

How would your organisation benefit from FELA membership?

Greg Brooks, FELA Treasurer, June 2019

Wondering what the benefits would be if your association joined FELA? They are considerable both for member associations and for those who represent them – as I can illustrate from my own experience.

Just as the UK Literacy (previously Reading) Association has been my professional reference group in Britain since I joined that association in 1977, so IDEC¹ and FELA have been and are my international professional reference group ever since the second IDEC meeting I attended, in Copenhagen in 1991. So I feel able to write about the benefits of such professional involvements.

Given the huge importance of literacy in every life, and the seriously and possibly lifelong detrimental effects of poor literacy, it has been a moral imperative to engage in the study and improvement of literacy in order to ensure that as many people as possible have good, or at least adequate, reading and writing ability. This task never ends – education is a relentless business – and all the associations which are members of FELA work tirelessly in concert on it. I have felt privileged to work for this goal alongside so many others from associations across our continent who are similarly committed.

In particular, the biennial European and other regional conferences and face-to-face meetings have been a great source of insights into literacy pedagogies and the ways they differ across languages and cultures – and why. It is fulfilling to engage in enquiry and research with national experts from so many countries. For many of those involved over the years, the networking opportunities are key to the professional value of our associations' membership of this international grouping.

The range of countries in the network has expanded greatly over the years since IDEC began in 1977, from the original six associations to the present 31, with contacts in many others both in Europe and beyond. Reaching out to colleagues in the eastern parts of Europe began well before the Iron Curtain fell and was richly rewarding; in times when divisions may be deepening again we may be able in a small way to prevent them becoming entrenched.

The working language of IDEC/FELA has always been English (though I remember a couple of colleagues from Baltic countries addressing meetings in German in the early 1990s). As (usually) one of very few native speakers of English present at meetings (occasionally the only one) I have been happy to clarify points of usage and to tweak the language of documents when necessary. I know too that even colleagues whose non-native English is of an already impressive standard have at times taken careful account of the way I put things. Since I have loved language and languages as long as I can remember, both this and encounters with colleagues' languages have benefited me as well.

Finally, the most pleasing aspect of our associations' involvement over so many years has been the depth and warmth of the many friendships gained, some now of nearly 30 years' standing, others recent and equally valuable – join us.

¹ International Development in Europe Committee