

## **National Report ESD project Sweden**

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### **Introduction**

Children of today face a rapidly changing society with new challenges and possibilities. For four decades environmental issues have been on the educational agenda (Rickinson, Lundholm & Hopwood, 2009). During the past decades, the concept of education for sustainable development (ESD) has influenced educational policies on international, national and local levels. The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) states that children have the right to be involved and to be heard in matters that are affecting them. In Agenda 21, the UN agreement for global sustainable development, children are recognized as important participants in the shaping of a sustainable future.

“Children not only will inherit the responsibility of looking after the Earth, but in many developing countries they comprise nearly half the population. The specific interests of children need to be taken fully into account in the participatory process on environment and development in order to safeguard the future sustainability of any actions taken to improve the environment”. (Agenda 21, 1992, chapter 25:12)

In the Swedish preschools environmental education has been an important part of the preschool program since the steering document “Pedagogical programme for the preschool” was adapted in 1987. The intentions were and are to foster the children’s environmental awareness and promote an environmental friendly approach (Ministry of Education and Science, 2006). In spite of the growing interest at international, national and local levels about sustainability, international and national research about education for sustainable development in early childhood education is still very limited. A relatively well-developed field is the child's thoughts on various phenomena in the surrounding environment and nature. In a recent longitudinal study from the UK, Palmer and Suggate (2004) showed that children already at the age of four had knowledge of their environment and showed by simple but accurate understandings of the effects of environmental change and its impact on different habitats and individuals. From a Nordic perspective, research surveys show that there are no contemporary studies on the theme of learning for sustainable development and children’s agency in Scandinavia (Persson, 2008; Nordenbo et al, 2009). International research lack especially research about learning and meaning making (Rickinson, Lundholm & Hopwood, 2009) and children’s agency (Barratt Hacking, Hacking and Scott, 2007; Davis, 2009). Davis (2009) argues that there is a huge gap to be filled and that an entirely new field of research focusing on learning for sustainable development for kindergarten and preschool children has to be built. Regarding children as meaningful and creative actors, in relation to the theme, is not adopted when exploring this area. Barratt Hacking, Barratt and Scott (2007) believe that children's experiences and involvement would be a welcome contribution to the development of the field.

The World Organisation for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) has appointed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as the major project for the next coming years. The OMEP World Assembly in Lagos in August 2009 started this project as one way for OMEP members and countries to work with children on ESD, and at the same time giving a worldwide spreading. The aim of the project is to collect information about young children's thoughts, comments and understanding of the OMEP 2010 Congress logo. When children get the possibility to talk freely about what they see in the picture, children's interpretation of the image, the words and concepts children use, provides a good basis for approaching the children's experience. This perspective of how children reason or don't reason can give cues about how sustainable development as a content is handled in the pre-school.

## Summary Form

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Number of children interviewed: 36 in total, interviewed in pre-schools

<b>Girls yrs</b>	<b>Boys yrs</b>
1-2= 1	1-2= 1
3 =0	3 =3
4 =7	4 =13
5 =7	5 =9
6 =3	6 =1
7 = 0	7 = 0
8= 1	8=0
<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>

Number of interviewing adults: 11 women 0 men

Number of Cities/Regions involved: 4 with 5 different pre-schools.

## **Description of organisation and procedure**

The project is a continuation of the project 'Child participation in the preschool outdoors environment' which was conducted in 2007-2009, by the Swedish OMEP engaging 10 pre-schools in Umeå, Gothenburg and Stockholm, with funding from The Swedish Inheritance Fund. In this project the same pre-schools were asked to participate, three accepted. So did also two other pre-schools from a pre-school network. Five of the interviews were of pairs, seven-teen individual interviews and four group interviews. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, geared towards children's comprehensions of: What is going on? Why are they doing this? What do the children say 'Sustainable Development' means?

## **Main finding**

### ***A: What is going on?***

A1: Cleaning the globe (16 answers)

Dom tvättar jorden för att den ska bli ren och fin.

A2: Children are painting (9 answers)

Barn som målar en jordglob.

Dom fäggrannar jorden och gör det väldigt fint.

Jag ska berätta att det finns färg på jordklotet och att barnen är duktiga och att det är nån som gör nåt med någon annan. Och den här tavlan är ganska fin och de gör ett duktigt jobb

A 3: Talking about things on the picture (6 answers)

Jag ser en fjärlil och en burk, tandborste och en vattenkanna och människor på en jordklump

A 4: Referring to friends from the pre-school as children on the picture. (2 answers)

Där ser ut som Ninni och där ser det ut som Wendela (barn på samma avdelning) och där är jag.

### ***Why are they doing this?***

B1: Because it's dirty (10 answers)

Jordklotet blir rent, då blir det en renare miljö.

För att annars blir den smutsigt och vattnet kommer att bli svart som en katt.

Det kanske är smutsigt, det har min pappa sagt att det är.

B 2: In the space the globe needs to be clean (1 answer)

För att inte det ska vara smuts på så att den inte kan vara uppe i rymden.

B 3: The globe was broken (2 answers)

För den kanske var sönder... de kanske vill göra en sån.

Det läcker ut smutsvatten ur ett hål under jorden.

B4: Creating a globe (2 answers)

Barnen målar den stora stenen så det ska ses ut som ett jordklot  
Det är ett stort papper som barnen har rullat till en stor boll.

### ***Anything more?***

C1: Garbage (2 answers)

För att man slänger skräp.

För att i början då var ju jorden inte uppfunnen ännu men då när jorden var uppfunnen då så var det skräp i början så dom fick ta bort allt och slänga i soptunnor.

C 2: Not healthy (2 answers)

Och så kommer det svarta vatten i vår kropp när vi dricker den . Och då kanske man är blind och inte ser det och så dricker man det där smutsiga vattnet och bli sjuk.

C3: Aesthetics (2 answers)

Dom kanske ska visa den för folk och då kan den ju inte vara smutsig.

C 4: Children are servants to the adults (1 answer)

De ser arga ut för att jordklotet är smutsig. Det är nio barn som tvättar jordklotet. För vuxna är upptagna och inte kan tvätta . Det är nog elaka vuxna som vill att barnen ska vara deras piga. (1 answer)

C5: Referring to television programs (2 answers)

I jakten på den försvunna lampan så säger de att jorden är smutsig. Det där är en skrubborste och de håller vatten på jordklotet, det blåa är vatten som de håller på jorden.

Det finns en reklam på TV, där får en bebis dricka smutsigt vatten. De tvättar med rent vatten, sedan tar de flaskan och tar vatten och det är smutsigt vatten och bäbis får dricka det smutsiga vattnet.

### ***Anything else?***

D1: It's a stone (2 answers)

Barnen målar en sten, en jättestor sten.

D 2: Brushing the moon (1 answer)

Jag tror att de borstar på månen och håller vatten på månen. Dom håller handen på månen. (1 answer)

D 3: It's an elephant (2 answers)

Dom torkar, elefanten ska va ren.

D 4: Discussing the size of the earth (3 answers)

De gör något som ingen kan göra (hänvisar till jordens storlek)

De arbetar på en låtsas jord.

Det är en på varje sida om jorden. Jag tror att dom är jättar. För titta vad stora.

## ***What do the children say 'Sustainable Development' means?***

E1: Sustainability for humanity (1 answer)

Jorden ska hålla bättre, om solen blir för stark då blir det för varmt för människorna på jorden

E2: Durability (1 answer)

Det är en slags utveckling som är bra för typ om en människa har inte en hållbar skulptur och tappar den då går ju den sönder så det är bra att man gör dom hållbara.

E3: Don't know (10 answer)

Vet inte vad det kan betyda. Det är en massa bokstäver.

### **Discussion**

The aim of the project is to collect information about young children's thoughts, comments and understanding of the OMEP 2010 Congress logo. In the interviews, children interpret the picture in many different ways. Most common is the answer that the children are cleaning the globe because it's dirty. But many children also thought that the children on the picture were painting the globe. The reasons why the children are cleaning or painting are aesthetical, health and garbage problem. Some children think that it's a stone, an elephant and some of them problemized the size of the earth on the picture.

Sustainable development is not a concept the children have heard before. Only one eight year old girl understands the concept. The result shows that just a few of the interviewed children express an environmental awareness. One of the children mentions that his father was talking about environmental issue. A teacher that interviewed the children comments the lack of this issue in the everyday practice. She said 'we need to talk more about these issues with the children'. Pre-school staff in the Swedish pre-school has the responsibility to develop an environment in which the children get involved and make their own choices. The staff shall have respect for the intrinsic value of each person and the shared environment, and nature conservation. They shall also have an ecological approach and give the children the opportunity to acquire a caring attitude to nature and the environment (Ministry of Education and Science, 2006). The next step in developing knowledge about sustainable development and younger children is to further engage children in research questions about learning for sustainable development in pre-school setting (Barratt Hacking, Barratt & Scott, 2007, Davis, 2009, 2010).

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