



OMEP World Assembly and Conference

Bologna, Italy
July 14-18, 2025



The Hartzman International Conference Travel Award enables SoE graduate students to present their work at international conferences. It is made possible through generous support from Marlene Hartzman.



Global Engagement Office
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

HARTZMAN AWARD HIGHLIGHT

YUNXUAN SUN

REHABILITATION PSYCHOLOGY & SPECIAL EDUCATION

Attending the 2025 OMEP World Assembly and Conference was an inspiring and rewarding experience. This year's theme, *Arts and Cultures in Early Childhood Education: Play, Expression, Participation*, deeply resonated with my research on improving play and social skills for children with disabilities. My presentation on Sibling-mediated LEGO play on social interactions for autistic children received warm encouragement and insightful feedback from international and domestic audiences. Thoughtful suggestions and inspiring perspectives not only affirmed the value of my current work but also opened up exciting new research directions. I am now developing a new study that aims to enhance the social-emotional skills of autistic children through family-centered brick play (e.g., LEGO play), following professional training provided to family members. This new project will adopt a community-based research (CBR) approach, engaging autistic children and their families not only as participants but also as co-researchers, actively shaping the design, implementation, and evaluation of the project.

This conference also provided meaningful opportunities for professional networking. I was fortunate to connect with several faculty members and graduate students from universities across China (e.g., East China Normal University, Zhejiang Normal University), and our discussions have already sparked possibilities for future collaboration in cross-cultural research. Moreover, I had the honor of meeting members of the OMEP Committee, who kindly invited me to join their regional committee in North American, allowing me to engage more actively in advocacy and international cooperation within early childhood education.

Additionally, having the opportunity to experience Italy's rich history and vibrant culture was eye-opening. This cultural immersion broadened my global perspective and inspired me to think more deeply about the role of cultural context in shaping inclusive and child-centered education practices. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Hartzman family, and to the School of Education's Dean's office and the Global Engagement Office for helping to make travel to this important conference possible.

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