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RIDEF 2026

Rencontre Internationale des Éducateurs Freinet

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Intercultural Evenings – Saturday and Sunday

As part of the intercultural evening on Saturday, our Polish hosts took us on a lightning-fast journey across the country – from the Tatra Mountains in the south to the Baltic Sea in the north. They presented samples of folk costumes, dances, and music from the regions of the country along the largest river, the Vistula.

The "Nadolanie" band engaged the audience in singing the song "Kaszubskie Nuty" (Kashubian Nuts) and a dance called "kowal" (blacksmith). The finale also featured the national Polish dance – the polonaise.

The intercultural evening on Sunday was attended by Austrians, Germans, Swiss, and guests from Cameroon, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast. The Swiss friends moved us with a beautiful performance of a

traditional folk song, while the Germans and Austrians brought tears of laughter with an expressive performance of the Brothers Grimm fairy tale "Happy Hans." The African representatives delighted the audience with spectacular traditional costumes from different parts of their continent, and then got everyone dancing.

Gina



Freinet without words

As part of the preparations for the opening ceremony, the Gdańsk Group performed an artistic program titled The Garden – from Me to We, based on an original script by Joanna Ryduchowska-Wrzałek. Subsequent rehearsals of the performance provided an opportunity to creatively implement the philosophy of Célestin Freinet: how a human being exists in the world as an individual who develops through an interest in others, attempts at confrontation, and even conflict, yet achieves the optimum of their potential through empathy, tolerance, respect, and cooperation. The performance was warmly received by the audience, who not only understood the intended message but also perceived their own subjective meanings, such as that hope is the last to die...



Gina

Visas for members from Africa: a question of equality

Cheikh, a member of the FIMEM Board of Directors, a founding member of ASEM and a representative of African women and men, is interviewed by Aurelia.

→ *Why were some members unable to come to Poland?*

I am delighted to answer questions regarding the participation of African men and women in Ridef. There are two main reasons for their absence:

- visa refusals by the embassies and consulates in our countries;
- the costs involved in applying for a visa, flight tickets or other travel expenses.

In 2024, for example, I had to fly to Morocco to obtain a visa for Mexico.

→ *What does FIMEM do?*

Several important initiatives have taken place: FIMEM provides financial support to certain African men and women through solidarity tickets (as it does for all B and C countries). In the Freinet approach, the solidarity aspect means that the movements provide support in response to the appeal launched at the end of each Ridef. The movements contribute according to their means, and individuals also provide support. The funds raised enable FIMEM to invite movements from B and C countries to submit applications, and FIMEM then allocates the funds accordingly.

FIMEM has undertaken to support registered African participants, whether they are subsidised or paying their own way, in order to help them obtain a visa, as this support is essential for them.

FIMEM and the OC (Ridef Organising Committee) are doing everything possible to ensure that original documents are sent securely, as this is very expensive...



It acts as a liaison between the local authorities and the participants: for example, it has written to the Togolese Ministry of National Education, asking the Minister for Foreign Affairs to support the request with the Polish authorities.

→ *Is Africa the main victim of these problems?*

Africa faces far more problems, not only because of economic factors but above all because of the difficulty in obtaining visas to Europe. Some South Americans are also leaving for economic reasons.

Border controls are strict: Spain issued visas for the Ivorians because there is no Polish embassy in Côte d'Ivoire. On their arrival in Warsaw, the police wanted to send them back. But fortunately, the CO was able to intervene on their behalf.

As for me, I was lucky enough to have already obtained my visa last year whilst preparing for the Ridef, but two Senegalese comrades were refused visas, whilst Karim – who, like me, is a member of the FIMEM Executive Committee and comes from Burkina Faso – was unable to obtain a visa…

A Cameroonian was unable to obtain a visa. As for Togo, Benin and Ghana, the entire delegation has been denied representation due to visa refusals.

They were present in Sweden, but Europe is currently imposing increasingly strict restrictions on entry for citizens from Africa.

→ *How can FIMEM's initiatives help, and what difference will they make?*

Firstly, by presenting a united front, but above all by voting in favour of the ASEM motion proposing the creation of a project officer in Africa to facilitate participation in all international meetings. This role would be voluntary and would support FIMEM's Commission 8, 'Visas and Solidarity', and CAMEM (the African Coordination of Modern School Movements) . Experienced FIMEM members with expertise in this area could also provide support. FIMEM must find a way to exert a positive influence on the issue of visas, in order to foster solidarity, cooperation and friendship between peoples, and to ensure that Africa is not prevented from building its democratic participation in collective exchanges. Everyone must have the same opportunities to participate.

Halina Semenowicz: A Meeting to Introduce a Strong and Inspiring Figure of the Movement



This Sunday, Marzena Kędra and Agnieszka Jankowiak-Maik, with excellent translation assistance, coordinated a highlight of our Ridef event. In Polish, English, and French, we discovered or deepened our understanding of Halina Semenowicz, a woman with an extraordinary life story, who lived from 1910 to 2004. Through her profound zest for life, her creative joy, her strength of character, and her unwavering belief in children's free expression, she was able to disseminate Freinet pedagogy within the institution itself, even during the years of Soviet totalitarianism. She was an active member of international gatherings, including Ridef, where her humor and storytelling talent were well known. Through numerous testimonies from members of this Ridef (Regional Network of French Freinet Teachers) who knew her or learned a great deal from her, we experienced a moving and enriching moment, which culminated in the consultation of extraordinary archives: a passport, letters, her diplomas, and even a book cover made of fabric embroidered with Halina's image.

Michel Mulat, who worked with Polish colleagues and a university professor to collect documents on Halina Semenowicz, kindly shared with me the importance of knowing and sharing the story of this major figure. I will summarize his remarks:

Halina Semenowicz is an important figure for the Freinet movement, not only in Poland. When she met Célestin Freinet in 1956, she was already running a school unique in the world, located in Otwock, near Warsaw, within a vast hospital funded by Swedish money since 1947. She succeeded in developing an

educational program for children who were sometimes very ill, even near death. She was able to enrich, deepen, and formalize her insights through her encounters with Freinet educators.

She corresponded with Freinet, sharing texts, which led to a fundraising campaign in France to finance a mimeograph machine, enabling the children of Otwock to publish their own work independently.

The anthropological approach found in the twelve videos on the archives-freinet.org website (in French and Polish) follows the thought processes of those who witnessed the school firsthand, such as her daughter Aleksandra. These documents are invaluable support for a research project on her pedagogy itself: every teacher can draw courage, find inspiration, and confidence in the life force of children from Halina, who succeeded in establishing the idea that sick children, whether they are present for a few days or longer, whether they have hope of recovery or not, are at the heart of every child's life, together.



Halina at the RIDEF in Leuven (Belgium) 1984

Films and video archives collected by Michel Mulat on the French website archives-freinet.org (technical issues are being addressed): SEMENOWICZ Halina

On the website of the Polish Association of Educational Animators C. Freinet, the Polish Freinet Movement: Halina Semenowicz - Polskie Stowarzyszenie Animatorów Pedagogiki C. Freineta

Aurélia

For the first time…

This is my first time at RIDEF.

This is the first time I've put in so much work to welcome people to my country who, like me, have come to love C. Freinet's educational approach.

The first word that springs to mind right now is 'Freinet'. His educational approach has been with me for 34 years. It has been with me for all that time and holds the top spot in my heart.

My first RIDEF and:

- multiculturalism;
- diversity;
- so many decisions to make already!



So many people, so many activities, so many workshops and… you can't be everywhere. That's both a bad thing and a good thing. A bad thing, because there's so much I'd love to experience, but I can't. A good thing, because it's better to feel hungry than to be full and sated.

It's not the first time I've thought about Frenet and how much I owe to his teaching methods. It's not the first time I've thought about my students and how much we give to one another.

RIDEF – it's meetings, conversations, joy, hope, openness, inspiration, creativity and… (here's your chance to add your own words).

Gosia

FIMEM Commission 1 (Communications) would like to welcome the various members of the Movements—particularly the delegates—to its booth in the lobby near the bar.
We will have the opportunity to discuss the Federation's existing communication tools and those that would be desirable to implement.

Are you taking part in the Long Workshops?
Share your photos and short summary with us. We'll feature them in Newsletter No. 5!
Send e-mail: gazeta@freinet.pl

Online version: https://2026.ridef-fimem.com/en/gazetka-2/	This newspaper was made during the workshop by: Gosia, Pierre, Gina, Arnout, Marguerite, Giancarlo, Aurélia, Kamila