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Rencontre Internationale des Éducateurs Freinet
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How can we teach and practice democracy in a world where it is under attack from all sides?

This Monday, the conference forum provided an opportunity to delve deeply into the theme of our Ridef: democracy.

In the morning, a roundtable discussion followed by small-group discussions and a wrap-up session brought together a large number of participants in the movie theater. This allowed us to engage with the topic through questions that reflect the daily challenges in our schools and the reasons that lead us to embrace Freinet pedagogy as a response—in step with the challenges of today's world, with and for the children, their families, and the teaching community.

The roundtable featured presentations by four teachers, followed by three representatives from the Polish educational administration, who discussed current practices, opportunities, and issues in Poland.



The teachers' very practical presentations showed us that schools at all levels of education are succeeding in building a climate of trust where children can express themselves through speech, the arts, and shared activities decided upon together. From this foundation, it becomes possible to understand and grow through the perspectives of others. Children must be able to influence their environment by making decisions about their own lives and, consequently, their schools. Freedom is learned alongside responsibility, in concrete ways within various circles. Teachers must be willing to adopt a research-oriented mindset and thus share the role of the knower with the children. When classrooms become multicultural—for example, in the context of the war in Ukraine—we embrace this diversity as an opportunity to learn from one another: books in multiple languages, presentations by children, and so on help build a culture of diversity.

Indeed, adults must be mindful of their own biases so as not to perpetuate the very prejudices they are, more often than not, eager to combat. Developing empathy and self-confidence, as well as trust in others, is essential: taking the time to observe what is actually happening in the classroom, creating safe spaces, and facilitating small-group discussions makes sense at a time when the world tends to think in shortcuts and at breakneck speed. Parents who are invited to observe these practices, in turn, come to embrace these principles with confidence. In this way, everyone can gradually come to terms with their fears and the risk inherent in democratic reality: while others are certainly different, reaching out to them brings me as much as I bring to them.

Indeed, against a backdrop of rising authoritarianism even in Europe, 18- to 35-year-olds are increasingly drawn to strong personalities, and a growing number view military regimes or those that restrict freedom in the name of security in a positive light. We must therefore tirelessly teach children of all ages to question the world and all forms of authority—an effort that is even more necessary should democracy ever rise from the ashes, here or elsewhere. As educators, we have a responsibility to preserve a world where children can make real choices and live together in peace. It is not up to children alone to fix a world that is in trouble. Schools, however, can provide a peaceful environment for children, enable them to question the society around us, and give them the collective tools to overcome individual fears.

A society cannot love children only when they are "its own" and when they remain silent. It owes young people consistency and trust at all levels of education, fostering healthy autonomy and concrete freedom for young people in their schools—and thus for teachers as well. The issue of this freedom for children and their families in public schools and private schools sparked significant discussions within the groups.

How, then, can democracy be strengthened, defended, and reinvented together with children? This is a daily challenge. This complex issue was explored in depth in the language groups, tailored to the realities of different countries, in such a passionate and engaging manner that we found it difficult to distill a true summary of it; yet this demonstrated just how deeply our movement cares about the subject and intends to address it in an equally complex—and, above all, collective—manner.

Thus, despite such a difficult overall context—marked by threats to and restrictions on collective freedoms—the Freinet Movement is a space that puts into practice the necessary consideration of the world and the urgent need for education in democracy.

Aurelia





Appreciation for a generous donation to support teaching and learning in Ghana - Benefits of RIDEF



After a brief discussion after the 34th Ridef, 2022 in Agadir,Morocco with Marzena, the head of Cogito school in Poland, a donation was sent to Mpota/ Mampong/Adawukwa Basic School to purchase teaching and learning materials for the students. Many thanks to the initiators of Ridef which brings teachers together from all the countries where the Freinet Movement is established. I am also grateful to Mr John Mensah (President of Freinet Movement in Ghana) who wholeheartedly accepted me to become a member of this esteemed establishment and further led me to have access to Ridef as a participant. I also extend my sincere gratitude to Marzena, Magda and Karolina who through their busy schedules find time to raise that little money of $330 for the purchase of the materials for my students in Ghana.

I write this to indicate how relevant the establishment of Ridef by FIMEM has always brought teachers, students and teachers across the globe to meet and connect to experience their various teaching pedagogies in their various schools. This little help goes a long way to help teachers and students in developing countries where the resources of the underprivileged is always a problem, and some little assistance is always needed despite the government's intervention and required support.

RIDEF is playing a significant role in the development of FIMEM members and I urge the organizers and sponsors to continue to support the program.

Find pictures of the presentation of the teaching and learning materials purchased by Cogito school in Poland for my schools in Ghana.



Augustine ANYAN
Freinet movement Ghana

At the commissions market: FIMEM in the making

At a RIDEF, some moments are highly visible: the workshops, cooperative meals, debates, evening gatherings, and reunions. And then there are quieter moments, seemingly practical, which nevertheless say a great deal about what FIMEM is. The commissions market is one of these moments.

For half an hour, the commissions present themselves, each with its own stand, documents, projects, and calls for participation. It might look like a simple information fair. In reality, it is more a way of making visible the work that enables the federation to keep going between two international meetings. FIMEM does not live only during the RIDEFs: it continues through these groups that translate, organize, write, prepare, connect, archive, and support.

The commissions first remind us that cooperation is not only a pedagogical principle for the classroom. It is also a way of making an international movement work. Communication between movements has to be maintained, the website kept alive, texts translated, RIDEFs prepared, finances discussed, and questions of visas and solidarity supported. All these tasks may seem administrative, but they are deeply political: without translation, some voices remain at a distance; without solidarity, some people's presence becomes impossible; without a shared memory, experiences are lost.

Alongside the commissions that sustain the practical life of FIMEM, others carry the major questions running through our schools and societies: the rights of children and adolescents, gender equality, current education policies, the environment, peace education, and convergences with other New Education movements. Here too, these are not merely themes to be discussed. They are questions that enter directly into classrooms: how can children's voices be given a real place? How can we educate for peace in a world marked by war? How can environmental education become more than a one-off activity? How can we defend an emancipatory school when education policies sometimes move in the opposite direction?

This market thus reveals FIMEM at work. A FIMEM made up of commissions, some older, some newer, some more visible than others, but all necessary. Some are looking for people to write, translate, relay information, and document experiences. Others are calling for classroom practices, testimonies, and traces of shared work. All of them remind us that Freinet internationalism is not built only through major speeches, but through a multitude of concrete gestures: sending a text, proofreading a translation, organizing a meeting, supporting someone's participation, putting an archive online, circulating a child's words.

What is striking, in the end, is that the commissions are not structures beside the movement. They may well be its permanent workshops. They extend the exchanges of the RIDEF once the suitcases have been closed. They give lasting form to what is said, sought, and decided collectively. They turn values into shared tasks.

The commissions market lasts only a short time. Thirty minutes is little to approach fifteen working spaces, their histories, urgencies, and needs. But it is enough to understand one thing: FIMEM holds together because people agree to take on a share of the common work. Behind each stand lies a simple invitation: not only to take part in the meeting, but to contribute to what makes it possible.

Pierre

Edgar Morin, or On Complexity



Edgar Morin, a progressive philosopher, sociologist and anthropologist, has died at the age of 104. Morin is one of the best-known thinkers, thanks to his theory of ‘complex thought’.

A world of connections without understanding

Education can no longer be confined to the transmission of fragmented knowledge, organized into separate disciplines as if the world itself were compartmentalized. It must gradually evolve into an education that fosters an understanding of the interconnections that weave reality together.

Morin set out to establish a dialogue between the approaches of the humanities and those of the biological sciences, advocating a conception of knowledge based on the integration of different disciplines. This dialogue is often still lacking in school education, as we can also see from our inability to understand the causes and consequences of the major upheavals driving climate change, which would require a complex analysis. Philosophy, sociology, anthropology and epistemology offer different perspectives on the same subject of observation – living beings – yet schools present different aspects of this subject in isolation, thereby preventing a holistic view.

Year One of the Ecological Era: The Earth Depends on Humankind, Who Depends on the Earth

Morin initiated a dialogue and reflection on the themes of the environmental crisis and social transformation with the proposal of a “politics of civilization,” aiming to place the individual at the center of public action and to prioritize quality of life over the mere pursuit of material well-being.

For Morin, globalization has created a single “community of destiny” for humanity. Awareness of this interdependence is weak, stifled by borders, homelands, religions, and ethnicities. “Only a regenerated humanism can save us.”

This community of destiny primarily concerns Europe: a Europe that, after imperialism and colonialism, is falling back into nationalisms and centripetal temptations, into demands for ethnic purity and remigration; while the hope of survival is a unity to be recomposed by opening up at the same time to the planet, to cultural pluralism, to other worlds and knowledge.

The themes of this Ridef (if only Morin could have been with us)

Solidarity: a cognitive necessity, not just a moral one

We are both unique and interdependent, rooted in our own distinct cultures and part of a global human journey. This tension must not be resolved through oversimplification — it must be reflected upon, lived out and embraced. And this is precisely what a class involved in an international pen-pal scheme — a class that writes to children in Senegal, Brazil or Poland — learns in a practical way: that the other is a resource, not a threat.

Morin appeals to a sense of global solidarity.

Freedom: learning to think beyond certainties

According to Morin, no worldview can claim exclusive possession of the truth; for this reason, he believed that different philosophical and religious conceptions should coexist within a society characterized by cultural and civilizational pluralism.

True freedom is that which the researcher enjoys when faced with their subject. It is the freedom to doubt, to question, and to resist what appears obvious. A truly free pupil is one who has learnt to be wary of ready-made answers and of ideologies that simplify the world in order to control it more effectively. And this cannot be learnt from a textbook — it is learnt through living, debating, creating and cooperating. Just as in our classrooms.

Facing uncertainty: nurturing minds capable of taking action without having everything under control

We are entering a historic period marked by uncertainty — not accidental uncertainty, but structural uncertainty. Even the sciences themselves now recognize their limitations. Technology is accelerating transformations that are often unpredictable. Artificial intelligence is reshaping the way we work and think. Climate change threatens the stability of societies. The purpose of education can no longer be to produce fixed certainties. It must be to nurture minds capable of thinking within a context of uncertainty — capable of understanding without oversimplifying, capable of acting without claiming to control everything, capable of reflecting without oversimplifying reality.

Freinet and the pedagogy of complexity

There is a profound connection between the demand for complexity and the spirit of the Freinet movement, not only in its teaching techniques, but in its vision of learning as a living, collective activity, rooted in experience, trial and error, and cooperation. In a Freinet classroom, the pupil is not a passive recipient of knowledge. They are an active participant, an individual engaged in relationships, a person who learns by doing, by exchanging ideas, by experimenting, and also by making mistakes. This is perhaps one of the most concrete manifestations of what might be called a pedagogy of complexity.

For knowledge is never merely a store of information: it is a living, relational process, constantly under construction. There is one crucial point: we never learn alone. Even when we believe we are learning alone, all knowledge is shaped by interactions, legacies and shared languages. Cooperation is not a desirable extra — it is a structural condition of human intelligence.

Babanou Abeldhadi
Giancarlo Cavinato

Education through Art

Freinet understood free child creativity also as artistic expression, through which a student establishes close contact with their surroundings. Besides that, it helps develop the ability to accept critical evaluation of the work they create. Every form of expression should reflect emotional experiences, so it's important that it is free. This type of creativity was demonstrated to us by the workshop leaders.

Gosia



During the workshop **Motanki – Slavic Power Dolls and Herbal Stories, Martyna Kozłowska**, together with the participants, transported herself into the world of Slavic motanki and natural herbs. They created unique little dolls together, filling them with fragrant herbs and grains, while learning about their symbolism and meaning.



Kamila Trojan Batik – dyeing fabric using wax



Kamila introduced the participants to the world of Indonesian wax dyeing techniques. A beautiful experience, quite different and engaging various senses. Lots of mindfulness, delicacy, and results that surprised even the creators themselves 🙂





Ewa Morzyszek-Banaszak, Celina Morzyszek – In Harmony with Nature, through Ceramic and Sculpting Experiences for Adults and Children

The creative workshops engaged all the senses. Functional forms were created, making the workshop activities even closer to everyday life. Working with clay brought calm and emotional relief, and also allowed us to step into the world of our ancestors.

Magda Kołakowska ran a workshop called **Zachwytnik - discovering nature through movement, art, and mindfulness**. Participants experienced, among other things, a walk in the treetops 😲 and practiced mindfulness and observation by listening to the sounds of nature.





Long Workshop 17 - Telling stories through art

The first two days we talked about the school newsletter and democracy and citizenship. We had a look at some copies of the Pioniers, the school newsletter from l'École Freinet in Vence and the newsletters from Antonio Benaiges from Spain. We spoke about:

Which words create boundaries between us and others, and which ones, on the other hand, open the way to relationships?

We have chosen some words and wrote stories about them. We made images with printing, stamping and collage. Our 'newsletter' is in the hallway. You're invited to have a look.

Sybren, Letizia, Annica, Sofia, Sonia, Elin, Madeleine, Katja, Anna-Karin, Federico, Luca, Ricardo and Heleen



“Reading the World”: No Pressure, No Impression

“Reading the World” is an essential concept in emancipatory pedagogy, which advocates for a critical understanding of one’s surroundings; to this end, individuals must engage with their social reality and challenge the status quo—that is, question the unquestionable.

This form of reading involves taking a political stance and serves as a precursor to “formal” learning and the reading of the written word.

This Freire approach is deeply linked to Freinet pedagogy. Both educators agree that education must stem from the student’s real life; the student should not view themselves as a mere observer of reality but, above all, as a transformer of it.

Patrocinio García Hernández – Mexico

Through reflection on our contemplative view of the world and the reality that surrounds us, human beings first come to understand their environment, culture, and reality—a process that occurs through the senses and individual experiences, even before language comes into play. Our childhoods allow us to reclaim our origins—as both the haves and the have-nots—to build different paths and possibilities from a political perspective, expressing this through a process of literacy (natural method), written language (free text), and artistic or visual expression. Drawing on the work of Freinet and Freire, this enables us to engage in a process of reclaiming our roots and culture to transform our reality in an artistic, emancipatory, and transformative way.



In this workshop, we share and reflect on various texts that offer a critical perspective on reality; we share and reinterpret photographs from an individual perspective, using shared texts, our bodies, and printmaking to explore our view of the world.

We will share our perspectives and interpretations of the world both individually and collectively.

Haide Rodriguez



Inside the Newspaper Long Workshop

During my first RIDEF I experienced how great it is to be a part of Long Workshop: Newsletter team. I met great people from different parts of the world. I learnt more French for few days with them than I did at the university for 2 years ;). I practised my organisational skills and time management.

While working on the newsletter, I missed the Minister of Education's official meeting. However, I got an unexpected surprise - she later visited our room during her tour of the school, giving me the chance to greet her in person. Sometimes the best moments happen when you least expect them.

Kamila



The Italian MCE invites you to participate at Verona Italy next October at the Convergence(s) congress



Tomorrow, you will be going on an excursion: remember to keep a record of your discoveries! Take photos, write down your impressions, your reflections, your surprises, and what you learn…

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https://2026.ridef-fimem.com/en/gazetka-2/

This newspaper was made during the workshop by:
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