

# 10<sup>th</sup> International Toy Library Conference – South Africa

Tshwane (Pretoria), 19 – 23 September 2005

**Main Theme: Building a Better World Through Play**



One of the main objectives of the International Toy Library Association (ITLA) is to make sure that an International Toy Library Conference is held every 3 years. The host country of the following conference is always chosen by ITLA members at the current conference. At the 9<sup>th</sup> International Toy Library Conference held in Lisbon in May, 2002, South Africa presented a proposal to host the next Conference in 2005. South Africa's proposal was accepted by the ITLA membership. We were very proud to be hosting the 10<sup>th</sup> International Toy Library Conference in Tshwane/Pretoria, following in the footsteps of such great cities as London, Stockholm, Turin, Toronto, Brussels, Melbourne, Zurich, Tokyo and Lisbon.

The Conference was held at the CSIR Conference Centre, a venue with excellent facilities.

## **ATTENDANCE** at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Toy Library Conference

**ALL-SA** promoted the Conference on a number of web sites in an attempt to reach organisations and individuals involved in play, child development and related fields. This was done to promote awareness about the toy library field. We were successful in that we received emails asking for more information from people in countries that do not have toy libraries. Although interested, funding and previous commitments were the main reasons for not being able to attend. Two delegates from the United States who were not involved in toy libraries attended as a result of this initiative.

270 delegates attended the Conference from 25 countries. These were England, Northern Ireland, France, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Estonia, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, India, America, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Nigeria, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

This included 72 international and local delegates who were able to attend the Conference due to the kind sponsorship of Omo Washing Powder, the Jim Joel Education and Training Fund, Unicef, the Japanese Toy Library Association, Exhibition and Event Management Services, Roma Lear, ALL-SA Gauteng and Cynthia Morrison (from UK Training).

## **PRESENTATIONS**

The Conference was titled "**Toy Libraries: Building a Better World Through Play**". The four themes were:

- 1: **International Toy Library Models – successes and challenges** - our aim here was to learn about different types of toy libraries that serve different purposes around the world. We especially wanted to hear how any challenges were overcome.
- 2: **Toys, Games and Play** - our aim was to share the latest information about toys, games and play that would lead to greater knowledge about how play supports normal development, children with barriers to learning and society as a whole.
- 3: **The Training and Status of Toy Librarians** - the aim here was to investigate the possibility of developing policies for good practice for training and administration.
- 4: **Public and Political Recognition of Toy Libraries** – our aim was to look for trends and develop strategies to help toy libraries and national toy library associations to gain recognition and support.

The Conference Committee had a wonderful response to the Call for Papers. With so many relevant and interesting abstracts, the Programme Committee decided to increase the number of breakaway sessions originally planned even though it is always frustrating to delegates when they cannot listen to all the presentations.

**EXHIBITION** – officially opened by Ms Barbara Creecy, Gauteng MEC for Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture

ALL-SA's aim was to showcase South African/African toy manufacturers. No imported toys were allowed. A total of 20 toy makers exhibited at the Conference. This included 2 NGOs that produce toys and learning aids and one retail outlet that markets toys made in a number of African countries. We are very proud of the fact that 6 unemployed groups/individuals were given a chance to display and sell their toys. ALL-SA would like to thank OMO Washing Powder and CSIR for making this possible. The experience in public relations, marketing and networking gained by these craftspeople was invaluable.

Three general craft groups were able to exhibit – a school for special needs children, women doing needlework from Bekkersdal, an informal settlement, and women doing beadwork, pottery etc. from Soweto – also made possible by sponsorship from Omo Washing Powder. Biblionef, an NGO providing books in all 11 South African languages, exhibited their exciting range. See Appendix 1 for a list of exhibitors.

This exhibition was graced with a photo display developed by the Children's Rights Centre in Durban entitled "*Visions and Voices, Rights and Realities of Children in South Africa*".

Delegates, visitors and donors were extremely impressed by the Conference exhibition.

## **DISCUSSION OF EVENTS**

The African scene was well and truly set as delegates arrived for **Registration** under gloriously sunny African skies to the rhythm of traditional African Drummers. Some lucky people also caught a glimpse of CSIR's resident peacock. Though the registration queue moved slowly at first, everyone was excited about getting the beautiful hand painted delegate bags proudly displaying the colourful conference logo.

When the buzzing, excited throng was finally seated, the programme director, Mr. Siza Masiza from the Eastern Cape, welcomed delegates and treated them to some African humour. He introduced Avriille Gork, National Chairperson of Active Learning & Leisure Libraries – South Africa and Cynthia Morrison – President of the International Toy Library Association who each said a few words of welcome and thanks.

The speakers at the **Official Opening** included Ms. Marie-Louise Samuels, Head ECD Directorate, National Department of Education, Mr. Macharia Kamau, Country Representative, UNICEF, Michelle Albertyn, the Mini Mayor of the Johannesburg Mini City Council and Puso Thahane, the Junior Mayor of the Junior City Council of Johannesburg. The presentations were all very relevant and were well received.

*Inspirations*, a gospel choir performed traditional songs in Sotho. Everyone loved their rhythmical and harmonious style of singing. The leader, Deliwe Macheke, had a strong and humorous presence. The delegates that could understand the language often had a good laugh at the lyrics. The words had been changed to reflect the occasion. In true African story-teller style, the singers asked what toy libraries are, how they started, and why everyone had come. They ended off by asking people to care for the children of the world.

The **Conference Programme** was structured so that all the plenary sessions and some breakaway sessions were held in the main Auditorium where translations to and from Spanish and French were available. Breakaway sessions ran concurrently – one in the main venue (with translation) and three in other rooms. As often happens, one would love to be in all the venues at the same time and delegates were sometimes rushing excitedly from one venue to another in between presentations in order to attend the presentations of their choice.

Due to the high costs of translation, it was only possible to provide translation in one venue. Spanish or French speaking presenters had to be allocated to the room with translation which meant that most English speaking presenters were allocated to the other breakaway rooms. Delegates who needed translation from English were therefore limited in their choices. 46 papers were presented of which 21 benefited from translation. We were very pleased that only one paper on the final programme was withdrawn. The two themes that we felt were very important (Training and Public & Political Recognition of Toy Libraries) were allocated to plenary sessions, though unfortunately a few of the relevant presentations had to be allocated to breakaway sessions.

'Food, Glorious Food!' Congratulations to the CSIR catering staff whose meals were beautifully presented and full of variety and flavour. Many complimentary remarks were heard as delegates helped themselves to lunch each day.

Lunchtimes were deliberately given plenty of time on the programme to allow delegates the opportunity to get to know each other, to share ideas and information, to reflect on the sessions which they had attended and to catch up on the sessions which they had not been able to attend.

During the breaks the main display area was a constant buzz of colour and sound and activity as delegates moved amongst the stalls, admiring, learning, making purchases and it was often a challenge for the organizers to drag them away from the displays back into the sessions. Delegates who did not have an opportunity to get to the shopping malls of the city were able to see and purchase some VERY PROUDLY SOUTH AFRICAN items. Comments were very complimentary about the displays and the quality of the products displayed.

Teatimes and lunch times were also a time of great creativity and learning. Many delegates crowded around the table in the main display area where some of the Japanese delegates very generously shared their time and expertise demonstrating the art of origami. Sophie Ahmed created an enthusiastic frenzy with her demonstration of the beautiful toys brought all the way from India.

The **Conference Topics** started with an overview of the history of Toy Libraries, and in particular, the past 9 International Conferences.

Roy McConkey, our very popular keynote speaker, entertained us with his presentation on the Spirit of Play, "a part of our human heritage which is increasingly undervalued in modern society". As always, his

presentation provided food for thought while engaging the delegates in active participation. (This time, though, the audience was so enthusiastic that Roy had a job keeping us in check!) This set the tone for a fun-filled but challenging conference.

The topics presented delegates with a vast range of Toy Library settings and models – from informal shack dwellings in Columbia to big high tech buildings in Korea; from mobile Toy Libraries in busses in France to ‘Toy Libraries on Legs’ where field workers in very rural communities in Kwa-Zulu Natal carry their bags of toys and walk to the homes of the families they support, including child headed homes. Delegates heard how toy libraries operate in Japan, Europe, Latin America, Mexico and how the role of the toy librarian is changing to one of special educator in Sweden.

We heard how toy libraries support children suffering from cancer in Brazil, HIV & Aids in South Africa as well as children affected by a devastating earthquake in Japan. Presentations described how play opportunities are being provided to children of all ages and abilities; to families; to Senior citizens; to people in prisons.

Toys described and demonstrated ranged from toys made from waste to computer games.

Dr. Freda Kim (Korea) provided delegates with information about the international activities taking place on World Play Day (28 May). Freda, who initiated the idea, is delighted by the number of countries that have adopted World Play Day as a special day in their annual calendar. All the delegates sang the English version of the World Play Day song that a number of countries have translated into their own languages. Everyone received a World Play Day balloon

Presentations were given on different models of the training of Toy Librarians offered in England, South Africa, Italy and France. These ranged from ‘informal courses’ offered by ALL-SA to modules offered at Universities e.g. in France. The International Toy Library Association has been tasked with finding out about the training offered around the world with a view to identifying any common, basic elements.

The public and political recognition of toy libraries is an important issue for toy librarians. In the plenary session we heard how government support has benefited toy libraries in Brazil, Korea, and the UK and we also found out how the Associations in those countries went about gaining that support. In previous breakaway sessions, a presentation from France discussed toy libraries in the public sector while a South African presentation highlighted a government initiative combining public libraries and toy libraries. We were reminded in the plenary session that we need to take the needs and opinions of the poor into account when setting up projects to assist them. ALL-SA was very pleased that Dr Jean Benjamin, Deputy Director of Social Development, delivered the closing address at the Conference. Inviting decision-makers in government to functions is an important step in gaining political recognition.

In addition to the programme of presentations, time was set aside for various meetings: Group meetings for delegates from various continents – Asia, Europe, South/North America and Africa; the ITLA link persons meeting; the ITLA General Assembly.

### **Indigenous Games Evening**

This event was very generously hosted at the Sammy Marks Conference Centre by the City of Tshwane. A welcome drink and traditional singing by the Kopano Chorus awaited delegates on their arrival. After a few words of welcome and introduction by Janet Prest-Talbot for ALL-SA, delegates were invited to take part in a number of traditional South African games set out in the hall – Kgate (skipping), Lintonga, Ncuva, Mgusha, Diketo, Morabaraba and Speed Clapping. These games were selected by a committee representing the City of Tshwane and ALL-SA. Game leaders were available to give directions and to facilitate play. They wore special T-shirts with the Conference Logo on the front and the motto “PLAY LEADER: Celebrate our Heritage – Play Traditional Games” on the back. It was very interesting to hear

people from different countries say 'Oh, we have a game that is very similar to that'. For some, it was an opportunity to go back down memory lane and play games they had played as children and virtually forgotten. Another benefit of the evening was that it demonstrated how games that are usually board games can be converted into large games and could be used in open spaces for community play days. We have since heard from many delegates who have started to play these traditional games at their toy libraries and with their own children.

## Visits To Sites

One full day of the Conference was spent visiting Toy Libraries, the ALL-SA Resource Centre and other places of interest. The 9 toy libraries visited were Friends for Life Toy Library in Alexandra; Nancy McDowell Toy Library in Daveyton; Kathlehong Early Learning Resource Centre in Kathlehong; Chris Hani-Baragwanath Hospital Toy Library, Elizabeth Toy Library, Greater Soweto Toy Library, Sunshine Centre Toy Library all in Soweto; Coronation Hospital Toy Library in Coronationville; Westbury Clinic Toy Library in Westbury and Jim Joel Toy Library in Motlakeng. A representative from each of the toy libraries bravely took on the task of leading their delegate group around Gauteng!

The delegates really appreciated the opportunity to go into the Townships and see the work being done at hospitals, Early Childhood Development sites, training organizations, clinics and centres for children with special needs – including disabilities and HIV & Aids. All but one of the groups were able to see important South African landmarks such as where Nelson Mandela had lived and the Hector Peterson Memorial. One delegate was inspired to go back and reread one of her favourite books, Cry The Beloved Country, after going through Diepkloof where Alan Paton had worked.

The visit to Museum Africa gave delegates a taste of South African history with some of its harsh past but with hope for the future. Some delegates were lucky enough to enjoy the additional bonus of some unexpected traditional dancing as well. And then the All-SA Resource Centre! For both South African delegates and those from other countries it was very special to see the happy and colourful place where ALL-SA's dream is coming true.

The day ended with a cosy 'dinner in the dark' at the Boston Barbeque. The dark was not intended but, due to a power failure (fairly common in those parts!), we ate by candle light.

## Special Happenings

1. Tribute to Roma Lear – a specialist in making toys for children with special needs who has published several books on that subject. Roma attended all 9 previous International Toy Library Conferences, but since she was unable to attend this Conference, she sent her well-known finger puppets for all the delegates. Roma also sent her conference fee to assist a number of delegates to attend. Cath Armstrong led the "2 Little Dickie Bird Song" (made famous by Roma at workshops and conferences) while the delegates sang and did the appropriate actions with Roma's finger puppets.
2. Reading of Poems – a group of delegates read a variety of children's poems featured in a Swedish book in which each poem appears in Swedish and the original language in which it was written. Many of the language groups represented at the conference had an opportunity to take part in this very special and inclusive interlude.
3. On hearing that it was Nylse Cunha's birthday, all the delegates spontaneously joined in the singing of "Happy Birthday".
4. Members of the Japanese group had arranged to hold a workshop on Toy Fruit-Making for unemployed women. Donated funds were used to assist in transporting these ladies to the conference venue. The Japanese group brought all the materials needed with them. These learners will be teaching others how to make the fruit. ALL-SA believes that this type of toy-making is a viable income-generating initiative.

These special happenings truly reflect the spirit of the 10<sup>th</sup> International Toy Library Conference

Although the African storyteller that was expected at the **Closing Ceremony** had transport problems, the allocated time flew by as gifts were handed out to the organising committee, members of the ITLA committee and others that had helped with aspects of the conference. The gift, the same as the ones given to the presenters, was a ceramic plate (and stand) with an African design on the outer edge and the conference logo in the centre of the plate – a beautiful memento of the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference. We all sang the “It is Growing – Toy Library” song.

Then came the moment when the announcement was made that France would host the next International Toy Library Conference in 2008 – the venue would be Paris. Cindy Piété, the President of ALF, the French Toy Library Association, presented a gift to the South Africans before receiving the Rope of Flags – that has a flag for each of the previous 10 countries that hosted the International Toy Library Conferences. With that, the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference was declared closed.

There were many sad goodbyes – so many friends had been made and with the great distances involved, many friends would never meet again. However, with promises to keep in touch via email and sms, the delegates went their separate ways – some on the long journey home, others to start marvellous tours of South Africa before heading for their own countries.

ALL-SA has received emails and sms messages from around the world congratulating South Africa on a very enjoyable and successful conference. We would like to thank everyone for this feedback. Gayle and Cynthia would also like to thank all the delegates, too many to mention by name, that gave them beautiful gifts from their countries.

In conclusion, we would like to share some of the comments made in the evaluation forms:

#### Reasons given for why it is important to attend International Toy Library Conferences organised by ITLA

To gain and impart knowledge and information; to make new contacts; to meet old and new friends; to keep up to date with information; to be exposed to international views about toy libraries; it motivates; to confirm that one is on the right track; to hear about common problems and solutions; to compare different models; it raises the status and profile of toy libraries; it demonstrates cohesiveness and unity; one feels a member of a great family; it widens your vision; you can take stock of the progress of toy libraries internationally

#### The most popular presentations at the 2005 Conference

1. The Spirit of Play in a World of Professionalism and Specialities – Prof. Roy McConkey (N. Ireland)
2. Spreading the Joy of Play – Prof. Nylse Cunha (Brazil)
3. If you do it Right, the Funding will come – Eric Atmore (South Africa)
4. Korea’s Recognition of Toy Libraries – Sr. Genovefa Geonghee Shin (Korea)
5. Original Play – On Being a Child’s Playmate – Linda Stocks-Copley (South Africa)
6. Quality Assurance in Training – Quality Play Matters – Edwina Pateman (UK)

Although these 6 were mentioned most frequently, every one of the presentations was mentioned on someone’s evaluation form as being among the topics they liked best. Conference organisers always have the difficult decision of whether to limit the presentations to allow more time for each or to include all the abstracts. At this Conference, despite the frustrations of not being able to listen to every presentation due to the breakaway system, delegates obviously enjoyed the wide choice available to them.

In general, people valued the session on training; presentations on toys and toy libraries for children with special needs; hearing about specific toy libraries around the world. Several people indicated that they preferred to hear about a specific library than to listen to a summary of the work being done in a country/on a continent.

### Topics that should be included

Toys for gifted children; Time to play with toys; More on training

### Specific aspects of the Conference

Of the 121 delegates that handed in their questionnaires 3 felt that the conference had not met their expectations – at least 2 felt that the conference had exceeded their expectations; 6 were not satisfied with the organisation; 5 were not satisfied with the information; 15 were not satisfied with the timetable; 13 were not satisfied with the presentations – most of these wanted handouts, printed copies of papers or CDs; 5 didn't like the regional meetings.

### General Comments

More discussion and reflection on less topics; the programme was too long; International Conferences should be held more frequently; time should be made available for presentations to be repeated (as requested by delegates); it was good that delegates were able to give their own opinions during the plenary sessions, especially on the way forward for training and the public and political recognition of toy libraries.

### Some quotes

"It was a great pleasure to me to see and hear different languages, culture and exchange of ideas also inspired us."

"I am a better somebody pregnant with information going to deliver and implement with full force."

"This was a very interesting, motivating, stimulating and intense conference. KEEP IT UP, ITLA"

"This has been a wonderful conference and I am feeling privileged to have been part of it"

GOODBYE, SALANI KAHLE, TOTSIENS, SALANG GANTLE from South Africa

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE CONFERENCE (see website)