Educating Children
for **Democracy**

Child-Centered Practices

The ISSA network began in 1994 as a project serving 5,000 preschool children and families in 15 Central and Eastern European and former Soviet countries and has grown to serve well over 1 million children and families in 27 countries—and it is still growing!

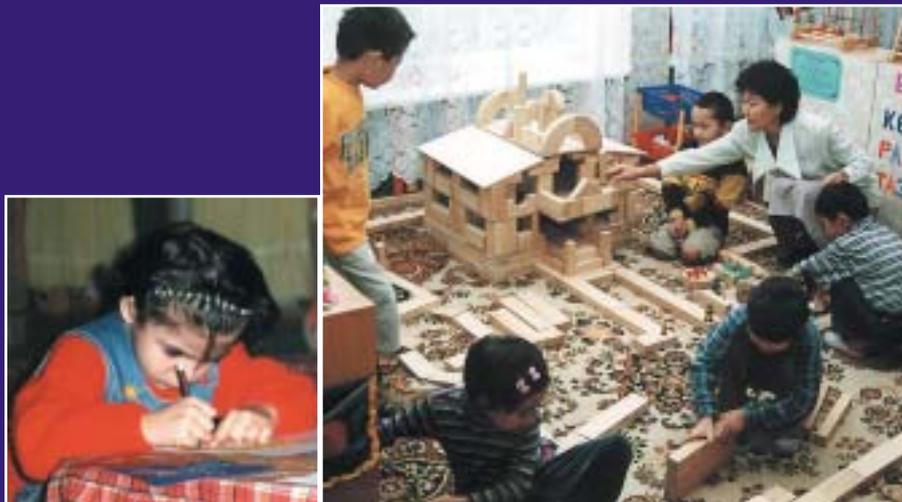# Table of Contents

Welcome

Welcome to the third issue of *Educating Children for Democracy* the journal of the International Step by Step Association. This issue brings together nine original articles from Central and Eastern Europe, South Eastern Europe, Europe, countries of the former Soviet Union and Central Asia, sharing important work of our members and partners who engage in child-centered early childhood initiatives with a focus on family and community involvement. Our network began in 1994 as a project serving 5,000 preschool children and families in 15 Central and Eastern European and former Soviet countries and has grown to serve well over 1 million children and families in 27 countries—and it is still growing!

Many of the articles in this issue are drawn from presentations made at the 3rd annual ISSA General Assembly Conference, held in Riga, Latvia, in December 2001, which brought together more than 120 early childhood experts and program managers from 36 countries. This conference marked the first time that participants from Western Europe and New Zealand joined and enriched this annual event with their expertise and experiences; and it was an important turning point for the ISSA network and encouraged us to keep inviting new members to join us.

As part of the December event, ISSA's members discussed and accepted a three-year strategic plan that focuses on developing wider membership and deepening our program activities in several areas.

Through the activities of ISSA's *Network Division* we seek to link communities of early childhood professionals from developing and newly democratic countries where our network is active, with early childhood experts worldwide in a dynamic network. Our plans over the next three years include:

- Developing a wider membership base;
- Developing *Educating Children for Democracy* into a self-sustaining publication that is accessible to early childhood professionals in local languages;
- Supporting member participation in international conferences;
- Developing ISSA's annual conference as a professional development and

Illustrations by Miha Zabukov

exchange opportunity;

- Establishment of advocacy activities to promote our fundamental beliefs in the rights of individual children to have support to reach their full potential.

ISSA's *Program Division* will focus on refining and spreading the Step by Step philosophy through implementation of programs with our network and in partnership with others. These activities will include:

- Extending and strengthening current Step by Step projects and extending to new countries, including this year Tajikistan and possibly Uzbekistan;
- New initiatives in the area of inclusive education, teacher training (higher education) and community-based parent programming;
- Continuation of our partnership projects. This year ISSA is delighted to be a partner on our first European Union project initiated by the Public Community Soros Educational Step by Step Center in Kazakhstan which will develop models of inclusive education in Central Asia;
- Updating and reprinting Step by Step core manuals and new publications;
- Offering professional development training to early childhood development professionals within as well as outside our network;
- Implementing new Step by Step teacher certifica-

tion standards as a tool to insure program quality.

Implementation of the new plan also requires changes in our structure. In February 2002, ISSA opened a new regional coordinating office in Budapest, which will facilitate networking in the region where our programs are most active, and we moved our base office to a new address in the Netherlands. To strengthen our connections and activities in Europe, I have moved from New York to Europe, where I will be based primarily in Budapest as the new coordinating office takes shape. We have also hired an administrative assistant and will be hiring a Network Manager to facilitate our activities. Together we will offer to our old and new members a range of professional services and network opportunities.

We invite interested individuals and organizations to explore our new and growing network and to join us in pursuit of our vision: an open society where the entire community helps each child to reach his or her full potential.

We welcome you!

Sarah Klaus
Executive Director
International Step by Step Association

Children and Families

Two Parents' Views on Child-Centered Practices in Croatia: Step by Step in My Child's Classroom

by Mirjana Crnac, mother of a fourth grader

The first day my daughter Jelena came home very lighthearted and she shouted right from the entrance door:

"Mummy, it was the best school day ever! You see, we have decided on our Class Constitution!

We have all been involved equally and we have decided on rules about our behavior in the classroom. Everybody had the possibility to express his or her ideas and we all decided to obey our rules. We even decided not to change our Constitution for at least three months. Every student very ceremonially signed our Constitution."

I was very glad to see my child so very happy and satisfied about school, but I did not pay special attention to these facts. I have to admit that the story about the Constitution was not very clear to me nor to Jelena's father. But that is life.

The next morning Jelena went to school very happy and she kept saying how she

liked it because they worked in groups—helping each other in the group and also competing with other groups. She came home lighthearted again and she had some news:

"You know, Mum, we shake hands now every morning when we come to school and we say how nice it is to see one another. We have really become friends. Even Darko has become a good boy and he abides by the Constitution."

At that point I became interested. What is Jelena talking about so very excitedly? Ever since the beginning of school she kept talking about Darko—that Roma boy, who managed to make all the students and their teacher "crazy" with his behavior, fighting, lack of learning and obedience. And now she comes home telling us that Darko is a "really nice boy" —that other students have changed their attitude towards him, that he partici-

> "I have become very much interested in my daughter's school events and I helped her with some mini-projects. As a result, we have become even closer to one another."

pates in designing centers, etc. What is going on in that school? My curiosity grew bigger and bigger.

Jelena could hardly wait to go to school. And she stayed there longer then she used to. She said she was working on a "mini-project"?! I have become very much interested in my daughter's school events and I helped

her with some mini-projects. As a result, we have become even closer to one another. Even her father was not left aside. He very gladly participated in designing picture books, water research, etc.

And what was the "catch" in these positive

changes? I found it out at the next parents' meeting, and I have to say it turned out to be a pleasant surprise. I have

never ever participated in a better and more dynamic parents' meeting. It was not the classic one that can be rather rigid. It included the pleasant participation of parents and students. Parents learned a lot about our children during games we played (and we played the whole meeting!). We learned how to understand them better, how to help them to become more successful in their tasks at school. And children saw their parents in whole different light—they felt closer to them. They saw their parents ready to play and help them with their tasks and problems.

One change was evident at the first sight—the classroom did not look the same. It was no longer a classic classroom. Students and their teacher arranged different centers in the room (Writing Center, Art Center, Math Center and Science Center). Everything was within the students' reach. Benches were arranged differently, and there were mini-projects exhibited on the walls (they really served as reports on students' research and the new knowledge gained from it). In the Writing Center they proudly exhibited their first joint work—a picture-book, "Pero's Group"— and in the Science Center there was a classroom pet, a happy hamster!

What has really happened there? My child is in a Step by Step classroom! I am glad, and she is delighted. We have become much closer, we do some tasks together, we are more sincere. Jelena talks about her school days, her results are getting better all the time, and she goes to school happily.

That is other parents' opinion too. And what about her teacher? If it is she or her students who go to school with higher expectations and satisfaction you cannot tell. But you can tell for sure that she has infected us with Step by Step ideas: And we the parents give her full support for that kind of work.

The Satisfied Parent's Perspective

by Smiljana Vranich, mother of a second grader

When my son was a first grader I asked him about his day at school and he responded in a somewhat unusual way:

"Super," he said. "We started with morning meeting by telling what happened to us yesterday. While doing so we sat on the carpet, right on the floor. And after that everyone picked the Center he or she wanted to be in and learn in a group. I decided on Math Center."

"Have you been learning Math for the whole day?"

"No, not at all. Once you are through Math you can change to another Center. You rotate throughout the day and in the end you have done a whole lot of subjects."

I was very curious to see what this was about and I looked at his copybook. Everything was there —drawings, numbers, letters—everything that I would expect
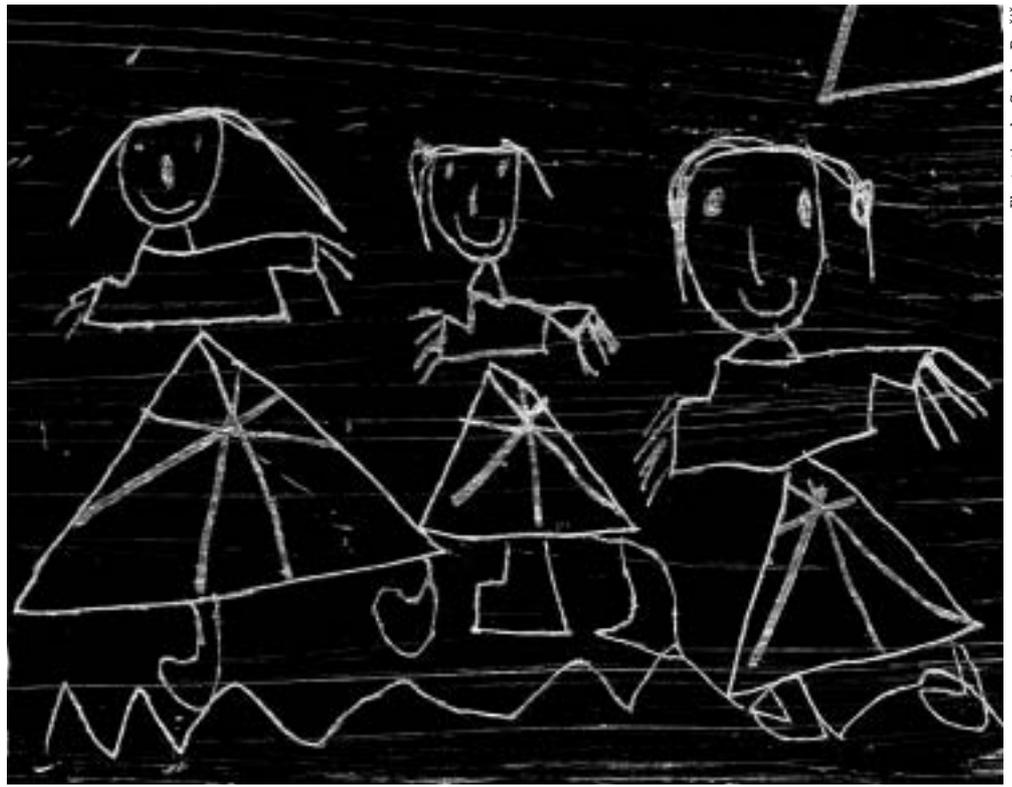
Illustration by Sandra Boršić

> "I strongly support this way of working with children because it reduces fears of failure, strengthens self-esteem, and makes children more open to communication."

to be there with a standard way of teaching. But I understood that he had acquired a whole lot of information with no stress at all. The curriculum had been tailored to his individual interests and abilities. Working in small groups can motivate students and improve their communication skills. Sometimes they find something to be "dull" and "complicated," but I have noticed their patience in solving more complex tasks.

This way of learning also changes parent-child relations. It introduces more conversation; more suggestions come from the child; and there are more possibilities to solve specific problems. To make a long story short, we are ready to be of the same mind about whatever situation we have with our child. And that is the way to improve his self-reliance in resolving problems he might have in everyday life, in school and elsewhere. If we forget something we have agreed upon, our child will remind us by saying, "That is not what we have decided!" We have to respect the agreement—both parties should. I know that you will say it is not easy—not at all. It takes lot of patience and presence of mind. Yes, but you will see your child's developing sense of responsibility. I strongly support this way of working with children because it reduces fears of failure, strengthens self-esteem, and makes children more open to communication.

Parental Involvement in the Step by Step Program in Kyrgyzstan

by A. N. Tentimisheva, Teacher, Department of Primary and Pre-School Education, Kyrgyz State Pedagogical University named after I. Arabaev

Background

When Kyrgyzstan achieved its independence, political, social, and economic reforms were initiated that necessitated changes to the Republic's educational system as well. The goals of these educational reforms were to create various types of educational institutions that could satisfy parents' demands for quality education and incorporate child-oriented pedagogical methods. The Republic's laws and policies[i] provided a vehicle to change kindergartens and primary schools so as to better orient them to the family, the major customer and consumer. In this changing climate various regions of the Kyrgyz Republic have begun implementing the international educational program Step by Step over the past seven years. This article reports on the results of an evaluation of the quality and type of parental involvement that has occurred in Step by Step schools during this time. Through the experiences accumulated and observations made, one can see how this program is being adopted in our Republic.

Methods

The evaluation team was a partnership between the Kyrgyz State Pedagogical University and teachers, principals, directors, and educators at kindergartens and schools across the Republic.[ii] Data collection and analysis were carried out during 2000 – 2001. The research protocol consisted of the following steps:

- Selecting groups/classes to participate, taking into account their location (i.e., urban/rural);
- Conducting interviews with principals and pedagogues of educational establishments;
- Collecting data from parents in various regions using questionnaires.

Interviews with Principals and Pedagogues

Interviews were conducted in three secondary schools and three kindergartens, including the participation of their principals, 15 teachers of junior grades, 12 educa-

Illustrations by Ekaterina Klančišar

tors, and 138 parents. The heads of these educational establishments were asked, "How does your school/kindergarten involve parents in their child's education?" Some of the answers included:

- providing parents with the opportunity to get acquainted with school activities at any time convenient for the parents;
- conducting seminars for parents on subjects they are interested in;
- involving parents and their children in various sporting events and festivals;
- recruiting parents for participation in decision-making committees or councils;
- requesting parents' advice, input, etc.

According to the parents, they were reluctant at first to participate in the various school events. This difficulty may be attributed to the fact that under the traditional system of education, pedagogues chose a haughty attitude when communicating with parents, not counseling or proposing, but instructing and acting as judges. This approach led to distancing parents from a school or a kindergarten. Nowadays parents see that their participation in their children's education is paying off; so parents are more willing to meet their schools half-way.

School administrators and teachers had to make a great effort in order for parents to accept the Step by Step program. At the beginning, they equipped the Step by Step groups/classes with the necessary educational materials.

Then they conducted a workshop for parents — in a non-traditional format — that demonstrated how the activity centers operate. The children were unreserved, confident, and proud of the fact that their mothers and fathers helped organize and participated in the work of the centers together with them. Parents were impressed by the changes in their children.

During our research, pedagogues in junior grades and kindergarten educators answered questions clarifying the form and content of their interactions with parents, children, and volunteers within the Step by Step framework. Respondents noted that they focus on studying their pupils' families, ascertaining the parents' background and level of education, clarifying who shares leisure time with the child, finding out the parents' opinion about the character of their child, and the most effective family child-rearing methods. Pedagogues acquire all this information by visiting and observing families and by designing and using questionnaires. Then the information they receive is written down on a card — a "passport" for each family. This passport system promotes an individualized approach to their work with families.

Interviews with primary school and kindergarten teachers solicited data that characterized the extent to which families were involved in the Step by Step programs at six schools in different regions of Kyrgyzstan. These data are summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1

Type of Parent Activity	Number of Schools	Average %	Participation Range
Participate in classroom activities	6	59%	10%–80%
Help with financing	6	47%	10%–100%
Help organizing repair work	5	89%	70%–100%
Make furniture or materials	6	25%	10%–50%
Organize various activities	5	18%	10%–30%
Make outdoor equipment	3	16%	10%–30%
Help find other funding	4	32%	10%–100%

Interviews with Parents

Interviews with parents also provided evidence of the positive effects of the Step by Step program. Parents reported taking an interest in the results of the educational and development work of the educational establishment, monitoring the success of their children's studies and acquisition of various skills, and their children's personality development as a whole. **Table 2** summarizes the areas in which parents noted changes in

The heads of these educational establishments were asked, "How does your school/kindergarten involve parents in their child's education?"

their children's development.

During interviews parents demonstrated that they were knowledgeable about the forms, methods, and contents of the pedagogical work of the schools and assessed it positively. Some quotations from parents characterize their experience with the Step by Step program in the Kyrgyz Republic:

"A very strong program." —B.K. Mamytov

"My child became more organized; great progress within seven to eight months." —L. Ybysheva

"My child's outlook has broadened; he began dancing, he speaks Kyrgyz." —V.T. Orozov

"My daughter developed logical thinking, is striving to learn something new; she became more communicative and developed." —V.V. Cherevko

"A very interesting, intense program." —U. Tapaeva

Conclusion

Based on the research, a few overall observations can be made:

- The orientation of the educational system has shifted, i.e., the creation of a broad, enlightened array of services is optimizing the network of educational establishments that can meet the current and prospective needs of Kyrgyzstan.

- Positive changes for children take place where pedagogical collectives and educational establishments build friendly, trustworthy relations with parents based on the ideas of child-oriented pedagogy, provide help to families to promote their children's cultural and spiritual development, and strengthen mutual understanding between parents and children.

- Those educational establishments that profoundly

Table 2

Aspect of Child Development	% Parents Noting Change
Overall development improved	99.3%
Level of speech improved	89.1%
Relations with adults improved	38.4%
Relations with peers improved	29.0%
Broadened outlook	13.8%
Greater independence gained	8.7%
Creative skills developed	2.2%

and systematically study the families of their pupils and treat parents with delicacy and respect attain positive results.

Today, educational establishments working with the Step by Step methodology are guided by these parameters. Their success is predicated on the active involvement of parents in the educational process, giving birth to a truly creative union of pedagogues and parents who are mutually interested in bringing up and educating healthy, spiritually rich, and intellectually developed members of society.

[i] The Law on Education, the Concept of Pre-School Education, the Regulations on Pre-School Establishments, the State Standards on Development and Education, Standard Programs, etc. There are discussions underway about passing a new Law of Education.

[ii] The evaluation team was comprised of the following members:

The Kyrgyz State Pedagogical University (KSPU) named after I. Arabaev–Head of the Department of Primary and Pre-School Education, T. A. Orusbaeva; teacher, A. N. Tentimisheva

School principals: Chui oblast, Lebedinovka secondary school 2, D. K. Kasymbaeva; Bishkek (city) secondary school 66, M. M.Yakupova; Bishkek (city) secondary school-gymnasium 69, B. D. Kupeshov

Teachers of junior school: Chui oblast, Lebedinovka secondary school 2; Bishkek (city) secondary school 66; Bishkek (city) secondary school-gymnasium 69—A. K. Bokosheva, G. Khalbekova, N. Sultanbaeva, G. Akjolova

Directors of kindergartens: Chui oblast, Kaliniskoe (village) kindergarten "Alyonushka," N. N. Sheludko; Bishkek (city) Author's Physics-Mathematics School-Lyceum 61, E. G. Tarlykova; Bishkek (city) crèche-kindergarten 162 "Azem," N. A Kasymova.

Educators of kindergartens: Chui oblast, Kalininskoe (village) kindergarten "Alyonushka," E. I. Lapustina, M. N. Voroshilova,; Bishkek (city) Author's Physics-Mathematics School-Lyceum ? 61, S. P Makarova, T. A. Ogorodnikova, Yu. V Kudryashova, I. Gorina, N. D. Manzhula, B. I. Asanbaeva, E.A. Sirotina
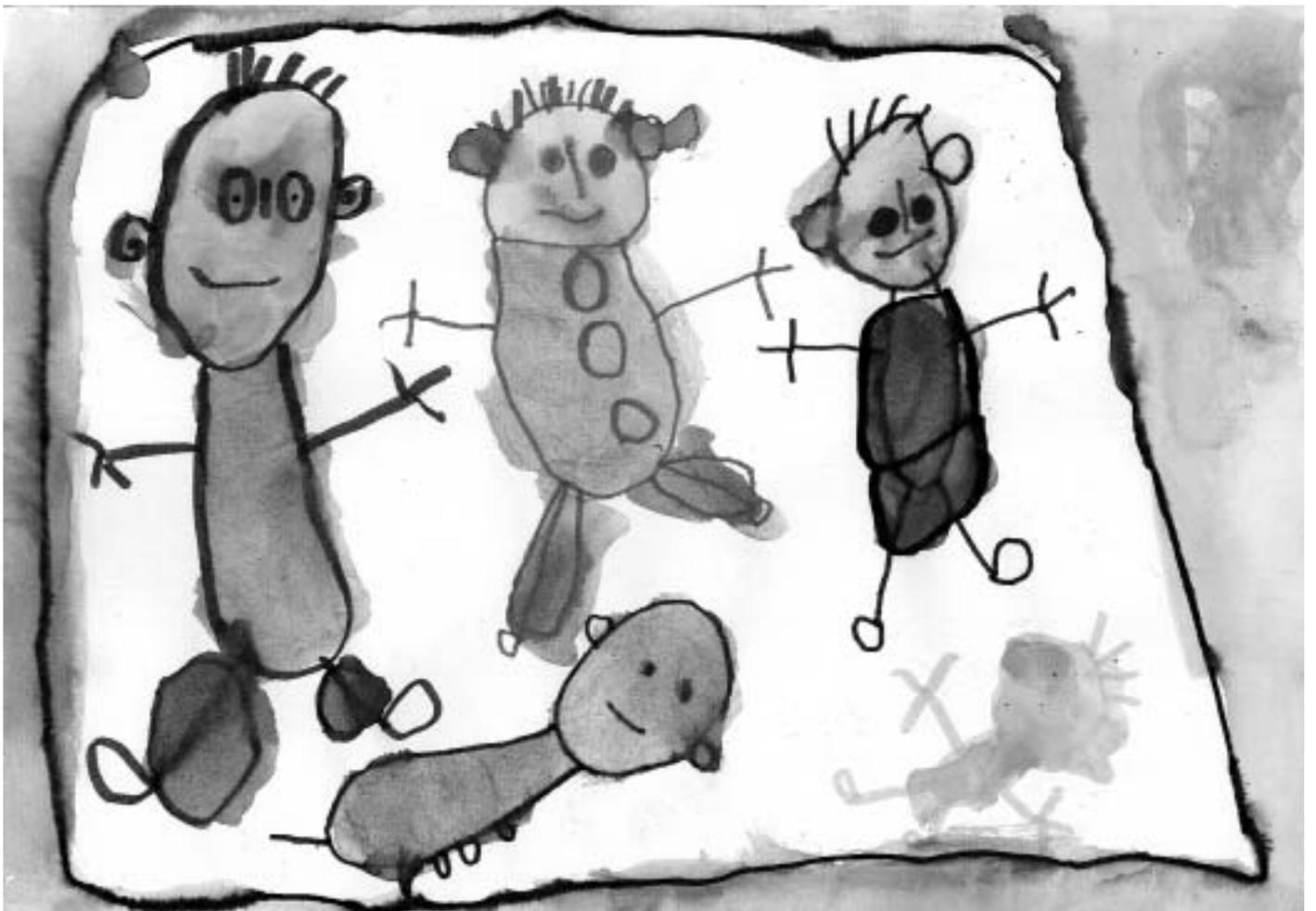
Classroom Practices
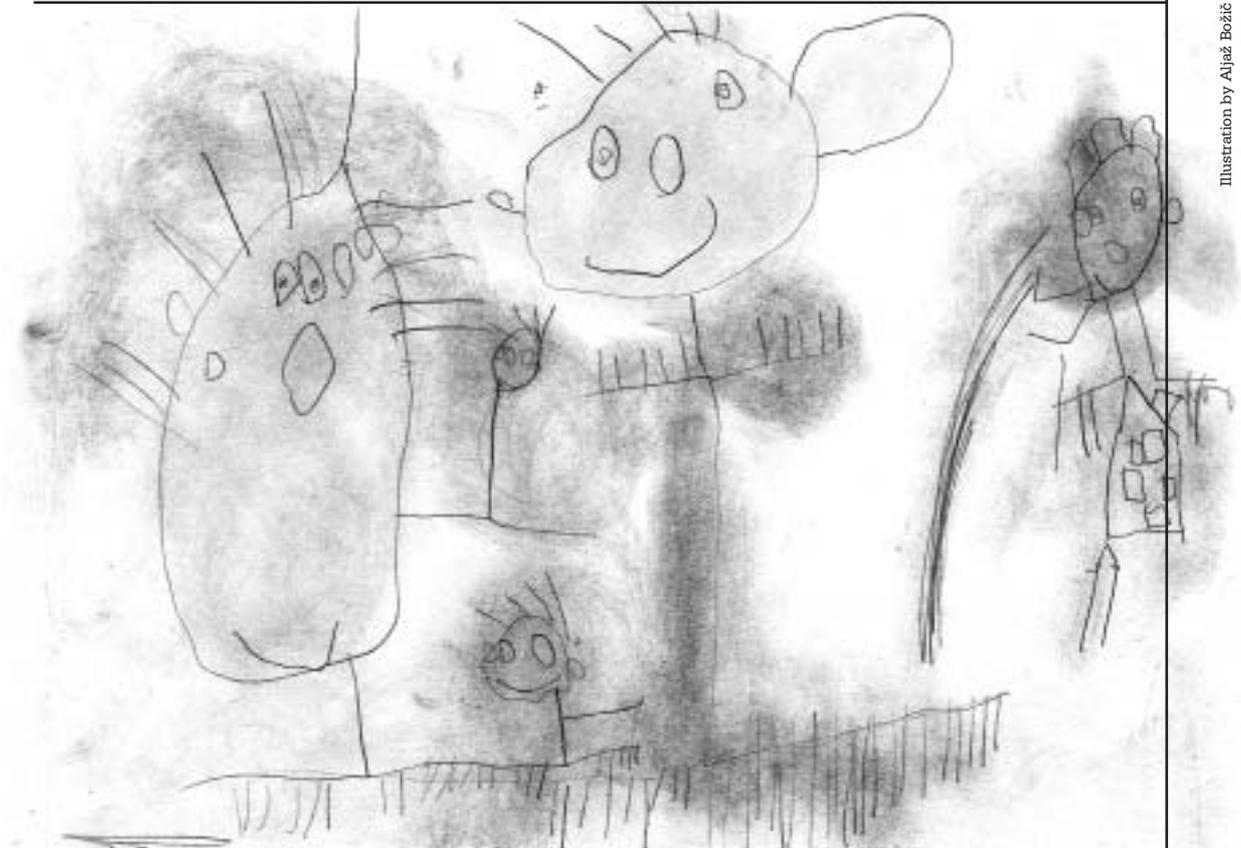
Step by Step: The New Role of the Teacher

by Sergey V. Zaitsev, Master Teacher Trainer, Russian Foundation Soobschestvo

Russia's system of education is undergoing a change nowadays. The change is so profound that it cannot but affect the goals, values, methods, and means of education. It inevitably has to do with a restructuring of teachers' professional mentality, as most teachers were professionally trained within a totally different educational system and naturally have certain pedagogical attitudes and stereotypes.

One cannot say that all of those attitudes and stereotypes are erroneous or incorrect. The problem is that that many of them were generated by the old, traditional educational model, and therefore they inhibit the transition to new systems of teaching and educating. That is why, when we start working with practitioners who want to study an innovative educational model, we always recommend that they "renounce former stereotypes, even good ones." It is obvious that this recommendation is more easily pronounced than followed. It is known that people's minds change very slowly, especially if common practice and

> Practitioners who want to study an innovative educational model, [should] "renounce former stereotypes, even good ones."

years'-long professional experience has formed them. Education is itself in the conservative sphere of society because its mission is to "conserve" the accumulated experience of mankind and "forward" it to the generations that follow.

Any change is a long and dramatic process that comes up against opposition and lack of understanding, goes through ups and downs, and produces new ideas

Any change is a long and dramatic process that comes up against opposition and lack of understanding, goes through ups and downs, and produces new ideas.

followed by new problems. In this article I attempt to analyze the process of change in the professional mentality of preschool teachers involved in the new program, Step by Step.

The changes occurring in Russia these days are characterized by a growing respect for the rights and freedoms of a person, a child being a person no less than an adult. Free choice and individual self-expression are becoming priority values of the new educational system. Also, research convincingly shows that when the child *independently* interacts with the environment, actively experiments with things and phenomena, and independently gains experience instead of assimilating someone else's (even though it may be more accurate), the knowledge thus gained is the most meaningful and most profound.

All the above leads us to different principles of educational ideology (compared to the traditional ones), which include the following:

- *The child learns better and gains more knowledge in the process of an independent interaction with the environment;*

- *The most valuable aspect of the child's development is gaining personal experience.*

Specific educational programs are being designed in accordance with this ideology. One of them is *Step by Step*, a program that is being actively developed in Russia, thanks to the comprehensive support of the Open Society Institute (the Soros Foundation). It is evident that this program requires a serious transformation of the traditional role of a classroom teacher. Essentially, this is laid out in **Table 1**.

In the traditional approach, the main function of the teacher is *a direct organizer of the children's activity*, in the course of which the teacher passes on to the children *adult experience*. Unlike that, the new approach assigns a totally different role to the teacher. This new role involves the creation of a learning environment that gives all the children the chance to realize their individual interests and needs and the opportunity for independent activity and effective accumulation of *personal experience*.

Even a very short comparative analysis of the traditional and non-traditional roles of a preschool teacher shows how different they are and how great a change of pedagogical attitudes and stereotypes it requires to shift from one role to the other.

Let us look at a few characteristic examples of the manifestation of the new role in the professional activity of Step by Step teachers working in Russia.

- Respecting each child's individual needs and interests, **the teacher recognizes the children's right to decide what they want to do and how to do it**. The

Table 1

Traditional role	Non-traditional role
1. The teacher is the central figure in the classroom.	**1.** The child is recognized as the central figure in the classroom.
2. The teacher ensures the most complete assimilation of given knowledge and skills, equally for all children.	**2.** The teacher encourages an enrichment of each child's personal experience.
3. The teacher acts as a mentor and supervisor.	**3.** The teacher acts as an observant facilitator, revealing and developing each child's individuality.

teacher creates in the classroom a comfortable, varied, and dynamic developmental environment, which is filled with a broad range of activities and materials, and helps each child make an independent and conscious choice. In this approach the notion of a

consciously on the basis of personal characteristics. In addition, it gives children the possibility of really influencing the process of learning, which makes them very active and interested learners who are the true *subject* of that process.
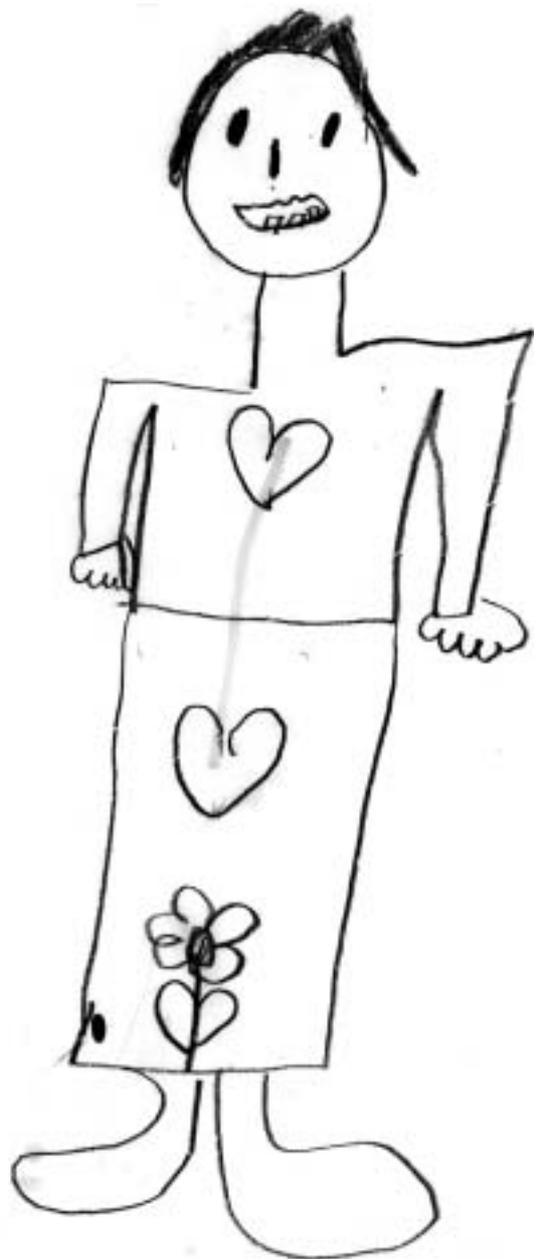
model as something static and unique (that is, allowing only one correct behavior or action) gives way to a notion of a *norm*, which is a range of equally possible behaviors and actions. Knowing such norms, the child will become integrated into human society, which includes broad diversity within the whole. And, what's even more important, the child will be able to find a place in that culture independently and

- Gradually recognizing the role of children's independent activity, which is important for the accumulation of their personal experience, **the teacher starts regarding the child's independent exploration as an effective form of learning**. In the course of such exploration the child acquires meaningful and personally significant knowledge and skills. Observing the children's activity, the teacher offers help and support only when is indispensable for a child's further development at the moment.

- Similarly, **the teacher starts regarding children's free play as an extremely serious and useful activity**, a form of experimentation with the environment, which is a *"triumphant or inspired exploration, in which psychological functions are exposed in all their possibilities"* (H. Wallon, 1967). However, this is possible only under certain conditions, that is, when the children's play is truly independent and free. In order to become a true means of creative self-realization and fully carry out its developmental function, children's play should be free from adult-imposed topics and regulation of actions.

- A certain standard of being *"good"* is characteristic of the traditional approach. Accordingly, good behavior is an accurate and meaningful adherence

Give children the possibility of really influencing the process of learning, and make them very active and interested learners.

to the teacher's initiatives, that is, a "good" child is *dutiful and obedient*. A Step by Step teacher, on the contrary, encourages the children to develop the ability to put forth their own initiatives, to set goals, and to work consistently toward attaining them. Active behavior is regarded as both the end goal and the means of the teacher's professional activity. For such a teacher, **"being good" is associated with being a creative and self-directed doer**, capable of clearly formulating and defending one's own interests, making independent and responsible decisions, and building cooperative relations with an adult.

- In order to develop as a personality, demonstrate individual interests, and put forth initiatives, children should feel an atmosphere of social and emotional comfort. Such an environment is ensured by genuinely respecting each child's individual interests and is achieved by positively supporting their ideas and consistently boosting their self-con-

fidence. That is why **it is so important for the teacher to note the children's successes and emphasize them in planning further work**.

ISSA file photograph

- Observing the children and working toward the greatest possible development of their individuality, **the teacher concentrates primarily on the process of their activities** in which each child's individuality is best expressed. A departure from the requirement that each child assimilate a single model—that is, offering the same skills or knowledge for all—stimulates the teacher to assess each child's progress on an individual scale and to see the children's achievements as personal ones—ones reflecting the dynamics of their personal growth. In this sense, the comparison of a specific child's personal stage of development with some age norm, some "statistical average" standard, does not play a decisive role for the teacher, as is the case in the traditional system of education. A Step by Step teacher has to create conditions for all children, regardless of their differing pace of development, to effectively enable them to accumulate their own personal experience and to acquire profound knowledge and vital skills. This is possible only when **the teacher practices an individualized approach to every child**, not just to those who "lag behind" or are "problem children."

It is obvious that this new, non-traditional role of a teacher requires great flexibility and the ability to improvise and constantly reflect on the changes going on. Teachers need to learn to grow along with the children and with each child individually.

The Use Of The Child's Experience In Solving Mathematical Tasks

by Jana Coufalova, Department of Mathematics, University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic

One principle of the curriculum focused on the child is individualization of the educational process. The need for individualization stems from the necessity to respect many individual characteristics of the child. "Individualization enables harmonious development of the intellectual, emotional, creative, moral, and other components of the child's personality. It takes into consideration that each child has different features of character, temperament, interests, and differently structured components of intelligence."[1] Individualized education respects the fact that children enter the educational process with unique abilities, attitudes, and experiences.

Photograph courtesy of Programul Educational Pas cu Pas

Previous experience may be exploited in problem-solving and decision making. The influence of the child's experience may be positive; in which case, it allows for easier and faster acquisition of new knowledge. In some situations, however, prior experience may have had a negative impact, which will slow or even prevent the acquisition of new knowledge. The teacher should be able to use the positive influence of experience and minimize the impact of the negative experience. When teaching is well planned, we can try to identify what assists positive transfer and anticipate and emphasize it.

The transfer of the child's experience in solving mathematical tasks was researched with students from the Department of Primary Education (Faculty of Education, University of West Bohemia in Plzen) at the Elementary School in Plzen, which employs the Step by Step program[2] The research showed that the influence of experience is in some situations stronger than we would expect.

Using Experience to Complete a Division Problem

Ten-year-old pupils were given the following task: Replace the asterisks in the text with the numbers 5, 6, 7 and 37. Use each number only once.

*Snow White made * cakes for * dwarfs. Each dwarf got * cakes, and * cakes were left.*

The task has two correct solutions: 1) *Snow White made 37 cakes for 5 dwarfs. Each dwarf got 6 cakes, and 7 cakes were left.* 2) *Snow White made 37 cakes for 6 dwarfs. Each dwarf got 5 cakes, and 7 cakes were left.*

It is obvious from the numbers provided to fill in the blanks that this task is not concerned with division with a remainder. If it were, the remainder would be smaller than the divisor, but the numbers provided do not allow for this solution.

The task was part of a project about a journey of knights to rescue an imprisoned princess. Thus it was perceived as one of the tasks, and the pupils were not asked to pay special attention to this question. Otherwise they would likely have expected it to be tricky.

Out of 24 pupils not one solved the task correctly.

Let's analyze the pupils' mistakes and concentrate on the children's ways of thinking and reasoning. The mistakes can be divided into two groups.

• **The first group** of the pupils used only some of the offered numbers and either added other numbers or modified the text. Their solutions are of three types:

1) Some pupils started using the given numbers, and when they could not reach the correct result, they changed one number—e.g., Snow White made 37 cakes for 7 dwarfs. Each dwarf got 5 cakes and 2 cakes were left. (8 pupils). The pupils' reasoning is obvious from the following discussion with one pupil:

Petr: *First I put 7 for the number of dwarfs, as there were 7 of them in the fairy tale. Then I selected 37 and put it for the number of cakes made. There must be plenty of cakes, as they have to be divided among all the dwarfs. This is why I used the biggest number.*

Teacher: *How did you get the other numbers?*

Petr: *I divided 37 by 7 and looked for the nearest mul-*

Individualized education respects the fact that children enter the educational process with unique abilities, attitudes, and experiences.

tiple. It was 35. If I put 6 there, it would not agree.

Teacher: *The last number was not offered. Why did you not use the offered one?*

Petr: *It would not be correct. I figured that 5 x 7 = 35 and 37 – 35=2. Two are left. If I put 6 there, Snow White could not do it that way.*

One girl solved the task like this: *Snow White made 47 cakes for 7 dwarfs. Each dwarf got 6 cakes and 5 cakes were left.* Again, she first substituted 7 for the number of dwarfs, then used 5 and 6 and finally counted the overall number of cakes as 7 x 6 = 42, 42 + 5 = 47.

2) Another way was that pupils used only numbers 37 and 7 and "invented" the rest (5 pupils), e.g., *Snow White made 37 cakes for 7 dwarfs. Each dwarf got 1 cake and 30 cakes were left.* Let's look at Vera's reasoning:

Vera: First *I put 7 with dwarfs because I know the*

fairy tale. Then I wrote that Snow White made 37 cakes.

Teacher: *Why did you write this?*

Photograph by Jana Caufalov

Vera: *If I put 5 or 6 there, there would not be enough cakes for all the dwarfs. I wrote that each dwarf would get just one cake. The dwarfs are small, so one is enough for each of them.*

Teacher: *This is interesting. And why did you substitute 30 as the reminder?*

Vera: *I figured 1 x 7 = 7 and 37 – 7 = 30. Snow White put the 30 cakes on the table. Later she ate some of them and left some for visitors.*

3) One pupil made up his own story to be "mathematically correct," but he did not use the given numbers: *Snow White made 150 cakes for 30 dwarfs. Each dwarf got 5 cakes and 0 cakes were left.* His way is clear from the following interview:

Tomas: *I did not know how to substitute the offered numbers so I thought out my own numbers.*

Teacher: *And how did you start?*

Tomas: *With the number of the dwarfs. I wanted many dwarfs so I wrote 30 there.*

Teacher: *Do you know the fairy tale Snow White and Seven Dwarfs?*

Tomas: *No, I don't.*

Teacher: *And how did you continue?*

Tomas: *I wrote down that each will get 5 cakes. This could be enough for them. Then I multiplied 5 x 30. This gives 150, so I wrote that Snow White made 150 cakes. I did not want any leftovers, so the remainder is zero.*

• **The second group** of pupils used the given numbers, but the answers are not "mathematically correct." There were two such types of solutions.

1) *Snow White made 37 cakes for 7 dwarfs. Each dwarf got 5 cakes and 6 cakes were left.* (3 pupils).

It was obvious from discussions with the pupils that

they started with numbers 37 and 7. Then they calculated 27 ÷ 7 = 5. They got a remainder 2, but as they had been told to use only the numbers offered, they wrote 6 into the text.

2) *Snow White made 37 cakes for 7 dwarfs. Each dwarf got 6 cakes and 5 cakes were left.* (7 pupils).

The pupils said that they did not understand the task. They multiplied 7 x 6 and got 42. In order to get 37, they took 5 from 42. As they used all the given numbers, the pupils considered their result right.

With the exception of Tomas, who did not know the fairy tale, all the pupils started to solve the task by using 7 for the number of dwarfs. Their previous experience won over a mathematical approach. They did not doubt that they had done the problem right, even when they realized that their solutions were not "mathematically correct."

Using Experience to Estimate Size

Experience plays an important role when doing estimates. The same group of pupils as above was shown a picture of a building with several stories. There was a flag on the roof and a tree and a car next to the house. The pupils were asked to estimate the size of the flag in reality. The picture contained windows, doors, the tree, and the car so that these could be used by the pupils for the estimate.
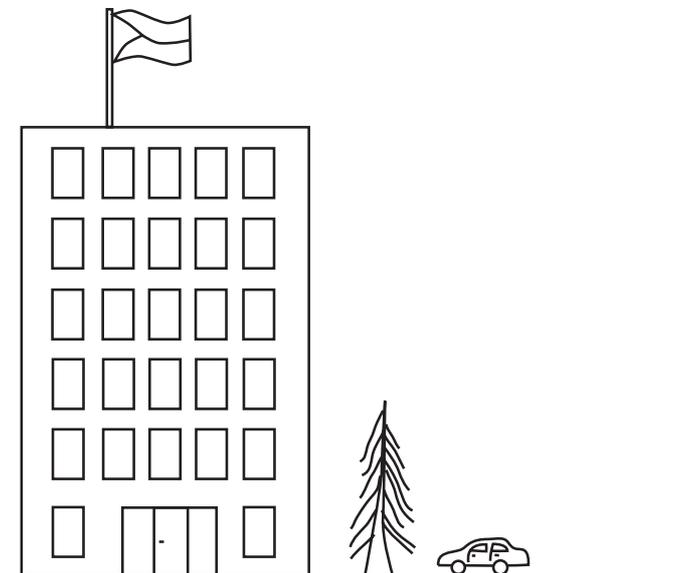
The solutions of the pupils were original and unique. Each pupil used different criteria. Some gave the size of the flag without comparing it with other objects. Several pupils offered numbers haphazardly, not reflecting reality.

Let's consider the correct estimates first. These can be divided according to the objects used for comparison.

1) Four pupils chose the car for comparison. They were inspired by the fact that the car was roughly the same length as the flag.

Jirka explained his solution: *The flag will be about 3.5 meters long. I know it from our car. Three meters is not enough for its length, four meters is too much.*

2) One pupil used rather complicated reasoning based on the heights of the tree and the stories of the building respectively.

Adam: *The tree in the picture reaches halfway up the second floor. This means that it is about six meters long. The width of the flag fits in the tree three times. I estimate it about 2 meters.*

3) An original method was used by Patrik, who used the length of the house.

Patrik: *I looked at the roof and the windows. The windows are very close to each other, and there is about a 2-meter space next to each of them. The length of the roof is then about 10 meters. The length of the flag fits there roughly three times. It will be a bit more than three meters.*

Patrik is a rather slow pupil but very practically oriented. His solution shows his skill at using his previous experience, which leads him to the correct use of mathematical operations.

4) Two pupils used the door for their estimates. The flag was 3 meters long according to them. They supposed its length to be identical with the width of the door. The door consisted of three parts, which could have influenced their estimate.

5) Four pupils used the height of the windows to estimate of the width of the flag. They were influenced by the almost identical measures of the windows. The pupils employed their experience and knowledge. They knew the average height of win-

dows and used this measure correctly. An interesting result was achieved by Jana.

Jana: *I think that the window is about 1.5 meters in height. The width of the flag seems to be a bit smaller, about 1.2 meters.*

All of the correct estimates show that the pupils have some experience with estimating lengths. Each pupil chose a certain familiar object in the picture whose size was known. The analysis reveals that each child has had different experiences with various objects, and they can exploit this experience when estimating the size of a new object. Such experience should be supported and developed.

Incorrect estimates were given by pupils who did not have an idea of how long things are and did not

Analysis reveals that each pupil has had different experiences. Such experience should be supported and developed.

have experience with units of length. Let's present two typical examples:

Mirka: *The length of the flag is about 3 cm, but because it waves, I added 5 mm.*

Michal: *The length of the flag will be about 1 meter. I estimate it from the height of the door; it could be 1 meter.*

Mirka perhaps did not read the task carefully and thus incorrectly estimated the size of the flag in the picture. Michal's incorrect solution revealed to the teacher that he had no idea of what 1 meter is, despite his ability to transfer various units of length into others.

Using Experience To Solve Word Problems

The last task was solved by groups of pupils within the project "Going for a Trip." The task was to complete the following text:

Our tourist group called . . . . decided to make a trip to . . . . in order to see . . . . The

club, to which our tourist group belongs, has . . . . members.

One bus holds 35 passengers. We had to order _____ buses. We collected . . . . crowns from each member. Altogether, we collected _____ crowns.

The trip from the clubroom to . . . . was . . . . kilometers long. The journey there and back was _____ km. We paid 12 crowns per 1 km for each bus. The whole journey for all the buses cost _____ crowns. The money collected was/was not enough. We had to collect/ return _____ crowns. The weather was wonderful, and we liked the trip.

The pupils could use any number they wanted into the dotted spaces; the data in the underlined spaces had to be calculated. The regional character of the task is obvious; therefore, we avoided an analysis of anything related to the actual place of living of the children and could focus on more general features of problem-solving.

We analyzed the responses from three viewpoints:
- whether the substituted numbers were realistic,
- whether the pupil's solution was correct,
- whether the pupils were able to use their geographical knowledge.

While selecting the amount of money to collect, there was a stormy discussion about what the money would be needed for. Basically, two approaches emerged: some pupils derived the price of the trip from the distance to the place of destination, another group of pupils substituted extremely low amounts. They supported their view as follows:

Jirka: *Our trip will cost only 5 crowns.[3] Everybody can give this sum, and so many friends of mine can go as well.*

Bara: *Our trip will cost 200 crowns. For those who will pay this sum, transportation, accommodation, and*

meals will be provided. It is better to return extra money than not to have enough.

Jirka: *The participants will buy everything by themselves on the spot.*

While Jirka based his answer on what he wanted to have happen, Bara seemed to have experienced trip preparations, and thus her thinking was very realistic.

There were big differences in substituting the distance. The children who either had already been to the place with their parents or could compare the unknown distance with a distance they knew filled in the blanks with correct data. All of these children preferred their own experience to the use of the map available.

Mathematical problem-solving was rather challenging for the pupils. They had difficulties looking for the relationships between the data, and they often segmented the text into simple tasks. Similar to their solving the Snow White task, they preferred using their experience to using a mathematical approach. To illustrate this, listen to Lukas' reasoning: *I crossed out 35 and wrote down that there will be 40 passengers in the bus. There are 40 of us, and so two buses were not necessary. We would pay too much, and the other bus would be almost empty. When I went for a trip with my dad and my younger brother, all three of us managed to sit on only two seats and did not mind it at all.*

The influence of previous experience is strong, especially with younger pupils. The examples we have used suggest that this factor is more important than the teacher often realizes. Although only a few examples of children's problem-solving are presented, they demonstrate the uniqueness of each child's thinking processes. Because each pupil has had different experiences, the teacher should leave enough space for the children to discuss them. The discussion enables reve-lation and possibly correction of experience. In addition, when offering our experience, we can help children to understand the world more easily. When employing children's experience, we can bring school and learning closer to real life.

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[2] All students trained at the Pedagogical Faculty at the University of West Bohemia for primary school teaching are acquainted with the principles and methods of the Step by Step program. The Faculty cooperates with the schools affiliated with this program. Some students go to these schools for assistantship practice and to carry out research for their theses.

[3] $1.00 equals approximately 37 crowns.

Introducing Books to Children

by Tatjana Vonta, Head, Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step, Slovenia, and Fanika Balic, Master Teacher Trainer, Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step, Slovenia

Illustration by Matic Košir

Introduction

Reading is one of the most important lifelong activities. Young children are connected with reading and books long before they actually know how to read. It starts when a child has the first book in his hand or when parents read to him from a book. It is a wonderful way for young children to spend time together with their parents. The interaction that is going on between a child and parent when they are reading together has some important components. One of them is predictability—as these activities usually occur on a regular schedule and follow a regular pattern of steps. Playfulness is evident as these activities are done for fun. Language is used to construct meaning and share ideas. The child gets opportunities to lead the activity, the parent is modeling language and reading behavior and together they develop their own jargon for many ideas. In this way parents intuitively use the "lab method" to teach their children about language, print, and books (Daniels, 1994, p. 37). A child understands that a book is connected with something pleasant for him and his important adults, something that makes them feel good. He understands the meaning of the word for an object long before he can say this word. Later he starts to understand that there are pictures and words in books and that they have some meaning. This is first step in developing reading abilities and love towards books.

STEPS IN INTRODUCING BOOKS TO CHILDREN

Introducing books to children and developing a love of books is a process in which adults help structure interactions and experiences that allow a child to pass through a series of developmental steps. This process can be understood within in the ERR (evocation, realization of meaning, reflection) framework (Steele, Meredith, & Temple, 1998).

Evocation Phase

In this phase we want a child to be actively engaged in recalling what he or she knows about a

There are several goals to introducing books to children:

- developing and reinforcing a love of books
- developing and reinforcing a culture of reading
- developing, reinforcing, and enriching speech, thinking, imagination, and creativity
- developing, reinforcing, and enriching emotions (recognition and expression of his own emotions and feelings, recognition of someone else's emotions and feelings)
- developing values and attitudes
- developing skills in how to use books and other printed materials as a source of information
- developing and encouraging freedom of expression, choice, independence and autonomy
- enabling and encouraging communication
- encouraging and developing literacy
- preparing the child for school and life

topic—encouraged to begin thinking about the topic they will be exploring in detail. The primary importance of this phase is to establish a base of personal knowl-

The child's point of view is not the same as that of an adult or a textbook point of view.... children raise their own answers to different questions.

edge and beliefs to which the new knowledge can be added, and to connect the new with the known. In this phase we also activate a child. Active engagement means that the child expresses knowledge and understanding through active thinking and speaking. The child's previously established construct for thinking about the topic is elicited. The child's point of view is not the same as that of an adult or a textbook point of view. In a group, children raise their own answers to different questions. Some of these ideas may be contradictory, and differences among ideas could lead children to ask themselves personal questions that are a powerful motivator for further activities.

The practice of introducing books to children at this phase contains several steps for teachers to accomplish:

1) *Introducing the covers, the title and authors of the text and illustrations.*

If they have encountered this author or illustrator in previous reading activities try to connect those experiences with the new one.

2) *Predicting the content.*

In this step we ask questions like "What is the content about?" "What is a book about?" "What will be going on in the book?" "Who will be the main character?" Together with those questions we need to give children opportunities to explain WHY do they think so?

3) *Looking at the illustrations and predicting the content according to the illustrations.*

Children foresee the events according to illustrations, they connect the text with pictures and ask themselves personal questions.

Realization of Meaning Phase

In this phase a child is coming into contact with new ideas from the text in the book. The task of this phase is to sustain the engagement and interest established in first phase. In addition, a child is building the bridges between known and new knowledge and in this way establishing new understanding. The teacher's role is to read the book with a sense of the dramatic and to create an exciting mood for reading and listening. He or she could read by candlelight, have quiet music as background, or use different kinds of visual tools to help the children focus on listening, etc.

Illustration by Anže Fujs

Classroom Tips for Developing Children's Reading Habits and Love of Books

- Read to children every day. A day without reading is like a day without sun.
- Read and talk about books with love and affection.
- Modeling is the best way to develop a love of books and reading.
- Set up a reading center in the classroom, so children will have the opportunity to independently choose their own books.
- Put all books within children's reach.
- Offer different types of books (topics, size, form, covers, etc.).
- Enrich the reading center with cassettes, radio, journals and other print materials, as well as material for making books.
- Be sure that books are individually appropriate for each child in your group (take into consideration the child's age, developmental level and interests).
- Be sure that in the classroom there are enough books for all the children.
- Create an exciting mood for reading.
- Reading should always be rewarding and fun.
- Encourage children's creativity with various responses to literature.
- Organize meetings with writers and illustrators.
- Organize festivals of readings, introducing favorite books.
- Create a bank of new words.
- Make books with children—those "made" books are equal to other books in the reading center.
- Visit a community or primary school library.
- Visit a bookstore.
- Involve parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters of children in classroom activities connected with books. As a teacher you can model how to read a book with children at home.

Illustration by Karin Perić

Reflection Phase

In this phase children are expected to express in their own words the ideas they encountered. Children will remember best what they understand in their own context, in their own words; that is why it is necessary to have a discussion after reading. Teachers can ask questions like "How did you find the book and why?" "Did the book remind you of anything and why?" "Did anything take you by surprise and why?" "Which character did you like and why?" The teacher should encourage the child's self-expression in those answers. Exchanging ideas among children expands their vocabulary and exposes them to varying schemata to consider as they build their own. This is a time of change and reconceptualization in a child's learning process. In a school setting, this phase brings each child into a position where he or she is exposed to multiple ways of integrating new information and more flexible constructs that can be applied in the future. Professional teachers will create all kinds of opportunities for children to use and apply these new ideas in creative ways in all kinds of activities—from different developmental and subject-matter domains—and in this way connect all of them in a holistic approach.

Evocation
1. Introducing the book
2. Predicting the content
3. Looking at the illustrations

Realization of meaning
4. Reading/listening

Reflection
5. After-reading discussion
6. Connecting with other activities

Books as a Bond Between Parents and School

Parents are very often confused about what kinds of books are appropriate for their child; some parents don't have the opportunity to buy or rent books and some of them don't know how important books are in a child's development and in his life. That's why one very important goal of every teacher and school is to inform

parents about the benefits that books have for the child's development and life.

A child will learn to love books if he or she lives with them every day.

At schools we could easily arrange all kinds of opportunities (e.g., information desk, letter for parents, periodic memoranda, etc.) to share information about appropriate books for children at different developmental levels. Another very important role of the school is to create opportunities for parents to have easy access to these books. Arranging it so that parents together with their child could choose and borrow a book really brings books into their homes and encourages reading at home. Involving parents and other family members in different activities connected with books—like making books with children or reading stories at drop-out or pickup time—is also a good way to enrich family members with knowledge and experiences that cultivate a love of reading and books.

One popular tool for using books to create bonds between home and school used by our preschools are book backpacks. As part of our implementation of the Step by Step methodology, we began five years ago to develop different kind of backpacks (i.e., birthday backpack, grandparents backpack, ecological backpack, author's backpack, etc.). Usually the backpack includes: books for the child; a professional book or journal where parents can find interesting information about education, children's development and learning, care and health, etc.; a letter to the parents that explains the aim of the backpack (see sample on next page); a notebook for responses; and other interesting information. According the rules that children and teacher made together, these backpacks travel between homes and school regularly. In some groups, there is more than one backpack to give more opportunities for children to take these home. This initiative brings very good results. According to teachers, more parents started to read with their children more regularly. Children share a lot of ideas at school as they

read the same books at home and those ideas enriched their activities and creativity. According to parents, these backpacks have become an integral part of life in their homes, and they've started to read more professional literature too. These backpacks with books changed the children, parents, and the school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have to stress that a child will learn to love books if he or she lives with them every day; if adults know how vital it is to involve books in the child's everyday life and introduce books to children in a manner that takes into account his individual and developmental characteristics in the learning process.

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LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear parents!

We would like to share with your child and you a new initiative. Every week you and your child will have a chance to share a backpack with books. You will usually get the backpack on Thursday. In the backpack you will find children's books, a book for parents, a notebook for parents, and an inventory card, on which is listed the contents of the backpack.

Children's books will bring joy to the whole family. Reading to your child means modeling reading behavior, helping to gain a love of books; it develops reading skills and it helps promote your child's literacy.

When you read a book to your child you should discuss the book with him or her. Ask the child to put down some notes about the book, some impressions, etc., in the notebook, "Comments about the book." Have your child draw a picture, or tell you about his or her impressions. You can write your child's words down. You as a parent can also write down how your child has experienced the book.

When you get the backpack, please check its contents. Compare the contents with the list on the inventory card. That's the only way to protect books from getting lost.

Please return the backpacks to the school on the following Thursday (at the latest), because other children are eager to have their turn.

I wish you a lot of joy at reading!

Teacher
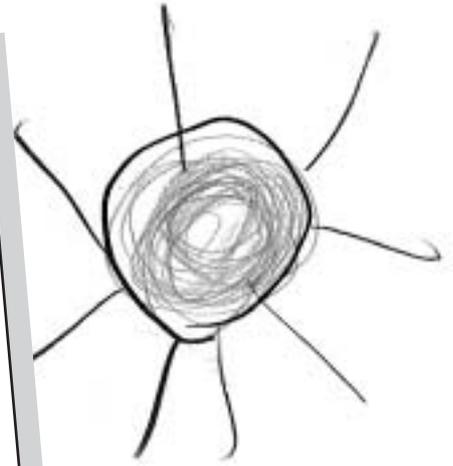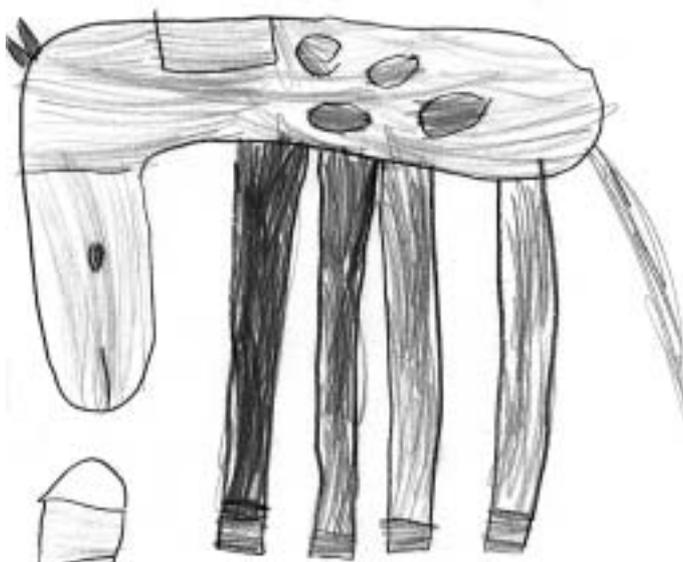
Reminder for parents

Dear_____

When I checked the contents of the backpack you returned to me, I found out, that_____

_____

_____
is missing. Please try to find the book and return it to me as soon as possible.

With respect.

Transforming the Role of Teaching Assistants in Slovakia

by Dawn Tankersly, Educational Consultant, Eva Koncokova, Country Director, and Peter Repisky, Master Teacher Trainer, Nadacia Skola dokoran (Wide Open School Foundation), Slovakia

Placing teaching assistants from the local community into classrooms is a common strategy used by schools all over the world to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps between schools and non-mainstream communities. The premise behind this practice is that the inclusion of teaching assistants will enable children from marginalized groups to be more successful academically. The teaching assistant can help children with the differences in languages spoken between the home and the school, be a link between the home culture and the culture of the educational system, and cultivate parents' support for their children's schooling process. The teaching assistant becomes a person that everyone in the community respects and a role model for the children on how to be a successful person, both in their own culture and in the mainstream culture.

In theory, this is what is supposed to happen. However, the reality often looks very different. In many classrooms, teaching assistants are seen serving students snacks, cleaning up after teachers or students, or watching the students on the playground while the teacher takes a break. Instead of being seen as a role model for students, the teaching assistants are placed in the position of being "babysitters," "maids," or even the "mother." What begins as a strategy to provide "at-risk" students the tools to meet mainstream curriculum standards, turns into a vehicle for keeping marginalized students in subservient positions in their societies.

If the purpose of the teaching assistant is to help

Photographs courtesy of Nadacia Skola dokoran

students succeed academically, then they must be seen as equal partners in the classroom. This article focuses on a case study in Slovakia where a new style of cooperation was developed between teachers and teaching assistants. Through the process of redefining the Roma* teaching assistant's role to be that of a co-teacher and agent of change in their communities, Slovakia documented an increase in Roma students' self esteem and academic performance as well as parent and community participation at school (Wide Open School Foundation, 2001; Rona, S. & Lee, L., 2001).

Background

In discussing the discrepancy between the theory of having teaching assistants help children in classrooms achieve higher academic results and the reality of using them in subservient roles, the response often has been, "teachers have teaching degrees and teaching assistants do not." However, there is not a correlation

*Editor's note: "Roma", rather than "Gyspy" or "Tsigane" is the term that most Roma prefer to use to describe themselves. There are significant Roma populations throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Belarus.

between years of education a person has and the ability to be a good teacher. In reality, anyone can be a good teacher. The best teachers are those who relate to people by making them feel valued and capable. They are the ones who feel confident in their ability to give another person something—be it knowledge of a subject or the development of a skill. Educators with teaching

When the job of the teaching assistant in the classroom is only to assist, their ability to also be teachers and leaders is not acknowledged.

degrees do not have a monopoly on teaching. Family members, friends, community members, co-workers, are all teachers in our lives.

If we believe that we are educating for democracy and a more just and fair society, then it is essential to stop treating the teaching assistant as a person who is only capable of assisting the teacher. Cummins (1996)

points out that the identities that are negotiated in schools between educators, students, and communities are reflected in the "patterns of power relations in the wider society." When members from the dominant group find a way to define themselves as superior (teachers who have a teaching certificate) and the members of the subordinate group as inferior (teaching assistants who do not), it is "a coercive exercise of power by a dominant group that is detrimental to the subordinated group" (p. 14). The role model that is being provided to those students is that of a person who serves those from the mainstream culture. Students can internalize this to mean that people from their culture will always be subordinate to those from the mainstream culture.

Cummins (1996) advises us to change this pattern of

coercive relations of power to collaborative relations of power where all participants in the relationship are *empowered* and have a greater sense of efficacy to create change in their lives or social situations (p.15). This is not a new concept. Dewey (1916) pointed out nearly a century ago that "all members of a group must have an equitable opportunity to receive and to take from others… Otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves" (p. 84). When the job of the teaching assistant in the classroom is only to assist, their ability to also be teachers and leaders is not acknowledged; this is not only demeaning to them, but their ability to help the students, their schools, and their communities is greatly reduced.

Case Study in Slovakia

The concept of having Roma teaching assistants become equal partners was a factor that contributed to the success of the Step by Step (SBS) Roma Special Schools Initiative in Slovakia. Roma teaching assistants were employed in classrooms with the intention to raise Roma students' academic performance to that of the mainstream curriculum. The project was an experiment in five classrooms in special schools where 92 percent of the students were Roma. The project's hypothesis was that Roma children were being misplaced in special schools; they did not have mental disabilities; and the majority of Roma children, when given appropriate conditions for learning, would be fully capable of academic achievement on mainstream curriculum standards (Rona, S. & Lee, L., 2001). In Slovakia, this proved to be true with 78 percent of students in these five classrooms being able to pass tests at a 75 percent level or higher on mainstream school curriculum standards (Wide Open School Foundation, Research Report, 2001).

There were five components to the program that contributed to the success rate of these students: the use of the mainstream primary school curriculum as opposed to the special education curriculum, the Step by Step methodology to deliver the curriculum, the use of appropriate methodologies for second-language learners,

workshops in anti-bias education for school staff members, and the placement of Roma teaching assistants in each classroom.

The promotion of Roma teaching assistants in the Slovakian educational system and the redefinition of their role has been a goal of the Wide Open School Foundation since 1994. The first step was to define what teaching assistants needed to do and the following indicators were developed for the position (Koncoková, 2000):

- Comes from the same community as his/her pupils
- Knows the parents and other community members of his/her pupils and demonstrates enthusiasm for working with them
- Speaks Roma language
- Has respect and an appreciation for the customs and traditions of Roma families
- Has some experience working with children
- Will participate in trainings covering the Step by Step methodology and anti-bias education
- Be actively involved in the education of the students both during the official school day and after school activities.

The Foundation then advocated for the job to be supported by the Labor Office and to provide a course for both potential Roma teaching assistants and teachers who would have them included in their classrooms. This course, which encompasses 150 hours of theory and practice, was developed by the Foundation, accredited in September 2001, and is now being piloted in schools in Slovakia.

Part of the content of the course was built on the Foundation's experience in the SBS Roma Special Schools Project. The content of the course (Wide Open School Foundation, 2001) includes not only the Step by Step methodology, but also includes work in the history, ethnography, and sociology of the Roma. In addition, the course includes work in the area of community education that entails assessing a community's needs and how to use current resources to meet those needs. The participants are also required to do project work where they develop new projects that

would help in meeting the needs of the community. Including the teachers in the process as well validates the importance of the teaching assistant's role in the community.

The New Roles for Teaching Assistants in the Slovakian Model

Research (Cummins, 1989; Fine, 1991; Garcia, 1988; Lee, Bryk, and Smith, 1993) has found that educators who feel empowered themselves have higher expectations of their students, and their students develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically. In the Slovakian model, this empowerment of Roma teaching assistants was developed by expanding their roles to include being 1) co-teachers in charge of small group cooperative learning activities, 2) teachers who provided activities to maintain

and strengthen Roma culture, and 3) family advocates who brought elements of the home culture into the school and who resolved issues between the school and home when they arose.

Having assistants work as co-instructors helps teachers be able to individualize instruction for their students. In Slovakia, the academic success of the students was impacted by the amount of classroom instruction and practice that was done in small groups working cooperatively together. Although the way that the teaching assistants worked varied from site to site, all students benefited from having two teachers in the classroom. For example, at one of the sites there was a group of children in the class with very noticeable learning disabilities. At that site, the teacher chose to work with that group because of her special education background and the teaching assistant worked with those

students who could do the mainstream curriculum. At other sites, where the students' abilities were more uniform, the same kind of cooperative learning activities were divided among the students with the teacher working with one group and the assistant working with a different group.

Another factor that the teaching assistants were able to provide for their students' success was the input of Roma culture into the classrooms. In all of the classrooms, the teaching assistant acted as the expert on Roma culture. Research has shown that cultural maintenance can have a positive influence on academic achievement (Rumbaut and Ima, 1987; Hayes, Bahruth, and Kessler, 1991; Abi-Nadar, 1993; Igoa, 1995; Cummins, 1996; Nieto, 1996). Time was given everyday for stories, songs, art, etc., that were activities led solely by the assistant. It was interesting to observe that during such

gram there were an average of eighty-three parent contacts, and in the control classrooms there were only eight (Wide Open School Foundation, 2001).

It should be noted that the focus on family involvement in Slovakia went beyond the traditional practices as attendance at parent-student conferences, parent meetings, or helping their children with homework. One study (Fruchter, Galleta, and White, 1993) found that when schools had a strong commitment to reducing the gap between home and school cultures by building on the values, languages, and culture of the home, that even the most reluctant parents became more involved. This idea was replicated in Slovakia by the teaching assistant inviting parents and community members come to school to tell stories, talk about the history of the community, and do other activities at school like cooking or making things that are also done at home.

> The changing role of the teaching assistant has a positive effect not only on the academic performance of the students, but the entire community.

times, one would even see the teacher preparing or cleaning up after the snack. The teachers then used the material that the teaching assistants brought into the classroom to plan with the assistant instructional activities for the students in reading, writing, and math.

As the importance of family involvement in their children's education has been widely documented, another role of the teaching assistants was to improve the communication between schools and homes. When the role of the teaching assistant is subservient, schools can destroy the bridge to the parents and community that they are seeking to build. The parents see that the mainstream culture does not respect the teaching assistant, so why should they? However, in Slovakia, when students and families saw the teaching assistant (who was from their own community) as a valued member of a teaching team who also had knowledge to impart, an increase in both family and community involvement was observed. For example, in the pilot classrooms in the pro-

Beyond Academics — The Future

The changing role of the teaching assistant has a positive affect not only on the academic performance of the students, but the entire community. According to Eva Koncoková, Country Director of the Slovakian Step by Step program, the professional development of the teaching assistants and teachers motivates the rest of the school to become more professional. In addition, she feels that it is important to expand the definition of the learning environment from just the school to the entire community. This way the teaching assistant can make a positive influence on the

children's whole environment and not just that of their school environment. By empowering the teaching assistant, who is from the local community, the program also works to empower the other members of that community.

To use Dewey's words of educating "some into masters and others into slaves," a dominant group can make a non-dominant group into slaves who are dependent on their masters when they are the only ones who have power to solve a problem. In Slovakia, the goal has been to make the teaching assistants familiar with resources that are available to the community's members, as well as how to develop new programs and resources for the community. The teaching assistants, as opposed to a person from the dominant group, become the agents of change in their communities. The ownership and sustainability of new projects are increased because the projects come from the community and not from the outside.

In conclusion, students, families, schools, and communities will all benefit from redefining the role of the teaching assistant so that power is shared instead of being held by those from the dominant culture.

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The Importance of Cooperative Learning in Undergraduate Education

by Anush Shahverdyan, Master of Education, Support for Community Outreach and University Teaching Fellow, Civic Education Project (CEP)
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Editor's note: Both the processes and outcomes of cooperative learning described in this article apply for children in pre-school and primary school as well as for undergraduates. Furthermore, efforts to prepare preschool and primary teachers to be competent and confident in establishing cooperative classrooms should include opportunities for them to be engaged in cooperative learning during their own educational preparation.

"Without the cooperation of its members society cannot survive, and the society of man has survived because the cooperativeness of its members made survival possible. It was not an advantageous individual here and there who did so, but the group. In human societies the individuals who are most likely to survive are those who are best enabled to do so by their group."

(Ashley Montague,1965)

Photographs by Ruzanna Tsarukyan

Learning can be structured in the following ways: competitively; individually; or, cooperatively. In competitive learning students are in a win-lose struggle working against each other to see who is best. In individual classrooms students work alone; in cooperative ones students work together to accomplish shared learning goals. In the traditional approach to college teaching, most class time is spent with the professor lecturing and the students watching and listening. The students work individually on assignments, and cooperation is discouraged. In individualistic learning situations, students' goal achievements are independent; students perceive that the achievement of their learning goals is unrelated to what other students do (Deutsch, 1962; Johnson and Johnson, 1975). Whether a student accomplishes his or her goal has no influence on whether other students achieve their goals in an individualistic learning situation. Thus, a student seeks an outcome that is personally beneficial and ignores the goal achievement of other students.

In competitive situations there is a negative interdependence among goal achievements; students perceive that they can obtain their goals if and only if the other students in the class fail to obtain their goals (Johnson and Johnson, 1975). Thus, a student seeks an outcome that is personally favorable but is harmful to the others with whom he or she is competitively linked.

Illustrations courtesy of Step by Step Benevolent Foundation

Such teacher-centered instructional methods have been found inferior to instruction that involves active learning—in which students solve problems, generate

and answer questions, discuss, explain, debate, or brainstorm during class; and to cooperative learning—in which students work in teams on problems and projects under conditions that assure both positive interdepend-

The benefits of cooperative learning outweigh the difficulties that must be overcome to implement it.

ence and individual accountability. This conclusion applies whether the assessment measure is short-term mastery, long-term retention, or depth of understanding of course material, acquisition of critical thinking or creative problem-solving skills, formation of positive attitudes toward the subject being taught, or level of confidence in knowledge or skills.

Cooperative learning (CL) is instruction that involves students working in teams to accomplish a common goal, under conditions that include the following elements (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991):

Positive interdependence. Team members perceive that they are linked with each other in a way that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds. If any team members fail to do their part, everyone suffers consequences.

Individual accountability. All students in a group are held accountable for doing their share of the work and for mastery of all of the material to be learned. Individual accountability exists when the performance of each individual is assessed

and the results are given back to the group and the individual in order to ascertain who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in learning.

Face-to-face interaction. Although some of the group work may be parceled out and done individually, some must be done interactively, with group members pro-

viding one another with feedback, checking for understanding, discussing concepts being learned, connecting present with past learning, challenging one another's conclusions and reasoning, and perhaps most importantly, teaching and encouraging one another.

Appropriate use of collaborative skills. Along with academic skills, students are encouraged and helped to develop and practice such social skills as trust building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management skills, which empower students to manage both teamwork and task work successfully.

Group processing. Team members set group goals, periodically assess how well they are doing as a team and at maintaining effective working relationships, and identify changes they will make to enhance group effectiveness.

Cooperative learning is not simply a synonym for students working in groups. A learning exercise only qualifies as CL to the extent that the listed elements are present.

Cooperative learning may occur in or out of class. In-class exercises, which may take anywhere from a few minutes to an entire class period, may involve answering or generating questions, explaining observations, working through derivations, solving problems, summarizing lecture material, and brainstorming. Out-of-class activities include carrying out research studies, completing problem sets or projects, writing reports, and preparing class presentations.

A large and rapidly growing body of research confirms the effectiveness of cooperative learning in higher education (Astin, 1993; Cooper et al., 1990; Goodsell et al., 1992). Research indicates that relative to students taught traditionally—that is, with instructor-centered lectures, individual assignments, and competitive grading—cooperatively taught students tend to exhibit higher academic

achievement, better high-level reasoning and critical thinking skills, deeper understanding of learned material, lower levels of anxiety and stress, greater intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve, greater ability to view situations from others' perspectives, more positive and supportive relationships with peers, more positive attitudes toward subject areas, and higher self-esteem.

There are several reasons why cooperative learning works as well as it does. The idea that students learn more by doing something active than by simply watching and listening has long been known to both cognitive psychologists and effective teachers (Bonwell and Eison, 1991), and cooperative learning is by its nature an active method. Beyond that, cooperation enhances learning in several ways. Weak students working individually are likely to give up when they get stuck; working cooperatively, they keep going. Strong students faced with the task of explaining and clarifying material to weaker students often find gaps in their own understanding and fill them in. Students working alone may tend to delay completing assignments or skip them altogether, but when they know that others are counting on them, they are often driven to do the work in a timely manner. Students working competitively have incentives not to help one another; working cooperatively, they are rewarded for helping (Felder and Brent, 1994).

Despite the proven benefits of cooperative learning, instructors who attempt to use these approaches frequently encounter resistance from the students. Bright students complain about begin held back by their slower teammates, weaker or less confident students complain about being disregarded in group sessions, and resentments build when some team members fail to pull their weight. As a result, some instructors become discouraged and revert to the traditional teacher-centered instructional model. This is a loss both for the teachers and their students.

Cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning are all important and should be used, but the dominant goal structure in the class should be cooperation.

The benefits of cooperative learning outweigh the difficulties that must be overcome to implement it. Instructors who incorporate CL principles in their courses, who are prepared for initially negative student reactions, and who have the patience and the confidence to wait out these reactions, will reap their rewards in more and deeper student learning and more positive student attitudes toward their subjects and toward themselves. It may take an effort to get there, but it is an effort well worth making.

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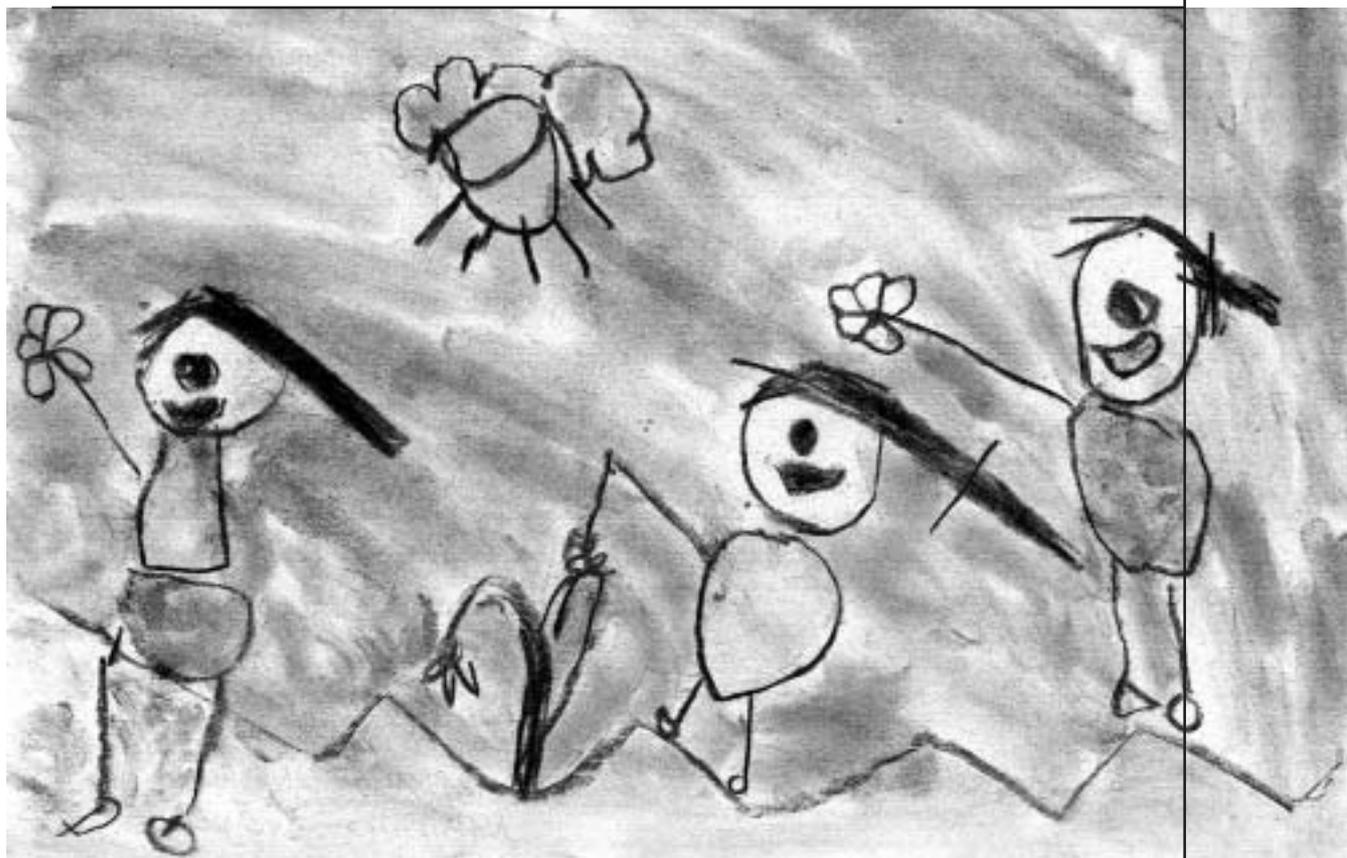
School and Community Partnerships

Where There Are No Preschools

by Henriette Heimgaertner, Bernard van Leer Foundation and
Mikolaj Markiewicz, Polish Children and Youth Foundation

Background

The first years of life are a period of amazing physical and intellectual development. Scientific research has demonstrated that the development of a young child's brain is quite dramatic, particularly in the first five years of life. Early intervention can give the child a good start and establish patterns for life-long learning, yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

Sadly, the benefits of early childhood education (ECE) are largely unknown in Poland. Many people still believe that education begins when children start school. Fortunately, in the last 10 years the situation has changed gradually. The efforts made by the Polish Children and Youth Foundation (PCYF) have been crucial in the process of disseminating ECE ideas. The mission of PCYF is to make a differ-

> The benefits of early childhood education are largely unknown in Poland.

ence in Polish preschool educational practice and to create a new culture of rearing young children. Its activities aim to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas.

An old proverb claims that the journey to the top is more important than the top itself. The journey for PCYF

"Where There Are No Preschools" is a journey during which new educational methods will reach the remote and rural areas of Poland.

started when a grant from the Bernard van Leer Foundation made the implementation of the First Step Preschool Teachers program possible. The lessons learned on that road were important for setting up new projects and for the successful continuation of the old ones.

Where There Are No Preschools

Over the last 10 years preschool facilities in rural areas—initially quite limited—have been gradually closing; about 30 percent of them do not exist any more. The main reason is economic: municipalities have very limited financial resources. With fewer children attending preschool, it is not economically practical to continue to provide early childhood education. Nor can municipalities afford to pay for transporting children to places where preschool services are still running. As a result children from rural areas are deprived of much-needed nourishment in their intellectual development, and disparities between rural and urban areas are growing[1]. The Ministry of Education recognizes the problem[2] but lacks the expertise, flexibility, and political will to address these issues.

To a large extent, this situation is the result of legal regulations in Poland. Preschool education is not included in the state-financed school system. Each municipality has the responsibility to provide this service, but since it is not required, many local authorities choose to fund services other than preschool.

The availability of preschool education is much lower in Poland than in other countries in the region. Overall, 33 percent of children three- to five-years' old are

enrolled in preschool, but this figure drops to 15 percent in rural areas. In the Czech Republic 85.5 percent of three- to six-year-olds attend kindergarten. In Hungary the comparable statistic is 86 percent, while in Slovakia attendance increases with the age of the child (54 percent of three-year-olds, 68 percent of four-year-olds, 83.5 percent of five-year-olds).

"Where There Are No Preschools" is a journey during which new educational methods will reach the remote and rural areas of Poland, where preschool enrolment is still disproportionately low.

Main Goal

The main goal of the new project, "Where There Are No Preschools," is to study, develop, and introduce new, flexible, and sustainable models of preschool education as an alternative to traditional preschool services. These models are called Centers. They are individualized and specifically tailored to the needs of the local communities.

The Beginning of the Journey

The "Where There Are No Preschools" project started with a one-year planning phase to allow for exploration of the feasibility of developing preschool opportunities for young children in rural areas. During the planning phase, the philosophy and content of the program were discussed and formulated, and PCYF gathered information about legal, organizational, and financial possibilities for alternative forms of preschool education. PCYF gathered information about several issues:

- awareness of the significance of preschool education for the future development of children;
- the willingness of the local authorities to modify their preschool education policies;
- parental acceptance of the proposed new forms of education;
- the ability of the local authority and national funders to ensure the sustainability of the project;
- appropriate models and educational initiatives in Poland or abroad, which could be used as a base.

View from the Bernard van Leer Foundation

"Where There Are No Preschools" is a holistic project. It simultaneously addresses several goals. First, it promotes a new early childhood education culture, levers up the importance of ECE, and improves opportunities for children. Secondly, it offsets the massive closure of preschools in rural areas of Poland, which are struggling with their general remoteness and old-fashioned attitudes. Thirdly, it strengthens civil society in Poland by creating new ways of communication and cooperation among local authorities, parents, and NGOs. Only a few years ago this type of dialogue—mutual understanding between local government and people—would have been unthinkable. And lastly, the project is sustainable and has the potential for large-scale coverage. It cooperates with mainstream organizations—colleges, supervising bodies for early childhood development workers, and local authorities—which enhances its sustainability. "Where There Are No Preschools" is not a one-day journey. It is a long trek, expected to continue with follow-up and to bear further fruit.

During the planning phase the project was promoted to local authorities and parents, and mistrust and scepticism about alternative forms of education was addressed. During this phase the municipalities who would participate in the project were selected on the basis of their interest and readiness to implement the pilot phase. Finally, the planning phase identified potential difficulties that the project might encounter during implementation of the pilot phase.

Strategic Choices

During the planning phase, several strategic decisions that helped shape the project were made. PCYF determined that the Centers would target children in the three- to five-year-old age group. (Most six-year-olds attend elementary school preparation classes—the so-called "0 year.")

Two teams were established to develop the curriculum, operating rules, and teacher training for the Centers:

- **A Curriculum Team** was charged with creating the program philosophy and curriculum for the Centers and developing strategies for implementing the pilot phase. They had to develop criteria for choosing municipalities for the pilot phase and for recruiting educators in those municipalities. The Curriculum Team also had to define how to train the educators and prepare training materials for children and teachers.
- **A Legal team** was charged with studying the legal, organizational, and financial possibilities for implementing alternative preschool educational forms in the communities.

There were two main goals with respect to securing the cooperation of local communities—to disseminate the program and to ensure the sustainability of the project. As part of this effort, PCYF organized two seminars—an **informational seminar** to familiarise the local government and municipalities with "Where There Are No Preschools;" and a **preparatory seminar** to explain the detailed rules for cooperation and draw up a contract between the PCYF and each of the selected municipalities. Five local coordinators were selected to support the educators and to be responsible for building partnerships with parents, local authorities, and institutions interested in the project.

The coordinators were also responsible for documenting and evaluating the educators and the Centers. The main guidelines for project documentation, implementation, and evaluation were defined, and The Polish Evaluation Society was selected to serve as an external

evaluator. An evaluation based on rigorous standards and methodology was deemed crucial for the successful dissemination of the program.

Municipalities agreed to pay the teachers'

There were two main goals with respect to securing the cooperation of local communities— to disseminate the program and to ensure the sustainability of the project.

salaries, as well as the Centers' operating expenses (e.g., rent, equipment, and maintenance costs). This arrangement made it more likely that, upon completion of the pilot phase, the municipalities would continue to provide services for children, setting an example for others to follow.

Results from the Planning Phase

The Curriculum Team developed a curriculum based on the educational and developmental needs of three- to five-year-old children, giving priority to social skills, creativity, curiosity, and self-esteem. The staff/child ratio was set at 1 to 10. The team defined the rules of operation for the Centers, established selection criteria for the educators, and selected the teachers and developed training for them. Municipalities who would participate in the project were chosen and agreements between them and PCYF signed.

The Legal Team clarified the legal situation of pre-school education in Poland. It identified the legal requirements and made this information available to the municipalities. Their study showed that local authorities could finance childcare services using communal funds

available for education, welfare, and arts programs, and it also made it easier to delegate childcare services to a NGO or to self-employed teachers.

In general, parents and local authorities are interested in the new ECE model, but it is not likely that they will accept it without a good information campaign to explain the meaning of ECE both to parents and local authorities and to describe how to introduce the new approach. Also, the personal commitment of at least one person who has decision-making power in each municipality is critical for success.

Pilot Phase (Implementation of the Program)

Based on the results of the planning phase, PCYF started implementing the program in 23 Centers in 8 municipalities; this pilot phase began in June 2001 and will continue until June 2004. Each Center provides care for 6 to 25 children. The total number of children who will be served is about 250. Other beneficiaries of the project are 48 trained educators, the institutions responsible for childcare and social policy, and the parents and families of the children.

Program components:

- **Train educators** to enhance their skills and to provide them with professional assistance. Communities were very active in looking for suitable candidates among unemployed teachers, teachers-training college graduates, and volunteers. PCYF experts trained the educators.

- **Facilitate opening and operation of the Centers** through cooperation with the local communities. Most of the Centers operate in unused school buildings, playrooms, and libraries.

- **Build local coalitions** through general municipality meetings and meetings with parents. The role of local coordinators is crucial in this process. The fact that the municipality pays the educator's salary from the beginning of the program makes it more likely that, after the pilot phase, the Centers will continue to operate. A Board of Parents is also established in order to help ensure that the program will continue as a permanent component of the local education sector. Local coalition building seems to be one of the most important factors for successful implementation and sustainability of the program.

- **Prepare educational materials** that are truly unique. Materials are customized to address the needs of each of the "Where There Are No Preschools" Centers.
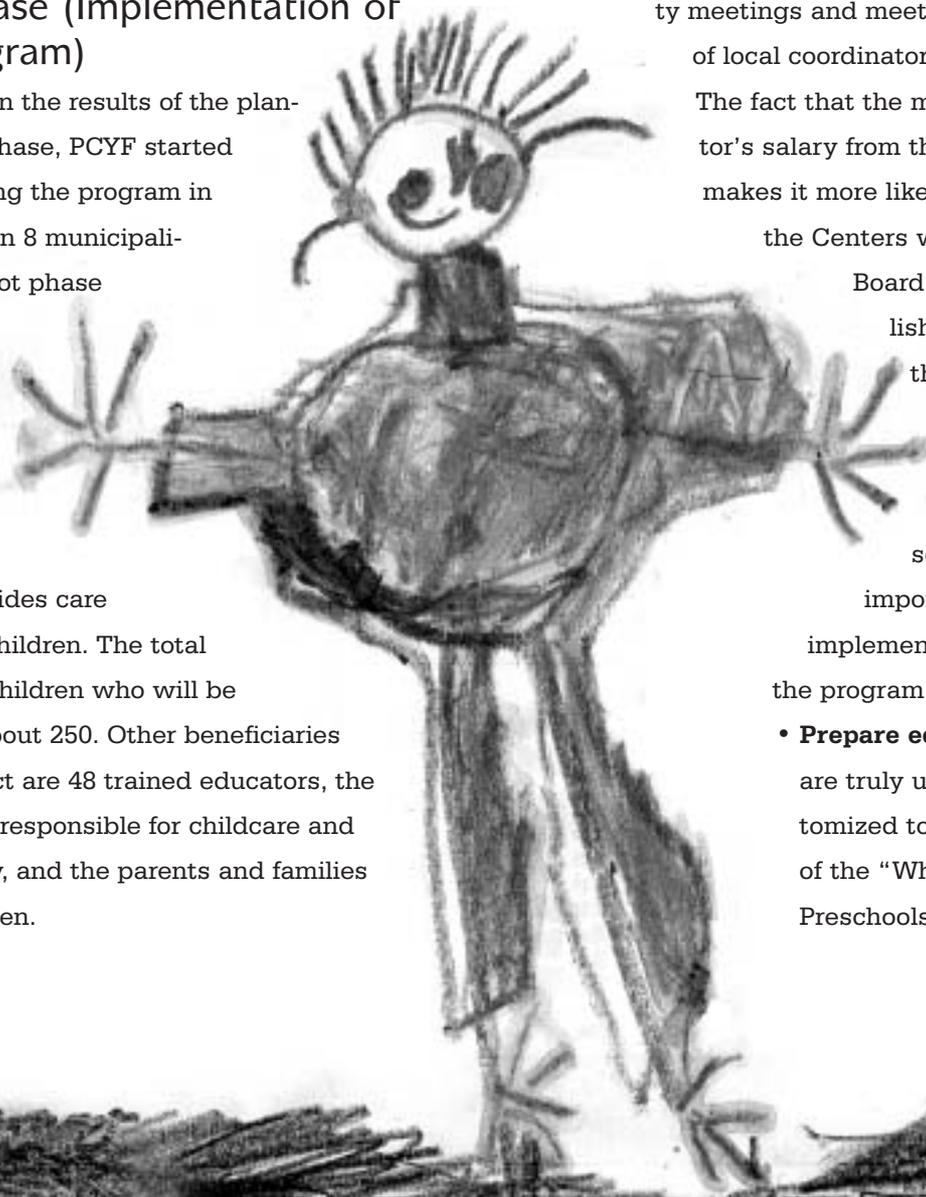
- **Document the program** to enable PCYF to inspire and help other communities to introduce early childhood education alternatives to traditional kindergartens. Various means are used to map the project's development: monthly reports from each municipality, evaluations, articles in professional newspapers and journals. By the end of the pilot phase PCYF plans to publish a brochure describing the importance of early education, with advice on how to replicate the Centers program in different settings.
- **Promote the program nationwide** in through local and national media—TV, radio, and the press. Information about "Where There Are No Preschools" is also presented at seminars and conferences.

Evaluation of the Centers' efforts

Special attention is paid to the evaluation of the project. While there is interest in seeing how the children from the Centers perform and feel in the '0' class, we can know the real impact of the program on children's development only after the assessment is made. In addition, the evaluation will show which activities in each municipality are effective and must remain unchanged and which have to be modified. It will also show which organisational models are successful and which need to be changed.

The Polish Evaluation Society will conduct the evaluation. Five out of eight municipalities will be evaluated, based on a case study approach. The evaluation will involve visits to municipalities, analysis of the local coordinators' reports, focus groups with local coordinators, interviews with educators, parents, local authorities, and the PCYF coordinator. Members of the Polish Evaluation Society will attend all meetings connected to the program.

Furthermore, ongoing internal evaluation will be an integral part of the project. The PCYF coordinator, local coordinators, and members of the Curriculum Team will consult regularly, and monthly feedback sessions with educators will be used to continuously discuss problems, implementation, and results.

[1] For example the attendance of three-years-olds in the cities is 36 percent, but in rural areas it is only 8 percent, and in some remote areas it is as little as 2 percent.

[2] The Ministry of Education has prepared a program called "Small Child" but has not implemented it.

The First Months of Implementation

Work with children in the Centers started in January 2002. Local communities and media received the program very well.

The Centers meet one of the most important needs of people: the wish that their children will have a better life than themselves. People in many rural areas in Poland are poor, unemployed, lost, and hopeless in the quickly changing world. The farmers fear the consequences of integration with the European Union. Rural people realize that early childhood education is crucial for their children to have better results at school and get better jobs.

"Where There Are No Preschools" has had good media coverage. It illustrates that there are possibilities for change, even in remote and poor areas. The proposed solution is cheaper than traditional preschools and creates new workplaces.

Finally, educators and local coordinators are very committed to their work. Their inspiration and their feeling of mission are conveyed to some of the parents. Many of the parents help in the Centers, which are slowly becoming a meeting place and hub of different activities in some villages.

Promoting Complex Change: Step by Step-Moldova Social Investment Fund Partnership

by Cornelia Cincilei, Programul Educational Pas cu Pas, and Ludmilla Malcoci, Moldova Social Investment Fund

Background

Step by Step is a non-governmental, non-profit organization whose aim is to support Moldova's transition to a more open, democratic society by promoting deep and pertinent changes in the country's education system. It started in Moldova in 1994 as a regional project of the Open Society Institute, New York, and the Soros Foundation, Moldova, having as its initial goal an alternative educational program that promotes developmentally appropriate methods of teaching, active learning, and critical thinking skills. It is a program that creates democratic classrooms in partnership with families and community.

Photographs courtesy of Programul Educational Pas cu Pas

As the program developed and expanded, the situation in Moldova greatly deteriorated. In fact, according to the statistics of various international bodies—UNICEF, the World Bank, the International Health Organization—Moldova is presently ranked last in Europe for living standards. The impact of the economic crisis upon the population's health and life expectancy has been dramatic and comparable to the situation of a nation going through a war.

Ironically, teachers—the ones who are preparing the future leaders of this country—constitute one of the most deeply affected groups of the population, particularly in rural areas. Salaries in preschool and primary schools are very low, plus there are long delays in payments. Teachers are leaving schools in great numbers and in some communities, schools are closing down. Recently greater numbers of teachers, particularly those living in villages, are temporarily seeking work in other countries, thus raising a number of additional social problems in these communities.

The repercussions of this crisis for the teachers and faculty who stay in the system are very alarming, from both a professional and moral perspective. While the Step by Step program can't solve teachers' economic problems, it endeavors to help them overcome despair and regain professional pride, competence, and satisfaction from their work in an improved educational environment. Numerous teachers and faculty confessed that their involvement with the program and the extended Step by Step family was the light at the end of the tunnel.

Forming a Partnership with the Moldova Social Investment Fund

A new and much needed boost to the implementation of Step by Step came in 1998 through a partnership agreement signed by the Soros Foundation Moldova and Step by Step with the Moldova Social Investment Fund (MSIF). The joint action of these partners proved to be very successful, according to educators, parents, community administrators, and official evaluators. The partnership is viewed as a successful blending of infrastructure rehabilitation projects with educational programs, which are creating long lasting changes in schools and village communities. This model has been recommended for replication throughout the Social Investment Fund and Soros Foundation networks.

The importance of this partnership is increased by the fact that it targets rural communities, whose populations have been most affected by the current economic crisis. The partnership actually doubled the effort in achieving MSIF's primary goals: alleviating poverty and promoting community development in rural areas. The long-term accomplishment of these goals can be reached only through human investment and education—particularly the education of a new generation of problem solvers and active citizens.

The MSIF-Step by Step partnership targets funds to assist in the physical and communal renovation of schools in those villages that succeed in finding the required local contribution of 15 percent of the cost of the project. This requirement is a wise, strategically well-thought out step in promoting community-building, one that also has great educational value. Many communities have learned that it is within their power to change their condition if they unite in their efforts, assume responsibilities, and take the initiative in solving their own problems. Step by Step coordinators and trainers assert that administrators, school principals, and teachers from the communities supported by the MSIF are much better able to identify their needs and look for solutions than

those who have not had MSIF assistance.

Initially committed to just physically renovating school buildings, MSIF began to appreciate the social impact of Step by Step. This led to their efforts to collect *additional funds* to cover furniture and educational materials for several Step by Step primary classrooms in *all* of its schools (in many cases, two classrooms per school). Due to this increased financial assistance, Step by Step was able to focus more on training and creating resource centers for *all* teachers and administrators from its schools and on training additional teachers from these schools (practically all who displayed an interest in the program), thus making deeper institutional change.

During the pilot phase (fall 1998) teachers from 20 schools (about 100 classrooms) started their training with Step by Step. During the next two years about 100 other schools joined the program. Presently the number of classroom teachers and administrators being trained in the Step by Step program is over 500.

Realizing the Partnership in Rural Communities

MSIF has identified strategies to increase an applicant's commitment and responsibility for the project's fulfillment and future. One of these is to require the community to contribute 15 percent of the project cost. Other proof of the seriousness of the community's intentions and the practical steps it will take towards ensuring the project's sustainability are required. For example, villages have to demonstrate evidence of parents' commitment to contribute funds towards the purchase of some classroom materials and consumables, strategies to recruit teaching assistants, and so forth. Since the economic situation, particularly in villages, is so bad, there were fears that such requirements might be too drastic and hard to comply with. But they turned out to be quite good for testing the real intentions of schools and for making them understand that they were committing themselves to a long-term project.

When communities are awarded MSIF support, they are offered the opportunity to implement the Step by Step program. To benefit from the complete training cov-

What Does Partnership Mean?

Partnerships are established relationships between two or more social institutions or organizations with joint interests, values, and social orientations in order to achieve a common goal. During project implementation, MSIF builds partnership relationships at different levels.

Partnership development at the community level refers to partnerships among different community actors—community-based organizations (e.g., implementing agencies, beneficiary associations), non-governmental organizations, local public administration, economic agents, etc. These partnerships are developed in order to prepare, implement, and maintain the project proposal.

Partnership development among different communities that have implemented projects with MSIF support. These partnerships are developed in order to exchange accumulated experiences, to have a permanent flow of new information, and to replicate the best models of community development at the national level. To foster these partnerships, we use round tables, the MSIF bulletin, and workshops. Next year we intend to create a network of MSIF communities, register the network as an NGO, and develop ways to disseminate best practices.

Partnership development at the national level among different institutions, organizations, NGOs, and donors working in communities in order to concentrate these efforts and to increase the social impact of projects concerned with community development and/or social services improvement.

Respective Responsibilities

According to the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed in 1999, the **main principles of the Step by Step/Moldova Social Investment Fund partnership are:**

- a common goal (community capacity building and improvement of delivered services)
- joint decision making
- joint responsibility
- joint evaluation and monitoring
- mutual information sharing about project development
- mutual confidence.

The MSIF is responsible for:

- renovation of school buildings,
- procurement of furniture and equipment necessary for Step by Step classes,
- permanent community mentoring and facilitation,
- monitoring and evaluation of the sustainability of the renovated facility and quality of delivered services.

The Step by Step program is responsible for:

- teacher training and didactic materials,
- technical assistance and facilitation for teachers and school principals,
- monitoring and evaluation of the Step by Step program implementation.

Community stakeholders are responsible for:

- providing information about the opportunity to implement the Step by Step program or other educational programs in the renovated school;
- involving the Parents and Teachers Association in the decision about which approach to use in implementing the educational program;
- obtaining enough funding for one year of the program's implementation (i.e., a sustainability fund);
- ensuring that teachers involved in the program write an essay about their vision for this program and provide a letter of recommendation from their school principal.
- ensuring that teachers and school principals are involved in training or retraining from the Step by Step program.
- ensuring that the Parents and Teachers Association will be responsible for the sustainability of the renovated facility and for the quality of the program implementation.

ered by Step by Step, schools have to meet the following conditions:

- openness and a desire to change school practices exhibited by school administrators;

Parents from other classrooms encourage teachers to adopt the Step by Step methodology, and school administrators encourage this sharing of experience.

- commitment to ongoing training for teachers and continuity of the program within the primary cycle and beyond;
- adequate conditions for setting up activity centers;
- commitment to parent involvement in classrooms;
- space for a parents' room (in preschools) or resource centers in primary schools;
- teaching assistants.

Step by Step supported and continues to support schools with various educational materials for students and teachers, including encyclopedic dictionaries, alternative textbooks, and other badly needed literature. All the materials are open-ended and stimulate active learning, learning through doing and discovery, and critical thinking in children. Still, the growing training needs within the partnership do not leave much room in the Step by Step budget for classroom equipment and educational materials. That is why Step by Step and MSIF jointly applied for and got a $50,000 grant from the Dutch Embassy for furniture and

Outcomes and Results

- **Development of the educational process at the school level**, including: training and retraining of the pedagogical staff; creating book funds; improving school management; implementing new teaching methods; developing new relationships among teachers, students, and their parents.
- **Establishment and development of partnerships between the school and parents.** Parents and Teachers Associations were created in all MSIF schools. Most of them were registered as non-governmental organizations and have created sustainability funds. Currently, there is approximately $15,000 available in these sustainability funds. Our efforts have also led to greater parent involvement in both the decision-making process and in the educational process in our schools.
- **Schools became more open to the community.** In Moldova the local public administrative unit is referred to as "primaria." One primaria sometimes includes two or more villages. The mayor's office is usually located in the biggest village; therefore, the smaller villages do not have an administrative unit. The school represents an community center in these types of villages. After the collaboration with MSIF and Step by Step program, the renovated schools in many communities became information and development centers for the community at large.

educational materials for Step by Step classrooms in 10 schools. That was our first joint fundraising action.

Results of the Partnerships in Rural Communities

We can be really proud of the many changes that have taken place in many communities in which MSIF and Step by Step are active. The relationship between parents and schools has changed. Parents feel that schools are open to cooperation. They come into the classrooms to assist teachers, help children build knowledge through inquiry and discovery, and they learn a lot about their own children and how to extend their learning at home. Parents from other classrooms encourage teachers to adopt the Step by Step methodology, and school administrators encourage this sharing of experience. There is a greater sense of school community and community at large; on many occasions the Step by Step experts visiting the schools were amazed at how actively involved community administrators were, and how they promoted and took pride in these changes. In some communities the local associations created by these administrators have provided funds for classroom materials, books, field trips, food, teaching assistants' salaries, and even to guarantee timely payment of teacher salaries. Parents of

Examples Of Best Practices In Community Development.

Zberoaia community rehabilitated the school with MSIF support and is implementing the Step by Step program in seven classes. All teachers and representatives of the school administration were retrained. The Parents and Teachers Association (PTA), registered as an NGO, created their sustainability fund, and generated $3,000. This money has been used for building fences, purchasing stoves, and acquiring a storehouse. The PTA also developed an action plan for better space utilization. The festivity hall is used now for different community activities. The PTA has initiated five new projects after their collaboration with the MSIF. Three have already been implemented: building two bridges, cleaning and remodeling of a village pond, and building a water supply system. The cost of the last one was about $65,000.

Pirlita village. The Step by Step program is implemented now in five classes. The PTA funds amounting to $3,000. The money was used to rehabilitate the student hostel and landscape the school grounds. They also implemented an ecological project using local resources: 5,000 new trees were planted.

Chiscaren community. The Step by Step program is implemented in eight classes. The PTA raised $5,000 in addition to the costs for building stoves, repairing classrooms, and procuring didactic materials that had been part of the original proposal to MSIF. After rehabilitating the school, this community implemented five new projects with support from UNICEF, the Ministry of Ecology, and local resources.

children with special needs mention a much more humane atmosphere in these classrooms, which favor the inclusion of such children.

Community Examples

Because of parents, the students of the Racesti/Soroca school did not freeze last winter. Parents took turns caring for the heating system. In Pirita/Dubasari, fathers modified the furniture in most classrooms to create learning centers with open spaces for classroom materials, and mothers made cushions for the meeting area. In Pleseni and Cucoara/Cahul, parents decided to make mini-flipcharts, convinced that they were very important in the meeting area. In Razeni/Chisinau parents come in daily as teacher's assistants; in the parents' corner they keep notes on what they did with the students and what they would recommend other parents who come into the class do. In Cioburciu/ Stefan-Voda, a thematic study of the native village resulted in a village museum. Students, parents, and grandparents made the first contributions; then other people from the community donated old tools, arts and crafts, and other artifacts. It turned into a real community project.

Schools before and after renovations

ISSA Network News

Children's Web Publishing Project

The **Children's Web Publishing project** was initiated by the Open Society Institute (OSI) to address the lack of developmentally appropriate children's books in the regions where Step by Step is active. As more child-centered classrooms have been established, the need for children's books that reflect contemporary themes and the program philosophy has grown tremendously. The challenge was how to foster the development of local authors and illustrators who could meet this demand, and do it in a cost-effective way. Liz Lorant and Martin Greenwald came up with an innovative approach, which drew upon the expertise of members of the Children's Book Council and the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Teams were sent to do five regional trainings for prospective authors and illustrators. Every participant in the workshops was required to submit at least one book for review by a local advisory board that then forwarded their best entries on to an international advisory board for consideration. In the first round more than 60 books were submitted by more than 16 countries, and final decisions are expected to be announced in June 2002. The chosen books will be available on the ISSA website for Step by Step county directors to down-load and translate into their national languages. Using state-of-the-art equipment provided to each country by OSI, stories will be published in low-cost format so that many copies can be disseminated to local schools in towns and villages throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Baltics, Mongolia and Haiti. Martin Greenwald is hoping that the project will yield books of such quality that they will attract the interest of commercial publishers from the West, to whom OSI will sell the rights. Prospective authors and illustrators should contact ISSA for guidelines on how to participate in this exciting enterprise.

School Success for Roma Children

School Success for Roma Children: The Step by Step Special Schools Initiative Interim Report (Rona and Lee, 2001) details some of the exciting findings thus far in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. This three-year project was initiated by OSI to address the concern that Roma children are inappropriately being served in special schools under the guise that they were "mentally handicapped." The project team, led by Susan Rona, set out to dispel the myth that Roma children could not succeed in mainstream educational settings. The project model has five components: (1) the Step by Step methodology serves as the vehicle for delivering the curriculum; (2) special education curriculum is replaced by the mainstream curriculum; (3) all teachers and administrators participate in anti-bias education;

Educating Children for Democracy

(4) each site hires a Roma family coordinator/teaching assistant; and (5) methodologies addressing second language learners are incorporated into the curriculum. After two-years of implementation, the data are compelling: 64% of Roma children in grade 2 tested at or above-grade level using the mainstream curricular standards—supporting the authors concern that these children were misplaced in special education. When children and families served in the project sites are compared to their peers in control sites, a number of dramatic differences were found in attendance rates, parents' and children's attitudes, parental involvement with the school, and student achievement. The sites are currently implementing a thorough transition process to support Roma children's return to mainstream educational settings by the end of the third year. The project's findings have also led to broad-based policy and programmatic changes in many of the host countries. More research findings and policy implications will be forthcoming.

Mentoring Initiative

ISSA has been supporting a **Mentoring Initiative** for countries who have new initiatives or request support in certain areas. Countries have been paired with an European and/or American mentor in order to provide individualized technical assistance and support to ensure that all Step by Step programs meet quality standards. Each mentor team made an initial visit to their host country to build relationships, visit classrooms, local or state officials, and to develop a partnership agreement. In March and April of 2002, mentors visited seven countries to develop action agendas with specific goals and objectives that allow each country to address their local challenges and circumstances. A range of issues are being addressed through these mentoring relationships, including building strong coalitions of parents to support child-centered practices, implementing inclusive education for children with special needs, and primary school implementation. A comprehensive evaluation of the mentoring initiative will be implemented this spring, and results will guide the future of this promising practice.

Yugoslavia

The Center for Interactive Pedagogue (CIP) reports on exciting initiatives underway in **Yugoslavia**. The Step by Step primary program is being initiated in fifteen classrooms in five schools across the country with the expectation that it will spread to other schools and regions. Through collaboration with the Ministry of Education, additional model centers for preschool are being established—where currently they have only one. Step by Step training has also been provided for High School teachers for the first time. A new donor—Concern (an Irish organization)—is a partner on the Step by Step Roma preschool program. Finally, CIP also just acquired a new office which will allow them to continue their momentum gained after the conclusion of the war.

Kazakhstan

News from **Kazakhstan** includes word of their partnership with UNICEF on improving outcomes for children and families in rural areas. Sixteen schools in the Aral basin and Semipalatinsk oblast were targeted because of the high prevalence of women and children with severe iron-deficiency; this region has a history of nuclear testing that left devastating effects on the local ecology. Results of these risk factors are seen on children's achievement, and higher rates of developmental and physical disabilities. Some of the work has focused on building coalitions of families of children with disabilities to provide parent-to-parent support. Focus groups with teachers, families and specialists are guiding this work. In a related area, the first roundtable was convened in March for their TACIS project "Equal Opportunity for Everybody." International experts in inclusive education joined local governmental and non-governmental staff working with children who have disabilities. Finally, the team from Kazakhstan was the first Step by Step trainers for a group of teachers from Tajikistan—one of our newest members of the ISSA network!

Guidelines for Authors

Educating Children for Democracy

The International Step by Step Association publishes the journal, *Educating Children for Democracy*, on a semi-annual basis, in English and Russian, and both in print and online. *Educating Children for Democracy* seeks:

1. Practical articles with ideas for teaching children and administering education programs that are child-centered in philosophy and implementation.
2. Scholarly articles that link current research and theory to practice, where at least 1/3 of the article describes practical applications of the research. (Note: research studies should be written as articles rather than research reports.)
3. Articles about how an individual or group of people changed a program or a policy to become more child-centered.
4. Essays related to the experience of educational transformation, including such topics as cultural diversity, inclusion of minority children and children with disabilities, family involvement in schools, etc.
5. Reprinted articles from national journals with limited circulation with proper attribution and permission.

Article Format and Style

Interested authors are invited to submit articles of 3 to 6 pages (1,200 to 3,000 words) that meet the following criteria:

1. Ideas must be consistent with child-centered theory and research.
2. Articles should be written in a readable style that generates interest and enthusiasm. (Articles in languages other than English should be professionally translated to ensure accuracy of interpretation.)
3. Complete references must be provided for all citations in the text. [The concept of "fair use" of copyrighted material includes the right to quote briefly for scholarly purposes (up to 100 words) from most published materials, if the source of the quote is cited. More extensive quotations require written permission from the original source. This permission must be included with the article submission.]
4. Authors are responsible for ensuring that all persons photographed have given their permission for the photograph to be published.

Preparing the Manuscript

Articles should be typed, double-spaced, with at least 1.25 inch margins on all sides. All pages should be numbered. Include author(s) name and contact information (name, address, telephone, and fax and email, if available) on the cover page. Submissions on computer disk (format Microsoft Word) or by email are preferred. Please indicate the kind of computer and the name of the word processing program used. Photographs or drawings related to the article are encouraged and should be included with the submission, along with descriptive information about the item sent for use in a caption.

Review Procedure

During the transition to our new editorial infrastructure, the Editor will review all articles and determine if the article merits publication in *Educating Children for Democracy*. Authors will be notified when their article is accepted and will be sent a brief agreement outlining terms of publication. All accepted articles are edited for style and content. Authors may be asked for assistance in the editing process. *Educating Children for Democracy* offers no payment for articles submitted. Articles and illustrations are considered a contribution to the early childhood profession.

We are currently establishing an editorial infrastructure that will cultivate original articles from teachers, parents, administrators, and faculty involved in early childhood programs and reforms in Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Baltics, Mongolia, and Haiti. During 2002, we will be identifying editorial associates in each of the 27 countries where active Step by Step programs are operating. These editorial associates will receive specialized training and ultimately will be responsible for soliciting and reviewing articles within each country; appropriate articles will then be forwarded to the Editor for blind, peer-review. If you are interested in becoming an editorial associate, please send an email to the Editor. We are also seeking qualified individuals to serve as regional Co-Editors and members of our Advisory Board. Please email your CV to the Editor with a letter of interest stating your qualifications for these positions.

Where to Send Prepared Manuscripts

During the transition to the new editorial infrastructure, authors located in countries with active Step by Step Programs should submit articles to the National Step by Step organization in their country in English or the national language. A list of National Step by Step organizations along with contact information is provided on the back inside cover of this publication, and is available online at the ISSA web site **http://www.issa.nl**. Authors from all other countries may submit articles for consideration to:

Deborah F. Perry, Ph.D., ECD Editor, Georgetown University Child Development Center, 3307 M Street, N.W., Suite 401, Washington DC 20007,
Email: dfp2@georgetown.edu.