

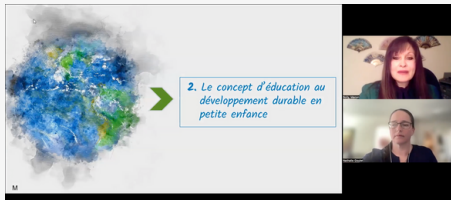
EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IS A MAJOR ISSUE TODAY, AS CHILDREN ARE INCREASINGLY AWARE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES THAT SHAPE THEIR WORLD. ON JANUARY 22, 2025, THIS THEME WAS AT THE HEART OF THE FIRST WEBINAR OF THE OMEP FRANCOPHONE COMMISSION. ORGANIZED BY OMEP-CANADA WITH INTERVENTIONS FROM OMEP-FRANCE, OMEP-MOROCCO AND OMEP DRC.

The Importance of ESD from an Early Age

Education for sustainable development can now occupy a central place in the education of young children. By drawing on their spontaneous curiosity about nature, their questions, and their observations, a holistic approach will address environmental issues, but also those of the economy, the ability to live together and inclusion, and daily engagement to fully participate in the world.

Speakers, whether in France, Quebec, Morocco, or the Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly emphasized the importance of addressing these issues in a positive and empowering manner. The goal is to encourage reflection, active participation, and awareness at the child's level.

ESD thus becomes a tool for self-development and world transformation.



Concrete practices, rooted in the regions

The presentations given during this session addressed key issues while demonstrating the diversity of daily practices in early childhood education settings. These efforts are essential to making ESD a living reality.

In Quebec, Manon Boily and Nathalie Goulet presented a particularly interesting overview. In many early childhood settings, ESD has become a truly structuring focus, aligned with Quebec public policies, such as the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy 2023-2028.

This translates into concrete initiatives: creating educational gardens, introducing pesco-vegetarian menus, installing recycling bins, organizing days without motorized transport or electricity, and developing outdoor educational activities.

The example of the "L'Arche de Noé" daycare center, directed by Mélanie Bélanger, illustrates this evolution well. In six years, this center has gone from a total absence of ecological practices to an exemplary and integrated approach. Starting in 2018, simple actions were introduced: implementing sorting, reducing paper use, and then creating gardens and sustainable menus. Little by little, the children were included at every stage, growing their own plants, participating in riverbank cleanups, community collections, and themed days such as "Let's Eat Local." This progress was accompanied by a strong commitment from educational staff, supported by an active environmental committee, guaranteeing the continuity and anchoring of the approach in daily educational life.

For France, Alice Delserieys emphasized that ESD is sometimes too focused on the environment alone and delivered very differently depending on the school and teacher. Curricula today integrate more complex aspects that must be implemented in preschools.

The European Erasmus+ project, coordinated by OMEP-Sweden, which resulted in the creation of a mobile application for educators, "Sustainable Development from Childhood on" (ECE Academy), can contribute to this.

The application is based on a pedagogical approach rooted in the child's experience, play, and nature. It encourages reflection on the part of both educators and children.

The French translation made it possible to integrate certain content better adapted to the context and to include references to curricula and teaching practices linked to the culture of both teachers and children.

These two examples show that ESD for young children can take very diverse forms while sharing the same foundation: the desire to link learning to everyday actions, to empower children without worrying them, and to create a sensitive and active link between them and their immediate environment.



EDUCATE, CO-EDUCATE AND TRAIN

In Morocco, OMEP, in partnership with the Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection, is committed to promoting education for sustainable development (ESD) starting in preschool. Presented by Ihsane Dahane, the Moroccan approach is based on educational practices that are fun, sensory, and closely integrated into children's daily lives. Gardening workshops, recycling activities, and games related to water management and biodiversity are conducted in the classroom and during field trips. These experiences aim to awaken children's curiosity and attention through play and observation, in a positive and engaging approach.

Part of the preschool eco-school program, these initiatives transform educational facilities into genuine spaces for learning about ecological coexistence. This dynamic also relies on the participation of families, who are regularly involved in certain projects or made aware of the daily actions to adopt, thus strengthening educational continuity between school and home.

CONCRETE SUPPORT FOR AFRICA

In a very different context, Joy Tunamau Kiese, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, presented the adaptation of the ECE Academy application.



On the ground, several challenges arise: limited or non-existent internet coverage in certain regions, use of local languages in preschool education, and cultural anchoring of educational practices.

The content should be translated and contextualized to reflect local realities and the proposed activities redesigned using materials available in rural communities (seeds, plants, pebbles, recycled objects, etc.), but also approached through traditional forms of transmission such as puppets, storytelling or community theater.



These adaptations would allow for respecting local learning habits while introducing ESD themes in a lively and accessible way. This demonstrates OMEP's commitment to making education for sustainable development truly inclusive. This reflection should continue for children living in precarious, displaced, or post-conflict contexts.

FIGHTING INEQUALITIES

Truly sustainable development cannot be conceived without actively addressing social inequalities. Environmental issues are closely linked to the economic, educational, and territorial realities that affect the most vulnerable populations.

Promoting inclusive sustainable development means ensuring that ecological transformations do not reproduce existing inequalities, but rather become levers for social justice. By promoting community knowledge and collective dynamics, OMEP promotes a model of ESD that strengthens social ties while combating structural discrimination.

RETHINKING OUR ECONOMY

The sustainable development discussed during the webinar goes beyond the environmental dimension: it engages in a comprehensive reflection on our economic and social models, directly linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Concrete practices such as recycling, local consumption, and vegetarian menus help children develop an ecological and economic awareness. Furthermore, the ECE Academy app includes a module dedicated to the sustainable economy. It explores concepts such as sharing, reuse, and responsible consumption, in line with SDGs 12 and 13. From a very early age, children are encouraged to consider a fairer, more inclusive, and resource-friendly economy.

CHALLENGES PERSIST

The actions undertaken demonstrate the need to strengthen the training of teachers and educators in order to implement a holistic education that engages children's experience and participation while instilling self-confidence.

Stakeholders emphasize the importance of an approach based on wonder, respect for life, cooperation, and creativity..

AN INTERNATIONAL DYNAMIC TO BE ENCOURAGED

The webinar highlighted the richness of local and international partnerships. Several projects are developing thanks to collaboration between educational institutions, local authorities, environmental associations, and research organizations.

These alliances help anchor ESD in the regions, expand available resources, and strengthen the legitimacy of the initiatives undertaken.

On a global scale, OMEP continues its efforts to unite stakeholders around this cause. The annual ESD competition is a good example: it rewards innovative, participatory educational projects that respect children's rights.

"Raising awareness from a young age means sowing the seeds of a sustainable future."

Mélanie Bélanger, director of the "Noah's Ark" daycare center

A COMMITMENT TO THE PRESENT... AND TO TOMORROW

This first webinar of the OMEP-Monde Francophone Commission laid the foundations for an ambitious collective reflection. At a time when ecological crises are intensifying, training tomorrow's citizens today is an educational duty, and ESD can become a true lever for transformation, both in schools and in society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the many people who participated in this webinar, as well as to the speakers whose contributions enriched the discussions with expertise and commitment: Manon Boily and Nathalie Goulet (OMEPE Canada), Alice Delserieys and Frédéric Charles (OMEPE-France), Ihsane Dahane (OMEPE Morocco), Joy Tunamau Kiese (OMEPE DRC), and Ingrid Engdahl (OMEPE-Sweden) for her presentation on the annual ESD competition.

OTHER FRANCOPHONE COMMISSION WEBINARS IN 2025

April 2: Awareness of linguistic diversity (OMEPE-Morocco)
March 19: Civil society engagement (UNESCO/OMEPE)
May 14: The quality of ECCE in relation to children's rights (OMEPE-France)