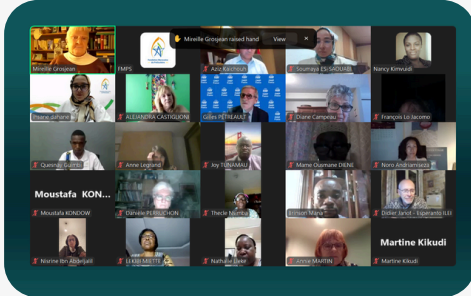


"Raising Children's Awareness of Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Strategies for Inclusive and Caring Preschool Education"

ON APRIL 2, 2025, THE FRANCOPHONE COMMISSION OF OMEP ORGANIZED A WEBINAR BRINGING TOGETHER EXPERTS FROM THE AMERICAS, AFRICA, EUROPE, AND THE MAGHREB TO DISCUSS A FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE: HOW TO IMPLEMENT PRESCHOOL EDUCATION THAT RECOGNIZES AND VALUES THE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF CHILDREN, FROM AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE PERSPECTIVE.



UNESCO: Promoting Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

Noro Andriamisezana, UNESCO representative, opened the webinar by presenting the organization's main guidelines on multilingual education.



Drawing on UNESCO's new guide, *Languages Matter: Multilingual Education for a Multilingual World*, she reminded participants that **multilingualism is the norm in most societies** and that education must reflect this reality.

She highlighted the cognitive, social, and cultural benefits of mother tongue-based education from early childhood. She also outlined the commitments made during the **Tashkent Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**, including support for inclusive language policies and the integration of the mother tongue into curricula.

Several examples illustrated these principles: in Mali, the Holistic and Inclusive Early Childhood Care program provides caregiver notebooks in eight local languages; in Uzbekistan, more than 685,000 children receive storybooks in national languages; in Bolivia, the Bilingual Nests strategy integrates Indigenous languages into the daily routines of daycare centers.



Democratic Republic of the Congo: When the Language of Instruction Becomes a Barrier

Michel Otto, President of OMEP DRC, presented a situation typical of multilingual African countries, where **the official language of instruction does not match the language spoken by the children—or even by the teachers.**



He gave the example of the Sakanya territory, officially designated as a Swahili-speaking area. In reality, neither the children nor the teachers speak this language. This disconnect poses a major barrier to learning and deepens existing inequalities.

He advocated for the use of the "language of the environment" as the language of instruction, in line with UNESCO's recommendations and official Congolese frameworks, notably the 2014 Framework Law and the 2016–2025 Education Sector Strategy.

Morocco: Analysis of a Field Experience in Preschool Settings

Soumaya Es-Saouabi, researcher and member of OMEP Morocco, presented a field study conducted in several Moroccan regions within institutions affiliated with the Moroccan Foundation for the Promotion of Preschool Education (FMPS). This study explored educators' perceptions and the practices implemented in response to linguistic and cultural diversity.



She showed that while educators acknowledge the importance of this diversity, they **often lack the training and resources** needed to fully integrate it into their teaching practices.

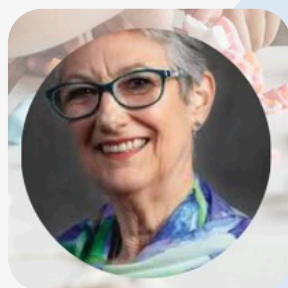


She put forward concrete recommendations, inspired by theoretical models of intercultural and multilingual education, to build an equitable preschool education grounded in local realities.

Canada: An Experience of Decolonizing Knowledge in Early Childhood

Diane Campeau, researcher and member of OMEP Canada, described the efforts of several Canadian provinces to **revise their early childhood programs** by **integrating Indigenous languages** and knowledge.

She relied on the work of Marie Battiste and Tyson Yunkaporta to advocate for an **Indigenous pedagogy based on orality**, connection to the land, and community transmission. She presented research conducted in 2019 that showed the **positive impact** of this approach on team engagement and on the inclusion of Indigenous children.



Many challenges remain: training educators, access to cultural resources, and institutional recognition. But the results show that this transformation is possible, provided it is rooted in the communities.

Argentina: Art as a Language of Inclusion

María Alejandra Castiglioni, from OMEP Argentina, proposed a sensitive and original approach, emphasizing **the role of art as an expressive language** and a vehicle for transformation from early childhood.



According to her, artistic languages allow children to express their identities, emotions, and dreams. They also enable questioning dominant narratives and pave the way for a critical intercultural pedagogy.

She advocated for a "**pedagogy of tenderness**," where every educational gesture becomes an opportunity for encounter and mutual recognition. By connecting art, education, and the environment, she invites us to inhabit the world in a more attentive, just, and humane way.

A Shared Vision for Inclusive Education

This webinar highlighted a strong convergence across different regions of the world: **for preschool education to be inclusive, it must recognize the mother tongue as a fundamental right and an essential driver of development.**

The shared experiences demonstrated that it is possible to integrate local languages and cultures into educational practices—provided that educators are properly trained, families are engaged in dialogue, and educational policies are sensitive to local contexts.