

## **Open letter from the President**

After four years in the CA, in this last letter I want to analyze and express my opinion on some of the issues that have worried me, especially the last two years I've been the president of the FIMEM.

I want to begin by estimating the hard work and enthusiasm of the organizing movements of the last RIDEFs. In these meetings we have tried to maintain consistency with Freinet pedagogy and the proposed topics. Subjects that respond to the challenges of humanity and the questions we ask ourselves as teachers at this time in which we are living. Teachers who do not ignore the reality of our world, characterized by deep imbalances, by injustice, by a neo-liberal development model, based on the laws of the market and that still do not respect Human Rights and where inequalities are growing. But the work done, the reflections, discussions and conclusions cannot be left in the site of the meeting. They must be the starting point for the labour of the federated movements and for each school where Freinet pedagogy is practiced.

If we are able to collect the conceptual and practical advances, theoretical approaches and educational practices that have been generated in the last RIDEFs, our passing through every meeting will have been fertile. We need to wonder how we have changed our schools to raise awareness and promote responsible actions on the natural environment around us. In what way we have promoted equity and justice for girls and women in our home, our school, our community and in our regional and national movements. How we will promote democratic participation of children in decisions that affect them, in school, in the city and in the family. It is therefore required a deep reflection exercise to discover the coherence of our actions and how we assume the commitments in the fight for more just, free, democratic, inclusive and equitable families, schools, societies and movements.

In the RIDEF 2012, recognition of the women members of the FIMEM and the work done by them was started so as it is reflected in the dossier of the meeting, distributed in Reggio Emilia. If this recognition also takes place in each

movement, this will enable us in future meetings to continue discovering the important contribution of the women in our movement of Modern School; an example of this is the good work, determination and the continuing struggle of our African colleagues.

In Italy, we returned to a debate on secularism. Some people say it's an old debate and that to talk of secularism is tiring and boring, but perhaps we should wonder why it is raised again and if the real debate is yet to be done.

In my opinion, we have lost again the opportunity to discuss deeply about the concept of secularism, which is not the same as using a garment. Discussions about the veil of some groups did not respond to the debate raised by the CA. If we want to reach conclusions and meeting points that help us to move forward, we have to read and reflect, individually and collectively, in each of our movements and come with clear concepts and concrete proposals.

When we speak of secularism we only remember where we come from. In 1927 the statutes of the Laic Education Cooperative (CEL) was voted and Freinet movement was born. Secularism, following the meaning given to it in the Charter of Modern School, is working for the values of social justice, free expression, democracy, human dignity, respect and promotion of human rights. And it is against fanaticism, dogmatism, superstition, the unique thinking, and absolute values.

To advance in the development of secular education we have to wonder what we specifically do to oppose the heteronymous thinking, the beliefs of absolute truth, superstition, and fanaticism, the vassalage and the magical-religious dogma that places women and girls in an inferior position in relation to men.

Whether we want to see it or not, we have a problem in FIMEM, of which we are only aware during RIDEFs; this problem has to do with an idea of religion as unique philosophy of life and certain practices promoted by these religions that have taken root in some participants in the meetings and they do not realize that public space, of all people, is not a place to pray, or make public statements of their own, personal and therefore private beliefs.

If we are members of the FIMEM, we have a commitment to the philosophy of the Modern School. Therefore, we collaborate with the institutions of the environment where we live, with social representatives, social volunteering, with representatives of the educational world... to promote a secular, free public education, which integrates all students; children with different characteristics, whether they have or not physical or mental impairments.

I have to express my deep disappointment at the performance of the CA. Its work did not respond to what should be a council of a federation, whose main hallmark is cooperation. Some people had to take on a heavy workload and a constant concern to take the work forward. The main cause pointed to the lack of tenure of the persons elected; Article 12 of the Regulation states that the CA is renewed by thirds every two years, and the fact is that from the elected persons for the CA in 2010, there was only one person when RIDEF 2012 was finished. To this, we must add that in the first meeting of CA resulting from the election of the General Assembly in Leon, two of the members were not present and that one of them resigned six months later. At the meeting in 2013, in Mestre, we have had to define and plan our work again and specify the duties of each member of the board until 2014. In spite of having agreed on how to organize and tasks to be done as listed in Inform 63, the operation of the CA did not improve. The next Assemblies will have to find solutions to these situations.

**I cannot conclude without making wishes for the future of FIMEM. Freinet died in 1966 but the international movement he began, is still alive. Each teacher who investigates in the classroom and shares it with his/her cooperative group, is advancing the pedagogy of Modern School. Educational work today involves a deepening of our creative pedagogy, focusing on equity, increasing student participation, respect for nature, daily history and social problems. The FIMEM was born over fifty years ago, but its ideals, then as now, are a modern, popular and secular education, freedom and individual and collective responsibility.**

In this regard, many of our movements are investigating and making relevant contributions about co-education, education for peace, respect for human rights, citizenship, inclusion of all differences and participation in community development, as noted at our meetings. A group of young teachers have come to Reggio Emilia to participate in their first RIDEF. We welcome them and look forward meeting them at the next.

**Long live FIMEM!**

August of 2014

Pilar Fontevedra Carreira