

REPORT on the World OMEP 68th Assembly and Conference

Venue: Ewha Woman's University, Seoul, Korea

Dates: July 4th-8th 2016

In this report I am focusing primarily on the two day World OMEP Assembly. For further information on the conference proceedings, please approach those who attended- see names below. I have selected highlights only.

From July 4th to 5th, I attended the 68th World OMEP Assembly as national president of and representative for OMEP Aotearoa NZ. The Assembly, held in the beautiful Ewha Woman's University complex, consisted of representatives and proxies from 46 OMEP countries. The actual number of countries present around the table was 34. A further unspecified number of countries were absent. The total number of OMEP countries sits at around 75; this includes those still seeking national committee status. Also present at the Assembly were each country's



observers. Aotearoa NZ had 5 observers in attendance: Lia de Vocht, Margaret Nicholls, Glynne Mackey, Kerrie Duncan and Sally Keane. See the OMEP Aotearoa (August) newsletter for Margaret's informative written report on the Assembly. As Margaret states, the Assembly was a wonderful networking opportunity, especially with our neighbouring countries



in the Asia Pacific region.

The Assembly was followed by the Conference which attracted over 600 participants, mostly early childhood teachers from throughout Korea and nearby Asian countries. Significant for New Zealand was that Dr Claire McLachlan and Sophie Foster joined those who attended the Assembly in order to present their award-winning research for

the Play and Resilience Project at the Conference.

The international executive committee in attendance consisted of 8 people: the World President (Maggie Koong from Hong Kong), the five Vice Presidents (Europe, North America and the Carribean, Latin America, Africa and Asia-Pacific), and the world secretary, Jessie Wong. The world treasurer, Nirmala Rao, was absent. Also present at the Assembly were past president and ESD representative, Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson from Sweden, and Donna Berthelsen, the editor-in-chief for the Springer/OMEP International Journal of Early Childhood (IJEC). An excerpt from the Assembly documentation reads:

With national committees and members in about 70 countries, OMEP is the oldest and largest worldwide, non-governmental organization for early childhood education, with special consultative status in the United Nations, UNICEF, and UNESCO.

The two-day Assembly began with welcome speeches from Maggie Koong (president), Eunhye Park (Asia-Pacific vice president and representative from the host country) and Namhee Woo (president of the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education). Following the greetings, there was a roll call, the appointment of scrutineers and the adoption of the agenda. The minutes from the 67th Assembly in Washington DC were tabled and passed. The 2016 World Declaration for OMEP working group was formed at this point and I volunteered to be part of shaping an advocacy statement on ‘all refugee, migrant, asylum-seeking and marginalised children living in conflict’.

Professor Won Young Rhee presented an interesting speech on ‘Early Childhood Education and Care in the Korean Context’. She explained how the Nuri Curriculum (2013) is taught across kindergartens and childcare centres for 3-5 year olds. Currently Korea is exploring a curriculum from birth- 5 years of age across all services. This presentation was followed by Donna Berthelsen’s overview of the International Journal of Early Childhood. Donna explained OMEP’s dependence on the IJEC for income and shared the interesting observation that each issue must attract 3 high-profile articles to attract the citations (impact factor) that currently determine the readership of any journal and ensure that other (lesser) articles are also read and cited. It is vital that OMEP Aotearoa members are acquainted with the IJEC, become readers and advocate for this journal as a site for publication.

After the coffee break we were presented with the 2015 OMEP Annual Report. Maggie Koong gave an in-depth power point presentation on aspects of the report which, since 2014, has taken the form of a survey that has been designed for comparative analysis. The full 2015 report is available on the World OMEP website. Following the World President’s Report Judith Wagner presented a report on behalf of OMEP’s United Nations representative in New York, Maria Pia Belloni. OMEP has ‘special consultative status’ at the UN and the capacity to contribute to UN discussions at the global level. Judith mentioned that often OMEP provides the only ECE voice in the room! The full report is available- please contact me. Judith Wagner also commented on the UN WASH project and the OMEP ‘Call to Action’. ‘WASH from the Start’ is a publication that will be launched at the end of 2016. Aotearoa NZ has contributed to the WASH project via Kerrie Duncan from the Wellington Chapter who has worked together with UNICEF NZ over the past year. Ulla Grob from Switzerland then commented on the UN in Geneva (where she is the OMEP representative) and stated that the OECD is to research Teacher Education and its effectiveness on a global scale, over the next year. Lisbeth Gouin from France is OMEP’s representative in Paris, on the UNESCO liaison committee meetings; this committee consists of 50 NGOs. Lisbeth quoted from one of her meetings: “Just as war begins in the minds of men, so must peace begin in the minds of men”. Lisbeth recounted how Maggie Koong joined Lisbeth in Paris for World Teachers Day on October 5th 2015. Lisbeth also stressed the importance of the UNESCO Education 2030 conference that took place in Incheon, Korea in 2015. She reminded us that it was at this

conference that an agreement was reached to ‘ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education’ (SDG 4.2).

The regional meetings took place over a ‘working lunch’ in a restaurant at the Ewha Woman’s University. The New Zealand group attended the Asia-Pacific meeting. The minutes of the meeting have yet to be circulated. Some highlights were:

- The 2017 focus of the Asia-Pacific Symposium at the conference will be the documentation of children’s learning. Eunhye shared hard copy booklets of the Asia-Pacific Symposium presentations over the past 3 years. Contact me if you wish to see these.
- Eunhye mentioned that the ARNEC/OMEP/UNICEF/UNESCO Innovative Pedagogical Approaches in ECCE Project which consists of narratives and video footage from 9 Asia-Pacific countries, will be finalised by the end of 2016. Eunhye Park(Korea), Carrie Lau (Hong Kong), Sue Grieshaber (Australia) and myself have been ‘regional experts’ for this project. A puna reo in Wellington is one of the featured pedagogies. It was unfortunate that the ARNEC president, Evelyn Santiago from the Philippines, was to speak about this project at the Assembly but, at the last moment, was unable to attend.
- The next regional Asia-Pacific conference will be held in Hong Kong in May 2017.
- Eunhye congratulated those present for the awards and accolades OMEP members from the Asia-Pacific region have received over the past year. The Play and Resilience awards included New Zealand, Australia, China and Korea. Udomluck from Thailand received an ESD award.
- Asia-Pacific OMEP member countries offered to coordinate/liaise the following areas over the coming year for our region (to be confirmed by the minutes):
ESD: Japan
Celebrating Special Days: New Zealand (Kerrie Duncan)
Monitoring UNCRC: New Zealand (Margaret Nicholls)
- Honorary OMEP Life Members were nominated from Australia, Korea and Japan
- Udomluck Kulapichitr (Thailand) is the new Vice President for the Asia-Pacific region
- Thank you to Maggie Koong (Hong Kong) for her years as World President
- Congratulations to Eunhye Park (Korea) who is the next World President

The regional meetings were followed by the five Regional Vice Presidents’ reports. These were mostly shared as informative power point presentations.

Day 2 of the Assembly began with an interesting presentation by Patience Awopegba, an Education Specialist with UNESCO in Africa. Her presentation was entitled *Creating awareness and access to quality, relevant and culturally friendly approaches to ECCE provision in Africa through cross-regional collaboration.*

Ingrid Pramling-Samuelsson then gave a detailed account of OMEP’s role in the Global Action Plan (GAP), going over all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ingrid reminded us of OMEP’s Rating Scale for Environmental Education and we were alerted to a

new Springer publication: *International research on education for sustainable development in early childhood* (2016). Ingrid noted that Ingrid Engdahl (who recently visited New Zealand) was attending the UNESCO Network 3 meeting in Paris, held at the same time as the OMEP Assembly.

Amber Eriksson from the USA (a student at Whittier College, USA and member of the Whittier College student OMEP chapter) gave a heart-felt presentation on her role as youth representative at the United Nations. She urged countries to focus on inviting younger members into OMEP, stating that it is youth who will form 'the next generation'. She shared a Facebook site called 'Next Generation' which she urged members to share with youth in their national OMEP organisations.

World membership was next on the agenda. Paraguay and Malaysia have begun the process of setting up a national committee. Venezuela has set up a new preparatory committee. Myanmar and Pacific Island Nations were voted in as full OMEP member countries with national committee status. This was greeted enthusiastically by New Zealand; we have been supporting our Pacific neighbours through the process and will continue to do so, in conjunction with UNICEF and PRC4ECCE.

After the treasurer's report and a coffee break (during which time a small group of us wrote the 2016 Declaration for OMEP), the elections were held and Eunhye Park was voted in as the next World President. Eli Bergsvik from Norway is the new World Treasurer. Mercedes Mayol Lassalle was re-elected as Latin America's Vice President. Udomluck Kulapichitr was elected as the new Vice President for the Asia-Pacific region.

The working groups were held over lunch; the NZ group ensured there was a person in each group:

- ESD (convened by Ingrid Pramling-Samuelsson) was attended by Glynne Mackey
- Play and Resilience (convened by Maggie Koong) was attended by Margaret Nicholls
- OMEP's 'next step' (convened by Eunhye Park) was attended by Lia de Vocht
- Refugee and Vulnerable Children (convened by Nektarios Stellakis) was attended by Sally Keane
- WASH from the Start (convened by Judith Wagner) was attended by Kerrie Duncan and Diti Hill

The working group reports and proposals were presented after lunch. These were followed by the reading of the 2016 68th OMEP World Assembly and Conference Declaration (see the World OMEP website): *Urgent call to address the rights and needs of the youngest displaced, migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children*. The opening paragraph states:

The world community is accountable and must immediately take action to end the inhumane and unjust treatment of millions of displaced, migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking children around the world, with special attention to those who are in their most formative years, birth

to age 8. Failure to act is unethical and a violation of the United Nations Convention on Human Rights as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Assembly closed at 5.30pm on July 5th and, the next day (July 6th) the Conference commenced.

Conference highlights included:

- Keynote Speakers: Sharon Lynn Kagan (USA), Samuel Odom(USA), Arjen Wals (Netherlands). The speeches and power points are on the World OMEP website.
- Visits to local Seoul preschools and kindergartens.
- The Asia-Pacific Region's 4th symposium involving New Zealand, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, and Thailand. In 2016 the focus was *Teacher Education Curriculum in the Asia Pacific Region*. I represented Aotearoa New Zealand at this symposium.



Salvador and New Zealand (with Claire McLachlan and Sophie Foster presenting).

- The OMEP ESD Project award-winning presentations from Greece, Kenya, Thailand, the USA and Uruguay.

- The OMEP Play and Resilience Project award-winning presentations from China, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, El



Before ending this World OMEP Assembly report, I wish to report on another World OMEP/UNESCO project (a Springer publication) to be released in August 2016 and signalled via a flyer at the Assembly. This book contains, amongst others, a chapter on ECE Policy in Aotearoa New Zealand, written by Liz Everiss, myself and Anne Meade, and offers an informative and current body of knowledge for courses and discussions on ECE policy in NZ:

- Hui, L., Park, E., and Chen, J. (Ed.) (2016). *Early childhood education policies in Asia Pacific*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Springer.

Next year (2017) the Assembly is replaced by the larger Congress, held only every 3-4 years, with an expectation that every OMEP country attends. This event and the usual accompanying Conference will take place in Opatija, Croatia from June 19th-24th 2017, with the focus being 'Early Childhood Relationships: The Foundation for a Sustainable Future'.

Special thanks to the seven other OMEP Aotearoa NZ members who attended the Assembly and Conference!

Diti Hill

(National President OMEP Aotearoa NZ)

