Educating Children for Democracy

The Journal of the International Step by Step Association

Quality in Early Childhood Education

Number 7, Summer/Fall 2004

The International Step by Step Association is committed to having a journal that is written for and by teachers, parents, faculty in institutions of higher education, and other interested educational professionals serving children from birth through grade 8.

Educating Children for Democracy, the professional journal of the International Step by Step Association, is intended for teachers of children from birth through grade eight, faculty who instruct preschool and/or primary school teachers, and other educational professionals interested in child-centered teaching methods. The journal emphasizes change and educational transformation, based on the experience of countries in transition, and addresses the continuing challenge for all democracies to provide the kinds of educational experiences that will ensure the continuation of open and free societies.

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The International Step By Step Association (ISSA) is a non-governmental membership organization established in the Netherlands to foster democratic principles and promote parent and community involvement in early childhood education. ISSA's vision is of an open society where the entire community helps children to reach their full potential and where children are active participants in the learning process.

ISSA combines the strengths of twenty-nine organizations in as many countries, reaching over 200,000 preschool and primary teachers, as well as caregivers, parents, school directors, psychologists, community leaders, and local and national education officials. Step by Step Programs currently reach well over one million children and their families. ISSA's members cooperate to advocate for equal access to quality education for all children; engage in national reform of early childhood education systems; develop new teacher resources; provide training; encourage research; implement national, regional, and international projects; and provide a forum for educators, experts, and policy makers to share knowledge and experience.

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Welcome to Issue 7

Quality in Early Childhood Education

More than 175 participants convened in Prague for the 5th Annual Conference of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), to present, discuss, and debate the meaning of quality in early childhood education.

Nearly a decade ago, the Step by Step Program was launched in 15 countries to foster democratic principles and promote parent and community involvement in early childhood education. Program pioneers focused their energies on identifying effective strategies to implement child-centered teaching methods. Today Step by Step operates in 30 countries. Now the critical issue for program champions is quality.

In October 2003 more than 175 participants convened in Prague for the 5th Annual Conference of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), to present, discuss, and debate the meaning of quality in early childhood education. Issue 7 of *Educating Children for Democracy* is devoted to the theme of that meeting and draws most of its content from conference presentations and workshops.

ISSA Conference Themes

- Defining Quality
- Achieving, Maintaining, and Ensuring Quality
- Building a Quality Education System
- Advocating for Quality
- Measuring and Evaluating Quality

Feasting on Quality Education

Sue Bredekamp, PhD, Director of Research for the Council for Professional Recognition, opened the conference with a keynote presentation on "Defining Quality in Early Childhood Education and Strategies for Reaching Our Goals." In her article Dr. Bredekamp offers us an appealing metaphor—the idea that quality education "is the difference between eating and dining"—and guides us through a comparative analysis of fine dining and quality education, drawing attention to the social and cultural dimensions of education as well as to concerns of content and aesthetics. As for achieving quality, Dr. Bredekamp reinforces what we intuitively already know, that—"There is really only one key strategy for providing high quality early childhood education: good teachers."

Phyllis Magrab, PhD, Director of Georgetown University's Center for Child and Human Development amplifies this portrait of quality education, drawing on the wisdom of the children in Step by Step classrooms. In this article, based on her closing keynote, "Voices of Children," Dr. Magrab shares the children's vision of quality education, giving us their responses to the questions "What makes your classroom really special?" "What do you think is really important to learn?" "What would you change in your school?" Not surprisingly, the children talk about their teachers and the relationships that motivate them to learn. Nastea (age 4, Moldova) tells us what makes her classroom really special: "Because I come in and see you (the teacher)!"

The conference also offered, in interactive workshops, hands-on strategies for achieving quality education in curriculum development, parent involvement, teacher training, and community-based programs. In "Hands Across the River" Marika Shonia, PhD, Step by Step Master Teacher Trainer and her colleagues from Georgia present a stunning example of child-centered, theme-based curriculum development. Enhanced by diagrams, children's artwork, and photographs of classroom activities, this article explains how teachers and family coordinators can plan together around children's interests to build a rich and

meaningful context for learning. The beautiful artwork on the cover of this issue grew out of this thematic project, "Mtkvari—Everybody's River."

Strategies for Evaluating Teachers and Involving Parents

In her article on teacher evaluation, "Teacher Evaluation Using ISSA Standards: A Tool for Professional Development and Quality Improvement," Tatjana Vonta, EdD, Director of the Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives in Slovenia, describes a research study that investigated whether the certification process, using the ISSA Teacher Standards, could also be an effective strategy for teacher evaluation and professional development. The answer is yes—when the use of ISSA Standards is combined with constructive feedback, reflective conversation, and the active participation of teachers in creating a plan to improve quality. Teachers, like the children they teach, grow and learn through meaningful relationships with skilled mentors.

In "Ensuring Program Quality through Family-School Partnerships," Corneila Cincilei, PhD, Director of the Step by Step Program in Moldova, and her colleagues examine how parents' views about what constitutes quality education change after they participate in a Step by Step Program. The expectations of parents about what their children's education "ought" to involve and about their own role in this education, tend to change dramatically after their experience in child-centered classrooms. As these authors remind us, "It is worth taking a look back to where we started in order to see signs of positive change."

"The Garden of Mothers and Children Network in Albania" by Linda Spahiu, Director and Suela Cela, Project Manager at Christian Children's Fund (CCF) in Albania, describes a community-based program that seeks to improve living conditions for children and families suffering from poverty. By establishing a network of Garden of Mothers and Children centers, CCF mobilizes local groups, including fathers, and community resources to enhance early childhood development, education, and health services. The benefits that have resulted for children, families, and communities in Albania underscore the importance of CCF's key program strategies to empower women and mobilize men to advocate for children's rights.

Quality Education and Democracy

Kathleen Knox, MA, Senior Correspondent at Radio Free Europe, attended ISSA's 5th Annual Conference and visited Step by Step classrooms in Prague. On October 23, 2003, her feature, "Czech Republic: Reform Project Tackles Childhood Education 'Step By Step,'" was aired on Radio Free Europe. Her article highlighting the conference and the Step by Step Program is reprinted here. Ms. Knox presents the essence of the Step by Step Program when she writes: "The ideas behind Step by Step seem obvious. Help young children learn through play. Encourage them to think for themselves. Relate the things they're learning to the real world. Make all children welcome. Get parents to join in. Be tolerant of minorities. Include disabled children. The bonus is that those are some of the things that help foster democratic principles, too."

Why Quality in Education Is Important

"God, Turn Me Into a Bug" is included in this volume not because it was a conference presentation or workshop but because it reminds us why achieving quality in early childhood education is of vital importance. In this heart-felt and insightful account by Dragica Varat, a Step by Step Master Teacher Trainer in Coatia, we meet Damir—"a boy who knows the difference between love and hatred, good and evil; a boy who is used to beatings and rudeness, to hunger and poverty; a boy who, above all, needs a lot of attention." We need teachers who are able to connect with children and feel compassion. We need quality education because what happens to children in their families and schools and communities really matters. As Phyllis Magrab concludes in "Voices of Children," "The future resides with our children. The responsibility for their future resides with us."

Please join us in Budapest, November 8-10, 2004, for ISSA's 10th Anniversary Conference "A Decade of Change: Stepping into the Future." We look forward to continuing to work together to meet the challenge of access to quality education for all children.

Rochelle Mayer, EdD
Editor

Keynote Presentations from ISSA's 5th Annual Conference

Defining Quality in Early Childhood Education and Strategies for Reaching Our Goals

We don't want children just to survive in child care. We want them to thrive.

by Sue Bredekamp, PhD, Director of Research, Council for Professional Recognition, Washington, DC

Keynote Speech Delivered at the 5th Annual Conference of the International Step by Step Association

I have worked for almost 30 years on issues of improving quality in early childhood education and enhancing the professional development of early childhood educators. In my experience, no effort toward that goal has impressed me more than the progress made in the very short time that Step by Step has been working in each of your countries. Each of you must be congratulated on your commitment to children and families, and your hard work under difficult conditions.

It was wonderful to have an opportunity to visit Step by Step classrooms during our visit to Prague. On the site visit I was reminded of something important—something I knew but had forgotten about the history of early childhood education. I asked the director of the preschool we visited why she had chosen to adopt the Step by Step philosophy for her school. She said that the Step by Step philosophy was congruent with that of Komensky, a famous Czech pedagogical leader who believed that the foundation of learning is play. Komensky's picture was displayed on the wall in each of the classrooms. In English, we call Komensky—Comenius (one of the oddities of language translation that I'll never understand). But in our study of early childhood education in the United States, we learn about Comenius. Hearing this connection was very important to me. It reinforced for me the fact that the Step by Step approach to education is not the imposition of a North American perspective on other cultures as some people, including many Americans, have said. Rather, Step by Step is an approach that grows out of many diverse cultural traditions that have one thing in common—the

Photograph by the Step by Step Program, Croatia

study of young children, how they develop and learn optimally, and what kinds of environments and teaching practices are most effective in supporting their learning and development.

My topic—Defining Quality in Early Childhood Education and Strategies to Reach Our Goals—could be addressed quickly with a simple statement: study the children, listen to the children, and learn from them.

But that's not always so easy, especially with preschoolers. I have 10 great nieces and nephews, and as you can imagine, I take an eager interest when each of them starts preschool. One of my most verbal nephews is Michael. When he started preschool, I interrogated him with questions like, "What did you do at school? What did you like? What did you play with? How do you like your teacher?" After several minutes of this, Michael looked at me with disgust and said, "You ask too many questions!" So we usually use more formal strategies to define quality than relying on the opinions of children.

What Is Quality?

In 1981, more than 20 years ago now, I was working for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) when they began to develop an accreditation system for early childhood centers and schools in the United States. Today NAEYC is the largest professional association of early childhood educators in the world, with more than 100,000 members. Then, however, the organization was only one-third its present size, and the field was much less developed. At that time, the most pressing question was, "What *is* quality?" We didn't have as much research as we have now about the effects of various aspects of a program on outcomes for children, although we did review the existing research to develop the accreditation standards. We didn't have consensus about what the standards should be. So we held meetings throughout the country and asked people to tell us or write us their thoughts about quality.

My job was to gather all this information and transform it into drafts of standards. When I was preparing for this speech, I remembered one particular response to the question, "What is quality?" Dr. Lilian Katz, professor at the University of Illinois, who is well known throughout the world, wrote, "Quality is the difference between eating and dining."

Those words came back to me as I thought about trying to define quality now, two decades later. The difference between eating and dining is quality. What are the dimensions that make an experience dining rather than merely eating? I think that there are parallels between what defines a dining experience and what makes a high quality early education experience.

Eating is a basic human need. Eating is necessary for survival. Adequate, even mediocre, care can meet the child's basic needs for health and safety—survival, if you will. But we don't want children to just survive in child care. We want them to thrive, and for that we need high quality early education.

Dining. What are the qualities that turn basic eating into a memorable dining experience? Think for a minute of a wonderful, high quality dining experience some place, some time in your life. It may have been a special occasion, or it may have been last night. What made it such high quality?

> Quality is the difference between eating and dining.... Just as an excellent chef prepares the very best options from which to choose, so does an excellent teacher.

1. First and foremost, the dining experience is defined by the food itself. The content of the experience matters. The food itself must be nourishing and meet nutritional needs. Similarly, a good early childhood program meets all of children's needs: their need for loving care, their physical needs, and their need for intellectual stimulation. The content of educational experience matters. Children need interesting things to learn about that are worthy of their time and attention. Their brains need nutrition just as much as their bodies.

Photograph by the Step by Step Program, Moldova

2. Dining is aesthetically pleasing. The best restaurants pay almost as much attention to the décor as to the menu. The environment also helps

define a high quality early childhood program. It needs to be comfortable, aesthetically appealing, and engaging to all the senses.

3. Social interaction sets dining apart from eating. Just as communication and conversation enliven a good dining experience, they are essential determinants of the quality of children's experiences in early childhood programs.

4. All dining has a cultural dimension. Our most memorable dining experiences are probably of two kinds: those that are culturally congruent and therefore most comfortable for us, and those that broadened our cultural experience by exposing us to the foods of another cultural group. Good early childhood programs provide children with both kinds of cultural experiences—those that build children's self-esteem and valuing of their own identity and culture, and those that demonstrate appreciation and respect for other cultures.

Children need interesting things to learn about that are worthy of their time and attention. Their brains need nutrition just as much as their bodies.

5. Learning is a less obvious but key dimension of dining. Dining is an excellent context for learning from other people, from the first-hand experience of the interaction with objects, and it has the added motivation of being very meaningful and engaging. Quality programs always provide hands-on, interactive, meaningful, interesting learning experiences.

6. While dining is a social experience, it is also an individual experience. It permits choices—the best dining experiences offer just the right number of choices, not so many to be overwhelming but enough to provide for preferences and opportunities to taste new foods. Again, high quality early childhood programs provide opportunities for children to make meaningful choices, to experience new things, take risks, but not so much that children become frustrated or the environment is chaotic. Just as an excellent chef prepares the very best options from which to choose, so does an excellent teacher.

7. Family involvement is another key dimension of dining. Perhaps our most memorable dining experiences involve our extended families during holidays or special occasions such as weddings, birthdays, or anniversaries. The involvement of families enriches every experience for the young child and is an absolute essential for quality early education. To ensure that we adequately provide all the other dimensions of quality for children, we must have relationships with their families, who know them best.

Assessing Quality

Let's think about the young child as restaurant critic for a moment (or program critic to be more accurate.) What questions should we ask about a

Photograph by the Step by Step Program, Moldova

program from a child's point of view?

1. Are my physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs met?
2. Is the program a welcoming, attractive, comfortable place where I see myself (my identity) represented? Are furnishings my size?
3. Do I have a sense of belonging here? Do I have friends? Does my teacher talk just to me at times?
4. Do I see my cultural identity represented and respected? Do I learn to appreciate the cultural perspectives of others?
5. Are there interesting, important topics to learn about? Do people value my time and attention and not waste it with endless waiting or senseless activities?
6. Do I have real choices?
7. Is my family welcomed and valued for their contributions?

In short, is my early childhood program child-centered?

Examining the Role of Play

One particular dimension of program quality deserves special mention—play. If you think about it, dining is one of the ways that adults most often play. And memorable dining experiences are always playful. If they are too formal or structured, we don't enjoy them nearly as much. For young children, of course, play is much more important. Play is the context within which young children learn and develop most effectively, and play is also a process that contributes to children's development in all areas: cognitive, social, emotional, and physical.

Perhaps most important, play is powerfully motivating for children. Two colleagues at the University of Maryland, my Alma Mater, Nancy Wiltz and Elisa Klein, did a study of four-year-olds' perceptions of their experiences in high and low quality child care centers (Wiltz & Klein, 2001). First, they conducted observations of centers and rated them as either high or low quality using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and independent measures/standards similar to those ISSA has developed. Then they asked children what they like best to do in school. Ninety-eight percent of children responded that *play* of some kind was what they liked best about school, even in poor quality centers where children had less opportunity to play. Those children somehow found a way to almost subversively play.

What did children not like about their early childhood programs? They didn't like it when people were mean to them. They didn't like timeout (a discipline strategy), naptime, or group time. In good centers only 8 percent said group time, compared to 25 percent in poor centers. But even in good centers, some of the children said they didn't like group time because it's too long. "I'd rather be playing," was the common response.

What happens in high quality programs is that good teachers use children's interests, particularly their intrinsic motivation to play, to achieve our goals for their learning and development.

Achieving Quality

The metaphor—quality is the difference between dining and eating—provides a concise way to define quality. Each of us can bring meaning to this metaphor from our own experiences, not just of dining but also of good quality early childhood programs. As for the second part of the topic—strategies for reaching our goals—there is really only one key strategy for providing high quality early childhood education: good teachers. What do good teachers do? The act of teaching in early childhood education is articulated in the ISSA standards. Good teachers:

> … there is really only one key strategy for providing high quality early childhood education: good teachers.

- Engage in positive, development-enhancing teacher-child interactions;
- Encourage family involvement and build relationships with families;
- Are child-centered;
- Provide meaningful learning experiences and an intellectually engaging curriculum;
- Provide a supportive learning environment; and
- Protect children's health and safety.

My great niece Lauren started preschool last fall. Just as I did with her cousin Michael, I asked her all about her experiences. "What did you do at school?" I inquired. "Cut," she answered. "What else did you do?" I asked. "Cut," she said. I know she likes scissors, but that seems like a lot of cutting, I thought. Finally, I asked, "What did you like best about school?" To this she smiled broadly and said, "I love my teacher!" And I was content. That's all I needed to know.

Reference

Wiltz, N.W., & Klein, E.L. (2001). "What do you do in child care?" Children's perceptions of high and low quality classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 16*(2), 209-236.

Voices of Children

by Phyllis Magrab, PhD, Director, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, Washington, DC

Based on the Closing Keynote Delivered at the 5th Annual Conference of the International Step by Step Association

I am honored to give these closing words. It is with great pleasure that I bring the voices of children to our rich discussion of quality in education.

Earlier this year, all the Step by Step programs were invited to participate with me in this effort—to ask children a few simple questions—What makes your classroom really special? What do you think is really important to learn? What would you change in your school?—and to share their drawings and pictures.

Reading through the many engaging responses has been a joy. These children speak with eloquence about the essence, value and meaning of their education. They remind us, in their own words, what we mean by quality education. At each stage of development they tell us about the learning opportunities, social life, and physical environment they value in school. But most of all, they tell us about their teachers, and the relationships that motivate them to learn the skills they need to lead healthy, productive, dignified lives and contribute to the development of their country.

Thank you to all who have made this possible.

Iulia, Age 4, Moldova

Schools that Participated in Voices of Children

- Armenia – School #198, Yerevan
- Azerbaijan – Kindergarten #266, Baku
- Azerbaijan – School #153, Baku
- Belarus – School #3, Minsk Region, Zaslavl
- Belarus – School #6, Grodno Region, Volkovysk
- Georgia – Tbilisi #2 Experimental Secondary School, Tbilisi
- Haiti – Ecole Gerard Baptiste de Vallue
- Kazakhstan – School #79, Almaty
- Kazakhstan – School #124, Almaty
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- Slovakia – I. Zakladna Skola (Elementary School), Kremnica
- Slovakia – I. Zakladna Skola (Elementary School), Ziar nad Hronom
- Tajikistan – School #2, Dushanbe
- Tajikistan – School #8 Nizomi Ganjavi, Dushanbe
- Uzbekistan – School #145, Tashkent City

What Makes Your Classroom Really Special?

My friend George.
Cezar, Age 4
Moldova

Because I come in and see you
(the teacher).
Nastea, Age 4
Moldova

I can play and there is lots of sun in our school.
Anton, Age 4
Moldova

I do stuff on the blackboard.
Vela, Age 4,
Haiti

Because my teacher is my friend
Tomas, Age 5
Slovakia

Our cooks can make delicious meals.
Andrej, Age 6
Slovakia

Nastea, Age 4, Moldova

Babek, Age 5, Azerbaijan

My mother can play with me.
Zuzana, Age 6
Slovakia

The classroom is nice and comfortable; we have many interesting books.
Cristina, Age 7
Moldova

Beautiful classrooms and good teachers make great my school.
Idona, Age 7
Tajikistan

That we understand each other, listen to and hear each other.
Ina, Age 9
Moldova

We study according to the Step by Step Program, we have our classroom equipped different than others.
Robert, Age 9
Slovakia

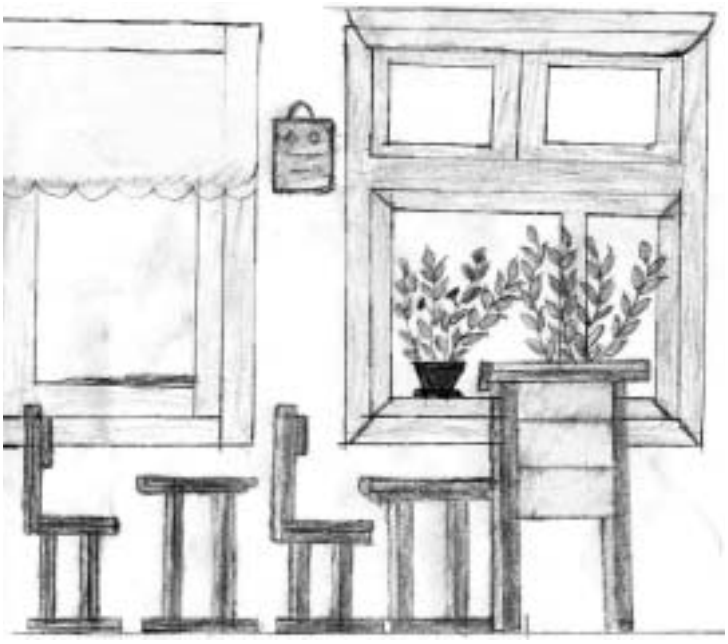
My school is great because we learn in a Step by Step classroom where I feel happy.
Mariam, Age 9
Georgia

We are classmates, we are friends, and we will always give a hand to those who need it. And what matters is that we are on one team!
Inga, Olga, and Natasha
Uzbekistan

Kind relationships with teachers who help you gain knowledge.
Malika, Age 10
Uzbekistan

We can trust each other.
Roderik, Age 10
Slovakia

My school is very clean, my pictures are often hanged on the walls, and parents and friends can observe them.
Alisher, Age 10
Kazakhstan

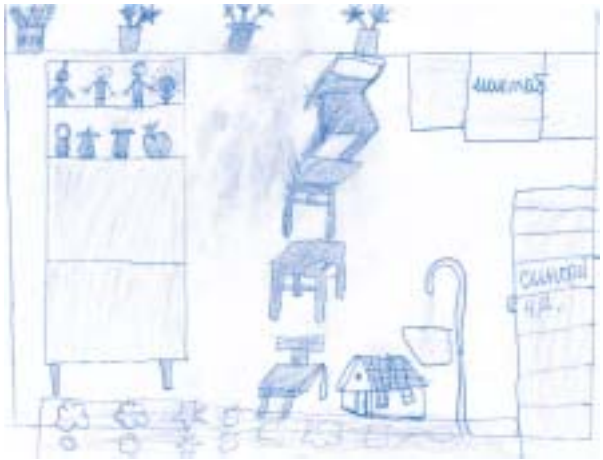


Shodi, Tajikistan

We study new things every day. We can be proud of our school.
Zaruhi, Age 11
Armenia

That we cooperate; we are a team.
Anastasia, Age 12
Moldova

My friends, teachers, parents — we make it all together.
Ionuts, Age 12
Moldova



Manizha, Age 10, Tajikistan

We can express ourselves freely, and we like each other very much.
Mariam, Age 13
Armenia

Our teachers are the most intelligent in town.
Dasha, Age 13
Belarus

My school is really big. It smells with painters. In my classroom there is new furniture, and a lot of materials in the art center.
Adilet, Age 9
Kazakhstan

But the main thing on my mind is that we think for ourselves; we are really the most self-dependent Eight Form in our school.
Masha, Age 14
Belarus

What do you think is really important to learn?

To learn the language of animals so that we can understand them better when they are sick and help them.
Maxim
Uzbekistan

To write my name, and to draw and to learn the time.
Cristi, Age 4
Moldova

How to help myself with the missing button.
Zuzana, Age 6
Slovakia

Vela, Age 4, Haiti

How to live happy.
Dan, Age 7
Moldova

Everything that one learns with interest and motivation.
Mariam, Age 9
Georgia

To work in groups and listen to others' opinions.
Abgaryan, Age 10
Armenia

To include lessons on politeness, so that teenagers don't offend the youngest ones.
Danila
Uzbekistan

It is important to learn foreign languages to communicate with children all over the world.
Yevgeniya
Uzbekistan

Learning more about other cultures.
Mariam, Age 13
Armenia

To know the school heroes — the teachers who put their heart in everyday work.
Nina, Age 15
Belarus

Everything is important!
Kristaps, Age 10
Latvia

Anastasia, Age 12, Moldova

What would you change in your school?

Nothing!
Martin, Age 6
Slovakia

I would like to make the chairs blue because Daniela doesn't like these ones.
Stefan, Age 5
Moldova

I want that all weak pupils become honor pupils.
Ardasheri, Age 10
Tajikistan

I would like our school will open the big library.
Mahbubai, Age 10
Tajikistan

I would insist on mandatory computer classes.
Zaruhi, Age 11
Armenia

Mariam, Age 13, Armenia

Haiti

We can take heart from these words of wisdom, and from the values, concerns and experiences they express.

The future resides with our children.

The responsibility for their future resides with us.

Classroom Practices

Czech Republic: Reform Project Tackles Childhood Education 'Step By Step'

by Kathleen Knox, MA, Senior Correspondent, Radio Free Europe, Prague, Czech Republic

When it comes to development, there's no more important time than a child's early years. But too often the traditional classroom—kids sitting silently in rows, teacher lecturing at the front—can be off-putting, to say the least. So why not build early education according to what young children like? That usually means lots of play, a place that makes them feel welcome, and one where they are free to say what they think. That's the basis for Step by Step, an education-reform project that focuses mainly on countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Professionals involved in the program gathered in Prague this week for their annual conference.

Prague, 16 October 2003 (RFE/RL)—At Angel Elementary School in Prague, teacher Radmila Neubertova is talking about children's rights with her class of nine-year-olds. They're asked to explain words like bullying, safety, or danger:

Girl: *"We still have danger [to explain]."*

Neubertova: *"What about 'danger' then?"*

Girl: *"When I am alone in the woods."*

Neubertova: *"That's when you feel unsafe?"*

Girl: *"If I'm lost, say."*

Neubertova: *"What are you afraid of?"*

Girl: *"I'm scared some animal will jump out at me."*

Boy: *"A bear!"*

The children sit in a circle on the floor, throwing out their ideas and telling stories from their own personal experiences.

When they return to their desks for a math exercise, it's in the form of a game—and the seats are in clusters, not rows. All of those afraid of math take note—the children are actually cheering. It's a typical Step by Step approach, similar to what you'll now find in classrooms in some 30 former communist countries.

Rochelle Mayer is an American early childhood specialist who was visiting the class. She spoke to RFE/RL during the raucous school break. "The discussion was very characteristic of what you would want to see happen in the Step by Step classroom because of the topic discussed, about safety both physical and psychological," Mayer said. "The issues of bullying and how you're treated at home and in the classroom came up, and the children were very interested and involved in sharing their experiences. That's very much what you're trying to accomplish. And I also felt that when children went into their groups and did bingo, a math game, and they had to work together as a team to try to win, there was great enthusiasm. And I felt throughout there was a very nice relationship, a rapport between the adult and the children. It looked very fun to be there and involved."

The ideas behind Step by Step seem obvious. Help young children learn through play. Encourage them to think for themselves. Relate the things they're learning to the real world. Make all children welcome. Get parents to join in. Be tolerant of

The ideas behind Step by Step seem obvious. Help young children learn through play. Encourage them to think for themselves. Relate the things they're learning to the real world. Make all children welcome. Get parents to join in…

Photograph by Zdenka Raskova

Parents visit first grade class at Primary School Zapadni 18, Plzen, Czech Republic.

minorities. Include disabled children. The bonus is that those are some of the things that help foster democratic principles, too.

But often parents and teachers are skeptical and worry their children won't do well academically. Step by Step people say the reverse is true—often they do better.

Regina Sabaliauskiene, the Step by Step country director for Lithuania, told RFE/RL: "Once, one parent came into the office [of a Step by Step school] and asked: 'I can't understand what you're doing with our [son]. He's going to the first grade for almost a month and each day when he's coming home, I ask what have you been doing at school? Always the same answer, "We've been playing." So please tell me when you will start to teach them.' After that the principal said, 'OK, go together with us in the classroom, and we can observe how they are playing.' The parent came, and after he observed the play, he came back to her office and said: 'What do you think—that they are all Einsteins? Why are you giving them such difficult tasks?' Really, children, when they are learning through play, they can't recognize that someone is teaching them. They are having fun, but really they are learning a lot."

Step by Step was launched nine years ago by George Soros and his Open Society Institute and is aimed at children 10 and younger. It's now an international network that trains teachers and professionals—200,000 of them so far. It provides manuals and children's books translated into many languages. Projects run by Step by Step have attracted funding from the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the European Union.

"The idea behind it is simple, but not simplistic," Cornelia Cincilei said. She's the program director for Moldova, which has 350 participating kindergartens and schools. Cincilei said it harnesses a child's natural curiosity and desire to explore, as she illustrates with a story of what happened when a Step by Step kindergarten merged with a traditional one.

"They had to divide the children into two classrooms, and in a week the parent of a child who was moved from Step by Step to a regular classroom came to the principal and said, 'Why did you punish us? My child stopped asking questions!' That was an indicator of how the program enhances children's curiosity and desire to discover things," Cincilei said.

Step by Step schools also try to be as inclusive as possible—and for some children that might mean their first experience in a normal classroom.

Dina Aidzhanova is the Step by Step country director for Kazakhstan. Three years ago she and her Kyrgyz colleague set up a joint project to help disabled children—especially from environmentally damaged areas—join regular schools.

"Several years ago, these kind of children were isolated, and they had no model how to develop themselves because they were in specialized schools where all children were disabled. Our idea was to help these children and to make the first efforts in this direction. It is very painful, and our national tragedy is not to pay attention to these children," Aidzhanova said.

Step by Step schools also try to be as inclusive as possible—and for some children that might mean their first experience in a normal classroom.

Aidzhanova's project trained teachers and arranged for participating schools to become more accessible for disabled students. They got some funding from USAID and scraped together everything from wheelchairs to books in Braille. Now, there are some 70 disabled children in Kazakhstan and nearly 40 in Kyrgyzstan in Step by Step classrooms in regular schools.

"It's a small start," Aidzhanova said. "But a heroic step, almost a revolution," she added. And that, the Step by Step people hope, is a bit like their program itself.

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Hands Across the River: Child-Centered, Theme-Based Curriculum Development in Georgia

by Marika Shonia, PhD, Step by Step Master Teacher Trainer, Center for Educational Initiatives, Georgia and Nino Kheladze, MEd, Step by Step Family Coordinator, Preschool #94, Georgia

For centuries Georgian poets have been inspired to write about the river Mtkvari. One wrote, "You have witnessed a lot, but kept silent." Now this precious source of water, fish, electricity, and cool summer breezes is threatened with ecological damage. In 1999 the Step by Step team in Preschool #94 decided to work on the thematic project, "Mtkvari—Everybody's River," to give the river a voice. Through cooperative planning and outreach, teachers, children, families, and the community were inspired to make the river speak about its history, significance, and needs. Classroom activities, field trips, and participation in Mtkvari Protection Day—a community-sponsored event—created opportunities for everyone to learn about water pollution problems and how to protect the river.

The River Mtkvari divides Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, into two parts.

The project, which began in one Step by Step school, soon spread to neighboring Step by Step schools. Now, each year, the project is brought to life again as two or more preschools work cooperatively to learn and teach each other more about the river. Ongoing development of the thematic project has also provided invaluable experience for Step by Step teams in creating high quality child-centered education through cooperative planning, parent involvement, and community participation.

"The River Mtkvari"

Teachers and Family Coordinators Plan Together Around Children's Interests

Critical to the development of the thematic project was joint planning among teachers and Family Coordinators from the neighboring schools, who met monthly to discuss the issues associated with the project and exchange ideas for its further development. Teachers created a detailed education plan based on

the interests and developmental levels of the children, using the KWL technique (Hansen, Kaufman, &Walsh, 1997). The KWL process involves teachers gathering information from children about what they Know (K), what they Want to know (W), and what they have Learned (L) about the topic. As a first step, teachers sat with the whole group and filled out a large chart, recording the children's responses to the questions, "What do you know about the Mtkvari River?" and "What do you want to know about the Mtkvari River?"

At the monthly meeting teachers and Family Coordinators pooled their ideas and designed a thematic curriculum web that incorporated all of the interests identified by the children (Walsh, n.d. 1-5). (See web diagram below). During this process it became clear that the initial focus on the river ("Is the Mtkvari River polluted?") led to more general questions about water ("Where do raindrops come from?"). As a result, the project was broadened from "Hands Across the River" to "Hands Across the Water."

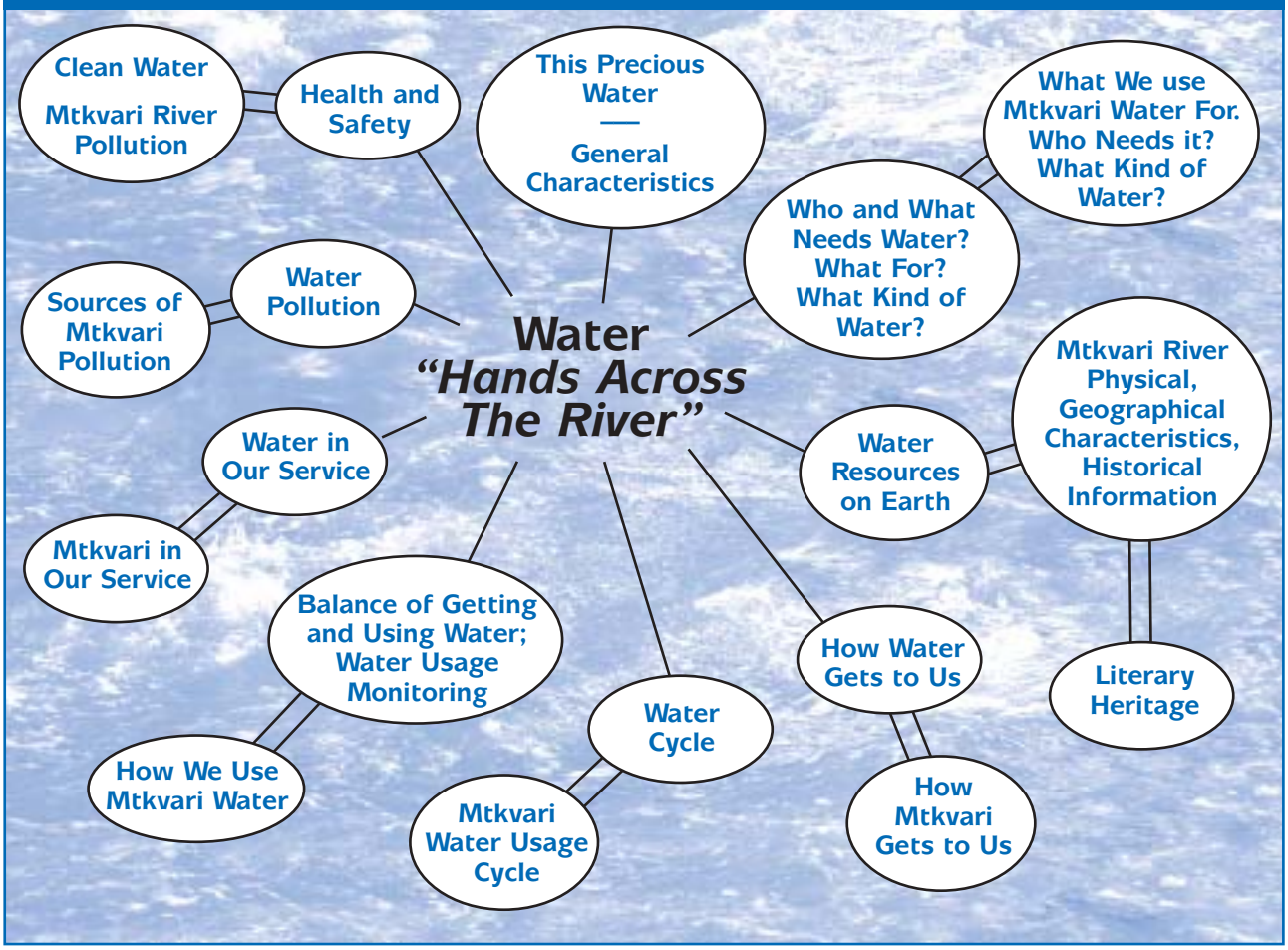
During the monthly meetings teachers also created instructional materials and teaching tools in the Georgian language, which they shared with each other. For example, they created a mural about the water cycle and "The Story About Tiny Raindrops" (see next page).

Water Cycle Mural.

Children Learn Through Play

The educational plans developed by the teachers and Family Coordinators reflected the principle that children learn through play and active exploration of their environment. Teachers designed activity centers where chil-

Thematic Curriculum Web: Water



The Story About Tiny Raindrops

Tiny Raindrops lived happily in their home clouds. They were all different, even their adventures and dreams differed… but three of them—Kap-Kap , Kup-Kup and Kip-Kip—were real dreamers.

Kap-Kap dreamt of traveling to foreign countries; Kup-Kup dreamt of helping a rainbow glitter in different colors; Kip-Kip dreamt of watering thirsty grass, flowers, bushes and trees… All of them waited for their dreams to come true.

One day the strong wind blew. The clouds moved faster and faster, became darker and darker and finally the doors opened and raindrops were set free to come down from the clouds: It rained…

"Three Little Rain Drops Lived in the Clouds"

As soon as Kap-Kap saw the river flowing below, she jumped out of the cloud, fell into the river and joined the river water drops to travel together with them.

Kup-Kup waited for the sunrays to appear, then together with other raindrops jumped out of the clouds and glittered colorfully in the beautiful rainbow arch.

Kip-Kip fell right on the top of a green leaf, which trembled and bent down as Kip-Kip was too heavy for the tiny leaf to hold. Kip-Kip slid down and down until he found himself on the earth. He disappeared almost immediately, as the soil was too dry and cracked because of the drought. It soaked up Kip-Kip. Kip-Kip found himself sliding down the crack moistening the soil. He thought, "I wonder what will happen to me? Will I ever return to my mother clouds? Will I ever see the blue sky and the golden sun again?"

Meanwhile Kip-Kip observed an adventurous and busy underground world: worms, a mole, mice… All were busy with their work. "Oh, what is this white thick strip?" thought Kip-Kip and came closer to examine it. As soon as Kip-Kip approached, the strange strip soaked up Kip-Kip. Kip-Kip felt that he was sliding up and up like on an elevator together with other raindrops. First they reached the trunk, then the branches and leaves of the tree. It happened so because the white thick strip was the root of the tree. It soaked raindrops up to alleviate the thirst of the tree… The dried leaves gradually came alive. Kip-Kip reached a tiny leaf on the top of the tree and suddenly a miracle happened: Kip-Kip could see the sky, the sun and even mother clouds… Kip –Kip became smaller and smaller. The warm rays of the sun touched Kip-Kip and turned him into vapor.

All of a sudden Kip-Kip felt that he was flying high in the sky. He was so happy that he had helped the thirsty tree. He felt so proud and important! And besides he was returning home again! Friends were waiting for Kip-Kip in the mother clouds to start their round trip journey all over again.

dren could learn about the water web topics and subtopics through observation, exploration, experimentation, inquiry, and analytical thinking. The children studied many aspects of water, from its general characteristics to the water cycle and acid rain.

The activities developed to support the theme-based curriculum involved multiple aspects of learning and included hands-on classroom experiences and field trips. Children wrote stories and poems, conducted science experiments, made maps, and used sand and water to create landscapes for a model of the Mtkvari River. They exchanged ideas, letters, and artwork with children from other schools. Children conducted investigations into the cleanliness of the Mtkvari River, plant growth, water quality, and the water cycle. Favorite topics the children explored included acid rain, bubbles, and sink or float. Attired in national

Children had a wonderful opportunity to explore, observe, analyze, create, and find answers to their questions—and have fun!

dress, children acted out the Mtkvari's historical events in the drama activity center. They wrote and published their stories and pictures in a newspaper and created a river environment in their block center. Children most enjoyed "fishing" in the preschool yard, cooking food that really came from the river, and sitting down together to eat fish salad.

Continued on page 20.

Experimenting with water: blowing bubbles.

Ongoing development of the thematic project has provided invaluable experience for Step by Step teams in creating high quality child-centered education through cooperative planning, parent involvement, and community participation.

Children act out Mtkvari River folklore in the block and drama center.

Children at Preschool #17 are looking through the gifts from the children of Preschool #162.

Children at Preschool #162 are drawing to send their artwork to children at Preschool #17.

Children create a model of the Mtkvari River in the sand activity center.

Mtkvari Protection Day

The preschool children opened the celebration by singing the anthem they had written dedicated to the project. Children wearing their national dress performed dances representing their culture and history. Teachers and children shared the experience and the results of their work with their colleagues and guests, complemented by the display of children's work on the project. After the celebration teachers, staff, and guests gathered around the table to discuss project outcomes and considerations for the future.

Children present "What We Learned" at Mtkvari Protection Day.

Children perform a Georgian Folk dance in the block center.

Experimenting with water: sink or float?

"Fishing" in the preschool yard.

Parents helping children cook fish salad.

Children had a wonderful opportunity to explore, observe, analyze, create, and find answers to their questions—and have fun!

Parents and Community Become Involved

Parent interest and involvement increased during the course of working on the project. In addition to assisting the teachers and the children in their daily activities, parents were eager to get more information about the topic, including water pollution problems. Through the Family Coordinator and parents, an environmental NGO—Foundation Aquamedia—became actively involved. The foundation supported a meeting of the preschool teachers, parents, and children on Mtkvari Protection Day. An informational brochure, "How Much Clean River Water Means," was distributed, and parents wrote letters to governing agencies about their concerns for more water filtering systems. Proponents of a clean Mtkvari also met at the mayor's house in Tbilisi to discuss ecological issues.

"Golden fish lived in a small river, and they joined Mtkvari."

"Hands Across the Water" continued into 2003 and was enriched by new elements. A questionnaire, "What We Know And What We Don't Know About Mtkvari," was given to parents. They also received a map of the tributaries that flow into the Mtkvari, and during the summer they collected information on the health of these feeder streams. Teachers used this information to compare and contrast the Mtkvari with its tributaries.

Celebration on Mtkvari Protection Day.

Collaboration Pays Off

During the three years of working on the collaborative project, the schools realized the following outcomes:

- Cooperation—working together on joint projects became an established practice.
- Materials for an in-depth study of water and the River Mtkvari with associated ecological issues.
- "Learning through Play" materials to support choices in the activity centers.

Children had a wonderful opportunity to explore, observe, analyze, create, and find answers to their questions—and have fun!

- Stories and murals about the water cycle.
- A tradition of displaying and exchanging children's work, along with the tradition of celebrating ecological dates.
- The informational brochure, "Mtkvari—You have Witnessed a Lot."
- NGO and media involvement; articles published in both Georgian and Russian newspapers.
- A package of poems, songs, stories, and historical events associated with the River Mtkvari.

The goal of instilling in children an attitude of caring for their community, country, and environment was more than reached. Many adults also learned to care about the ecological problems of the River Mtkvari. "Hands Across the Water" is an example of how one school's ecological project became a community's project through collaboration among teachers, parents, and students. At last, the Mtkvari River has many voices.

Photographs by Nino Kheladze

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Teacher Evaluation Using ISSA Standards: A Tool for Professional Development and Quality Improvement

by Tatjana Vonta, EdD, Director, Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives, Slovenia

Photographs by Tatjana Vonta

Observation in the classroom.

The ISSA Teacher Standards, developed by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA, 2002), provide a model for teacher certification in the Step by Step Program. We were interested in the question of whether the certification process, using the ISSA Teacher Standards, could also be an effective strategy for teacher evaluation and professional development. A study was implemented in Slovenia (Vonta, 2003) to address the following research questions:

1. How good are ISSA Standards as a measure of quality?
2. Does the quality of teaching improve for teachers who participate in the certification process?
3. What kinds of factors influence the results on ISSA Standard scores?
4. What are teachers' opinions about the certification model and process?
5. What are certifiers' opinions about the certification model and process?
6. Do these opinions change over the duration of the whole certification process?

Research Design and Instruments

Based on the following characteristics, a representative sample of 20 preschool teachers was drawn from all 123 preschool teachers implementing the Step by Step methodology in classrooms for children three- to six-years old during the 2002/2003 school year in Slovenia:

- Years of job experience
- Level of formal education
- Average age of children in the classrooms
- Amount of in-service training
- Number of Step by Step classrooms in the preschool
- In-service training of teacher assistants

Two instruments were used to measure quality: the ISSA Teacher Standards Observation Form (ISSA, 2002) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) with 37 items (Harms & Clifford, 1980). We selected ECERS as a second instrument because

ISSA Teacher Standards

Standard 1: Individualization

Teachers use their knowledge of child development and their relationships with children and their families to appreciate the diversity of each class and to respond to each child's unique needs and potentials.

Standard 2: Learning Environment

Teachers promote a caring, stimulating, and inclusive classroom by organizing the environment in ways that best facilitate children taking learning risks, practicing democracy, and working both cooperatively and independently.

Standard 3: Family Participation

Teachers build partnerships with families to ensure optimum support for children's learning and developmental needs.

Standard 4: Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning

Teachers design and implement varied strategies to promote conceptual understanding and to encourage innovation, creativity, independent inquiry, social cooperation, and exploration within and across the disciplines.

Standard 5: Planning and Assessment

Teachers create plans based upon national standards, program goals, and individual needs of children and use a systematic approach for observing and assessing each child's progress.

Standard 6: Professional Development

Teachers regularly evaluate and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of their work and collaborate with colleagues to improve programs and practices for young children and their families.

ECERS (1980): 37 Items organized into 7 Subscales

Personal Care Routines
1. Greeting/departing
2. Meals/snacks
3. Nap/rest
4. Diapering/ toileting
5. Personal grooming

Furnishings/Display
6. Furnishings (routine)
7. Furnishings (learning)
8. Furnishings (relaxation)
9. Room arrangement
10. Child-related display

Language/Reasoning
11. Understanding language
12. Using language
13. Reasoning
14. Informal language

Fine/Gross Motor
15. Fine motor
16. Supervision (fine motor)
17. Gross motor space
18. Gross motor equipment
19. Gross motor time
20. Supervision (gross motor)

Creative Activities
21. Art
22. Music/movement
23. Blocks
24. Sand/water
25. Dramatic play
26. Schedule (creative)
27. Supervision (creative)

Social Development
28. Space (alone)
29. Free play
30. Group time
31. Cultural awareness
32. Tone
33. Exceptional provisions

Adults
34. Adult personal area
35. Adult opportunities
36. Adult meeting area
37. Parent provisions

ECERS has frequently been used for comparative studies on quality.

The study proceeded in two phases: preparation and evaluation. In the preparation phase we trained certifiers in the use of the instruments, tested the certifiers on inter-rater reliability, and created instruments for assessing teachers' and certifiers' opinions. In addition, we held meetings with teachers to share information and materials about the certification process. Teachers completed a self-evaluation according to the standards and registered for certification.

Teachers who participate in the certification process show improvement in the quality of their teaching.

The activities in the evaluation phase of the research are listed in **Table 1**.

Quality Improvement Planning

A key strategy for promoting professional development and quality improvement was the development and implementation of a Quality Improvement Plan. Based on findings from classroom observation, the teacher and Master Teacher Trainer (MTT) jointly developed a plan for improving the quality of teaching. Areas identified in the plan might include:

- Structure of the physical environment
- Individualization
- Involving children in the planning process
- Transition between activities
- Systematic observation and assessment of children's development and learning
- Meaningful and process-oriented learning
- Cooperative learning
- Developing elements of critical thinking (anticipation, inference, asking questions, argumentation, planning, and assessing)
- Active parent participation in the learning process
- Planning
- Experience-based learning
- Teamwork

Results

1) ISSA Standards are a valid tool for measuring teacher quality.

In order to ascertain the validity of the ISSA Standards, we compared the results of the findings from the ISSA Standards with the ECERS findings. We found a high and statistically significant correlation between the results on the ISSA Standards and the ECERS at the beginning of the certification process (first observation) and at the end of the process (second observation). After the first observation the Pearsons' coefficient of correlation was 0.88; after the second observation it was 0.84. We also measured the regression between ISSA and ECERS results and found them to be statistically significant. These results confirm that ISSA Teachers Standards are a valid tool for measuring teacher quality.

Table 1

Activities in Evaluation Phase

What	When	Who
1. First observation with ECERS (37 items) and ISSA Standards	Beginning of November	2 Master Teacher Trainers (MTT) receive training to become ISSA certifiers
2. Discussion with teachers after observation in the classroom	Beginning of November	2 Master Teacher Trainers
3. Quality report	Middle of November	2 Master Teacher Trainers create and write the report; 1 MTT communicates the findings in the report
4. Development of a Quality Improvement Plan (with teacher's active involvement)	Middle of November	Teacher coaching by 1 Master Teacher Trainer (the same MTT who communicated the findings from the Quality report)
5. Implementation of the Quality Improvement Plan	Middle of November through the end of March	Teachers
6. Second observation with ECERS (37 items) and ISSA Standards	End of March to beginning of April	2 Master Teacher Trainers
7. Discussion with teacher after the observation in the classroom	End of March to beginning of April	2 Master Teacher Trainers
8. Quality Report	End of March to beginning of April	2 Master Teacher Trainers writing the report; 1 MTT communicating the findings from the Quality Report
9. Quality Improvement Plan (with teacher's active involvement)	End of March to beginning of April	Teacher coaching by 1 Master Teacher Trainer (same MTT as communicated the findings from the Quality Report)

2) Teachers who participate in the certification process show improvement in the quality of their teaching.

The results on the ISSA Standards after the second observation are statistically significantly higher than after the first observation on all standards (see **Table 2**). Moreover, the data indicate that teachers improved their quality no matter what kind of instrument was used to measure quality. These findings suggest that the activities entailed in the certification process—observation with follow-up discussion, identification of the teacher's strengths and weaknesses for each standard, and active participation of teachers in the creation of a quality improvement plan—provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on and improve their practice.

3) The amount of in-service training has a positive effect on ISSA Standards scores.

We also examined the relationship between the results on ISSA Standards with such variables as amount of in-service training, amount of formal education, and number of years of teaching experience. As indicated in **Table 3**, we found that one variable—the amount of in-service training—was positively related to ISSA scores (Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation). However, we found no correlation between the level of teacher's formal education and ISSA scores. This result is surprising since we are

Table 2

Differences in Scores Between First and Second Evaluation With ISSA Standards

	MAXIMUM	AVERAGE SCORES IN FIRST EVALUATION	AVERAGE SCORES IN SECOND EVALUATION	DIFFERENCE
STANDARD 1 Individualization	9	7.0	8.3	1.3*
STANDARD 2 Learning environment	9	6.4	7.9	1.6*
STANDARD 3 Partnership with families	18	13.5	16.1	2.6*
STANDARD 4 Strategies for meaningful learning	15	10.8	13.2	2.4*
STANDARD 5 Assessment and planning	21	15.0	18.2	3.2*
STANDARD 6 Professional development	12	10.2	11.4	1.2*
ISSA together**	72**	52.6**	63.5**	10.9*

**Differences are statistically significant (Analysis of variance- Huynh-Feldt test).*
*** Total scores without scores at Standard 6.*

aware from other research of the importance of a high level of teacher education for achieving quality. It may be that the content and teaching approaches in higher education, based on traditional educational methods, are too dissimilar from the knowledge and skills measured by the ISSA Standards to have a positive effect on ISSA scores. On the other hand, in-service training that was in tune with the content and methods of the new educational paradigm—provided mostly by the Step by Step Program—resulted in high correlations with scores on the ISSA Standards.

The amount of in-service training has a positive effect on ISSA Standards scores.

4) Overall, teachers' opinions about the certification model and process were positive.

Teachers who were involved in the certification process said, at the end, that they would recommend certification to their colleagues. They affirmed that quality improvement can be achieved because it is based on a plan that is clear, operational, and proactive. They valued the certification process because it was goal oriented, promoted higher responsibility, and was better than self-evaluation because help was provided.

Coaching the teacher in preparing an individual quality improvement plan.

5) The certifiers identified challenges as well as posi-

Table 3

Correlation Between ISSA Scores and Some Independent Variables

	FIRST EVALUATION		SECOND EVALUATION	
	N	CORRELATION OF SCORES WITH ISSA	N**	CORRELATION OF SCORES WITH ISSA
DAYS ON TRAINING-SUM	N=20	0.58*	N=19	0.61*
AVERAGE AGE OF CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM	N=20	-0.25	N=19	-0.03
JOB EXPERIENCE OF TEACHER	N=20	0.33	N=19	0.11
NUMBER OF SBS CLASSROOMS IN PRESCHOOL	N=20	0.03	N=19	0.01

**correlation coefficient is statistically significant*

*** One teacher didn't participate in the second observation due to an extended leave of absence for health reasons.*

tive aspects about the certification process.

The certifiers noted that aspects of the certification process were stressful and difficult, especially the process of engaging low ISSA-scoring teachers in reflective conversation and quality improvement planning. However, they had a high opinion of the ISSA observation form and their preparation for the certification process. Moreover, they viewed their experience as one that positively influenced their own professional development as well as that of the teachers.

6) Opinions change, becoming more positive, over the duration of the certification process.

At the beginning of the process, teachers thought that the certification process was good because of the opportunity to receive feedback on their teaching. At the end of the certification process they felt it was good because it contributed to their professional and personal development and increased their satisfaction and motivation.

Conclusions

Our research confirmed that ISSA Standards are a valid instrument for external evaluation of teachers and, at the same time, can be used as an effective tool for professional development when combined with constructive feedback, reflective conversation, and the active participation of teachers in creating a quality improvement plan. The certification process is, however, only one small piece in a larger system of professional development that seeks to change the culture of the school and the culture of teaching to improve children's (and adults') learning. This larger system includes training and workshops, exchange of ideas, and support from colleagues, principals, and Step by Step team members. Step by Step seeks to build capacity for coaching and mentoring teachers in reflective teaching to achieve better quality and to develop a "learning community" on both the school and network level.

ISSA Standards are … an effective tool for professional development when combined with constructive feedback, reflective conversation, and the active participation of teachers in creating a quality improvement plan.

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Ensuring Program Quality through Family-School Partnerships

by Cornelia Cincilei, PhD, Director; Svetlana Seminonov, Master Teacher Trainer for Preschool and Valentina Lungu, Master Teacher Trainer for Primary School, Step by Step Moldova

Family-school partnership is a cornerstone of the Step by Step philosophy and a key strength of Step by Step programs internationally. The partnership with families has created wide support in communities, fostering the success of the Step by Step Program and contributing to the implementation of democratic changes. This article examines how the role of the family in the Step by Step Program contributes to ensuring program quality.

Teachers and administrators face a two-fold task: on the one hand… they have to respect parents' views on what parents consider quality in an educational program. On the other hand, they have to educate parents as partners to achieve educational goals in the best interests of the child.

The issue of family input into the quality of the Step by Step Program is quite intricate. Teachers and administrators face a two-fold task: on the one hand, recognizing that parents are the main educators of their own children, they have to respect parents' views on what parents consider quality in an educational program. On the other hand, they have to educate parents as partners to achieve educational goals in the best interests of the child.

Research Questions and Methodology

In an attempt to understand the parents' role in ensuring quality in the Step by Step Program, we posed the following questions:

- What do parents view as quality in educational programs?
- How do their views change as the child moves through stages of development?
- How did they change over the years of Step by Step implementation?

Photographs by the Step by Step Program, Moldova

In order to identify changes in parents' understanding of a quality educational program, data were collected through teacher interviews (80+) and parent questionnaires (160+). We interviewed teachers who had been in the program since 1994, asking them what they considered had changed in parents' expectations for the classroom environment, the school environment, the teacher's role and the role of parents. We also asked if they had noticed any difference in the types of questions or concerns parents used to have and have now. In the parent questionnaires, completed by parents at several sites, parents were asked what they thought was, in fact, important in an educational program.

Analysis and Findings

We sorted the responses into three age groups—infants and toddlers, kindergarten and pre-school, and primary school—since parents' expectations for each of these stages of development are quite different. In each of the three categories, we grouped the responses as *then* (i.e. at the beginning of the program) and *now*. Here are the results:

Parents' Expectations for a Quality Infant and Toddler Programs

Then

- The requirements that parents stated were minimal: children should not be wet, hungry, or cold; they should have a bed to sleep in and be safe;
- The caregiver was not expected to be a skilled educator.

Now

- Parents expect to find **a caring and skilled teacher**, able to recognize and respect the child's individuality, enhance children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, and accept the family in the classroom as partners;
- They look for **a stimulating environment** (understanding its value, parents contribute a lot to it, enriching the physical environment with cozy furniture brought from home, helping create materials, books, etc.)

Parents' Expectations for a Quality Kindergarten and Preschool Program

Then

- As children approached school age, parents placed increasing pressure on teachers to primarily develop children's' pre-academic skills, directly teaching them elements of reading, writing, arithmetic;
- Parents could evaluate learning by comparing the products children produced.

"I don't care so much about my child learning to read and write in the kindergarten; it is more important for me that she learns to communicate with peers and adults, to listen and think, and to be responsible."

— from a parent's questionnaire

Now

- Parents consider the development of **social skills, attitudes, and independent thinking** of much greater importance;
- They appreciate that teachers **support and develop the child's innate curiosity (inquisitiveness) and creativity**;
- They want to be sure that the child's opinion is respected.

It is important that the child "has his own opinion, is able to formulate it and that he feels that his opinion matters."

— from a parent's questionnaire

Parents' Expectations for a Quality Primary Program

I like that teachers in Step by Step "give children the opportunity to experience pleasure from finding out things and to reflect on their own activity."

— from a parent's questionnaire

Then

- The academic performance of children was of primary importance for the parents, with academic success measured by the child's ability to reproduce an amount of pre-established knowledge;
- Discipline—i.e., for the child "to be obedient"—was viewed as a value in itself.

Now

- Parents place a high value on the **teacher's ability to maintain the child's inner motivation for continuous learning**;
- They appreciate that teachers help **children become independent in discovering knowledge and evaluating their own progress**.

"I like that in this classroom children learn to work in teams, develop respect for their peers' opinion, become responsible for joint work."

— from a parent's questionnaire

I like that teachers develop "skills that are needed for his (the child's) successful functioning in everyday life."

— from a parent's questionnaire

Discussion

No doubt, changes that happened in society during the years of the program's existence in Moldova made many parents realize that the values promoted by the old system of education were meant to support an old system of socio-economic relations and that modern dynamic societies need other kinds of skills and attitudes. Herein lies the big difference between the Step by Step Program and the old education system that was highly disciplinarian and academically oriented.

Parents who understand this new paradigm have already made a big step forward. Still, there is another big step to be made between understanding an objective and reaching it in terms of daily classroom practice. Here the supporting and educating role of the teacher inside the partnership is very important: teachers help parents see how the strategies they use help develop the skills parents realize (or don't realize, for the moment) are important for their child, who will be active as an adult in a society quite different from the one they grew up in or live in today.

When parents understand how their new aspirations for their children's education are translated into new teaching strategies and learning activities, they become really important partners in the maintenance and improvement of program quality. Their input into ensuring program quality is considerable and diverse:

- Parents cooperate with the teacher in identifying child's interests and needs, as well as in identifying strategies that facilitate the child's learning.
- They contribute to classroom curriculum with topics to study and get involved in study projects (sharing expertise, organizing field trips, providing materials, etc.)
- Parents get actively involved in the new way of qualitative evaluation of children and understand its benefits and positive effects upon children's attitude toward learning (for this reason there is a lot of pressure coming from parents to revise the traditional system of evaluation in middle school).
- They contribute to the establishment of a true community of learners, where everybody is a learner.

Changing a person's mentality is a very difficult process: it requires a new paradigm that implies a change of values, and it is not always easy to see which is a real value and which can be lightheartedly traded for another. This change also happens very slowly, and one may become frustrated, and even discouraged, particularly if the country stagnates or suffers reverses in the implementation of democratic reforms. For this reason alone, it is worth taking a look back to where we started in order to see signs of positive change.

When parents understand how their new aspirations for their children's education are translated into new teaching strategies and learning activities, they become really important partners in the maintenance and improvement of program quality.

God, Turn Me Into A Bug

by Dragica Varat, Step by Step Master Teacher Trainer, Croatia

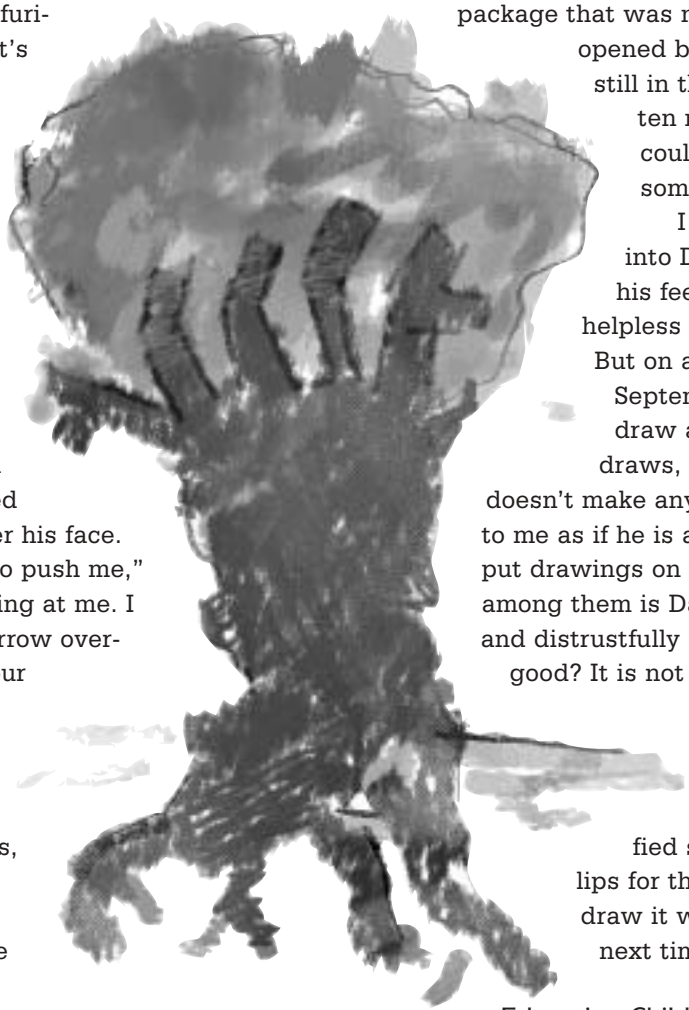
On a night when the sky was full of stars and the bats flew over the sleepy school playground, the pupils of the seventh grade were assembling a telescope and, blinking, looked toward the stars. In the corner of the playground, near the school wall, a young Romany boy was smoking. He ran toward us with fists held ready to fight. Short, with uncombed black hair and a dirty face, he cursed several times and disappeared in the darkness. Then it struck me: that was Damir—the "problem" from fourth grade of the morning shift.

By the time the moon sickle had emerged over the school building, I had forgotten about Damir and our first encounter.

Autumn 2000. A deep blue, dewy morning announced the first day of school. Two Romany boys—Eljko and Damir—who had failed and were retained in the same form, came to my class. Apart from them, there was also a new, tiny, blonde girl named Meri, who had finished the first three grades in Switzerland. My "old" pupils surrounded me at once, pricking me with their noses and their furious eyes and saying: "That's Damir: he lies, he steals, he smokes, he is the worst, he is crazy." I was afraid of their words and the fury in their eyes. I approached the newcomers to welcome them. Damir stood in the corner. He was pouting and muttered something under his breath. I wanted to touch him, but he backed away, lifting his hands over his face. "You don't have the right to push me," he snapped, not even looking at me. I lowered my hands, and sorrow overcame my body. That was our second encounter.

Days went by. Eljko and Meri soon became friends with everyone in the class. Damir, capricious, rough, always ready to fight, didn't have any friends in the class. No one wanted to sit next to him. He became worse and worse. During class he jumped on other people's words, made grimaces, cursed, didn't learn, and didn't do his homework. What should I do? There was no help. It was as if I had received a package that was not supposed to be opened but to be left to stand still in the darkest corner for ten more months so that I could then hand it over to somebody else next year.

It was as if I had received a package that was not supposed to be opened but to be left to stand still in the darkest corner…



I often tried to peek into Damir's soul, to reach his feelings, but I remained helpless before his dark eyes. But on a Wednesday, late in September, the children draw an autumn tree. Damir draws, too. He is calm then, doesn't make any scenes, and it seems to me as if he is almost enjoying it. I put drawings on the painting wall; among them is Damir's. He looks at me and distrustfully asks: "Is my drawing good? It is not as others." He remains standing in front of the painting wall looking at his drawing and a satisfied smile shows up on his lips for the first time: "I didn't draw it well, I'll do my best next time!" he retorts and

runs to Eljko. "She put my drawing on the painting wall! My drawing is on the painting wall!!!" he yelled and jumped for joy all over the classroom.

"How little it takes to make one happy," crossed my mind, and I realized that Damir had slightly opened the door to his heart.

About that time, I started attending the initial seminar of Step by Step. Delighted with the idea of forming a class oriented to the child, I decided to consult the principal, children, and parents and ask them to give me their permission to start practicing the program in my class.

"She put my drawing on the painting wall! My drawing is on the painting wall!!!" he yelled and jumped for joy all over the classroom.

Dark autumn-clouds hung over the town, and a festive atmosphere ruled our class—our class passed class rules of conduct—the Class Constitution. Negotiations lasted for almost ten days, and there were even some heated exchanges about the constitutional proposals. "If our proposals are passed, does that mean that we should stick to all those rules?" asked the playful ones uneasily. "If they break the rules, will we punish them?" the girls chuckled. It wasn't hard for my pupils to assume responsibility for their behavior. But, at last, the Class Constitution was ready to be adopted, and the first paragraph, "We come to school regularly, clean and tidy," was put there on Damir's suggestion.

The principal and secretary came to witness the correctness of the procedure of enacting the constitution, lending solemnity to such an important event for us.

Before the signing ceremony, Damir asked if he could explain to the guests what kind of class a Step by Step class is. "This is my class and here are my friends. What happened today is going to change our lives. We will go step by step ahead; it is not allowed to take a step backwards. I am changing my life, too." "God willing!" crossed my mind. We came over to sign the class rules. Damir put his signature next to Ivan's and Tomislav's, the signatures of his friends, with whom he played more and more often during the break.

Days went by lazily. Soon it was All Saints' Day. We read the text *Ships of Memories*. Each of us has his/her ship with which he/she sails through memories:

"I have a ship of memories too," said Damir. "It's a small pillow my little sister used to sleep on."

"Beautiful," I said clumsily, "that pillow reminds you of your sister and the days when you were small?"

"No, that pillow reminds me of my sister who was burned alive in the fire started by my brother from Fourth B class. Jasna was only one-year old. My mother and I were in the barn, and we couldn't break through the fire. A neighbor pulled her out. She was totally burned." His eyes brimmed with tears. A hush fell in the class. I was so overcome with sorrow that I forgot to speak. I couldn't move from my place. I let the bell, which denoted the end of class, save me.

Next morning during the news report at the morning meeting, Perica said, "Damir, is your sister's grave on the edge of the forest, and is *Jasna B., 1*

year written on the tombstone?"

"Yes. How do you know?"

"Yesterday afternoon we, the boys from the class, were searching for the grave of your sister. When we found it, we lighted a candle and said a prayer for her."

I was left speechless again.

The fourth-graders, ten-year-old boys, acted as adults at that moment, and I learned something from them: that Damir needs attention and love.

Little by little, step by step, Damir started to participate in the activities and, out of the corner of my eyes, I used to notice that he listened to me when I talked, contentedly blinking his dark eyes. During the break, he used to match mathematical dominoes with the girls or wipe the blackboard. He helped the cleaning women, he greeted his teachers, and the school soon forgot about Damir—the problem. Everybody except teacher D. Unfortunately, she couldn't accept changes that happened within the class, and I often saw how she chased him through the halls and how he called her names. Sometimes he was calm during her class, for me. As he used to say, "Because of you I will behave well, but she doesn't like me. Why is she like that? What happened in her life? She wants me to turn into a bug, so I would disappear from this world."

Spring set in, with all its flowers and scents. Through the classroom window we were watching a swallow that rose up skyward and rolled for joy when Damir suddenly interrupted us saying: "Teacher, God forbid, if my last night's dream comes true! You were walking home across the playground when you suddenly fell. I ran to you and tried to help you. Suddenly, I woke up, and my face was all wet. I was afraid." We laughed at Damir's dream, and until the end of class I totally forgot about it. That day I left school at about half-past one. At the school entrance door there was Damir waiting for me, and it had been a long time since his bus left. He walked with me across the playground. Feeling relieved, he said: "Now, you can go on alone." He wanted to be sure that the dream would not come true. I gave him some sweets: "Thank you, Damir, for your concern."

Summer set in early that year. Everything was bathed in a shiny river of light. Everything except Damir. He was coming to school exhausted and often threw up. I learned that his mother had left for Zagorje, to visit her relatives. His father drinks, and Damir takes care of his brothers all alone. They don't have much to eat. They get along somehow. "Teacher, no one wanted to sit next to Damir on the bus because he stinks," Eljko reported one day. I approached Damir. He smelled like a carcass.

I took him to the bathroom to brush his teeth and wash his face. But the odor was still there. "I have eaten only milk, I swear," he tried to justify himself, although I didn't ask him what he had had for breakfast.

Children were tidying the sports hall when I noticed Damir carefully putting something into his bag. I sent the children out and I peeked into his bag. In the bag there was a young cooked rat, wrapped up in a piece of paper. I was shocked. I was panicking.

"Is he so hungry, or is he demented? What should I do?"

"Report the parents to child welfare."

"Call the police."

"Expel him," the other teachers advised me.

… a boy who knows the difference between love and hatred, good and evil; a boy who is used to beatings and rudeness, to hunger and poverty; a boy who, above all, needs a lot of attention …

I decided to talk to Damir. He told me that he was hungry, and he wanted to see how a rat tasted. "I cooked it really well, but my brother didn't want to eat it."

The end of the school year. We say goodbye to each other. Many pupils will move to other schools, and about 15 "old" pupils will move up to fifth grade in my school. Damir is among them—the Romany; a boy who knows the difference between love and hatred, good and evil; a boy who is used to beatings and rudeness, to hunger and poverty; a boy who, above all, needs a lot of attention.

Autumn, 2001. Beginning of another school year. I meet Damir. He is angry, sullen, dirty. "Teacher slapped me first, and then asked me what my name was. She asked me who the hell let me move up to fifth grade!"

The schoolyard is frozen. On the freshly whitewashed wall Damir writes, "____ is a cow." Once again, Damir is the problem in our school.

The names of the children in this story have been changed.

School and Community Partnerships

The Garden of Mothers and Children Network in Albania

by Linda Spahiu, Director, Christian Children's Fund (CCF), Albania and Suela Cela, Project Manager, Early Childhood and Care Development Project, CCF, Albania

The ECCD project in Albania seeks to empower parents to lead the process of improving child care and education by participating in local groups and mobilizing community resources.

Fabiola, six- years old, and her sister Ina, four, live in Maqellara. They have never gone to kindergarten because the only one in their area was closed many years ago. Both sisters were having developmental difficulties; they did not communicate with peers or adults, only with their mother.

Genta, their mother, is poor and unemployed. In addition to the two girls, she has two younger children. Her husband, Shpetim, is an illegal emigrant who has never seen his newly born son. He cannot make enough money to feed his family. The mother is worried about her daughters' development.

Since June 2003, both Fabiola and Ina have attended the Garden of Mothers and Children center in their village, where they are engaged in many activities. They have the opportunity to participate in group activities—drawing, putting on plays, climbing—with the rest of their peers. Since then, their language and social skills have been improving. Their mother also participates regularly at the center in informal education and is strongly supported by the other mothers.

"Now I'm more confident of my capacities. I know my daughters are improving, and I try to find more time to spend with them."

A "Very Hard" Life

The social, economic, and political situation in Albania in the last decades, and especially in the last ten years, has been very grave. The collapse of the state system of production and inefficient agricultural cooperatives after the fall of the communist regime exposed many Albanian families to a struggle for survival. According to the UNDP annual Human Development Report, nearly two-thirds of Albanian families live in a situation considered "very hard." The average declared income is only half of the official poverty level.

In the last seven years, the demographic movement of people from the northeast and rural areas to the capital has almost quadrupled the population of the capital. As a result of this rapid population growth, there is very limited access to social and health services in these areas. Although the infant mortal-

Photographs by Christian Children's Fund, Albania

ity rate in the first nine months of life, and for children birth to five-years-old, has decreased in the last several years, it remains the highest in Europe. Twenty-five percent of children age birth to three suffer from low to moderate forms of malnutrition, while 10 percent experience severe malnutrition (Report on the National Strategy for Children in Albania, 2001).

These centers aim to develop a holistic and community-driven system of child attentive care, with a view to advancing the well being of children.

During the last 10 years, most of the crèches and kindergartens have closed, particularly in villages, rural areas, and suburban areas. The official figures show that while 37 percent of children nationwide attend kindergarten, only 12 percent do so in the northeast—a decrease of 50 percent, and the number of children attending elementary school has decreased by 18 percent. At present little attention is being paid to the psycho-affective development of children, and educators and child caregivers lack professional knowledge and training.

Children playing, led by mothers within gardens.

The Early Childhood and Care Development (ECCD) Project

In the last four years the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) in Albania has developed the Early Childhood and Care Development (ECCD) project to provide intensive, community-based programs to improve living conditions for children and families in those areas that have been hardest hit by the massive population migration. The ECCD project in Albania seeks to empower parents to lead the process of improving child care and education by participating in local groups and mobilizing community resources. Since March 2003, project implementation has begun in the northeast areas of Kukes, Has, and Tropoja.

Sara, Age 4, Tropoja, North Albania

The project is inspired by the successful experience of communities, parents, and local authorities in Tirana who are involved in the network of the Garden of Mothers and Children centers established and supported by CCF. These centers aim to develop a holistic and community-driven system of child attentive care, with a view to advancing the well being of children in northern Albania and contributing to community reconciliation.

The main objectives of the ECCD project are:

- To develop community-based, low-cost, and child-friendly services through expanding the Garden of Mothers and Children model to the target areas in northern Albania and upgrading local child care facilities.
- To humanize existing child care services and practice by enhancing the responsibilities and professionalism of health and social work practitioners.
- To develop the capacity of mothers' groups, community leaders, fathers' groups, and other local caregivers in delivering quality early childhood care by providing training.
- To provide seed funding to local initiatives that ensure the humane treatment of children and help build strong communities.
- To disseminate positive child care practices and attitudes by conducting regional and national media campaigns, peer round tables, and community events.

The Garden of Mothers and Children Network

At present, 57 Garden of Mothers and Children centers are functioning around the country. Thirty of these centers are located in remote and hard-to-reach villages in the north, where there is very limited access to health and education services.

Typical center services include social and educational activities for the children; medical services for mothers and children provided by local health specialists; information sharing, counseling, and education related to early childhood for mothers and pregnant women; training for community caregivers, including ex-nurses, midwives, youth volunteers, and fathers; and community activities such as workshops, cooking fairs, holiday celebrations, and community events to support the construction of playgrounds or other community initiatives.

"Garden of Mothers and Children" in Sohodoll area (Diber-Northeast area of Albania).

> *"I have learned a lot from the experience of the project. I am aware of things I didn't know before, and this knowledge helps me raise my children. The project is a big help for my son, who used to have difficulty speaking, especially after his father emigrated."*
>
> Gilere Haxhiu,
> Lead Mother,
> Shishtavec, Kukes
> Northern Albania

Each center serves approximately 30 children, ages three to seven-years old, under the care of community mothers. The centers are equipped with learning and play materials and provide a safe and friendly environment for children. The educators are supplied with Ministry of Education pre-school instruction guides and program booklets.

The mothers themselves organize the educational activities, social events, medical visits, and informal counseling. Five lead mothers and an administrative mother implement the program with active support from a larger group of 15 to 20 mothers and grandmothers who visit the center when they can.

The mothers are divided into groups of pregnant women, mothers with children birth to one-year old, mothers with children three to seven-years old, and mothers who care for orphan children. Information, counseling, awareness raising, and parenting education is provided to mothers in groups formed in the centers or through home visits and a peer process in the community.

The philosophy of this approach is to support all of the stakeholders in the community by encouraging active participation and self-help in improving the community and the lives of its children and families. Lead mothers govern the network of centers in partnership with community members, local government, state institutions, and community elders. CCF provides critical managerial, financial, and technical input.

> *"We used to limit ourselves to feeding our children, to having them properly dressed and to slapping them when they gave us too much trouble. Now I am convinced that slapping children doesn't get you anywhere, and I try to inform other mothers about child development and children's needs."*
>
> Sibe Shehu,
> Administrative Mother,
> Borovian, Peshkopia,
> North Albania

Outdoor activities at the "Garden of Mothers and Children."

Involving Fathers

Respecting cultural norms that place the responsibility for raising children on mothers while fathers provide the family income, the project has stressed:

- Strengthening the father's role in program and policy development.
- Recognizing the father as a powerful element in the child's well being.
- Involving fathers in project activities.
- Encouraging the father's support in the establishment of the centers.
- Increasing the participation of fathers in early childhood activities.

A key strategy to achieving these goals has been the establishment of Boards of Fathers, groups made up of representatives from multiple sectors of the community, including education, health, and local government. These boards support the implementation and sustainability of the program by involving the local male power structure, including mayors, community leaders, councils of elders, administrators of local hospitals and schools, heads of large traditional families, religious leaders, and intellectuals.

Boards of Fathers [are] made up of representatives from multiple sectors of the community, including education, health, and local government.

Fathers at workshop.

Three Boards of Fathers have been established in the north. These, in turn, have created 30 satellite Boards of Fathers in areas where centers are located. Boards of Fathers address the need for improving child care and health and education services in the region and have participated in decisions to establish some of the centers in very remote and hard-to-reach areas. They are also actively involved in training activities. Topics such as the role of fathers in the family, the importance of playing with children, and domestic violence are discussed during informal training.

Fathers in workshops representing different areas — local authorities, health, and education.

> *"I never knew that I could play an important role in my child's development, even from the earliest ages. All I knew and inherited is the tough style of behavior with kids. This is the way I was brought up and that was all I was able to give. In my culture, men are ashamed to talk about children's needs. The man who does is not a real man. This has been the way I was taught. But now I'm ready at least to try to change my behavior, even though it's difficult."*
>
> Mr. Zef Ukcama,
> Member of Father's Board in Cernice,
> Tropoja, Northern Albania

The Boards of Fathers have also increased the partnership and coordination between community members and local governments. For example, in Maquellara the Board of Fathers, the local government, and local businesses agreed to rehabilitate the state kindergarten with financial support from parents in the community, local businessmen, and local government agencies.

Health Service Delivery

In the last decade the health system in Albania has seriously deteriorated. As a result, there are many areas, particularly in the north, that do not have access to health services, birth registration or control, and children's immunizations. In each of the areas where a Garden of Mothers and Children center is located, CCF Albania, in partnership with local health practitioners, provides outreach services to pregnant mothers, including those living in remote areas.

A Health Task Force was established in each program area, composed of 11 local health practitioners who provide pediatric, gynecological, and family planning services. Services for the mother

and child include care before and after birth and promotion of breastfeeding. Medical check-ups, group conversations, information and education, and referral to other specialized services take place at the centers. Great attention is paid to involving local health personnel in the formal and informal training and services offered by task force members.

Benefits for Children and Mothers

The Garden of Mothers and Children centers offer a safe and friendly space for children, socialization activities, and pre-school education, health services, and the celebration of community events. These activities and services attract the interest and commitment of mothers in the community. The centers, supported financially by community members, are contributing to the social life, healthy development, and well being of children and families in the community.

Mothers have demonstrated higher self-esteem and have developed and improved their individual and social capacities, resulting in healthy relations in and outside their families. Even though coping with extreme poverty and other difficulties such as vendettas and blood feuds, they can now contribute to the improvement of their lives and the lives of their children.

"I'm lucky that I can come here in the center when possible. I'm glad to have learned how to take care of my newborn baby, seeing that it's my first child. I know now the importance of speaking and communicating even with babies. Thanks to the ongoing health care provided at the center, my son is receiving better healthcare."

Marieta Cupaj-Young
Mother, beneficiary of the program,
Has, Nikoliq,
Northern Albania

Conclusion

CCF Albania uses Early Childhood Care and Development as a tool to promote community reconciliation and social peace. Implementation of the program is based on empowering local and regional groups to establish early childhood development, education, and health services. Key strategies involve the mobilization and empower-

The Garden of Mothers and Children centers offer a safe and friendly space for children, socialization activities, and pre-school education, health services, and the celebration of community events.

ment of women and the mobilization of men to advocate for children's rights. The establishment of active community-based groups and involvement of local and central government to support the project in the region has produced an increase in health and education services and has resulted in significant benefits to children, families, and communities in Albania.

ISSA Network News

Step by Step Arrives in Argentina

We discovered that many of the problems that teachers face are truly universal, and yet these exist in unique cultural settings.

Step by Step has taken its first exciting step in a new country on the Latin American continent.

It was more than a year ago that the Director of the Leer Foundation, Patricia Mejalelaty, met with Liz Lorant at the Step by Step office in New York, inquiring about possible cooperation. Patricia had already successfully introduced the RIF (Reading is Fundamental) Project extensively throughout Argentina. Leer has established reading libraries in the neediest schools throughout the country and provided training to teachers and parents on reading to children. She is also pioneering exciting human rights projects in the country—her latest initiative is to establish soup kitchens and libraries for children in women's prisons.

Following one year of planning and thoughtful preparation to select schools and teachers to participate in the pilot Step by Step project, an excellent team of fluent, Spanish-speaking Step by Step trainers (Evelyne Magron, Margaret Stine, Dawn Tankersely, and Rita Kanell) arrived in Buenos Aires to offer initial training for preschool and primary school teachers from eight schools. The training, focusing on how to achieve Step by Step standards in the classroom, also marked the beginning of the process of developing Step by Step trainers for the Leer Foundation. In order to monitor the progress of the students over the initial three-year period in these new Step by Step classrooms, outcomes will be monitored by Linda Lee of Proactive Information Services. One unique feature of the Argentinean Step by Step Program is that the Leer Foundation raised all funds for implementation from corporate sponsors. Because of the economic crisis in Argentina, scant funding is available from the Ministry of Education for projects of this nature.

Although the education system is economically stressed and there is significant overcrowding and lack of resources in all the schools we visited, there is nevertheless great interest among the teachers, as well as a great depth of understanding of the philosophy and methodology that was presented to them. The Step by Step team was enthusiastic throughout the week of training. We discovered that many of the problems that teachers face are truly universal, and yet these exist in unique cultural settings.

We appreciated the warm reception by Patricia Mejalelaty and her staff and look forward to working closely with them. Welcome aboard Step by Step Argentina!

Step by Step Case Study Project

Inspired by the upcoming 10th Anniversary of the Step by Step Program in September 2004, ISSA has embarked on a two-year, large-scale initiative to develop national case studies in the 29 countries in which it operates, as well as cross-cutting issue papers that document the project's enormous experience. While one aim of the project is to provide a series of country papers that describe core implementation issues, another equally important aim is to develop expertise in the field of case study research. Through in-person and online training and mentoring, the Case Study Project is cultivating an international cadre of qualitative researchers and a network of evaluation expertise in countries where Step by Step is active.

The Step by Step case studies must, collectively, reflect a complex and multi-layered program. For this reason, topics for case studies were carefully coordinated across the countries participating in the Step by Step Program. Topics cover all areas of the Step by Step Program: preschool, primary school, infant/toddler, higher education, teacher professional development, networking, and partnerships. Within a topic area, each country defined a specific case to study. For example, Bosnia's case study will focus on professional development through networking and partnership in one Step by Step training center. Russia will examine how parents select preschools and are involved in them in one impoverished rural setting and one middle-class, suburban setting. Bulgaria will look at the impact of the Education for Social Justice (anti-bias)

initiative, which is being implemented in cooperation with the university and Step by Step model sites in one city.

In addition, several cross-cutting thematic areas have been identified for deeper investigation, including:

- Children's outcomes;
- Family and community engagement;
- Equal opportunities for each child to develop to his/her full potential;
- Enabling networks and partnerships;
- Sustainability.

The project is guided by a training and research plan devised by Hugh McLean, Open Society Institute's evaluation expert, in cooperation with Sarah Klaus, ISSA Executive Director, both based in Budapest, Hungary. The work is mentored by McLean and a steering group consisting of Iryna Lapitskaya of Belarus; Larry Bremner and Linda Lee of Canada; Teresa Vasconcelos of Portugal; Tatjana Vonta of Slovenia; and David Caughlin, Cassie Landers, Steffen Saifer, and Robert Stake of the United States. Each mentor is responsible for assisting four to five national research teams.

The 29 participating national research teams, which consist of between two to four early childhood education professionals, were selected by the Step by Step director in each country. Teams have participated in a six-week online course and a four-day seminar in Budapest, Hungary. Field research and development of the case studies, now in progress, will be followed by a seminar for case study writers to be held in Visegrad, Hungary, in May. Initial copies of the case studies and cross-cutting issue papers will be available at the 10th Anniversary Conference in November in Budapest.

Parenting Education Workshop: Children from Birth to Three

Participants from Step by Step and UNICEF-assisted programs in eight countries attended a parent education workshop in Sarajevo, Bosnia, February 22-26, 2004. The goal of the five-day training workshop was to develop a range of strategies and materials to help parents support the social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development of young children during the first three years of life. The workshop was conducted by Cassie Landers, Kris Hansen, Jan Martner, and Ruth Uhlmann. Jill Zarchin, Education Program Officer UNICEF, Bosnia, and Radmila Rangelov-Josovic, Step by Step Country Director, Bosnia, were involved in planning and hosting the event.

The fifty participants from Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia represented a wide range of professions including pediatrics, nursing, early childhood education, policy, and educational planning. These various perspectives created a lively and participatory training environment.

The workshop objectives were to help participants:

- Understand the goals and objectives of different approaches to parenting education programs and their benefits for families and children;
- Understand basic principles of adult learning and the implications for developing effective parent education programs;
- Recognize the steps involved in strengthening families and the mechanisms inherent in effective partnerships;
- Observe and participate in a series of workshops modeled by trainers on parenting children from birth to three years of age;
- Practice designing both the content and methods for conducting additional parent education sessions;
- Outline an implementation strategy for conducting a series of parent education workshops; and
- Understand the project-specific monitoring and evaluation tools.

The workshop was organized around three major areas. The first section introduced participants to the field of parent education, reviewing existing programs and lessons learned from past successes and failures.

Part two of the workshop focused on selected themes. These included:

- The Amazing Newborn
- Social and Emotional Development
- Behavioral Aspects of Feeding Young Children
- Fun with Language and Literacy
- Building Relationships
- Preventing Problems: Setting Limits
- Playing and Learning
- Safety

During the third part of the workshop country teams prepared a project proposal to implement a series of parent education workshops. When appropriate, the strategy was developed to encourage collaboration between UNICEF and Step by Step country offices.

International Step by Step Association

10th Anniversary Conference

Location: Budapest, Hungary

Congress Park Hotel Flamenco

http://www.danubiusgroup.com/flamenco

Dates: November 8–10, 2004

A Decade of Change: *Stepping into the Future*

Ten years ago the Step by Step program was launched in 15 countries, serving 5,000 children in preschools. Today the network serves children birth through grade eight in 30 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Asia, and the Americas. The program has reached hundreds of thousands of teachers and millions of young children and their families.

Join us to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of Step by Step and engage in dialogue around:

- Change in Early Childhood Education practices and policy in regions where ISSA is active,
- Achievements of the Step by Step program and other international development programs,
- Challenges within the Step by Step program and the field of Early Childhood Education worldwide.

In honor of this milestone, **Mr. George Soros**, founder of Step by Step, will attend the opening ceremony.

Participants from more than 40 countries will gather to share their knowledge and ideas by engaging in discussions and presentations. Like ISSA's past events, the conference offers many opportunities for participants to actively exchange ideas and experiences in small groups. To take advantage of this valuable opportunity for professional development and networking, register now!

Official Languages of the Conference: English and Russian

For further information please contact:
Eva Izsak
Manager, Membership Division
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Phone: +36 1 486 2856
Fax: +36 1 266 3463
E-mail: eizsak@issa.hu

For conference information and registration forms, visit the ISSA website: http://www.issa.nl

Photograph courtesy of the Budapest Tourism Office

ISSA Membership Information

ISSA offers several levels of membership and welcomes applications for membership from individuals and organizations that promote child-centered, community-based approaches to early childhood care and education.

Membership for Organizations

Benefits:

- Invitation to the Annual Conference and General Assembly
- One-year subscription to *Educating Children for Democracy* (3 copies of each issue)
- Subscription to ISSA Member Newsletter (by email)
- Discounts on ISSA books, events, and trainings

Fee: $125 USD or €100 euros for one year ($65 USD or €50 euros for organizations from developing countries)

Current Organizational Members Include:

- Educational, Non-Governmental, and Public Benefit Organizations
- Teacher Training Institutions, Universities, Retraining Institutes, and Technical Colleges
- Schools and Preschools
- Parent Associations
- National and International Development Organizations
- Other Network and Membership Organizations

Membership for Individuals

Benefits:

- Invitation to the Annual Conference and General Assembly
- One-year subscription to *Educating Children for Democracy* (1 copy of each issue)
- Subscription to ISSA Member Newsletter (by email)
- Discounts on ISSA books, events, and trainings

Fee: $65 USD or €50 euros for one year ($30 USD or €25 euros for individuals from developing countries)

Current Individual Members Include:

- University Faculty Members
- Preschool and Primary School Teachers and Staff
- Early Childhood Experts

For more information about ISSA, please visit our website at www.issa.nl, e-mail ISSA at info@issa.nl or contact one of the following ISSA coordinating offices: 400 West 59th Street, New York, NY 10019 USA, tel: +1 (212) 547-6918, fax:+1 (212) 548-4610; or Rakoczi ut 22./IV./24. H-1072 Budapest, Hungary, tel: +36 1 486 2855, fax: +36 1 266 34 63.

All new members will receive a membership package upon joining ISSA.

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, both in print and online, and in Russian 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 one-third 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 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, and 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 three to six pages (1,000 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 (12–14 point font), 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, degree, title, institutional affiliation, address, telephone, 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 in a caption. When submitting children's artwork, please include the name and age of the child. When submitting photographs, please include the name of the photographer.

Review Procedure

During 2003 ISSA recruited and trained a cadre of Editorial Associates from Step by Step countries in order to create an international editorial infrastructure for the journal. These Editorial Associates will review articles submitted for publication and 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 Baltic States, Mongolia, and Haiti. Authors are encouraged to contact an Editorial Associate in their region to receive guidance in the preparation of articles. A list of Editorial Associates follows the Guidelines.

Articles that are deemed appropriate by both the Editorial Associate and the Country Director are forwarded to the Editor. The Editor will review all articles received 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 education profession.

Where to Send Prepared Manuscripts

Authors located in Step by Step countries should submit articles in English or the national language to an Editorial Associate or listed country contact. A list of National Step by Step organizations, along with contact information, is provided on the back inside cover of this publication, as well as online at the ISSA website http://www.issa.nl A list of Editorial Associates is provided below. Authors from all other countries may submit articles for consideration to:

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