three major aims in mind which I refer to collectively as P.M. P stands for popularising the centre in the true sense of the word. This we have already achieved to a considerable degree: last year around 8,000 people visited the centre, including secondary school students, sixth formers, University students and members of the public.

"I stands for internationalising the centre. This we are achieving especially thanks to our contacts with the Council of Europe and the ECML (European Centre of Modern Languages) in Graz of which I am the national representative on the governing board. We have various publications with the ECML and the French Resource Centre is the disseminator in Malta for the ECML.

"M stands for modernising the centre. Today it is equipped with the latest technology including a 12-booth computer lab which will soon have Internet access. All services at the Franco-Maltese Centre are free of charge. We are happy with what we have achieved up to now but we will try to do even better in the future."

Mr Gatt said this year being the European Year of Languages (EYL) he wanted to give the French Resource Centre and the Curriculum Department of the Division of Education "a project which would be a milestone in its genre".

He continued: "My chance came when I was called to help Ms M.R. Mifsud, Director International Relations, of the EYL National Committee, of which I am vice-chairman and secretary. She told me of an immersion project she had read about - that was it. The spark was enough to ignite in me the vision of my own project. But to carry it out, great changes had to be made. This was more reason why I should take up the challenge."

"I always argue that one should empower change, that the future of the world is a learning future. We live in a world where change is a journey of unknown destination, where problems are our friends, where seeking assistance is a sign of strength. We should not be afraid of the work any change will necessarily involve. I have no doubts that being better at life and better at work go hand in hand and this is what I always try to inculcate in my students and all those who work with me."

"But real change requires a new

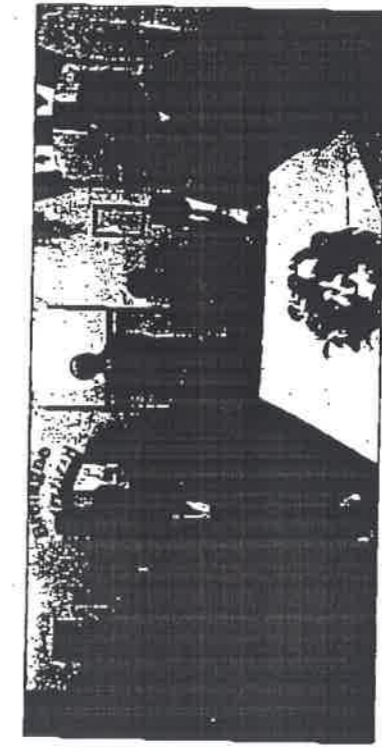
mindset... New mindsets can help us manage the unknowable. Let us try to make the educational system a learning organisation. Let us try to make a positive difference wherever the good Lord has decided to send us. This is also very much in line with the general philosophy and rationale of the new National Minimum Curriculum."

**H**owever, Mr Gatt warned, "systems do not change themselves; people change them. I was enthusiastic that I had thought of it way where I could make a difference, where I could change the system, or so I hoped, for the better. For there is always a moral purpose in positive change. It is a must for today's educators to have this moral purpose and to become disciples of positive change."

"Now the four core capacities in a change agent are vision, inquiry, collaboration and mastery. "Personal purpose and vision are the starting agenda. We need positive images as starting forces. We know what our visions have been in the past and what we have achieved when we had nurtured the right visions and this should spur us on to take up any future challenge and persist in our vision."

"The vision should be an altruistic one aimed at social improvement. Teachers become teachers not for themselves but to enhance and make positive differences in the life of others. This I consider as basic in every teacher and educator."

"In addition, vision and personal purpose should be dynamic and not static. Inquiry is what makes vision more dynamic and proactive. In fact,



**MR GATT** addressing guests at the Franco-Maltese Centre. They include the Minister of Education, Dr Louis Galea, and the French Ambassador, Didier Desreumaux, who jointly inaugurated the Immersion Project.

inquiry is the very engine of vitality and renewal. Vision must be fulfilled by information, ideas and constant research. Inquiry actually means developing a way of thinking that is continually open to the next paradigm and the next and the next.

"Collaboration comes next. The ability to collaborate is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern societies. I am a great disciple of participative management, of charismatic leadership, of bottom-up and horizontal forms of management; I am a great believer in discipline that produces disciples. This is what I try to practise daily at the French Resource Centre or in the schools which I visit to share experiences with my colleagues and friends. And I think I am on the right track."

Mr Gatt said the project could not be realised without the help of various people - Education Division directors, assistant directors, the

staff at the ERC, the foremen, the carpenters, the painters. They all started to share his vision and they worked wholeheartedly towards the realisation of the project, he said.

**M**r Gatt also thanked "our French partners who gave me all their trust and through co-partners allowed me to pursue my vision all along. Besides, a French native speaker, Mlle Stephanie Descamps, who is a teacher of FLE herself, is working with us on the project. A special word of thanks to Ms Josephine Zammit and Mrs Lydia Zammit, her husband and daughter, who have sacrificed a lot of their time to polish to the last detail their respective pavilions."

"And a very special 'bravo' to Mr Raymond Fenech, subject co-ordinator, who believed in the project from the very start and shared with me from the very beginning all the

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vicissitudes and positive moments that accompany any project. Thanks to Ray, to Miriam, his wife, and their two sons for giving so much of their precious time. Thanks also to Margaret Giffon, Roland Borg and Dorianne Mifsud for their help. Everybody collaborated to the best of his/her ability and the results show. I am a great believer in people. Contrary to what Sartre believes, I affirm that *Le paradis c'est les autres*."

Last but not least, mastery, Mr Gatt continued. "This does not mean that I am fully satisfied. Far from it. Mastery means approaching one's life as a creative work. Mastery is a lifelong generative process. Personal mastery is not something you possess but a process, a lifelong discipline. In fact, it may sound paradoxical but it is true: people with a high level of personal mastery are aware of their ignorance, their incompetence, their growth areas. The journey towards mastery is an unending one and the journey itself and not the destination is the reward."

"Vision, inquiry, collaboration and mastery are important. But these would mean nothing without enthusiasm, that is, an unselfish heart that pumps generous blood. Enthusiasm can provide positive contagion to all those around you. And when enthusiasm is genuine it will spread like harmless wildfire and enkindle all and sundry."

"Vision, inquiry, collaboration, mastery, enthusiasm, thinking and action are a *sine qua non* to achieving some real success when embarking on a project," Mr Gatt said as he proceeded to explain what the project is about.

"It is a hands-on, autonomous

experience," he said, "where students will actually behave as if they were in France itself. They are the main actors at every moment of the experience."

"We have transformed part of the FRC - only a part, because we are still offering the services we used to offer before - into a French region, to start with, Brittany. Our idea is to change the region every two or three years. There are 22 regions in France. So one can see how long-term the project is."

The project is called *Around Brittany in 180 minutes*. Each time a group of 25 students are invited, but before their visit the students will have received material on Brittany sent by the FRC.

All the 25 students will be welcomed at the customs-shed and asked to complete the usual formalities before entering any foreign country: passports, visa and the like. Afterwards, they will have a few minutes' power point presentation on Brittany.

After the presentation, the students will proceed to the spacious hall which virtually represents the region of Brittany. Here they will be divided into five groups and each group will be under the guidance of a facilitator. D. Ed students will also be participating. Each group will visit in turn five main pavilions.

These include a commercial pavilion, *Made in Breizh*, where students will actually use French money, euros and French chequebooks to pay for things they have actually bought. The pavilion is full of authentic articles one can find in

Brittany. They will also be able to buy postcards, fill them up and post them to friends. There will be many other activities besides.

Another pavilion, *Racisme-moi!* / *mer*, tries to capture the atmosphere of a main feature of Brittany: the sea. Students will watch a video on the Occitanis of Brest, they will explore various charts on the sea, become familiar with the names of different fish and shells, and will explore, by means of the Internet, different sites in Brittany which have to do with the sea or seafaring life in Brittany.

The next pavilion, *Maison de la Bretagne*, is a research treasure hunt corner where students are invited to complete a crossword puzzle on various aspects of Brittany. To help them in their cultural quest, they can have access to various documentation exhibited in the pavilion. They can even, through the Internet, contact students in Brittany and ask for their help. Finally, students can check their answers on a gigantic crossword puzzle which can be lit up at will to discover the solutions.

A fourth pavilion tries to recreate the legends and mystic lore of Brittany. So the pavilion simulates a fantastic wood or forest where students can enter and feel part of the myths of this region: Merlin, Brocéliande, Tristan and Isolt, Astérix... After watching some slides, students take part in hands-on, play-way activities linked with the topic.

Last but not least, students will be cooking food for which Brittany is renowned, not only *crêpe* but other delicacies as well. This will take place in a fully-equipped kitchen, under the guidance of a Francoph-

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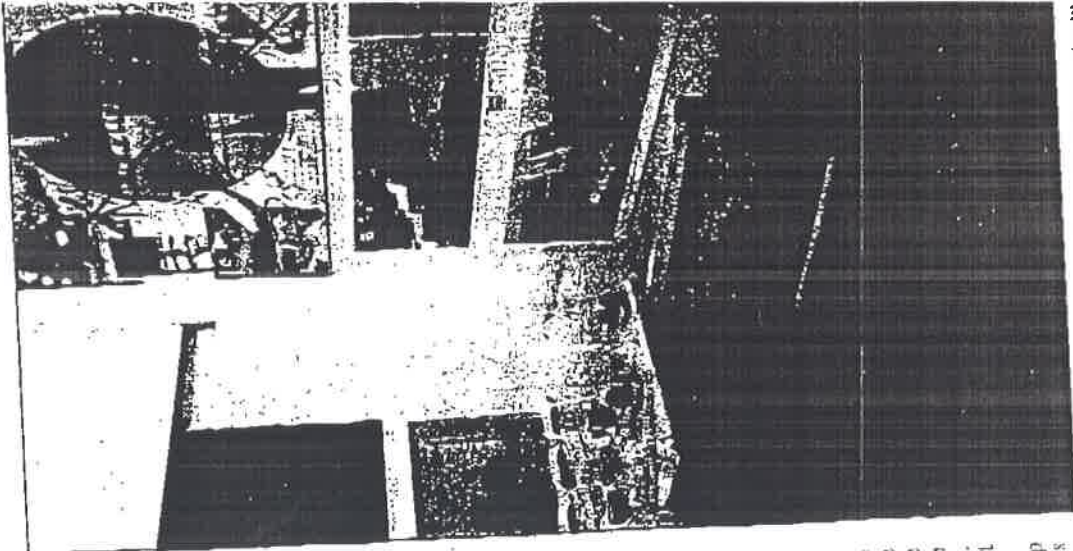
one professional cook. When everybody has gone through all the pavilions, all 25 students will meet up in the main hall, called *Place du Calvaire*, and will entertain themselves to songs, dances and food as if they were in Brittany itself.

Mr Gatt said that some spaces in the main hall have been used to mount exhibitions on Gauguin, Bernard and Jourdan, typical Breton cuisine, and the megalithic temples of the region with particular emphasis on the menhir alignments in Carnac. These exhibits are accompanied by explanatory captions.

He added that future plans for the project include the building of dormitories and living areas, to be able to house students not for three or four hours but for a whole weekend. "Immersion would then really be complete especially if foreign students are invited to join," Mr Gatt remarked.

Mr Gatt then lit a white candle "which symbolises the white that exists in all three flags of Brittany, Malta and France" and invited Minister Galea to light a red candle representing the colour in the Maltese flag and Ambassador Destremau to light the blue candle symbolising the blue in the French flag. "I hope that these three candles will continue to produce the light and warmth which we need in order to give the best to our students. I repeat, our learners deserve the best and nothing but the best."

"I hope that this project will help all of us appreciate other cultures and look more positively, may, treasure the differences that exist between us," Mr Gatt concluded.



THROUGH the Internet, students can get in touch with many to be