REPORT on
The OMEP World Project on Education for Sustainable Development 2009-2013

The OMEP World Project on ESD Part 1 (Child interviews, starting in 2009) and Part 2 (ESD in practice, starting in 2010) were great successes. OMEP members all over the world have interviewed children about their thoughts and opinions linked to the drawing of young children and the Earth, and also carried out ESD-in-practice projects. Around 35 countries from all regions of the world have participated and thousands of children and teachers around the world have been involved in the two parts of the ESD projects; a fantastic contribution. This report gives a short background about Parts 1 and 2, already reported, and bring out the results from the newest project, Part 3.

The overall aim of the ESD project is to enhance the awareness of Education for Sustainable Development among OMEP members, young children and early childhood education at large.

The aim of ESD project Part 1 - Child interviews is to collect information about young children’s thoughts, comments and understanding of the drawing of the Earth and young children. (Statistics: 9 142 children and 641 adults in 385 schools in 28 countries)

The aims of Part 2 - ESD in practice are to implement Education for Sustainable Development together with children in early childhood education practices and to collect information and further understanding of young children’s ideas and actions for ESD. (Statistics: 30 714 children and 12 075 adults in 29 countries participated in 396 projects)

OMEP is an international, non-governmental and non-profit organisation (NGO) founded in 1948 with the objectives to defend and promote the rights of the child from birth to 8 years to high quality education and care worldwide.

OMEP is currently established in over 70 countries and holds a consultative status within UNESCO, UNICEF, and the European Council.
In Part 3 – Intergenerational dialogues for ESD the perspectives are broadened and strive beyond the preschool/school. Children and teachers are asked to engage in intergenerational dialogues around three specific goals for a sustainable lifestyle. Such dialogues can bring mutual benefits for the young children and their teachers and caregivers, based on the local context and including indigenous and traditional knowledge.

Intergenerational learning is a process through which people from all generations acquire skills and knowledge and develop their attitudes and values. It takes place in everyday life and on all sorts of occasions. Intergenerational learning is not restricted to any specific age or the view that you must learn specific things in specific ways. It recognizes and accepts learning as a relational process and that we learn differently. Intergenerational dialogues as a method within the OMEP world project was introduced to clarify the links between ESD and life-long learning.

The initial questions and the goals for the projects in Part 3 are chosen from successful projects carried out during Part two. These kinds of activities involve all three dimensions of ESD (social-cultural, environmental and economic) as well as the political dimension of empowering the participants.

1. How do we use plastic?
   Reducing the number of plastic bottles and plastic bags used in the preschool/school and at home
2. Where does the food come from?
   Creating a new garden in the neighbourhood to produce food
3. How do you play with toys and with other children?
   Establishing a network of friends, starting by the exchange of games and traditional play by reaching out to children in another preschool/school in your community or somewhere in the world

Children and teachers together chose one of the goals and discussed how they understand the chosen topic. How is it today? and How was it before, in previous times? Together with their teachers the children formulated questions for the intergenerational dialogues with people of the grandparent generation to collect information about previous times.

The intergenerational dialogues were carried out in many different ways;
- children asked their grandparents directly or with assistance of their parents via phone, e-mail or Skype
- invitations were organised where some from older generations came to the preschool/school
- groups of children went to homes for older people to pose their questions
- or any combination of these activities.

The children brought their answers and ideas back to preschool/school setting and discussed the result of their explorations and investigations, and the varied answers they got. Based on the ideas from the children, activities or local projects started. These projects are still on-going, but in July 2013 eleven countries have sent in their reports. In total 209 projects have started (goal 1 77, goal 2, 67 and goal 3 62), 4475 children, 509 teachers, 2737 grandparents and 2389 parents have participated.

The following ideas were brought up linked to Goal 1:
- Let's invent plastic bags that disappear. But what if it disappears at a wrong moment and everything that in it will drop out onto the pavement?
- In food stores, at the cash desk there should be announcements for all people to bring old plastic bags from home, or to come to the stores with cloth bags,
- Let's write an announcement not to throw away bags for no reason

Children in a Kamchatka kindergarten started a project Just a Usual Plastic Bottle, where they counted all types of goods in a supermarket sold in plastic bottles and found out what specific types of bottles in what numbers that were scattered in the streets.

The Russian project leader wrote:
We underestimate children as citizens who can fully understand environmental problems at their own level and take part in the solution. When discussing how to solve the problem of plastic bags, children understood how everything is connected in nature and how challenging environmental problems at the same time are ecological and social problems. In spite of the fact that no total solution to the problem of plastic bags has yet been found by adults, it is vital that children start to think about it, to think about the consumerist attitude, and that they start to engage in social activities. It is very important that children's initiative should be supported in the society.

Goal 2- projects were commented by the project leaders in different ways:

The grandparents named vegetables, the children flowers and fruit. The different preferences, vegetables or flowers, and the reasons behind show that there is more than about a difference of age.

Grandparents know the importance of knowing how to grow things you can eat, whereas children who think food comes from the supermarket, prefer to grow flowers and some fruits.

And project leaders made the following concluding remarks on Goal 3:

The contrasts between the preschool position on toys and children talking about toys, indicates experiences from two different worlds; a quite frequent technique at-home-world and a preschool-world characterized by environmental awareness and restraint. This voltage field may give rise to fruitful discussions and creative processes that combines these worlds, with a little help from teachers and projects.

Finally, some overall highlights from project leaders:

Aside from the intended goals for sustainability, all projects resulted in a secondary goal: the strengthening and respect of old age.

Both the children and myself benefitted from the project. I realised the importance of cooperation between family and kindergarten, and that family is not just the parents. The grandparents were pleased to come, to share their wisdom and I saw the love with which they spoke about their childhood.

Modern society desperately needs to have dialogues between different generations. In new urban areas there are no grandparents, a weak intergenerational influence. The intergenerational dialogues can be integrated in the preschools. Preschools used to have traditions of inviting elderly to visit.

Adults rarely play the games of their childhood with children, nor traditional games at home. Grandparents seldom speak about their own childhood. Grandparents found out lots of information from their grandchildren and they came up with inspirational ideas for how to spend time together.

We also see that the children got an idea about that all children, regardless of time and room are in need of play and toys. They now know that not everyone has, or has had, the same opportunity as they have, to pick and choose among multiple toys. The children say that you probably like to do roughly the same things even if you live in different countries.

It is wonderful to hear a child say: I’ve never done this before, but I love it.

This project brought new views of everyday situations. It provided children with numerous opportunities of topics for independent thinking, situation evaluation, and communication.
Children changed their views of things that are common and standard for them. They discovered life is possible without a plastic bottle.

I have learned through this project that what we do here and now, has consequences elsewhere and later, for me and for others.

**Concluding discussion**

The reports about the thousands child interviews, intergenerational dialogues and many hundreds of ongoing projects can be understood as a collective sign of success for the OMEP ESD projects. To use informal child interviews seems to be a good method that promotes child participation and a listening approach among the adults.

The result from Part 1 shows that children interpret the picture in many different ways. Most common is the answer that the children are cleaning the globe because it’s dirty. But many children also thought that the children on the picture were painting the globe. The reasons why the children are cleaning or painting are aesthetical, taking care of an environmental and a garbage problem, and because they want to promote health. The seven RE-words in Part 2 seem to have served as inspirational starting-out points for the local projects; Respect, Reflect, Rethink – 146 projects, Reuse, Reduce – 156 projects and Recycle, Redistribute – 111 projects.

Most reports from the national project leaders, however, inform that the young children do not recognise the concept Sustainable Development. In some countries, there is no translation into their mother tongue. However, many interviewers were amazed by all the knowledge the children showed. The children had thoughts and ideas to bring up about the state of the earth in relation to sustainability. They even suggested definitions of sustainable development although they hadn’t heard of the concept before:

- **Sustainable development?**
  - *It means that everybody makes something for the globe.* (Poland)
  - *I think it might mean, like, to save the world for later.* (Ireland)
  - *Action, love and care for nature, to ensure everyone a better future.* (Brazil)

The result shows that young children have knowledge about the earth, thoughts about environmental issues, the responsibility people carry and ideas about what to do. Multiple reports concluded that adults too often underestimate the competencies of young children.

The rich data from the reports has given OMEP an inspiring project basis. The fact that the participating countries are found in all regions of the world indicates that OMEP has access to many good examples of ESD projects from North and South, from urban and rural, from preschools, other institutions and homes. We hope to share the results with others.

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Attachment

Participating countries in the OMEP World project on Education for Sustainable Development