
Fédération Internationale des Mouvements d'École Moderne

Pédagogie Freinet

www.fimem-freinet.org
cafimem@gmail.com



#

FROM THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL AND HUMANITY

In this difficult moment, we send a greeting, a thought and support to our fellow teachers of the different Movements affiliated to the Fimem, committed to the safeguard of their own health, that of their relatives, and taking care of their pupils, offering them a great support, in the absence of attending their school!

The Fimem is the federation that groups together the movements of teachers committed, in 40 countries of different continents, to the affirmation of Célestin Freinet's popular pedagogy, sharing the objectives of international organisations (UN, UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO, etc. ...), and with associations engaged to education and fighting for the affirmation of the rights of children, women and human rights in general. We have been, we are and we will always be, for the emancipation of the latest and against the inequalities, to build a more right, more equitable and more united world, for all the girls and boys of the world.

Today, to the many problems that are facing humanity, we have added the Coronavirus emergency, which makes life much more complicated for all human beings, but to a greater extent, for the most needy, the weakest and defenceless. We are living in a pandemic situation, officially declared by the W.H.O. (World Health Organization) on March 11, 2020, which has been spread to almost every country in the world. Nowadays, there are many sick and dead people, that are constantly increasing, as can be seen on <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html#> to which must be added the number of asymptomatic infected people, which is difficult to evaluate.

As in other global emergencies, we are living in a difficult and complicated moment that unites all of mankind and of which there is no end in sight, even though China (the first country interested in the coronavirus) may have been succeeded in eradicating the virus in just over two months.

With rigorous decisions, the other countries should also be able to succeed, even if we must not turn down our guard, for possible contagions "return" (in this case too, China, preceded us, is very cautious).

The leaders of the various countries, despite the Chinese example, initially underestimated the problem, encouraging the spread of the epidemic; then, when they become aware of the seriousness of the phenomenon, they introduced, without any real international coordination, a series of restrictive measures, blocking productive activities, except those deemed essential and encouraging, as far as possible, smart working.

Cities have become increasingly "closed", with citizens relegated to their houses, who are forbidden to "leave" except for certain basic needs, with inevitable social closure and a slowing down of cohesion, partly mitigated by the use of the media. It is true that everyone has more time for the family, for reading and resting, and that there is an improvement in the health of the air, the sea and all nature (confirmation of the influence of human behaviour on the environment). But it must also be considered that the obligation to stay at home can encourage an increase in domestic violence, especially against women, and jeopardize the well-being of children and the elderly. What is still serious, however, is the unease, shortage and unemployment affecting many families, especially where there is no stable work.

In all countries, solidarity contests have been launched, not only by doctors, nurses, law enforcement officers and operators of essential public utility services, but also by ordinary citizens who have made a commitment and pledge to help others as volunteers.

Everywhere, schools were closed, risking a world without schools, which did not even happen during the Second World War. The closure of schools forced the use of existing technologies to provide distance education (even if it is not compulsory) with the use of platforms and software (Skype - Zoom - Google Suite for Education), and then whatsapp or the simple telephone. In addition, some public and private television stations have offered their contribution, thus increasing the number of educational programmes.

The problems are many and varied: from the barely consolidated tradition of the use of information and communication technologies, in the different school levels, to the consideration that distance learning maintains, more at a distance, the

students who need a school more present. Let's think of the most disadvantaged children, who live in absolute poverty, in small houses without resources, unable to connect to the Internet, (due to the lack of technological equipment, energy, connectivity and bandwidth) as do their peers who have computers, tablets, smartphones. Think about children with disabilities, or who don't have a family that can help them use technology. This is a global problem! And let's not forget that there are countries where the lack of schooling for children is not recent, but has been for years.

Some Ministries of Education assume that 20% of children will not be reached by distance education, (in reality there will be many more), which encourages, even more, inequalities, already very evident in various countries. Moreover, we keep in mind the importance of being with others for the growth of a child, to become a true citizen.

We must be careful and respectful of individual freedoms, whose violations, if they extend beyond emergency situations (this is already the case in some countries), it may constitute a real danger to democracy.

Moreover, we need to be sure that this emergency situation is not exploited in the near future by the economic and financial forces, which decide on the political and organizational choices of States, to "empty" the school of economic resources and teachers.

Moreover, the warmth of the teacher-pupil relationship is being replaced by the cold communications of distance education, which could become increasingly "automatic" with the use of artificial intelligence, as is already happening to a large extent in highly industrialized countries, in the field of advanced learning in enterprises and industries.

The task of the "militant" teachers of the Freinet pedagogy remains the same: aiming at development and emancipation of all the students (that are learning) entrusted to us; all of them, not one less! We must, therefore, be more and more present in schools and trainings, experimenting popular pedagogy and Freinet techniques also with the use of digital technologies, distance learning, the internet, guaranteeing the same tools to all, perhaps provided by the institutions, or identifying the means of communication that can be used by the less wealthy. Is a world without schools possible? Or would it be a world without a future?

We are not starting from zero, the Freinet movement as a whole is no foreigner in experimenting with overcoming physical distances in teaching/learning; for some time now we have been using tablets, virtual classrooms, the use of videos, international correspondence via the web, virtual educational workshops, educational radio, etc.

It is necessary to make a recognition of the experiences disseminated in the continents, putting them in a system, in order to know them, to continue to experiment them, verifying how, with the cooperation, Freinet pedagogy, and more generally a popular pedagogy that puts children at the centre, it is possible to implement emancipation, also with digital technologies, demonstrating the pedagogical intuitions of the French teacher.

The theme of RIDEF 2020 was: Freinet pedagogy still alive! Let's show it during the emergency! We must hope that the crisis can be converted, even with our creative contribution, into a historic opportunity for rebirth. We must have the strength to emerge from the pandemic, humble but stronger, and aware that the only way out for Humanity is a strengthened sense of solidarity, cooperation, community, keeping in mind our values of uniting, rather than dividing and isolating ourselves in our own selfishness.

Some indications for the immediate future:

- on these issues, facilitate the exchange between teachers from all over the world who adhere to the Freinet pedagogy, the different national movements, the CA, by using the Multilettré system and the Fimem website.
- involve other international associations (starting with those belonging to the Education Nouvelle network) that can share our main objectives, concerns and worries. At the national level, individual movements could take similar initiatives.
- propose the creation of a specific Fimem commission on Cooperative Distance Learning
- Lobbying governments to provide public distance learning platforms for schools and families, unlimited Gigabytes on the internet supplies, more resources for schools when they reopen (more time, more teachers, more tools), the use of young educators to stimulate more, and, if possible, further support for schools, through the circulation of mobile libraries and mobile toy libraries, in countries and peripheral areas where the need is greatest.
- The individual movements in the different countries will identify further requests, according to the specific needs of the different territories.
- Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, it will not be possible to carry out the Ridef Québec 2020, for which our Canadian friends have worked so hard, that we thank them for their commitment and sacrifice. In the same period, however, some virtual meetings could be planned, through the Internet.

Only culture and education can save the world!