

Doreen (Dors) Launder and OMEP Aotearoa NZ

Doreen was a member of OMEP from 1990 to around 2017. She became the first treasurer for the Wellington Chapter when that was developed as a separate entity from the National Executive in 1993. At that time Doreen also took on the role of Secretary for the National Executive. Following is a letter from Doreen, as Secretary, to Dr Maris O'Rourke, then the CEO for the Ministry of Education:

*Dear Maris,
From small beginnings OMEP (Organisation Mondiale Pour L'Education Prescolaire) Aotearoa/New Zealand has grown into an organisation with six chapters nation-wide. Until now organisational structures have been somewhat informal with Wellington Chapter taking responsibility for executive business. In light of the growth and the enthusiasm shown by our members we are now pleased to announce our first General Assembly.
It is my pleasure to invite you to officially open the Assembly. You will see from the attached programme the time set for the opening ceremony is 7.30pm on Friday November 26th 1993. We also invite you to participate in the programme or part of the programme as your timetable allows.
We are very excited about this event and feel it marks a milestone in Early Childhood Education in New Zealand.
We look forward to hearing from you and more particularly look forward to having you honour us with a favourable reply for this important occasion.
Yours sincerely,
Doreen Launder
National Secretary
14 November 1993*

Doreen supported Betty Armstrong to forge strong links with OMEP in China and in 1991 they established the China-New Zealand Education Trust to continue links between early childhood educators in New Zealand and China. She led many groups to China to contribute knowledge of Te Whāriki and early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand and ensured that teachers in China and New Zealand were linked up through OMEP. Doreen also initiated several visits by delegations of Chinese early childhood educators to Aotearoa/New Zealand and encouraged the chapters to host and make this a reciprocal learning experience for all.

Doreen attended the Asia-Pacific Regional Conferences in Bangkok in 1996, in Wellington in 2005 and in Auckland in 2015. As OMEP World's Vice President for the Asia-Pacific Region from 2006 to 2012, Doreen also attended many OMEP World Conferences and OMEP World meetings. She served for two terms of three years each in this role, supporting other Asian and Pacific countries' participation in OMEP and ensuring that OMEP Aotearoa NZ, as well as all other member countries in the region, had knowledge of the international organisation through her regular and very informative, regional Asia-Pacific Newsletters. In one of these newsletters, dated 2009, Doreen wrote:

Dear National Presidents, OMEP colleagues and friends,

In the southern hemisphere we have experienced spring and are moving into summer, the northern hemisphere leaves are mostly gone and winter is about to begin while in the equatorial zone tropical mid-winter is hopefully bringing relief from rain to many regions. While we all live and work in different contexts, cultures and climates we are unified by concern for young children and families. We especially remember this in November 2009 that marks 20 years since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). UNCROC was the first international statement that recognized children as citizens with special rights in relation to their vulnerability and their contribution to society. It is time for reflection on achievements made over the last 20 years and the challenges before us. Particularly it is time to consider education and social inequities, the three pillars of Education for Sustainable Development and how, in the coming year and beyond, our region can respond to the many issues in early childhood education.

2009 has been a busy year. I have travelled a lot and been privileged to meet with many wonderful people doing magnificent work in different countries and contexts.

The year began with the OMEP World Executive "Spring Planning Meeting", held on the island of Syros, Greece in April. Alongside the planning meeting I thoroughly enjoyed attending the OMEP Europe Annual International Conference that was a celebration of children and families with great support from the community of Syros and excellent leadership from OMEP Greece's National President Nektarios Stellakis. I also attended the European Region Annual Assembly that was chaired by Vice President Europe, Milada Rubusicova. OMEP Europe struggles with many of the same challenges as we do in the Asia Pacific Region. Greece may mark the last face-to-face "Spring Planning Meeting" as a decision to move to electronic meetings was agreed by the executive. The first OMEP World Executive Skype Meeting was successfully trialled on 13 November. Monthly Skype Executive Meetings are planned.

Greece was followed by a two week lecture and study tour in China in June, the Nigerian OMEP World Assembly and International Conference and the Asia Pacific Regional Assembly and International Conference in Singapore, both in August, and finally I will attend the Aotearoa/New Zealand Annual General Meeting in Rotorua (NZ) on 30th November. The Aotearoa/New Zealand meeting will report on achievements and challenges in 2009 and elect the Executive Committee for 2010.

Major areas of concern and focus from the two Assemblies include: questions and issues regarding government policies for children, with particular focus on birth to three years old; issues of access, quality and equity, government attention and funding for ECE, understanding and practicing Education for Sustainable Development; pressure on early childhood teachers to practice formal teaching methods that conflict with pedagogical values and beliefs including push down of the compulsory school curriculum; and the question of 'the way forward for OMEP. The

two Assemblies and Conferences reinforced OMEP's ongoing commitment to these issues, recognising the achievement already made and the challenges ahead.

I take this opportunity to thank everyone for their contributions and commitment to early childhood education and care in 2009, where-ever you are.

Finally I send strength and blessings to you all. To the millions of Muslim who will pilgrim to Mecca, the millions of Christians who are preparing to celebrate Christmas and the birth of Jesus, to followers of Buddhism who seek universal harmony across all living things, to Jewish communities who prepare to celebrate the eight day Hanukkah festival of lights, to the followers of Hindi and to all who seek peace and harmony for human-kind alongside a reversal of environmental degradation of planet earth.

Seasons greetings and very best wishes to you all.

*Doreen Launder
OMEP Vice President
Asia Pacific Region
delauder@xtra.co.nz*

In March of that same year -2009 - the National Executive met in Leigh at the bach of Diti Hill-Denee's family for a weekend-long, national meeting. Hilary Alach was National President at this time. The productive yet relaxed and fun nature of this meeting and the role Doreen played in bringing the executive members together is evident in the following photos:



As Vice President, Doreen invited and inspired OMEP members to participate in world-wide OMEP research projects. The following excerpt is from the OMEP Aotearoa Annual Report for 2014:

The Asia-Pacific Region Teacher Pedagogies research project which involved OMEP chapters throughout New Zealand took place from 2009- 2012. This research project was initiated and led by Doreen Launder as Asia-Pacific Vice President, and is due for publication in the Springer International Journal of Early Childhood Education in 2016. Presentations on this research have taken place at local, national and international levels. In 2013 Fiona Ellis, Lyn Foote and Diti Hill presented the New Zealand research to an international audience in Shanghai, together with similar research carried out by members of OMEP China, OMEP Korea and OMEP Japan.

Doreen was also, over the years between 1993 and 2015 international co-ordinator and treasurer of OMEP Aotearoa NZ, as well as the inaugural secretary. Doreen was nominated and subsequently elected as an Honorary Member of OMEP World in 2015. Doreen is on the OMEP World website <https://omepworld.org/honorary-member/>.

(notes collated by Diti Hill-Denee)

OTHER tributes and notes

1. From Helen Bernstone

Not to do with OMEP per se but at a similar period...

The Department of Education- Wellington/Wairarapa Regional Advisory Team.
Circa 1993

What a time we had.

So much laughter.

What quality guidance we all provided to the many ECE settings.

Dors was part of the fun, a provider of energy and thoughtful creative thinking of the many obstacles we faced.

Stories of her tramping expeditions fascinated me. So brave so strong and so tiny .

A true team, with the rock 'Dors' keeping us grounded.

In the photo below are (from right to left): Carol Garden, Clare Barrett, Charlotte Hughes Johnson, Helen Bernstone, Merrin Dobson, Dors, Fay Clark.

Hard to believe that 3 women in this photo have died.

Ngā mihi māhana,
Helen Bernstone



2. Posted on the OMEP World's website

Doreen Launder

OMEP Aotearoa New Zealand regrets to announce the death of Doreen Launder, a founding and longstanding member of OMEP Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ). Doreen was a qualified early childhood teacher who spent much of her working life working for the New Zealand Ministry of Education and was especially dedicated to professional development. Through OMEP connections Doreen travelled widely within China during the 1990's to share and lead professional development with/for early childhood educators in China.

Doreen was the Asia-Pacific Vice President from 2006-2012, serving two full terms. She was also, over the years between 1993 and 2015, secretary, international co-ordinator and treasurer of OMEP Aotearoa NZ. Doreen was nominated and subsequently elected as an Honorary Member of OMEP World in 2015.

3. From Hilary Alach (a past National President)

I was really saddened by the news that Doreen had passed away. We attended the International Conference in Tromso (Norway) together, and shared a room at the backpackers outside of town instead of in a hotel in the centre of town. Consequently, we chatted each morning on the way in to the university, and again on the way home and during the evenings. I found her an extremely humble person, well informed, but without pride and full of gentle fun and humour. I also found that she was very appreciative of the beauty which surrounded us in the Norwegian mountains. We both had a laugh when we returned to the hostel at around midnight after the conference dinner had been held on an outlying island. The bus dropped us off on the way back to

town at a spot from where we walked through the bush in the middle of the night back to the hostel. The light was amazing! Once we returned to NZ we met up on a number of occasions - at my home, in Titirangi, at St Lukes, and more recently in Devonport where she last lived. My condolences to her family (I can only remember Nicki's name at the moment). OMEP has lost a treasure.

I would also like to mention Dors' **hospitality**. I recall staying with her while in Wellington at her home past the Weta Workshops. Her lovely home was perched on the side of a hill with a magnificent view of the harbour. If I stayed there, I'm sure many others did too. The steps to her home were very steep and there was a little contraption which could haul you up the steep incline (if it was working). However, we always had a laugh on the way up or down!

Arohanui,

Hilary Alach (OMEP Auckland and Life Member)