1. What are the most serious challenges facing young children today?

Audrey began by pointing out four main challenges: (1) climate change, which affects everybody in this world; (2) war and acts of terrorism: children need to be helped to integrate, cope and move into the future and see hope; (3) social media and the Internet: children need to be helped to understand technology and move forward, as well as learn to protect themselves from inappropriate exposure; and (4) changes in the global economy, which is happening in both developing and developed countries.

Selma continued by noting that children in many traditions have been considered as dependent and have been invisible and marginalized in historic and social descriptions. They need to be conceptualized as a distinct social group from the adults, with their own cultures, unique symbols and rituals. They have the right to education, play, and recreational activities. They have social, cultural, and physical influences in their surroundings. There are also tensions between local and global, modernization and tradition, spiritual and material, which may lead to inequalities, particularly for those who are vulnerable, marginalized and excluded.
The field of early childhood, therefore, needs to be constantly reinventing itself in relation to the cultural contexts, integrating all the players in the process, flexible and capable to stay ahead of future challenges. It needs to be considered as a part of an ambitious agenda of social justice with strong moral frames.

Ingrid considered attitudes and values to be the most serious challenges. Poverty, on one hand, is no doubt a big challenge, but rich countries may not necessarily be willing to invest in early childhood. Global and local equity and equality depend very much on the attitudes and values of people. High quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems need to be advocated in relation to the culture but also to change the culture.

Maggie further suggested that there are various gaps in: (1) service provision, which needs to be viewed holistically, yet the current provision is fragmented; (2) school readiness: there are huge between- and within-countries disparities in early childhood service enrolment; (3) the understanding of childhood: should children be ready for schools or schools be ready for children? (4) ideals and actual practices; (5) professional development; and (6) parenting practices.

Lynn summarized the above content into three themes:

1. Challenges associated with attitudes and values:
   - gender equity;
   - tensions between the spiritual and the material;
   - the issue of social invisibility of very young children; and
   - cultures and inherited history and customs that we bring to the enterprise of raising and caring for young children.

2. Challenges associated with the broader global context:
   - climate change;
   - war and terrorism;
   - the impact of social media and the Internet;
   - the impact of global economy; and
   - issues related to poverty, equity and equality.

3. Challenges associated with the field of early childhood education:
   - gaps in professional development;
   - gaps in service equity; and
   - gaps in ideas about transition; about what is appropriate (pedagogy, appropriate approaches to assessment and measurement, etc.).
2. Why and how has this changed over time?

Selma noted that early childhood education, from being neglected in the past, has gradually attained foremost political importance in the last decades. This is due to the increasing presence of mass communication, the explosive importance of consumption and the rapid emergence of new technologies. Together, they have created profound modifications in the relations within families, neighborhoods and educational establishments. Inequalities in access, however, could at the same time be produced as a result. A roadmap should be developed with different rhythms and priorities in accordance to the starting point of each country. More political and societal willingness are also needed to achieve child rights and develop legislature and integral policies that span from gestation to 8 years of age.

Ingrid felt the changes were both positive and negative. She identified a trend (at least in the Western world) that competition is encouraged while networking and cooperation are much neglected.

Maggie called attention to looking at ECEC through different lens: (1) holistic context: there needs to be a good integrated system to provide services for children; (2) child right perspective: the actualization of rights needs to be monitored; (3) children as competent learners: good learning environment should be provided. Appropriate tools and assessments should be developed to understand outcomes and inform policymaking; and (4) mindsets of parents and teachers: parents and teachers need to be educated about what really is good for children. She hoped all the above components could be linked and thereby closes the early childhood gaps.

Audrey said that the world is changing and paying more attention to early childhood. The more work on ECEC is conducted, the more we can persuade governments to realize that ECEC is not just about providing somewhere for children to go. Governments need to find the money to put in good quality ECEC with well-qualified teachers, particularly for the most disadvantaged children.

Lynn concluded that some of the changes are due to changes in the field of ECEC, both in terms of its ascendance to prominence of the global agenda and in our own justification in dealing with issues that are before us. Scientic advancement in knowledge and new technology also plays a huge role. These come with pros and cons, due to tensions between:
- individualism and collectivism;
- spiritualism and consumerism;
- supporting programs and creating systems; and
- the rights of the child in terms of equity and quality.
3. What is OMEP’s role in addressing these issues, in light of its mission and the work of other organizations?

Ingrid said that OMEP’ is unique as it is one of the very few organizations that focuses on early education. With a growing prominence in the global community, OMEP needs to better utilize its voice today. OMEP is doing quite well in relations to the sustainable development goals and education for sustainable development (ESD). More than 50,000 children and their teachers have been involved in its world projects. OMEP was invited to participate in the UN and UNESCO. The greatest challenge of OMEP is to attract young people who can carry on the OMEP mission. Ingrid would like to call for a “think tank” of young OMEP members in the near future.

Maggie pointed out various areas that OMEP can exert its influence:

- **G:** government influence; global voice for championing child rights; global monitoring of CRC articles 28, 29, and 31;

- **A:** advancing equity; access to water, sanitation and health; access to high quality comprehensive early childhood services; and (the most important A) alliances with other NGOs, government agencies and international bodies; and

- **P:** program enhancements; parental education and empowerment; professional development; protective factor enhancement (such as home literacy environment, parent education, quality health, nutrition) and risk factor reduction; and play and play-based curriculum.

Multiple sectors need to support the health, cognitive, social and emotional development of the young child. We need a more coordinated and strategic approach. Therefore, OMEP has joined the UNESCO’s Global Action Program (GAP).

Audrey brought the discussion to national and local levels. She revealed that thousands of early childhood workers do not know about OMEP. Therefore, OMEP needs to work with appropriate regional organizations and local authorities to extend the ideas and values that it stands for and make people realize how important it is to belong to a national or international organization. The more we are, the more power we have.

Selma believed the change in the social representation of childhood and appropriate treatment of children need to be better promoted in the society and in policymaking. The diversity in cultures needs to be considered carefully. OMEP needs to preserve its fundamental principles and pedagogical positions and advocate strongly for the value of play, multiculturalism, the importance of the first three years of life, and the use of technologies of information and communication. It should also give more space to regions and countries,
enhance communication, and maintain Spanish, English and French as its official languages.

**Lynn** noted the common acknowledgement of the wonderful work of OMEP thus far. The World President and Former World Presidents also set forth some very important strategies from planning group to youth engagement to continuing the wonderful efforts that have been undertaken. In addition, they called for attention to country and regional levels of work.

4. **If there were one thing that we collectively could do to advance the world for young children globally, what would it be?**

**Ingrid** thought that all children should have the possibility and access to ECEC (from prenatal to 8 years) with very well-educated teachers.

**Selma** felt that promoting the social representation of child is the key. Children need to be viewed as persons with rights.

**Audrey** said a child needs to be given the right to be a child. They should have the right to play and the right and opportunity to develop to their full potential.

**Maggie** suggested the quality of educators needs to be enhanced. There needs to be quality educators in order for children to have quality childhood.