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EACH CHILD DOES MATTER



FICE Federal Council Meeting: 70th Anniversary: 4 April 2018

Characteristics of FICE International

By David Lane, Honorary president of FICE

Speech held at the Official opening ceremony of the 70-year Anniversary of FICE "Shaping high quality child and youth care"

Thank you for the invitation to join in the celebrations. It is a real pleasure both to meet people who were on the Federal Council when I was a member, and to meet those who have joined since then and who are actively taking FICE forward.

Robert Soisson may have been involved with FICE longer than I have. My first FICE Congress was at Paris in 1973, where we were then celebrating FICE's 25th anniversary. When I joined, founder members were still active, such as Dr Alexander from Great Britain and the long-term President, Louis Francois of France. In other words, I have been around FICE for 45 years, though it was the late 1980s before I joined the Federal Council, and my recent contacts have been mainly through reading the news on the computer.

I do not propose to give a potted history of FICE; if that is what you want, I would commend the history prepared by Irene Knopfel Nobs in 1988, and Robert Shaw's 2008 book, *Children, Families and Care – Reflections on the first sixty years of FICE*. Indeed, I would suggest that this book could usefully be brought up to date by adding a chapter or two on the events of the last decade and the ways in which caring for children and young people are changing.

What I propose to do is pick out a few characteristics of FICE, which seem to me to have permeated the work of the organisation, mainly over the five decades which I have witnessed.

Learning



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First, FICE has always offered opportunities to share ideas and to learn about the ways in which people in other countries and cultures meet the need of their children and young people.

Sometimes we can pick up ideas directly and apply them in our own countries. The new ideas may be specific types of provision for children. I recall, for example, the South African delegation introducing us to the brilliant idea of play parks, staffed by trained workers, as a way of supporting the 165,000 children who were then having to act as heads of their families when both their parents had died of AIDS.

The new ideas may concern novel theoretical approaches. I recall the problems for the interpreters at the 1973 Congress in Paris when most of continental Europe was speaking of social education or social pedagogy, and the new British approach at that time was to see residential care as a form of social work. There was no adequate language to convey the nuances of meaning of the terms we were using.

However, perhaps the most important aspect of the sharing of ideas is not the specific ideas one picks up, but the realisation that people in other countries do things differently, and that we need to continually question the validity of our own thinking. I greatly regret the lack of UK involvement in FICE: some people in England think that the country can solve its own problems, and they do not appreciate that they are wearing blinkers.

However, in terms of learning, FICE is probably of most value because of the opportunities it gives for national sections to make contacts and develop joint projects. Over the years there have been many of these, such as the creation of FICE-Europe, the Alps-Rhine Group, the French initiative CERF-FICE, which focused on research, and the many exchanges and visits to other countries by delegations of FICE members.

FICE has always emphasised learning, and if you read the history you will see frequent references to training and to courses, workshops and seminars organised by FICE-International or the National Sections. from 1951 onwards.

Language

I mentioned problems about language in the Paris Congress. When I joined FICE everything was translated into the three official languages – French, German and English. French was the main language used in FICE in the early decades; then there was a period when German was dominant. Over time, English has gradually been used more widely. If one language is used, it certainly simplifies things and does away with the cost of interpretation, but I think that there may be losses as well. Different languages reflect different ways of thinking, and it is sometimes impossible to put an idea into another language directly without a lot of explanation.



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As Julia Ward Howe put it,

Some hold translation not unlike to be
The wrong side of a Turkish tapestry.

I have known times in FICE when translation has presented problems. I recall, when we were in Israel, meeting a group of Ethiopian Jews who had recently been dramatically evacuated to Israel. They spoke in Amharic, which was translated into Hebrew, which was then translated into English, and I tried to pass on the gist of what was being said to a French member. Whether what I told him was anything like what the Ethiopians were saying I have no idea.

On another occasion we were planning a FICE conference in Manchester funded by the EU on services for people with learning disabilities. At that time in the UK we had just abandoned the term *mental handicap*, but we had problems in conveying the subject to people in other countries. In Romania the children were termed *irrecuperable*; in Russia they were speaking of *defectology*, while the Americans were talking of people being *differently abled*. There was no common acceptable terminology, and the words we used reflected our cultures and the stage of development of our services.

Over the years, FICE was extraordinarily fortunate to have had the support of Christine Karner and Helga Stefanov as interpreters. We could not have asked for better; with all due respect to the interpreters who assisted at other times, they were never as good as our regular team, who got to know the subject matter of FICE and how it worked really well. I think that they both attended the Federal Council meetings longer than any Council member, and their contribution was invaluable.

Continuity and Change

An important feature of FICE has been its continuity despite ups and downs over the years. There are delegates, some of whom are present, who have kept on attending or maintained contact over the years, such as Robert Soisson, Rolf Widmer, Emmanuel Grupper, Thomas Machler, Toma Mares, Julia Blumenfeld, Jim Anglin, the late Carol Kelly, Richard Joubert, Martti Kemppainen, Roland Stubi, Malay Dewanji, and Bettina Terp. I should emphasise that FICE has always depended on the voluntary contributions of the people who have taken on active roles as officers or the organisers of activities, and I apologise to the dozens of individuals whose contributions I should have recognised by naming them. The continuity offered by these people has led to the building of friendships and joint working.

It is easy for us to become absorbed in current problems, but our work today is only possible because of the achievements of those who have gone before us. We stand tall because we are on the shoulders of giants, such as Johann Pestalozzi and Janusz Korczak.



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We have to acknowledge that FICE has had its difficult times, and on occasion in its history it has almost collapsed. Sometimes this has been a question of money, sometimes personal differences, and sometimes the different professional approaches taken by different countries. It is true of organisations that they grow and flourish and die away again, but in FICE's case, after difficult periods, it has always re-invented itself with a new group of people contributing to its survival and growth.

Different countries have at different times been dominant. The French played a major role in FICE's foundation and early years. When I joined the Federal Council in the late 1980s it was the Swiss under Professor Heinrich Tuggener and Franz Zusli who had brought FICE through a problematic time. More recently the Danes when Steen Lassen was President, the Dutch in Theo Binnendijk and Famke Schiff's time in office, the Austrians when Monika Niederle was President and the Bulgarians when Dashenka Tashkova have all played important parts in helping FICE develop. There are national sections which have provided consistent support over many years. Until ANCE unhappily collapsed, France was very active, and the German and Dutch sections have been consistently supportive over the decades.

Historically, FICE has been largely European, with regular Israeli and North American representation, but I am delighted to see a broadening of the membership to include representation of countries all round the world in the twenty-first century. Caring for children is a world-wide matter. As well as continuity we need change, as new ideas are introduced to address new problems.

Peace and Friendship

When I joined FICE the Cold War was coming to an end; indeed, we witnessed aspects of its conclusion at Federal Council meetings in Hungary, immediately before the reunification of Germany, and in what was then Czechoslovakia.

I remember the Prague Congress in 1990 well. It was at the time of the Velvet Revolution, when the Communists had lost power. Prior to the Congress we received no information, and we were concerned as to what we would find. However, the reason was that the country was facing many problems and one was that it had run out of paper; the Congress itself was brilliantly organised by Rudolf Nechvatal and his colleagues, and proved to be one of the best. Despite all the dramatic changes at government level and in the child care services, the Czech FICE section had persisted and delivered an excellent Congress.

In the forty years between the founding of FICE and the Prague Congress FICE was one of the few organisations at which delegates from both sides of the Iron Curtain met. There were at times



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constraints on the delegates from Eastern Europe as political officers often accompanied them, but the links were maintained.

It was in recognition of these links that in 1987 UNESCO awarded FICE the title of Peace Messenger. I think that this was deserved, and something of which we should be proud.

Peace is not just the absence of war; it takes time and effort to create trust after conflict. From 2000 to 2006 FICE sections in former Yugoslavia, Hungary, Switzerland and the Netherlands set up a Peace Camp, later called Friendship Camps because of the friendships which they engendered, in the wake of the conflict there, in an attempt to heal the wounds. This work required real commitment, and those involved deserve recognition.

The importance of peace and friendship within FICE was summed up for me personally at the last Federal Council meeting attended by Meir Gottessmann, an outstanding Israeli child care worker, who had made his way during the Second World War to Israel on foot as a young man when his family had been deported. He spoke very movingly about FICE being the setting in which, despite the tragic loss of his family, he could become a close friend of Gerhard Haag, the German delegate,

Emphasis on high quality services

FICE has always emphasised the need for high quality services for children and young people, and I am sure it will continue to do so. What is meant by high quality does, of course, differ from one country to another and from one time to another, depending upon the economic strength of countries, their cultures, public expectations, and the development of the services.

In particular, over the years there has been much debate about residential care – whether it is good or bad, and whether it should be developed or abandoned. Going back before my time, FICE was at the forefront in the development of self-governing communities in France, Hungary and Italy. In those days it was necessary to think in terms of large communities because of the numbers of children who needed care. The average children's home in England now has four children. Times change. In my view there is no simple answer; we need different solutions to children's problems as things develop.

FICE-International has developed a number of projects over the years, such as the Code of Ethics; I am glad to see that Emmanuel Grupper is working on producing a new version, as I think that these things become dated, and the subject is important.



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There has often been a tension between the need to run FICE as an organisation, and the wish to focus on professional issues. On re-reading FICE's history it has struck me that, mainly for lack of substantial resources, we have failed when trying to set up large-scale projects for the whole organisation, such as Educateurs sans Frontieres and the Professional Exchange Programme. They were both excellent ideas, but they required finance and administration, to deal with the complexity of the different systems and legislation in member countries.

FICE has succeeded where two or more members have come together to develop joint projects. Indeed, the history records literally hundreds of conferences, seminars, exchanges, visits, activities for children, research projects, joint statements, policy drafts, bulletins, books and other publications. Over the last seven decades, FICE has had a massive impact on child care services. It has not hit the headlines, but its influence has been there.

An important factor affecting FICE is that children's services are often underfunded. People generally do not make a lot of money out of meeting children's needs, and this means that FICE too is usually short of resources for what it would like to do. Indeed, there were financial problems from the start. But with the voluntary effort of its officers and the national sections, FICE has kept going. There is a lot which it has achieved, and which in the future it can achieve.

The Future

When FICE started, there were 20 million displaced children in Europe. Sadly, today there are children in Syria, Iraq, Myanmar and other countries where they are displaced or affected by war.

In another organisation of which I am a member we refer to *extreme nursing*, meaning nursing in areas of human conflict or humanitarian need, such as earthquakes or the Ebola outbreak. There will, unhappily, always be a need for *extreme child care*, the work with displaced and refugee children or with those with disabilities or serious social, emotional and developmental problems.

The needs will always be there: I hope that FICE continues to address these needs, despite the limits on its resources. I have been impressed by the current range of activities about which I read. Every spring and autumn I get the feeling that I should be packing my bags and heading for continental Europe, but I am content that you are all keeping up the good work, and that FICE is in good hands, and I wish you well for the future.

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