



ORGANISATION MONDIALE POUR L'Éducation PRESCOLAIRE
WORLD ORGANISATION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
ORGANIZACIÓN MUNDIAL PARA LA EDUCACIÓN PREESCOLAR

Newsletter 45

A new year with new ambitions for children and their professionals lies ahead of us. Swedish OMEP is working hard to do their best for the next World Congress in Gothenburg in August. We also negotiate with other OMEP committees about the following years', World Assembly and international seminars. I hope we have solved this before we meet at this year's World Assembly. Every country who has organised World Assemblies and international seminars knows that it is a lot of work, but it is also very satisfactory for the OMEP members when all the work is successfully completed.

In a few weeks' time we will have a new Skype meeting in the Excom group and take decisions, among other things, about the annual report for 2009. And shortly after this you will all get information, but as always the report should be ready by March 1. There are also elections coming up, which you also will get information about.

I finished 2009 by spending a week in Shanghai, China. It was a real pleasure and very interesting to both meet professionals from Early Childhood Education and to visit preschools. I also had the privilege to meet a group of students at East China Normal University, where I gave a lecture about Education for sustainability in Early Childhood Education. I also had an interesting discussion with staff from Early Childhood Education at the University and learnt a lot about similarities and differences between my own culture and the Chinese culture. And things get into perspectives when one realises that the city of Shanghai has a population twice as large as the whole of Sweden! Shanghai was a beautiful and interesting city, with very generous people.

At the conference there was a lot a discussion about public preschools versus private alternatives. In my own country we have about 13% of private preschools. 25 years ago we had none. In China there are about 30% private preschools, while 70% of the preschools are public. If there are municipal or private preschools, it can depend on whether the country feels it is their responsibility to contribute to the youngest age-groups' education

and well-being or not, or it can be the one or the other dependent on ideology, of what one believes will benefit children's learning the most. Learning and knowledge is specifically focused in ECE in China, something we also saw in the OMEP study Play and learning in international perspectives (Pramling Samuelsson & Fler, Eds., 2008).

We also visited a family centre where all families in the area were offered to come with their young child in order to learn about their own child's development and what to do to challenge the child's learning further. Families got 'home-work' to do with their child until their next meeting. This can also be seen as a very strong emphasises on children's learning and development, and it strongly shows how important education is in China.

Maggie Koong, our treasurer was our host, a host with whom you never get bored! She had arranged full day programmes, and we visited her preschools where they had an impressive and well-educated and international staff. The working language was English. They used the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme (<http://www.ibo.org/pyp/>) for children 3 to 12 years of age, which seems to be very much based on play and organised around thematic contents. The areas for creative work were very well equipped and inviting to work in.



And finally, coming from a country where we do not even have school uniforms, it was fascinating to see young children graduating every year from preschool, see photo next page.



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In the municipal preschool this autumn they had worked with a theme about the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Revolution, where children had played soldiers.

Coming from the west, where today all learning is supposed to be based on interaction and communication, I have a big question mark about what I observed in many class-rooms, that is, why children were separated when they worked with blocks, jigsaws, play-dough, etc. Each child was either sitting at his or her desk or there could be a small wall separating each child. I asked a teacher and got the answer related to the 'one child policy', which means that children need to be independent since they are being so spoiled in the family. But for me it did not make sense, since as I understand it, every child then should need to be devoted to work together with other children, all the time. Sometimes it is really difficult to understand other cultures, no matter how much you want to.

Ingrid