



## **Reflections on the OMEP World Assembly and Conference**

### **Gothenburg, Sweden**

### **August 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> 2010**

Denice Cunningham attended the World Assembly on August 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> and both she, and Patricia Radley attended the Conference on August 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Denice Cunningham**

I arrived on a very wet Sunday morning in Gothenburg, thus unfortunately I was hotel bound for most of the day. However, by Monday morning, the sun was shining and I attended the OMEP World Assembly in Gothenburg University. It must be noted that the University is not located on one campus, but rather spread across different areas of the city. Hence, both the World Assembly and the Conference were held in different venues across the city, which made some interesting sight seeing, as both the University and the city were very beautiful. Furthermore, it was during my first walk to a lunch venue on Monday that it came to my attention that there appeared to be an extraordinarily large number of lone men pushing prams. It was only in the afternoon of our first day that the World President explained this phenomenon, telling us that for parental leave in Sweden, both the mother and father get twelve months leave with eighty percent of their salary!

When we arrived at the World Assembly, we were greeted personally by the Swedish president, Ingrid Engdahl and were given time to register and have some light refreshments. The World President, Ingrid Pramling-Samuelsson opened the World Assembly. The morning involved the Assembly addressing a large number of issues

and reports, including a report on the Haiti Donations and it must be noted that Ireland was only one of the few member states to donate to the Haiti fund. Madeleine Baillargeon, the North American and Caribbean Vice President thanked Ireland for its donation. I will not outline the outcome in relation to the World congress as the full minutes of this meeting can be found at the following address; [http://www.omep.org.gu.se/digitalAssets/1316/1316743\\_minutes-world-assembly-gothenburg--sweden-2010.pdf](http://www.omep.org.gu.se/digitalAssets/1316/1316743_minutes-world-assembly-gothenburg--sweden-2010.pdf)

The World Congress continued over both Monday 9<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2010. During this time, it must be acknowledged that the proceeds were run to a very high professional level, with an excellent catering service throughout. Likewise the interpretation system was of International standards, facilitating the three official languages of OMEP, those being French, Spanish and English. On the evening of Monday the 9<sup>th</sup>, the committee of OMEP Sweden held a reception at Gothenburg University, where there was a very elaborate spread of local food and wine. This turned out to be a very pleasant evening and it gave each of us the opportunity to meet and acquaint ourselves with some of the members from the other 43 member countries who were in attendance at the World Assembly.

### **Patricia Radley**

The three themes of the conference were “Education for Sustainable Development”, “Gender” and “Different Childhoods” and papers comprised of invited sessions, individual paper sessions, self organised symposia and poster presentations. All together there were over 500 paper and poster presentations and this Conference was the biggest ever held in the area of Education for Sustainable Development.

Each morning participants attended a keynote address in the Concert Hall and then walked to the Pedagogen where the paper and poster presentations took place. Everyone re-convened each evening in the Concert Hall for another key note address and some entertainment. The keynote addresses were given by Corinne Carasco Pons, Bronwyn Davies, Jan Eliasson, Ingrid Pramling Sammuelson, Sylvie Rayna

On the second day, participants were invited to visit preschools within the greater Gothenburg area. This was a great chance to see the Swedish childcare system in

practice. Denice and I visited two very different preschools. The school Denice visited was on the other side of Gothenburg city and was situated in a built up area of apartment blocks in an area of lower socio economic status. The preschool conditions for the staff in this school were excellent with both excellent working and leisure facilities. There was a full working kitchen, office and dining area. The leisure room had leather couches and magazines for easy reading. Staff also had use of a bed, in the event that they needed a 'catnap'. Also, all the staff shared the chores and duties evenly and their work was staggered to allow for adequate rest throughout the day. Also their salaries were on par with their primary school counterparts and the majority of staff are trained to third level education.

The preschool that I visited was in Backen, an area a few miles outside of Gothenburg. The preschool catered for children aged 3-6 years of age. There were six staff members in all and four were trained to third level. The school had four rooms in which the children could play – each laid out with a different theme – a cloakroom (where children could get ready for 'outdoor play' and a dining area where the children sat around the table each day for their dinner. There was also a kitchen where a meal was cooked for the children each day. What struck me about the school was the huge amount of outdoor space which was available to the children. The preschool teachers said that the children spent a substantial period of the day playing outside. On the day I visited it was a very warm and sunny day, but the teachers explained that even on wet or snowy days the children still play outside for a portion of the day as they have outdoor clothes to suit these conditions. One section of the outdoor area was laid out like a playground, there was then some green space for the children to ride around on their tricycles and finally there was an area around the side of the preschool that was used as a garden in which the children planted and grew their own flowers and herbs. The teachers were extremely friendly and were very interested in hearing about early childhood provision in the different countries. We had our lunch at the preschool with the children. The children sat with us around three different tables. The teachers stressed the importance of teaching the children to sit around the table so they could learn the social aspects of eating as a group.

The Conference was extremely enjoyable and it was great to meet with people from other countries and cultures and to learn from their experiences.