Summary Statement

This is the first time in the history of our organization that anyone has had the audacity to try to make a thirty minute summary statement of three lectures, thirty-six discussion meetings and fifteen Talk-It- Overs involving the thinking of more than four hundred vocal, professional people.

I'd like, therefore, to ask the reporters and the leaders of all these groups to stand so you can see and give them the credit for anything in this report that agrees with your appraisal.

Now, I shall assume the responsibility for omissions and other points with which you disagree—and assure you that you have that right. I shall not leave Battersea until Sunday so you can tell me so at the Ballet or at the Hall of Residence.

In truth, I feel each of you has made his own summary, his own appraisal. I can do little more in thirty minutes than attempt to reflect some of the large areas of agreement or disagreement and point out the hopes expressed in the oral and written reports I received.

In this selection I feel like a gold miner when he is panning—fearful that by searching for the big nuggets I may be overlooking the smaller pieces of a more valuable metal.

The first highlight of the conference was the speech given by Dr. Anna Freud, that woman of the fine mind and the warm heart! Her topic was The Emotional and Social Development of Young Children.

You will recall her four main points by which the child differs from the adult; those which she feels are so important if we would truly understand the young child. I will remind you of them:

1) the child's egocentric concept of the world which she likened to our dreams even as adults we are ever in the center of the dream.

2) the contrast between reason and unreason, between logic and illogic. Adults have longer views and children's are shorter; there is no waiting period in childhood where actions are immediate—the urgency of feelings and wishes, she said, is
3) time sense: the concept she developed so carefully for us, and illustrated so vividly in relation to the separation of the mother from the child.

4) sexual expression and understanding in which young children give lip service to the facts of reproduction given them. This Dr. Freud says is the area of greatest difference between the adult and the child.

Concerning the first point - ego centrism - there was general agreement and understanding in the discussion groups. Only a slight measure of doubt was expressed by a few people in two of the groups. Concerning point four (sexual expression and understanding) the area of greatest difference - it is interesting to note - was treated very lightly in the discussion groups and then only in connection with the role of the father. I wonder why!

But in contrast, points two and three (reason and time) provoked much discussion and brought forth ever so many questions. Briefly, a few persons wondered if a measure of frustration is essential to discipline; where and when limits should be set by adults, and whether it is good for the child to have the adult prevent all or most child conflicts.

The minimum age of admission to nursery school, the desirable length of the school day, and methods of helping the child emotionally at times of mother separation were topics discussed with much feeling in most of the groups and the differing procedures in many countries were shared and evaluated quite openly.

In short, the greatest desire of the largest number of people was to be informed of practical applications of the above four points of Anna Freud in relation to the stages of development of the child.

Knowledge of specific chronological ages for each stage was desired by a few, while the majority wished it to be emphasized that specific ages, if stated, could or would be misleading. They further felt that a given child may at one time be in several stages in different aspects of his development.
However, landmarks or ways of assessing the stage of development of a child were desired by many and Dr. Freud, during the question period, reassured us that in our hearts we know we can tell some of these if we truly observe and try to understand children.

Do we wait for signs of readiness for the next stage to develop; expect children to conform to our demands; or should we anticipate and facilitate the next stage? This basic question was discussed, many thought, to the consideration of the following two problems for which answers were sought by many: 1) what do teachers really need to know to understand a child and 2) how shall we prepare teachers and reeducate those already in service?

In brief, Anna Freud's lecture disturbed a few, clarified the thinking of many, and challenged all of us. We wished she could have met with each of our groups to help us further to translate theory into practice by giving us more of her delightful and profound illustrations.

On Tuesday, the eight Talk-It-Over sessions held onto these thoughts and questions stimulated by Dr. Freud and it was interesting to observe the extent to which they colored the content of the Talk-It-Overs.

Shortage of time for exploration of the Talk-It-Over announced topics of concern to many was expressed by some members and leaders both on Tuesday and on Wednesday. Perhaps that is the reason those appeared to be somewhat less interaction in some of these groups as contrasted with the discussion groups which had more time to share ideas and to come to know one another on three consecutive days of meetings.

On Wednesday Dr. Andre Barge spoke to us on the topic The Understanding Adult. By means of his lecture and the answer period we raised further questions to our already lengthy list. We appeared to be most concerned with these two:

1) As teachers, what is our concept of self? What can be done to help the teacher who does not have pleasant feelings about her childhood? How can we learn what it is in ourselves and our reactions to our childhood that causes us to react unfavorably to certain children and favorably to others?
2) How can we develop teachers who have the qualities Dr. Berge enumerated as desirable for all those who live and work with children? namely, respect for the child as a person, ability to adjust to a difficult situation, curiosity concerning what lies behind a child's behavior, compassion.

And we hope we all remember his advise that there is not much distance between a defect and a quality. Incidentally this is one example of Berge's ability to phrase ideas succinctly.

Our third speaker, Dr. Lois Murphy's topic was World Wide Implications of the Education of Young Children. She reminded us of the purposes of OMEP: of fostering happy childhood, and of using all the resources of related professions as well as of our earnest desire to promote World Peace.

Through her talk and answers to our questions our groups became increasingly aware:

1) of the basic needs of all children which are alike in kind but differ only in degree.

2) the similarities of the problems each of us faces in our profession even though we come from and return to different countries:

   more children than in former years
   too few teachers, classrooms, schools, inadequate play space
   the great need for inservice training
   the great need for improving the quality of teacher education
   the division of responsibility for the welfare of children into several different governmental agencies
   the need for parents and teachers to understand 1) the goals of each and 2) the purposes of education
   the need for the establishment of courses for parents, especially mothers

The reports of the national committees and the talk given by the delegate, Monsieur Renee Halcommuy, of UNESCO at Friday's meeting gave all of us a new lift - a wider perspective of the many places where research and action programs are already in progress and of the continuous support of UNESCO and other organizations working in behalf of young children.