



OMEP

Organisation Mondiale Pour L'Éducation Préscolaire
Organización Mundial Para La Educación Preescolar
World Organization for Early Childhood

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EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
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With members in nearly 70 countries throughout the world, OMEP is the oldest and largest organization devoted to the general wellbeing, optimal development, and education of children between birth and age 8. OMEP has had consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO since its founding in 1948 and was in May 2015 granted Special Consultative Status at the United Nations, UNESCO and UNICEF.

OMEP works on two arenas, as advocates for the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child ensuring all children's right to a sustainable and good life, including equal rights to education and care for *all* children, with priority to the poorest and most vulnerable, and as educators, bringing high quality education to the children in their own early childhood setting.

Research from many fields clearly shows that the first years of life are the strongest predictors of later attitudes, values, competencies, habits, and a variety of other important qualities and skills. Investing in early childhood is beneficial for the children, for the families, for the communities and for society at large.

Since 2008, OMEP has been running a project on education for sustainability, which includes peace education, with the purpose to reorient education in order to contribute to a sustainable future and peace for the common good of present and future generations. This project is OMEP's contribution to the UNESCO decade 2005-2014 on education for sustainable development which recognises the environmental, social/cultural, economic and political dimensions of the learning processes involved and aims at creating change, focusing on re-thinking and re-making educational programmes and pedagogies to support social and cultural transformations towards sustainable development.

The OMEP project consists so far of five parts, which have engaged thousands of children, teachers and families. The OMEP world project is placed within a child oriented perspective and is designed to especially invite child participation. The young children are looked upon as actors who contribute both to stability and to change in a continuous interplay with their environment. Through their agency, they influence and change their everyday lives. Respectful communication and dialogues can bring mutual benefits for young children and their teachers and caregivers, based on the local context and including indigenous and traditional knowledge. The project is also founded in children's rights to express her/his views, to be listened to and to participate and be involved in decision makings in questions that relate to them. Following Agenda 21, children are recognized as important participants in the shaping of a sustainable future. The five project parts and main results are:

Part 1 – Children's voices on the state of the earth (9 142 children in 28 countries)

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.

Part 2 – Education for sustainable development in practice (30 714 children in 29 countries)

This part resulted in 396 projects around the words respect, reflect, rethink, reuse, reduce, recycle and redistribute and the starting question: What is not sustainable here in our preschool/school/home?

Part 3 – Intergenerational dialogues for ESD (4 475 children, 2737 grandparents, 2389 parents)

After dialoguing around their own questions with old people, children around the world worked in 209 projects with three goals related to sustainability:

1. 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 garden in the neighbourhood to produce food
3. How do you play with toys and with other children? Establish a network of friends reaching out to children in another preschool/school in your community or somewhere in the world.

Part 4 – Equality for sustainability (87 projects in 13 countries)

This study collected examples of early childhood education initiatives that focused on social and economic perspectives.

Part 5 - Teacher Education (29 projects in 13 countries)

This part collected teacher training resources for education for sustainability in early childhood education and care for students in colleges, universities or for early childhood practitioners in professional development programs.

The most important result of all parts of the projects is the number of ideas the children came up with which were carried through in local projects that directly reflected on the children's lives. Participation in the OMEP project has become a driver for quality development within daily practices. The methods used in the studies were designed for children's everyday lives, integrated curriculum approaches, thematic oriented teaching and authentic topics. They lean on child participation through a conscious listening to children's voices and on documenting what was being put forward. This design seems to have strengthened the children's voices; the children were valued as thinkers, problem-solvers and agents of change. The project has brought out new knowledge about how children think about their surrounding world. All information about the project is to be found on the OMEP web site www.worldomep.org.

In 2015, as a continuation of the ESD decade, UN developed 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and UNESCO has adopted a Global Action Programme for 2015-2019. Many of the SD goals directly address young children, especially Goal 4:2 "Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education..." which for the first time puts education for children before primary school, as a priority. SD Goals 3-6 are:

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

OMEP has in 2015 been appointed as an established and important partner within the network for area 3 in the Global Action Programme, with a specific task to work for *Increasing the capacity of educators and trainers*. This alone motivates continued efforts and prioritising of education for sustainability in early childhood.

The OMEP World Assembly in July 2015 thus calls upon OMEP National committees and OMEP members in collaboration with other organisations who care for the future generations, to scale up the efforts to reorient education and change everyday life towards sustainability and peace by:

- Listening to and acting on children's ideas, thus recognising and respecting their rights as citizens
- Encouraging children's active participation in matters that concern them and their future, in education, family and society at large,
- Advocating for high quality education for young children and the inclusion of sustainability goals as national policy and in the national frameworks and curriculum
- Engaging in transformative processes of the daily curriculum in early childhood settings, based on the environmental, social/cultural, economic and political dimensions of ESD,
- Enacting a transformative change within teacher education, pre-service and in-service
- Initiating discussions and self-evaluations using the OMEP ESD Rating Scale

Multiple reports show that adults too often underestimate the competencies of young children. However, the OMEP ESD project shows the creative and also down to earth knowledge of young children, e. g. these answers to: Have you heard of 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)

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