Educating Children for Democracy

The Journal of the International Step by Step Association

Transforming Early Childhood Education

Number 9, Summer/Fall 2005

Educating Children for Democracy, the professional journal of the International Step by Step Association, is intended for teachers of children from birth through age 10, 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.

Educating Children for Democracy is published semi-annually, in English both in print and online, and in Russian online.

The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is a nongovernmental 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 30 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 policymakers to share knowledge and experience.

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Welcome to Issue 9

Transforming Early Childhood Education

In November 2004, more than 180 participants from 36 countries convened in Budapest to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Step by Step Program.

A decade ago, a handful of people with a huge idea—and generous funding from George Soros—banded together to advance the cause of education for young children. The vision was to introduce child-centered teaching methods and family involvement in the early childhood education systems of 15 countries in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. Ten years later, what is now known as the Step by Step Program has developed into the International Step by Step Association (ISSA). This network of 30 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is engaged in large-scale national reform and regional advocacy initiatives in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Mongolia, and the Americas—as well as in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe.

In November 2004, more than 180 participants from 36 countries convened in Budapest to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Step by Step Program. The conference theme, "Decade of Change: Stepping into the Future," offered a forum for reflection, celebration, and recognition of past achievements, as well as a look at the challenges ahead. Issue 9 of *Educating Children for Democracy* draws its content from that conference, highlighting insights shared about efforts to transform early childhood education systems over the past decade, as well as findings from state-of-the-art research on child development and education.

A Decade of Transition for Children, Families, and Communities

The initiation of the Step by Step Program in 1994 followed the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989. During this period, there have been rapid and dramatic demographic shifts that have had a direct impact on child development and education. In her article "Children and Families in Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States: The Last Decade," Eva Jespersen, MSc, Chief of Social and Economic Policies at UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre, presents

Step by Step Country Directors receive certificates of appreciation from George Soros.

statistical trends in birth rates, out-of-wedlock births, institutionalization, preschool enrollments, and child poverty. In addition, she documents transitions in governance, increases in conflict and migration, and decreases in the level of public resources devoted to social services. These data provide a context for understanding the societal changes that have been occurring at the same time that efforts to reform early childhood education systems are being implemented.

From the Brain to the Heart: Relationships Are Key

Drawing on cutting-edge research in brain development, Deborah A. Phillips, Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology at Georgetown University, provides an overview of our evolving knowledge about early brain development. In "Neurons to Neighborhoods: Implications for Early Childhood Education," Dr. Phillips reviews the role of early experience as it affects the developing brain and notes that, "Of all elements of early experience, relationships with caregivers constitute the most profound influence on early brain and behavioral development." Drawing on current research, she underscores the importance of nurturing "social-emotional development during the early years to ensure that children grow up as caring, curious, tolerant, and friendly people."

Sam M. Intrator, PhD, Associate Professor in the Department of Education and Child Study at Smith College, reminds us that relationships are also the critical factor in educational settings outside the home. In "The Heart of a Teacher: Making the Connection between Teaching and Inner Life," Dr. Intrator writes, "If schools, youth groups, and other educational enterprises are to be places that promote academic, social, and personal development for students, everything hinges on the presence of intelligent, passionate, caring adults working as teachers and mentors." One tool for helping teachers retain their idealism and renew their vitality, he says, is The Courage to Teach program—an approach to professional development designed to deepen the educator's professional identity and vocational integrity.

Documenting the Step by Step Experience: The Case Study Project

As the Step by Step Program approached its 10th anniversary, ISSA leadership launched a large-scale project to document and analyze the Step by Step experience, with the aim of sharing the knowledge gained with a wider international audience. Step by Step engaged more than 100 early childhood educators and researchers from the ISSA network, supported by an international team of mentors, to create a forum to identify and reflect on the lessons learned from a decade of implementing educational reform. At the 10th Anniversary Conference, preliminary findings from 31 case studies were shared, organized around eight topic areas. These included:

- **Promoting High-Quality, Child-Centered Teaching: ISSA Standards and Certification**
- **Creating Child-Centered Environments and Learning Opportunities**
- **Reforming and Decentralizing Teacher Training**
- **Social Inclusion: Access to Quality Education**
- **Inclusion: Children with Disabilities**
- **Reaching Children Outside of Preschools**
- **Family and Community Engagement**
- **Building a Network of Networks: Step by Step NGOs and the ISSA Network**

An article summarizing each of these topic areas, prepared by Cassie Landers, EdD, MPH, consultant to the Open Society Institute and Assistant Professor at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, provides insights into the successes and challenges of implementing large-scale early childhood programs. In addition, highlights of findings from each of the case studies are included. The Case Study Project will continue to refine and publish research on the Step by Step Program to share with the early childhood development field.

Rochelle Mayer, EdD
Editor

Children and Families

Children and Families in Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States: The Last Decade[1]

Policies are needed to protect children and promote their development, as identified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

by Eva Jespersen, MSc, Chief, Social and Economic Policies, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy

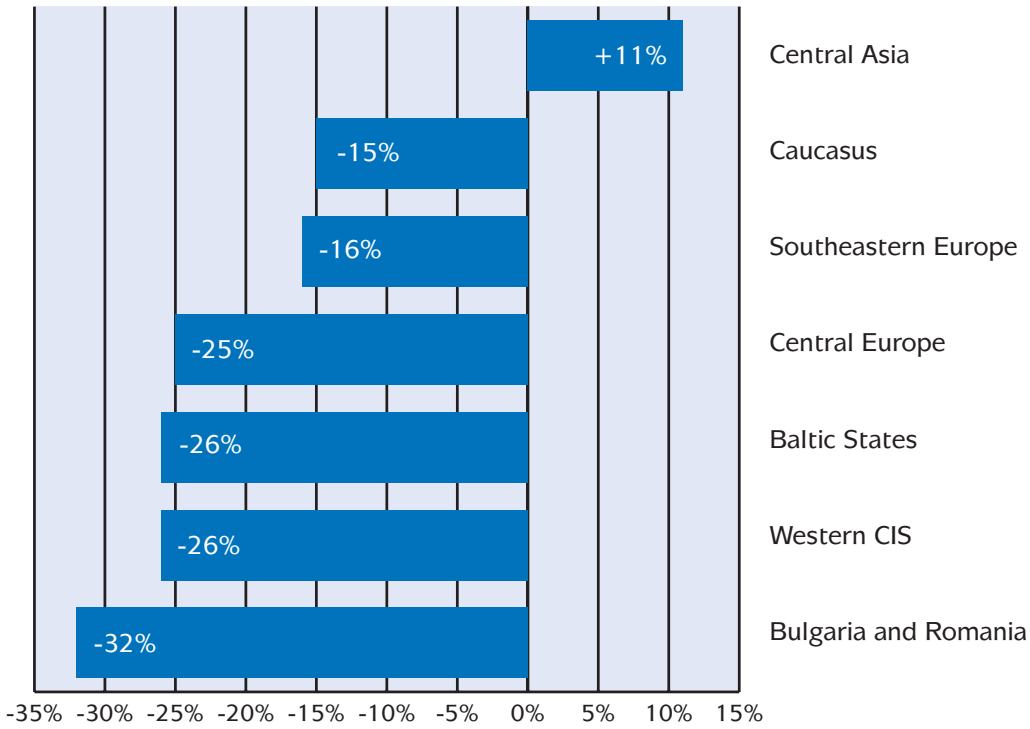
Introduction

Among the many dramatic changes that occurred in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989 were demographic shifts that affect the realization of the rights of young children. These include a decline in the number of marriages and births and an increase in institutionalization and adoption. While there has been considerable economic growth as countries have moved toward market-based economies, child poverty is widespread and services for children—including enrollment in preschool—have decreased. Policies are needed to protect children and promote their development, as identified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Changes in Family Structure

Since 1989 there has been a decline in the number of marriages and in the birth rate in Central and Eastern

Change in Child Population 1989–2003 (Percent)



Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)	Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	Baltic States

Central Europe
- Czech Republic
- Hungary
- Poland
- Slovakia
- Slovenia

Southeastern Europe
- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Macedonia
- Romania
- Serbia/ Montenegro/Kosovo*

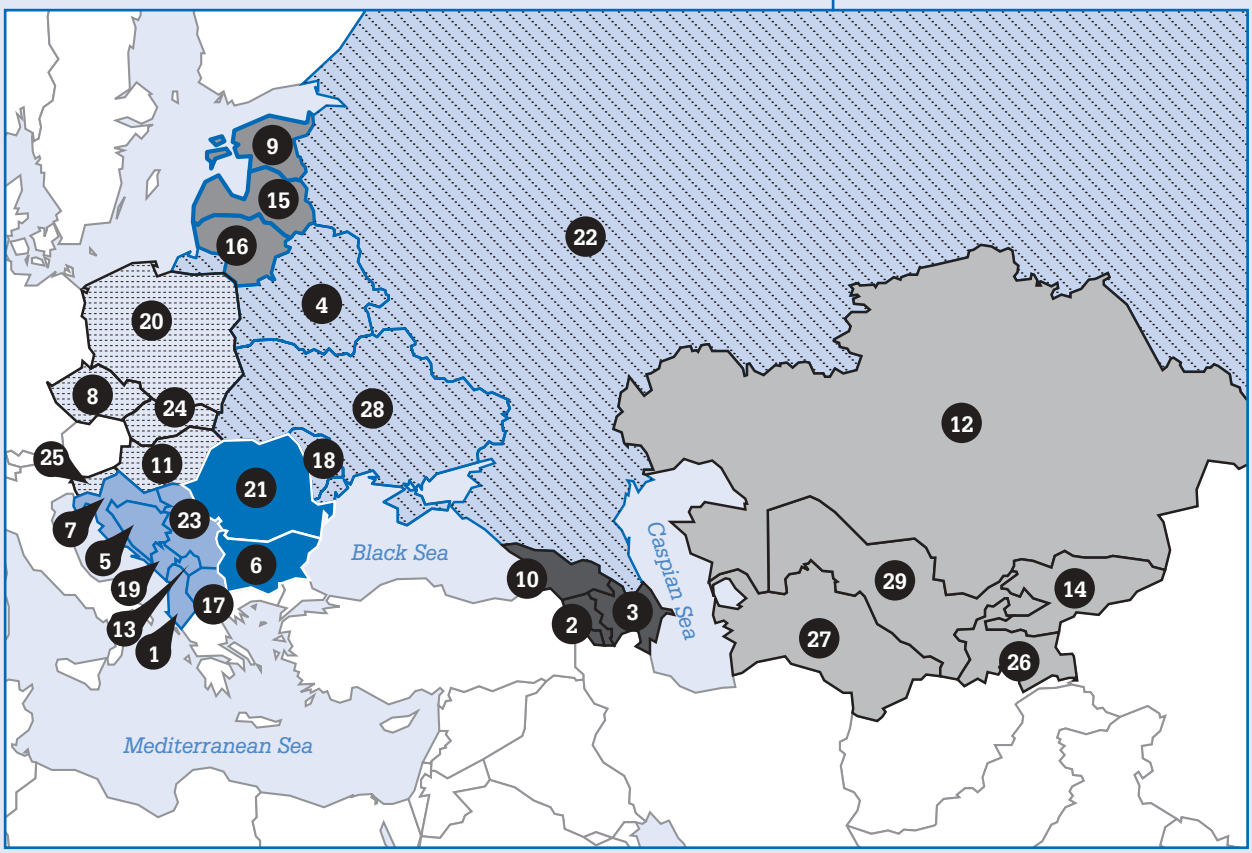
* *Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo are combined into one in UNICEF IRC statistics, which have been used for the analysis.*

Western CIS
- Belarus
- Moldova
- Russia
- Ukraine

Caucasus
- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Georgia

Central Asia
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Tajikistan
- Turkmenistan
- Uzbekistan

- Estonia
- Latvia
- Lithuania



1 Albania
2 Armenia
3 Azerbaijan
4 Belarus
5 Bosnia & Herzegovina
6 Bulgaria
7 Croatia
8 Czech Republic
9 Estonia
10 Georgia
11 Hungary
12 Kazakhstan
13 Kosovo
14 Kyrgyzstan
15 Latvia
16 Lithuania
17 Macedonia
18 Moldova
19 Montenegro
20 Poland
21 Romania
22 Russia
23 Serbia
24 Slovakia
25 Slovenia
26 Tajikistan
27 Turkmenistan
28 Ukraine
29 Uzbekistan

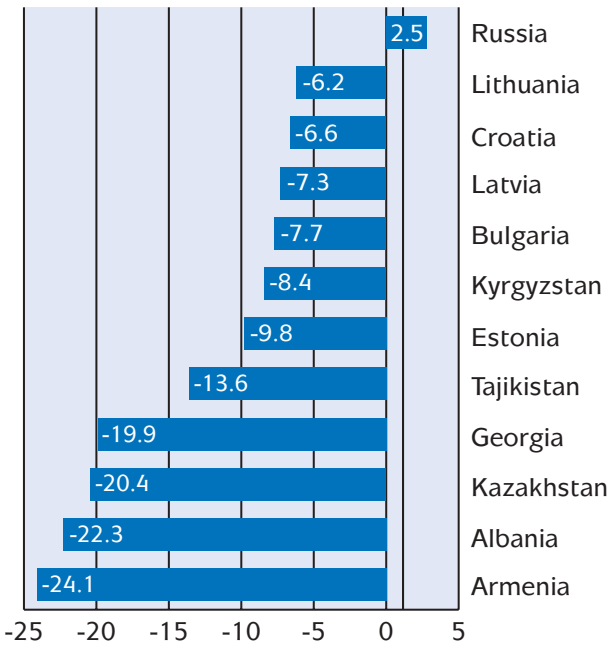
Europe, the Baltic States, and the Caucasus. In 2002 there were barely 100 million children[2] in the region, down almost 20 percent since 1990. The number of children under age five fell by over one-third, from 35 million to 23 million. The share of children born out of wedlock increased by nearly one-third, from 17 to 28 percent. Marriage rates also declined by one-third, on average. These trends suggest that the number of one-child families, the number of children growing up without siblings, and the number of children growing up without a father may have increased.

Only in Central Asia, the poorest area in the region, has the child population continued to grow, but at a rapidly declining rate. Also of concern is that some countries—such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Serbia/Montenegro—show an unusually high proportion of infant boys to infant girls; higher than the average global ratio of 1.03.

Increases in Institutionalization and Adoption

Despite the decline in the child population, 1.5 million children—or 1.5 percent of the total child population—were in out-of-home care at the end of the 1990s. This represents a 10 percent increase since 1989 in the proportion of children in out-of home care. The sharpest increase occurred in the Baltic States, but Central Europe has the highest rates. In 20 countries there had been a rise in the proportion of zero-to-three-year-olds in institutions.

Change in Net Migration: 1989–2002 (Percent)



Increases in institutionalization and adoption often go hand in hand. In Belarus, for example, the rate of adoption rose by 160 percent between 1989 and 1999, and the proportion of children three years or younger in infant homes rose by 170 percent.

Decreases in Preschool Enrollment

Along with the decline in the number of children, the proportion of children enrolled in preschool dropped significantly in almost all of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) immediately following the transition. The decline was most

severe in Central Asia, the region where the number of children continued to rise, and where more than half of all preschools closed during the 1990s. The Caucasus also saw steep declines. Other regions generally had less dramatic declines and saw recovery or growth in preschool enrollment rates over the 1990s.

Increases in Conflict and Migration

What were 8 countries in 1989 became 27 with the breakup of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia.[3] Associated with these transitions, internal or cross-border conflicts affected one-third of the countries. Large-scale movements of people were one of the outcomes, leaving many families and children as refugees or internally displaced persons. At the end of 2003 1.8 million people in the region were registered as internally displaced and some 700,000 as refugees (considerably down from a combined number of 3.5 million at the end of 1998).

Since 1989 most countries in the region have lost people to out-migration with some, such as Albania and Armenia, having seen one-quarter of their populations leave. In the early 1990s ethnic factors were the primary cause of migration, including Russians

returning to Russia, but since then economic motives have been the primary cause. A considerable proportion of the migrants are young people in search of employment and opportunities. Not much is known about how children of migrants from the region fare, and whether they are left behind, brought along, or born abroad.

Transitions in Governance

The transitions in government systems have also had significant bureaucratic-administrative implications. Provincial governments accustomed to taking firm directives and funds from the central government suddenly became themselves the national authorities responsible for urgently needed policy reforms and for allocating resources to lower administrative levels. Lack of experience, capacity, and, in some cases, political will perpetuated growing disparities among regions within countries—including the funding of basic social services. But within a relatively short time much reorientation was accomplished.

With transition also came new thinking in the direction of public policies, moving from an authoritative to a consultative and accountable orientation. Simultaneously, there was a growing international understanding of the mandate of the State to protect and promote the human rights of citizens and empower duty bearers at all levels of governments and institutions to perform their duties; and of the mandate of citizens to articulate and demand their rights. Most important for children was, of course, the near-universally ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Provincial governments accustomed to taking firm directives and funds from the central government suddenly became themselves the national authorities responsible for urgently needed policy reforms and for allocating resources to lower administrative levels.

Trends in Economic Growth, Employment, and Equality

Since the Russian crisis in 1998, there has been considerable growth in income per capita in Central Europe and the Baltic States, and more modest improvements in most other regions. And there is a sense that the region has turned a corner and is back on a growth track. Yet, compared to 1989, a number of countries still have not fully recovered their income levels—including the Central Asian or Caucasus areas that were already far below the regional average at the time of transition. This has severely strained employment and social development prospects.

Generally more than half of the economic growth is now produced by the private sector. But the transition to market-based economies and competitive labor markets has been uneven. Many state-owned enterprises have closed down or severely retrenched when sold, often affecting women disproportionately. This often happened far from urban centers, leaving families with children stranded in areas of high unemployment, not migrating out of fear of losing access to services for their children. Yet there is evidence to suggest that in the regions with high unemployment, households have access to fewer doctors and infant mortality rates are higher than the national average.

Following the transition in 1989 unemployment increased to double-digit levels in many countries—and with few exceptions has remained high—while large proportions of the employed have earnings below two-thirds of the national median. This has meant that many working families are poor, and that many children are growing up in families where neither parent works.

Inherent in the transition away from nominally socialist or communist equality-based societies are changes in the distribution of income. However, the changes were dramatic and in the early 2000s, the extent of income differences in at least four countries—Russia, Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan—resembled that found in Latin America, where inequality is notorious.

Trends in Child Poverty and Services for Children

Slow or no growth, high levels of unemployment, and very wide disparities are likely to be closely associated with substantial levels of income poverty—and levels of child poverty tend to be even higher. In 9 out of 14 countries in the region for which comparable data is available, nearly one-third of all children lived in poverty in 2002, measured by national poverty lines. Most of these

poor children were in the CIS, but levels are also still high in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Recent return to growth has lowered the number of people living in poverty, but not proportionally. In Poland, for example, poverty has been growing despite recovery in national income.

Linked to negative and slow economic growth during much of the 1990s were insufficient levels of public resources for social services. In a number of countries social-sector spending further declined as a share of national income. This was particularly alarming in some of the Central Asian countries where the combined share of health and education spending is below 4 percent of national income—much below the regional average. UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy has noted that we are seeing children who are the first in their families *not* to attend school in generations.[4]

It is especially important to design systems that ensure that all children… have access to a basic package of services—including support for family or family-style environments to promote early childhood development.

However, a number of countries have succeeded in protecting public expenditure as a share of national income, but face new challenges because of changing demands on social services—particularly pertaining to quality, and to making decentralization socially equitable. It is not difficult to understand that where spending on social services is low—or the costs associated with obtaining them are high—it is children in poor households who pay the price. For example, Bulgaria, Romania, and Uzbekistan show notably lower school enrollment rates for poor children.

Conclusion

The period preceding the breakup of the Soviet Union was characterized by political and economic deficits, but a considerable degree of social protection; while the subsequent period has, for many countries, been one of righting those deficits but ignoring the changing demands on social development—particularly services to promote and protect the human rights of children. Having put policies in place that support renewed growth in the region, it is time for politicians to address an emerging social deficit to poor children. It is necessary not only to advance the rights of poor children, but to ensure that economic and social progress is sustained.

Governments should develop measures of child poverty, set targets for its reduction,

and adopt policies and establish institutions to monitor progress. It is especially important to design systems that ensure that all children in different regions of a country have access to a basic package of services—including support for family or family-style environments to promote early-childhood development. All policies adopted should be guided by "the best interest of the child" and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A priority in this regard is providing incentives for job creation, as household income is closely associated with the material well-being of children and families.

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[1] This article is based on a presentation at the International Step by Step Association annual meeting in Budapest, November 8–10, 2004. It draws heavily on the *Innocenti Social Monitor 2004* and on the Innocenti Regional Monitoring Report No. 8: *A Decade of Transition* (2001)—both available from www.unicef.org/irc. The statements in this article are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF.

[2] UN CRC defines children as individuals aged 18 or below.

[3] Another significant transition taking place has been that eight countries joined the EU in May 2004 and two additional countries are in line for later accession.

[4] BBC.com on November 14, 2004.

Neurons to Neighborhoods: Implications for Early Childhood Education[1]

by Deborah A. Phillips, PhD, Chair, Georgetown University Department of Psychology, Washington, DC, USA

The Developing Brain

A baby's brain weighs less than a pound; yet it co-opts most of the human genome for its proper development. In fact, much of the information encoded in the human genome is used to guide the brain's functioning. At the same time the brain is unique among organ systems because it relies so heavily on information from outside the genome in order to develop. While our genes encode enough information to provide a blueprint for our brain architecture, experience in the real world of smells, sights, sounds, objects, events—and, especially, interactions—is essential to complete the process of brain development.

"Our nervous system comes partially assembled, but most of it—all the fine tuning—really comes about through interactions with the environment."
—Prof. Pat Levitt, Vanderbilt University

This dance between genes and experience is a lifelong phenomenon, which implies that even the most effective early interventions cannot inoculate children against subsequent damage. The work of protecting children's development is never done. By the same token, early damage does not inevitably consign a child to compromised life opportunities. Our brains, and thus our selves, are continuous works in progress. But aren't the early years special? Aren't our earliest experiences uniquely important? These questions have been hotly debated for more than 50 years. Some have argued that early experiences set the course for all that follows; they determine subsequent outcomes. Others have argued that early experiences matter little; they are readily overwritten by later chapters of life.

Research on Early Experience

The extensive scientific literature reviewed in *Neurons to Neighborhoods* (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000) suggests a middle ground. "While rarely deterministic, early experiences matter because:

- early damage, while seldom irreversible, can seriously compromise children's life prospects,
- compensating for missed opportunities often requires extensive intervention, if not heroic efforts, later in life, and
- early pathways, though far from indelible, establish either a sturdy or fragile stage on which subsequent development is constructed."

Of all elements of early experience, relationships with caregivers constitute the most profound influence on early brain and behavioral development. Some of the most exciting research in this area examines associations between characteristics of our earliest caregiving relationships and the development of the neurological systems that affect our responses to stress. These are very complex systems that involve both a variety of brain structures (the amygdala, hypothalamus, pituitary, hippocampus, and prefrontal cor-

tex) and brain hormones (cortisol, adrenaline). They can be thought of as the hardware (structures) and software (hormones) of brain development. In practice, they work together to control our ability to react to stress or threat and, equally important, our complementary ability to calm down and restore normal functioning.

When working as intended, these systems promote adaptive functioning (e.g., the need to be vigilant, the need to gear up when threatened), but when stress responses are frequent, prolonged, or chronic, they can lead to disordered development and functioning and, eventually, to illness. Importantly, these systems are involved not only in how we manage stress, but also in the regulation of attention, the ability to manage emotions effectively (notably emotional reactions to fear and anxiety), executive functioning abilities that help us plan and organize, and some aspects of memory.

Of Mice and Men

Research on both animals and humans is now demonstrating that early parent-offspring relationships play a crucial role in the development of this stress system. For example, research on laboratory rats has shown that licking and grooming, as well as arched-back nursing, by the mother keeps the infant's stress hormones low during much of early development and thus enables the young rat to develop a normal stress-response system.

Experimenters have learned this by randomly assigning new rat mothers to a condition that either promotes or disrupts their caregiving behavior and then observing the behavior of their offspring. The rat pups that were deprived of licking, grooming, and arched-back nursing grew into adult rats that were significantly more fearful and stress-reactive than the pups of the mothers that provided plenty of such early care.

This directly implicates the early caregiving system in the development of stress-reactive adults. Even stronger evidence for the critical role of early caregiving is provided by follow-up research in which cross-fostering the at-risk pups to high-licking moms resulted in substantially improved stress behavior—more like the behavior of their well-adapted foster mom. Interestingly, the reverse does not seem to occur: pups from high-licking and grooming moms, when cross-fostered to low-licking and grooming moms, appear to be "protected," to some extent, from becoming more fearful.

Importantly, researchers have recently pinpointed the neurobiological consequences of early maternal deprivation in the rat, and they directly involve the negative feedback loop that turns down stress reactions in the brain. In effect, the stress system remains easy to turn on—maybe even becomes overly sensi-

tive to stress—but gets harder to turn off and restore to normal functioning. This recalibrates the brain, tipping the balance to reactivity over regulation of the stress system.

Implications for Human Development

Can we extrapolate from the rat pup to the human infant? This is a very tricky business (human mothers usually do not lick their babies, for example), but research is telling us a lot about the early experiences that most profoundly shape brain and behavioral development, about what constitutes damage, and about what it takes to recover and how much recovery is possible. While the answers vary somewhat for different children with different constitutions and personalities, who are growing up in different circumstances, there are some common themes.

Sensitive and responsive care from parents and childcare providers connects with biological systems that buffer infants and toddlers from stress and promote their ability to calm down. Physiological regulation later in life appears to be shaped by the security of the young child's relationship history. In contrast, disturbances in early care make

infants and young children vulnerable to stress, often seen in more fearful, anxious, and reactive behavior. In addition to behavioral observations, researchers can easily measure the levels of cortisol—a stress hormone—circulating in the child's system. Typically, cortisol levels are highest when children (and adults) first wake up and then decline to near zero by bedtime. Children with poorly developed stress-response systems do not show this daily pattern.

Much of the relevant research has examined young children growing up under adverse circumstances in orphanages, in abusive families, or with depressed parents.

Nurture social-emotional development during the early years to ensure that children grow up as caring, curious, tolerant, and friendly people.

Children who experience repeated abuse during the first few years of life show elevated levels of cortisol during the day, even several years after having been removed from the abusive situation. This is particularly the case for children who also show continued behavioral problems. Maternal depression during the early years of life has also been found to be associated with higher cortisol levels in preschoolers and school-age children, especially when the depression is recurrent.

Beyond these somewhat extreme circumstances, research has revealed that the security of the young child's attachment to his or her caregiver influences stress responses. Children who are securely attached to their mothers do not show elevated cortisol levels when separated from her, even when they exhibit increased heart rates and behavioral distress. In contrast, insecurely attached children display all three reactions. Secure attachments also buffer stress reactions in toddlers who are prone to be fearful in novel situations. When suddenly exposed to strange puppets in a psychology lab, fearful toddlers who were with their mothers did not show rises in cortisol *if* they were securely attached.

Recommendations for Promoting Child Development

Questions remain concerning which children are most vulnerable to insults to the systems underlying stress reactivity, how much plasticity there is in these systems and thus whether interventions for older children can be effective, and what it takes to "repair" a dysfunctional stress system. Yet the knowledge we do have carries very important implications:

1. **Provide the basics.** Prevent fetal alcohol exposure with intense public education about the serious effects of drinking while pregnant. Ensure that all babies are screened at birth for normal vision and hearing. Ensure mother and child nutrition.
2. **Take care of children's caregivers**—parents and others—to prevent and treat depression, poverty, and family violence.
3. **Support mother-child relationships** to ensure that young children receive sensitive and consistent care, characterized by ample give and take, mutual enjoyment, and dependability. This will foster secure mother-child attachments.
4. **Nurture social-emotional development** during the early years to ensure that children grow up as caring, curious, tolerant, and friendly people.

Conclusion

Healthy development—including brain development—is embedded in caregiver-infant relationships. Sensitive, responsive caregiving supports the healthy development of biological systems that promote calming and buffer infants from stress. Disturbances in early care make infants and young children vulnerable to stressful stimulation. This vulnerability, in turn, seems to shape the child's brain to be more fearful, anxious, and stress reactive. In light of this evidence, the social and emotional development of young children warrants the concern and attention of all nations. Efforts to support caregiver-child relationships belong at the forefront of early childhood initiatives worldwide.

References

Shonkoff, J., and D. Phillips (eds.). 2000. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

[1] This article is based on a presentation at the International Step by Step Association annual meeting in Budapest, November 8–10, 2004.

Classroom Practices

The Heart of a Teacher: Making the Connection between Teaching and Inner Life[1]

We can't teach children well if our teachers aren't well.

by Sam M. Intrator, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Education and Child Study, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, USA

The Source of Good Teaching

A few years ago, I interviewed a veteran teacher from South Carolina about her work. She struck me as the embodiment of the very best teachers I've known. She spoke reverentially of the mystery and complexity of learning and how she struggled to understand the "rivers of my students' minds." She talked about herself as a quilter—as somebody who knits connections among her students, their families, and the community. At the end of the interview, she added, "One more thing. Maybe the most important thing—

> *Like the old saying, 'If Momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.' If you get a teacher in the classroom who's not happy, then look out, little children."*

This bit of wisdom, offered in the homespun vernacular of the American South, has become a touchstone for how I think about efforts to mobilize for educational reform: We can't teach children well if our teachers aren't well.

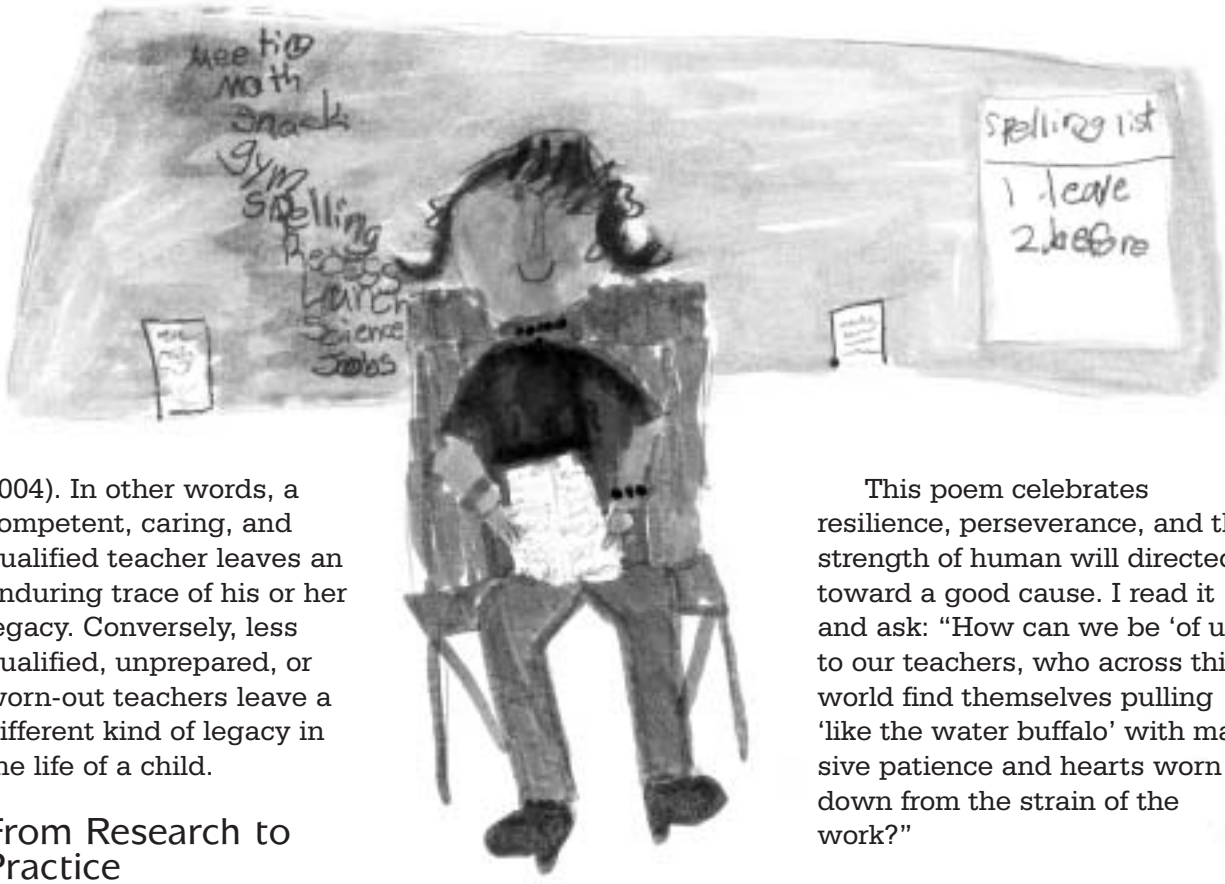
It's worth lingering on the cold implications of this teacher's observation. If our teachers are unwell—weary, unhappy, or demoralized—then our children will suffer. Conversely, available, energized, and soulful teachers provide opportunities for our children to thrive because—as teachers—our moral energy matters, our idealism matters, our capacity to be fully present for students matters. In other words—who we are matters.

Let me frame this encounter a little more broadly: if schools, youth groups, and other educational enterprises are to be places that promote academic, social, and personal development for students, everything hinges on the presence of intelligent, passionate, caring adults working as teachers and mentors.

Parents intuitively understand the critical importance of having a qualified, connected, and humane teacher in the classroom. Now social science researchers have explored the link between the quality and experience of a teacher and educational outcomes, and the evidence is compelling. The American Council of Education synthesizes these findings in a report, *To Touch the Future* (American Council of Education, 1999):

> "The success of the student depends most of all on the quality of the teacher. We know from empirical data what our intuition has always told us: Teachers make a difference. We now know that teachers make *the* difference."

The quality of the teacher is the most important in-school factor for improving student achievement: who the teacher is matters more than what curriculum is taught or what methods are used (Nye, Konstantopoulos, and Hedges,



2004). In other words, a competent, caring, and qualified teacher leaves an enduring trace of his or her legacy. Conversely, less qualified, unprepared, or worn-out teachers leave a different kind of legacy in the life of a child.

From Research to Practice

The upshot of this important research turns us toward asking: What can we do to ensure that our teachers continue to develop their skills and deepen their understandings about teaching? Likewise, what can we do to heed the insight of the teacher from South Carolina who understood that a teacher's emotional and spiritual wellness is a critical element of good practice? And how do we design programs that recognize that a critical dimension of quality teaching involves the condition of a teacher's inner and emotional life?

When I think about these questions, I find myself drawn to the words and imagery in Marge Piercy's poem "To be of use" (Piercy, 1982). She writes:

> The people I love the best
> jump into work head first
> without dallying in the shallows
> and swim off with such sure strokes
> almost out of sight…
> I love people who harness themselves,
> an ox to a heavy cart,
> who pull like the water buffalo,
> with massive patience,
> who strain in the mud and muck to move
> things forward,
> who do what has to be done,
> again and again.

This poem celebrates resilience, perseverance, and the strength of human will directed toward a good cause. I read it and ask: "How can we be 'of use' to our teachers, who across this world find themselves pulling 'like the water buffalo' with massive patience and hearts worn down from the strain of the work?"

Pathways to Professional Development

As a researcher who studies the forms of professional development available to teachers, I have come to believe that there are at least four ways that we organize opportunities for teachers to learn and grow. I will briefly consider the first three, but focus on "the way of heart" or "the way of the inner life."

The way of the subject: Familiar to all of us who work on improving teachers' practice is professional development focused on expanding a teacher's understanding of content and subject matter. Exploration of key concepts and principles at the core of a subject is necessary if teachers are to advance student learning. Done well, teachers learn not only about key ideas within the subject area, but strategies for bringing these ideas to students in developmentally appropriate ways.

The way of the method: A second critical approach is to support the growth and refinement of our methods. Our focus on expanding teachers' practices and refining their techniques seeks to augment their instructional capacity. Professional development organized in this way introduces teachers to systems of instruction such as

cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, or other similar approaches.

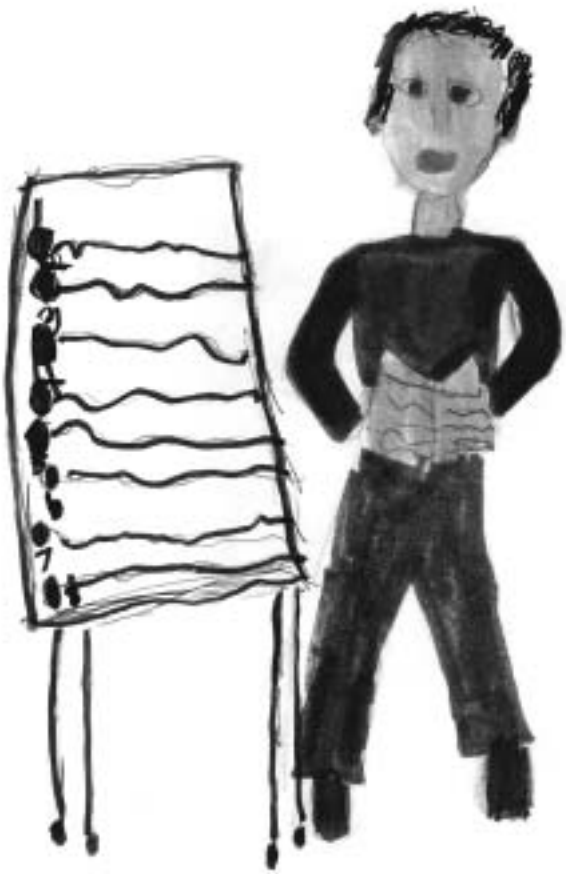
The way of understanding students: A third approach to working with teachers asks, who are our students and how do we develop more complex and appreciative ways of understanding how they think and live? Our focus is to introduce teachers to cutting-edge findings in learning theory and child development.

Obviously, there is no single way forward. Teachers need a combination of professional development experiences to continue to grow and develop. The first three approaches can be understood to focus on questions integral to the teaching and learning process: What do I teach? How do I teach? Whom do I teach? I would like to now consider what I call a fourth way "to be of use" to teachers.

Inspired, memorable teaching irretrievably depends on the condition of a teacher's heart.

This way forward is inspired by the South Carolina teacher's observation: *"We can't teach children well if our teachers aren't well."* It is reflected in comments of Denis Sparks, Executive Director of the National Staff Development Council, who contends that "teachers' vitality and engagement in their work improves school performance." It is grounded in Parker J. Palmer's best-selling book *The Courage to Teach*, where he argues that if we're serious about improving schools then we must address the heart and soul of a teacher. As Palmer reminds us, "In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the resource called the teacher on whom so much depends. Teachers must be better compensated, freed from bureaucratic harassment, given a role in academic governance and provided with the best possible methods and materials. But none of that will transform education if we fail to cherish—and challenge—the human heart that is the source of good teaching" (Palmer, 1998).

The way of the heart: The way of the heart means that even as we work with teachers on deepening their content knowledge, expanding their methods, understanding their students, and probing their sense of purpose, we strive to "cherish—and challenge—the human heart that is the source of good teaching."



A Teacher's Heart

The heart of the teacher bespeaks of mystery and ineffability; it hints of romanticism and connotes hard-to-codify qualities and elusive constructs such as emotion, intuition, and passion. As a researcher, I know it is my duty to try and pin down a definition of what I mean when I say "a teacher's heart," but I move to this task with utter humility knowing that no word or concept in the gallery of language and human thought has garnered as much attention as the idea of "heart." For example, the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers 56 distinctions of heart in its noun form, beginning with heart as a biological organism. While the denotation of heart interests me, the connotation is what intrigues me. Heart is implicated as the center of vital functions: the seat of life and mind, of feeling, understanding, and thought. The heart is the setting for one's innermost being and one's soul. It is the core of our human self and according to those who study the self's role, the coordinating center

for our action in the world. Thus it is not merely an ethereal concept, but a pragmatic force: it goads us to action, to make choices, and to take responsibility. It is the guide for our executive functions (Baumeister, 1998).

For a teacher, the role of the self plays out not only in those decisions and actions of everyday practice, but also in regard to larger questions of calling and mission. The Dutch researcher Fred Korthagen describes this

Our greatest challenge is to sustain, motivate, and deepen a teacher's understanding of true self.

place of heart as the setting for the "core qualities" of a teacher: qualities such as creativity, courage, kindness, and spirituality (Korthagen, 2004). Importantly, Andy Hargreaves reminds us that this core place, or what he calls the "emotional geography" of teaching, also includes the shadow emotions of shame, jealousy, frustration, boredom, and other dark sentiments (Hargreaves, 2001).

In short, my contention is that inspired, memorable teaching irretrievably depends on the condition of a teacher's heart. Our capacity to engage students, connect them to the subjects we teach, intervene in their lives, discern their needs, attend to their development, and cultivate constructive relationships with colleagues and parents depends on the condition of that "core place" of the teacher.

This brings me back to "the way of the heart." Most teachers enter the profession with a vision of themselves as potent agents of change in the lives and learning of their students. Across the long stretch of a career or a school year, teachers face a steady stream of external challenges and institutional limitations that erode their idealism, energy, and purpose. There is much that teachers can do to support themselves and many initiatives that can be developed by educational leaders committed to deepening the adult community at their school site in an effort to renew the vitality of their teachers. One formal professional development program explicitly devoted to cherishing and challenging the heart of the teacher is The Courage to Teach program.

The Courage to Teach

The Courage to Teach is a program of retreats designed to support educators on the journey to reclaim and deepen their professional identity and vocational integrity. It focuses on bringing teachers and educational leaders together into supportive communities to explore their teachers' hearts and examine how their inner lives play out in their work as teachers. Each group consists of 20 to 30 educators who gather for three-day retreats over a one- or two-year period. In large-group, small-group, and solitary settings, "the heart of a teacher" is explored, making use of personal stories, reflections on classroom practice, and insights from poets, storytellers, and various wisdom traditions. The intent of the retreat activities is to support teachers on a journey to reclaim their passion for teaching and find the balance so critical for sustaining their work.

The program operates under the premise that teachers choose the vocation for reasons of the heart, because they care deeply about their students and about their subject. But the demands of teaching cause too many educators to lose heart. The personal and communal process of the retreats seeks to create quiet and disciplined spaces, often called circles of trust, where teachers can hear their own inner voices and begin to claim what it will take for them to do their work with integrity and

wholeness. Let me give a short taste of what these programs look like in practice:

> *Twenty-five teachers and administrators sit in a circle, giving their full attention as an elementary teacher speaks passionately, and poignantly, about her love for her students and her commitment to reach each and every one of them. She goes on to tearfully describe the personal toll this is taking on her own life—creeping guilt at not having enough time or emotional energy to give to her own family, bone-deep exhaustion, nonstop worrying about the safety of some of her students, the weariness of facing an always burgeoning mountain of papers and projects to grade, a sense of increasing isolation from friends and colleagues because there is simply no more to give. The listeners sit quietly, respectfully, as she finishes, each reflecting on his or her own version of her story* (Jackson and Jackson, 2003).

As this vignette illustrates, these professional development retreats deeply understand that "the way of the heart" matters. The

"If you get a teacher in the classroom who's not happy, then look out, little children."

retreats do not focus on pedagogical methods, content knowledge, or child development, but on the exploration of personal and professional beliefs. Here is one participant describing the experience:

> *A poem about fear led to an amazing conversation about the fear in our own lives. Very capable and accomplished professionals shared openly and honestly. People with multiple graduate degrees and years of experience and awards in their professions shared their fear of being inadequate. Their fear of failure. Their fear of letting people down. Sharing that vulnerability, in a way I still don't completely understand, helped strengthen all of us. But somehow knowing we were all indeed quite human and quite apprehensive about being able to meet the challenge of educational leadership actually made us bold to keep on trying* (Jackson and Jackson, 2005).

Ultimately, "the way of the heart" attempts to go public with an alternative way "to be of use" to teachers. It contends that our greatest challenge is to sustain, motivate, and deepen a teacher's understanding of true self. It's an approach that believes what teachers need is not simply a refill of energy and vigor, but careful exploration of the question: How should I allocate my energy in ways that are consistent with the deepest values I have about myself as a teacher and a person? It's an approach grounded in the simple homespun words of that South Carolinian teacher: "If you get a teacher in the classroom who's not happy, then look out, little children."

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[1] This article is based on a presentation at the International Step by Step Association annual meeting in Budapest, November 8–10, 2004.

Documenting Educational Reform: The Step by Step Case Study Project

By Cassie Landers, EdD, MPH, Consultant, Open Society Institute; Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, New York, New York, USA

Description of the Case Study Project

Launched in 2003, the Step by Step Case Study Project aims to:

- Create a forum for institutional reflection among members of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) on the 10th anniversary of the Step by Step Program;
- Develop a cadre of skilled researchers, adept at using qualitative case study methods in educational settings in the regions where the Step by Step Program is active; and
- Share lessons from the Step by Step Program with a wider international audience.

It represents the work of over 100 researchers and educators from more than 30 countries, who are all dedicated to exploring and documenting the Step by Step early childhood education reform program in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Mongolia, and the Americas.

Large-scale, multicountry research projects require enormous planning and effective communication. The Step by Step Case Study adventure would not have been possible without the partnership and support of many individuals,

The Case Study teams devoted many hours to learning about case study research, developing research plans, conducting field research, collecting data, and then writing cases.

including the expert advice of an accomplished international Steering Committee of qualitative research experts. Each Steering Committee member agreed to serve as a research mentor, and was matched with four or five country research teams according to areas of expertise.

The process began with the Step by Step directors in each country who selected, briefed, and supervised the Case Study research teams. In most instances, each team included at least one person from the national Step by Step Program. The Case Study teams devoted many hours to learning about case study research, developing research plans, conducting field research, collecting data, and then writing cases.

The cases and crosscutting papers will eventually provide a narrative description and exploration of the Step by Step Program during its first 10 years.

Teams selected their topics, ensuring that key content and experiences from the Step by Step Program would be represented across the studies. For example, case studies from Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia explore Step by Step's efforts to support school success for Roma children. Case studies from Albania, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Macedonia explore programs that seek to serve children who do not attend preschool. At the outset of the project several crosscutting thematic areas were identified for deeper investigation. These included: children's outcomes, family and community engagement, equal opportunities for each child to develop to his/her full potential, professional development, enabling networks and partnerships, and sustainability.

The Case Study Project is engaging experts to develop several crosscutting reports addressing the most pressing issues. Two such reports, children's outcomes and enabling networks and partnerships, are already in process. Taken together, the cases and crosscutting papers will eventually provide a narrative description and exploration of the Step by Step Program during its first 10 years.

In this issue of *Educating Children for Democracy* highlights of the case studies are presented, grouped by topics that echo the cross-cutting themes cited above. The case study highlights are snapshots of much longer, in-depth works, which explore selected topics from many perspectives. Future publications will present the complete cases, rich with description and observation, telling the "story" behind each Step by Step site chosen for study. We hope this glimpse into the findings of the Step by Step Case Study Project heightens interest in the in-depth reports.

Promoting High-Quality, Child-Centered Teaching: ISSA Standards and Certification—Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, and Slovenia

Using Performance Standards to Achieve Quality

The Step by Step Program and Teacher Standards for Preschool and Early Primary Grades provide a framework to monitor and assess teacher performance. Standards are vital to the quality of child-centered education and community engagement. These standards were developed by an international task force of early childhood professionals. Ensuring quality teaching at the classroom level is critical in a rapidly expanding network. The Step by Step standards include individualization, learning environment,

ISSA Teacher Standards

Standard 1: Individualization

Teachers use their knowledge of child development and their relationships with children and their families to understand 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.

Standard 7: Social Inclusion

Teachers model and promote values and behaviors that support human rights, social inclusion, and the foundation of open democratic civil societies, including protection of the rights of all minorities.

family participation, teaching strategies for meaningful learning, planning and assessment, professional development, and social inclusion.

Certification is based on classroom practice and follows a systematic process consisting of self-assessment, portfolio review, classroom observation, and an interview by a Step by Step certifier. The standards can be used as a self-assessment tool for teachers and as a teaching tool by mentors and teacher trainers. The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) accredits NGOs operating Step by Step programs to function as regional certifiers. These NGOs in turn train certifiers and certify individual teachers.

Questions Raised in the Case Studies

The case studies from Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, and Slovenia examine several critical issues in the implementation of ISSA standards, as well as in the design of certification systems and procedures. The authors raise a number of crucial questions:

- What is the impact of standards on individual teachers' classroom skills?
- Has there been a positive impact on children's learning outcomes?
- What is the role of mentoring in Step by Step training?
- How can the essential elements of mentoring systems be strengthened and maintained in resource-poor educational systems?
- Can mentors effectively be incorporated into existing training and retraining systems?

Experiences of teachers, mentors, children, and parents illustrate the positive impact of the Step by Step standards on the certification process and individual self-assessment. Creating structures that support teachers' continuous professional learning is a powerful tool. The impact reaches beyond the individual to all members of the school community, enhancing learning and relationships at all levels.

All three cases discuss the need for close collaboration between ISSA's Teacher Standards and those accepted by the Ministries of Education. Understanding the barriers to, and motivation for, certification underscores the role of legislation in supporting professional development. The challenges and insights raised by these case studies will be of interest to those concerned with the interface between policy and practice.

Highlights of "Mentoring in Azerbaijan"

Case Study Researcher: Mehriban Ahmadova

Underlying the concept of mentoring is a view of professional development as an ongoing process. As one mentor said, *"It is necessary to change the attitude toward teaching and accept it not as something you have learned once and it is over…teaching, as learning, is ongoing and a lifelong process."* A preschool principal further clarified the concept of mentoring by contrasting it with training: *"Trainings are like short-term therapy, a quick injection and the patient feels well. Then the patient starts feeling worse. The patient needs another injection, but there is no chance to arrange trainings for the same teachers all the time."*

In Azerbaijan we learned that:

- Mentoring was successful because it provided detailed, immediate, and practical applications of general and conceptual Step by Step trainings.
- Mentoring was effective because it provided ongoing support on the job.
- Attitudes need to change. Where the district policy requires that new teachers be mentored, it must be understood that the mentor's role is nonevaluative and that this is not due to teachers' inadequacies.
- If the Step by Step Teacher Standards could be linked to the Ministry of Education attestation process, teachers would be motivated to improve their teaching and reach the Step by Step goals.
- Mentoring helped teachers work together as a team rather than viewing colleagues as competitors, diminishing teachers' feelings of isolation. When principals were involved in mentoring, the school turned into a community of learners.

Highlights of "The Role of a Step by Step Certifier in Czech Republic"

Case Study Researcher: Lenka Franova

The Step by Step certification process in Czech Republic differs dramatically from traditional methods of teacher assessment. According to one certifier, *"The role of the examiner ended with the assessment of quantity. For Step by Step certifiers, examining a teacher's current quality of teaching is a starting point of a systematic support process."* Through conducting the case study we learned that:

- Teacher and certifier opinions on the role of the certifier differed greatly. Certifiers used positive terms to describe their role such as "help," "guide," "support," "take care of," and "open the door to improved quality." By contrast, teachers focused on the certifier's role as evaluator, expecting her or him to point out mistakes. Certifiers respected individualization with room to improve, while teachers felt that their errors should be compared with the standards and corrected.
- Certifiers are inspired and motivated by their new role. They feel it is an exceptional opportunity to observe and learn from others. Based on these interviews, the most challenging aspect is providing constructive feedback. In the words of one certifier, *"It is demanding to be objective and provide clear and constructive feedback that will motivate rather than deflate the teacher's self-esteem."*
- The sustainability of Step by Step certification is uncertain. On the positive side, the Step by Step standards and the focus on developmentally appropriate methods comply with the general trend in European education. If high-quality teaching is to be realized, standards and the certification process are powerful and essential tools. However, the demand for certification will be low if teachers are responsible for covering the cost of certification.

Highlights of "Step by Step Pilot Certification Process: One Individual's Experience in Slovenia"

Case Study Researchers: Larry Bremer, Mojca Jurisevic, Mateja Rezek, Sonja Rutar, and Tatjana Vonta

This case study examined the experience of one teacher, whom we will call Anja, in the pilot certification process. By conducting an in-depth study of one teacher we hoped to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between teacher certification and classroom practice when using the Teacher Standards, and to garner insights about teacher motivation and the personal challenges of engaging in the certification process. We learned that:

- Although Anja was widely recognized for her excellence in teaching, part of her motivation to participate in the pilot process was her desire for validation. To achieve this validation she needed an objective view of her own practice. She wanted insights into her own strengths and weaknesses, so that she could devise strategies for self-improvement.
- Participation in the certification process had a direct impact on Anja's practice. The principal and parents agreed that a very good teacher had become even better.
- Anja, despite the accolades of others, still regarded involvement in the pilot certification process with trepidation. The challenge will be to demonstrate to teachers that the personal and professional benefits they gain from the certification process are worth any initial anxiety they might feel. Appealing to the teacher's intrinsic motivation that originally attracted her or him to the profession—helping children learn—may be one answer.

Creating Child-Centered Environments and Learning Opportunities—Argentina, Estonia, Georgia, Montenegro, and Uzbekistan

Experience-Based Learning

Step by Step's child-centered education is built around two core beliefs: that children create their own knowledge from their experiences and interactions with the world around them; and that teachers and parents foster children's growth and development by building on their needs and strengths. Using a thematic approach, classrooms are organized around developmentally appropriate learning and activity centers. Step by Step teachers facilitate children's learning and focus on creating a community of learners. Highly valued student skills include intellectual curiosity, independent learning, enthusiasm, empathy, and caring.

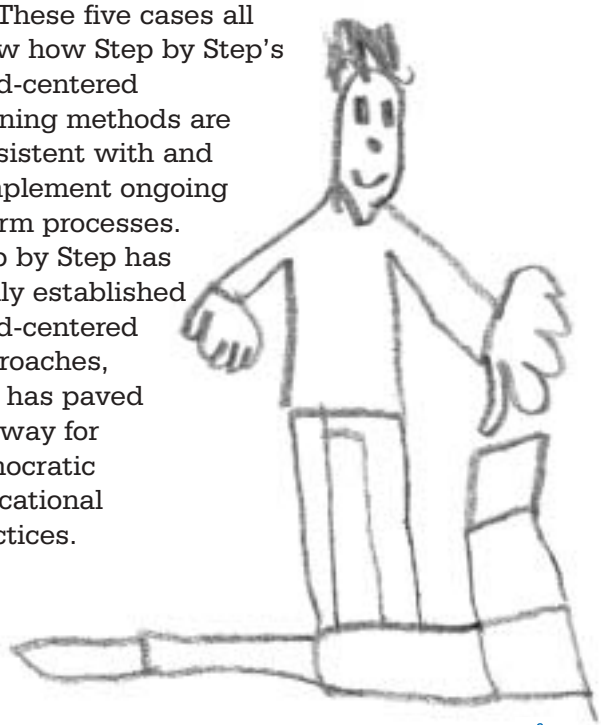
The case studies from Argentina, Estonia, Georgia, Montenegro, and Uzbekistan illustrate the educational context in which many Step by Step programs operate. Traditional educational standards reflect an overemphasis on knowledge-based curricula with little emphasis on practical life skills. Content is fragmented with few links between subjects.

Children create their own knowledge from their experiences and interactions with the world around them.

Teachers struggle with outdated bureaucratic authoritarianism. By comparison, these five cases show how Step by Step methods alter traditional methods and environments. Through classroom observations and interviews with teachers, parents, and children, the day-to-day workings of Step by Step classrooms come to life. Issues raised include the impact of child-centered teaching on children's language and self-esteem, the creation of high-quality teaching environments in spite of limited resources, and strategies for overcoming barriers to change.

Estonian educators describe how child-centered methods complement and reinforce democratic principles. Noting that some teachers feel that child-centered teaching requires extra time and energy, the case investigates the degree to which the methods are actually applied in classrooms. In Georgia, teachers' creative energies are unleashed through thematic lesson planning. The case study from Montenegro focuses on the impact of Step by Step principles on reading and writing. Interviews with children, teachers, and parents capture a new-found freedom of exploration and creativity. In Uzbekistan and Argentina, educators find local solutions to the problem of limited learning materials and resources. Step by Step has supplemented the existing classroom facilities with low-cost, child-friendly furniture and educational materials that promote active learning.

These five cases all show how Step by Step's child-centered learning methods are consistent with and complement ongoing reform processes. Step by Step has firmly established child-centered approaches, and has paved the way for democratic educational practices.



Highlights of "Argentina: A New Frontier for Step by Step"

Case Study Researcher: Dawn Tankersley

ISSA's partner in Argentina is Fundacion Leer, which has been implementing the Reading Is Fundamental program in Argentina since 1977. Fundacion Leer's historical focus is the development of literacy for all children in Argentina, a natural ally for Step by Step's program of educational reform.

In Argentina we learned that the Step by Step Program has been successful in many ways, including:

- Family participation—In the past, the concept of family involvement in Argentina was very limited; parents visited schools only on special occasions. In the Step by Step schools, family members are now working as educational assistants, making learning materials for the classrooms, attending parent meetings and workshops, and becoming involved in the decision-making processes.
- Changes in classroom atmosphere—Interactive, child-centered learning environments have been created.
- Academic achievement—Student academic outcomes have improved.
- Community empowerment to improve school environments—Schools are now accessing community resources, such as a professional trade school and local cooperatives that provide furniture, parents who repaint the schools and make learning materials, and pedagogical institutes whose students work as teaching assistants in the schools.

Highlights of "Understanding Democracy: The Impact of Step by Step on Education in Estonia"

Case Study Researchers: Meeli Pandis, Kristel Pau, Judit Strompl, and Maili Vesiko

Since Estonia became independent in 1991, the concepts of democratic and child-centered education have figured prominently in discussions of educational reform. There have been some remarkable changes, including curriculum reform, freedom of choice, and computer and Internet connections linking students into a global learning environment. Despite these dramatic shifts, Soviet-style teaching methods still characterize many institutions.

According to some educators, such terms as democracy, democratic education, and child-centered education are unfamiliar and difficult to understand. The confusion has in turn fueled a tension between a child-centered and subject-centered focus. This case examined how the terms democracy and child-centeredness are understood in Estonian Step by Step. We learned that:

- Many teachers found it difficult to define their understanding of democracy. Responses generally centered around three categories: school, society, and politics. With regard to school, most used terms associated with freedom: "to decide," "to choose," "to express one's thoughts and feelings."
- The relationship between freedom and the need for rules was raised by many teachers. Rules help teachers and children establish trust and encourage socially considerate behavior.

Highlights of "Innovation in Preschool Education: Integrated Thematic Units in Georgia"

Case Study Researchers: Mariam Shonia, Marine Japaridze, and Mariam Goguadze

The Georgian case study focused on the challenges and rewards of thematic teaching in preschool education. The need to increase awareness of alternative methods is great as traditional authoritarian practices and a highly fragmented subject approach continue to dominate teaching practice in most schools.

Through classroom observation and interviews in three difference preschools, we learned that:

- In thematic teaching information is conveyed through observation, exploration, and experiment. The methods stimulate children's thinking as they learn to explore and reach conclusions. There is a positive impact on language skills, self-esteem, and creativity.
- *"The methods foster cooperation between teachers. They are encouraged to exchange information and materials and to observe each other's classrooms.... It is true we have to work much more than before. I often get tired, but I do not want to go back!"*
- Teachers reported more positive social and emotional relationships with the children. *"Thematic teaching integrated us with the children. We no longer give orders, but help children to achieve what they are trying to."*
- Many different themes were successfully developed, including environmental issues, water, seasons, animals, vegetables, musical instruments, and magical journeys. For example, taking the cow as theme, the children discussed all the products generated by cows, what they eat, how to take care of them, and why they are so important. When spring was the theme, children drew, worked with clay, made spring pictures, and danced as flower petals. According to one teacher, *"Thematic teaching made the walls speak too, not only the children."*

Highlights of "Reading and Writing in the Step by Step Curriculum in Montenegro: Grade Three"

Case Study Researchers: Milja Vujacic and Dussanka Popovic

This case study explored how Step by Step methods are used to develop the four elements of communication—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—in the reading and writing program in Podgorica, the capital city of Montenegro. The case study focused on one teacher and her class of 20 third-grade children. We learned that:

- The classroom environment is designed to encourage listening and storytelling. Classroom walls are alive with printed materials and written messages. Different types of reading activities are encouraged in the reading and writing centers, such as reading aloud, common reading, and directed and independent reading. A particularly creative aspect is the writing workshop where children choose a topic, make a plan, revise, edit, and publish their own book.
- Children reported that reading stories as a group was a favorite activity. Children working in small groups reported that it helped them listen to others.
- Teachers were asked to compare Step by Step methods with traditional ways of teaching reading and writing. The major difference was an increase in self-expression, particularly in the written form. Assessment was based on a variety of indicators, including record books, worksheets, and student portfolios.
- Parents commented on their intense cooperation with schools and teachers. Parents saw an increase in their child's desire to read. Children used their language skills to deliver and read a message, narrate an event, retell a story, or read to a younger brother or sister. They kept diaries, completed crossword puzzles, and wrote letters to friends and family.

Highlights of "Step by Step in Uzbekistan"

Case Study Researcher: Shakhlo Ashrafkhanova

Implementation of Step by Step in Uzbekistan has included teacher training at the preschool and primary school levels, the development of model training centers, and training higher education faculty. Step by Step trainers have worked with schools on creating learning materials from locally available, no-cost materials. Step by Step staff mentor teachers. During their visits they receive feedback from children and parents of Step by Step classes. We learned that Step by Step methods have been welcomed enthusiastically by children, parents, and teachers.

Here is what the children have to say:

- *"I love playing with blocks and I don't want to leave until I build a bridge."*
- *"Each day we work in centers. I don't even know which center I like the best—it's interesting everywhere!"*
- *"I learned a lot of new things in school. I will be able to answer any children's questions, when I'm a grown-up person."*

Here is what the parents and grandparents have to say:

- *"I used to be worried about my grandson.… He was very shy and somewhat introverted. But now he has noticeably changed. This is thanks to this new method of learning that makes children feel more at ease."*
- *"Our daughter became so different since joining the Step by Step group. In the evening, she divides us up into centers at home and starts different activities with us.... In the morning she can't wait to go to her favorite kindergarten."*

Teachers are also inspired and work with great enthusiasm:

- *"It gives the teacher the opportunity to educate children so that they are ready to become lifelong learners."*
- *"This new program allows us to take into consideration individual peculiarities of each child. Everyone has an opportunity to fulfill the tasks in accordance with his/her abilities."*

Reforming and Decentralizing Teacher Training—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, and Romania

The Step by Step Approach to Teacher Training

Step by Step programs provide innovative preschool and primary school professional development training. The Step by Step cycle begins by creating model classrooms in several public and private preschools and primary schools in the country. Core training is provided to a team of early childhood experts responsible for developing the country program. Expansion to additional classrooms is dependent on resources available in communities or from the Ministry of Education. The goal is to establish high-quality, self-sustaining programs that are officially accredited by the appropriate Ministry and are available and affordable to all teachers, schools, and communities.

Exemplary Step by Step programs in schools are transitioned into training centers. The centers, which can be found in remote rural communities and central cities, provide cost-effective, comprehensive training through classroom observations, courses, ongoing supervision, and on-site mentoring. Many training centers are linked to teacher-training institutions and universities, where skilled teacher trainers influence teacher-preparation and retraining systems.

Documenting and Assessing Teacher Training

These four cases from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, and Romania provide insights into the operation and management of Step by Step training centers and professional networks. Through observations, questionnaires, and interviews with teachers, trainers, and parents, the authors compare Step by Step training to previous methodologies. Responses highlight Step by Step's emphasis on active participation and the ways in which participants are encouraged to find answers to practical challenges. Many respondents commented on the respect shown by Step by Step to teachers, students, and families.

Training centers located within schools are an innovative and enthusiastically welcomed strategy. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the training center works in partnerships to support an educational reform process focused on increasing access to high-quality teaching methods. Their efforts have fostered a spirit of collaboration across ethnic boundaries and strengthened cooperation among schools, ministries, and pedagogical institutes. In Lithuania, the training center created a team of professionals, encouraged self-training, and provided access to information and resources. Teachers understood that the training center was designed and managed by and for them. Focusing on process and outcomes, the case from Romania describes how Step by Step has gained the reputation of being an extraordinary educational alternative.

All cases acknowledge the complexity of educational change at both institutional and individual levels. They illustrate the hidden and visible tensions between spontaneity and planning, between alternative and traditional pedagogy, and between teaching in the context of teacher training and teaching as daily classroom practice. Of major concern, noted specifically in the cases from Kyrgyzstan and Bosnia, are the sustainability of training centers and the measures that must be taken at all levels to ensure financial independence and security. The cases highlight several factors influencing long-term sustainability, including licensing, relationships to Ministries of Education, and the openness of communities to alternative methods of instruction. Reforms to encourage and reward professional development are critical. These four case studies clearly illustrate how Step by Step's training centers bring innovative teaching methods to a wide range of teachers. It is in the interest of all to secure legislation and policies to ensure that their efforts are sustained.

Highlights of "Professional Development through Networking and Partnership in Bosnia and Herzegovina"

Case Study Researchers: Radmila Rangelov-Jusovic and Elvira Ramcilovic

This case study describes the impact of Step by Step training centers on the ongoing professional development of teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The study focused on the training center located in Suljo Cilic elementary school, in the small mountainous town of Jablanica. Classroom observations were supplemented by interviews with the school principal, mentors, teachers, and representatives from the Ministry of Education and the Center for Educational Initiatives (CEI). We learned that:

- The need for training is very high, especially during the transition period to innovative teaching methods for all teachers. The Jablanica Training Center joined forces with the Ministry of Education to create local capacity and provide opportunities for long-term professional development. As the director of the Pedagogical Institute noted, *"It is much better when training is conducted within a school. Participants can immediately see mentor classrooms and ask relevant questions. It is very important that teachers feel that the training center belongs to them."*
- CEI has developed a mentoring system to ensure that support from more experienced teachers is offered to new trainees when they return to their classrooms. In spite of the program's success, the number of mentors is not sufficient and there is significant variation in the quality of mentors' skills.
- Teachers' motivation to seek professional development varied tremendously. For some, the motivation is personal. Others are not ready to sacrifice personal time for professional development. Conditions at schools are not always favorable to innovation. Recognition is based on rigid criteria, which do not encourage individual efforts. Financial support is lacking.

Highlights of "Step by Step Training Centers: On the Way to a Quality Education in Kyrgyzstan

Case Study Researchers: Alima Abdyvasieva and Anara Tentimisheva

Using questionnaires and interviews, this case shows how a Step by Step training center in the ancient city of Osh transformed the vision and unleashed the talents of teachers in one elementary school. We learned that:

- The need to change the training of teachers was well recognized; the question was, *How?* In an innovative approach, Step by Step created training centers located within schools. School are selected through a process that considers the level of family participation, individualized teaching, availability of resources, and the ability to provide ongoing supervision and monitoring.
- An overall goal of the training is to foster independent thinking and decision making. One participant explained, *"Step by Step seminars helped me to restructure internally, to change my relationships and behavior with colleagues and students. My emotional state improved, my self-reliance increased. I apply the acquired knowledge and skills in my work with children."*
- Teachers reported on the major differences in their teaching before and after using Step by Step methods. They had moved from standardized to individual approaches to children, from the predominance of theory to active practical examples, from teacher domination to teacher as partner, and from rote learning to the richer creative and intellectual development of children.
- Challenges to the sustainability of training centers include the lack of demand for alternative educational services, the loss of trained facilitators who leave the program in search of better opportunities, and lack of financial support.

Highlights of "Network of Step by Step Training Centers: Ongoing Professional Development and the Impact after Training in Lithuania"

Case Study Researchers: Antanas Valantinas, Regina Sabaliauskiene, and Regina Rimkiene

This case study focused on the Step by Step Training Center located in the Vilnius J. Basanavicius Secondary School. The goal was to identify the impact of teachers' professional development on teachers, children, and families. Using document analysis, interviews, and questionnaires, we learned that:

- This school, being a training center, has an excellent reputation for innovative and creative educational techniques as well as qualified, caring teachers. Because of this reputation, families are willing to transport their children to the school and are very involved in its activities.
- Transition to fifth grade, which includes more traditional teaching approaches and subject teachers, was flagged as a difficult area. In making the transition, some positive attributes of Step by Step children—being active, asking questions, and expressing opinions—can be concerns for subject teachers.
- Teacher-lecturers and primary teachers knew they were setting the standard for education, and were proud to work hard. However, everything took longer than expected. If they could do it again, the teachers would hire a full-time employee to run the center.
- Obstacles faced by teachers from other schools who were trained at the center included skeptical administrators and colleagues; a fear of introducing radical changes; a fear of parents' reactions to new methods; and the absence of a supportive team.

Highlights of "Center for Educational and Professional Development Step by Step: Teacher Staff Development at the Tulcea Model Training Site in Romania"

Case Study Researchers: Catalina Ulrich, Luciana Terente, and Ioana Herseni

Professional development at Kindergarten #3 was the main focus of the case study. Using observation and interviews, we learned that:

- Implementation of Step by Step principles was a slow process. Participants experienced tensions between spontaneity and planning and between alternative and traditional pedagogy. The study of the teacher-training process revealed the complexity of educational change at both institutional and individual levels.
- The training of practicing teachers using a "learning by doing" principle was unique. This practical, supervised model was seen as foundational. A trainer observed, *"For one trainee, this session had a eureka effect. She finally understood the core essence of Step by Step."*
- Content issues seldom covered by traditional pre- or in-service training were discussed, such as individualized learning, learning through play, engaging children with special needs, integrated teaching, culturally sensitive education, and inclusive and intercultural education.
- Kindergarten #3, an inclusive preschool, had earned a reputation for high performance. This success was grounded in inspired leadership, a highly qualified and motivated professional staff working in a climate of positive competitiveness, and strong support from the County Inspectorate. Managers and teachers were proud of their work and of the children's achievements.
- Good performance meant that the demand for the extension of Step by Step grew every year. Parents were the most persuasive advocates, and contributed directly to educational activities.

Social Inclusion: Access to Quality Education for Roma Children—Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia

Reaching Out to Roma Children and Families

Availability and accessibility of quality education for minority children is a priority for ISSA and its network. Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Europe. The majority of Roma children do not have access to quality education, while a third of Roma children are assigned to "special schools" based on culturally biased testing. Step by Step seeks to create innovative solutions backed by sustained policy reform. For example, Roma teaching assistants are placed in classrooms to facilitate majority language learning and serve as a bridge between the school and the Roma community. The challenges are great but the commitment to achieving acceptable alternatives is a driving force of Step by Step efforts.

Through careful observations and interviews, case studies from Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia paint intimate portraits of Roma families and the teachers who guide their children through a maze of social and institutional injustices.

Documenting Strategies and Challenges

The case study from Bulgaria explores how access to quality education and child-centered teaching practices help to overcome social prejudice. Teachers in mixed classes are challenged by complex social and behavioral problems. The case from Hungary considers factors influencing the quality of parent-teacher relationships. As Step by Step methods expand and are integrated into teaching practices, quality-control measures

These studies make a strong case for the preventive and long-term social and educational benefits of early education programs.

are needed. The researchers suggest that a core package containing the essential elements of the Step by Step methods be introduced. The case from Slovakia focuses on one Roma settlement in the northeast of that country. Classes were offered for preschool children and their mothers in order to enhance early childhood learning outcomes. The goal was to improve the children's chances of admission to regular schools, rather than to special schools for children with disabilities.

These case studies identify elements critical to helping Roma children achieve school success: incorporation of Roma culture into mainstream schools; retraining of teachers with skills matched to the challenges of working with marginalized children; teaching methods designed to facilitate second-language learning; anti-bias training for teachers and school administrators; and the promotion of positive relationships among children through peer learning. Several of the authors raised questions regarding schools' responsibility toward children whose home environments place them in jeopardy. The studies show that changing teachers' attitudes was perhaps one of the greatest challenges. As these cases confirm, Step by Step methods can and must accelerate this process. Collectively, these studies make a strong case for the preventive and long-term social and educational benefits of early education programs.

Highlights of "Education for Social Justice in Bulgaria"

Case Study Researchers: Dimitar Dimitrov and Yoana Tsvetkova

This case looked at the impact of the Step by Step Program's Education for Social Justice (ESJ) initiative on Roma children in integrated schools in Bulgaria. Classrooms of teachers who had received ESJ training to support minority learners were included in the study. We learned that:

- Teachers working in mixed classes reported that the work is challenging and problematic. They recognized the need to improve their own skills and qualifications. Teachers interviewed indicated that they need new information on the customs, culture, and traditions of the Roma community.
- Evidence of Roma culture—music, fairytales, and stories—was observed in the kindergarten and first-grade mixed-classroom settings. Students worked well together, with little conflict among the children. The challenging task is to improve the relationships among Roma and Bulgarian parents. Teachers also reported the difficulties caused by the lower attendance rates of Roma children.
- Particularly in the preschool there was an improved level of contact among various ethnic groups, creative new forms of joint work, and an effort to foster relationships among teachers, parents, and the wider Roma community. Children gain mutual understanding and tolerance from working together; their social world is enriched by friendships with those from diverse backgrounds.
- Without exception, Bulgarian and Roma parents show a sincere desire for their children to receive quality education. For some parents it was impossible to help with homework, but all those interviewed felt that the school has had a positive effect on the physical, cognitive, and social development of their children.

Highlights of "Parents and School Partnerships: A Comparison of Two Families and Two Schools in Hungary"

Case Study Researchers: Silvia Nemeth and Attila Z. Pappa

This case study analyzed the impact of Step by Step methods on family-school relationships in two Roma-majority primary schools in Miskolc. We learned that:

- Changing the attitudes of teachers was one of the greatest challenges. Initially, both the school administration and the local municipality resisted parent participation in the school. Change within the school system is still challenged by traditional attitudes both inside and outside the school environment.
- Multiple factors affected parents' ability and motivation to form close relationships with the school. Lack of proximity to the school impeded the development of meaningful parent-school partnerships.
- Discrimination was found to be based on a combination of ethnic, social, and economic factors.
- Parents' perceptions about the value of Step by Step differed greatly. While one family felt the methods had a positive impact on their child's academic skills, sense of community, and family life, another family found no positive value or effect of the program on their child's performance and behavior. They found the program too lenient, thought that it did not give enough homework, and were frustrated at being unable to monitor what the child was learning.

Highlights of "Step by Step Community Resource Mobilization at a Roma Settlement in Slovakia"

Case Study Researcher: Eva Koncokova

Prior to the involvement of the Step by Step Program, Roma children had almost no opportunity to participate in early childhood education programs before attending school. Through the work of the Step by Step NGO in Slovakia, the Wide Open School Foundation, a community center was opened in the Roma settlement adjacent to Jarovnice, a village in northeast Slovakia. This case study documented strides toward improving the educational opportunities of Roma children. We learned that:

- Morning preschool classes for the children most at risk and their parents, as well as home-based afternoon learning programs to prepare the remaining preschool-aged children for school, were developed. At weekly training sessions the mothers learned how to help children develop language, cognitive, and social skills necessary to be accepted in the regular school system.
- The settlement's social worker became involved in Step by Step training focused on multicultural and anti-bias education. With a Roma teacher assistant, she reached out to the Roma community and made people feel welcome in school. In her own words, "It brought new meaning to my teaching."
- The key challenge identified was the urgent need to gain acknowledgement across Slovak society of the needs and potential of the Roma people. Stereotypes were a problem, and interpersonal relationships needed development.
- The foundation's program of multicultural activities has stimulated Roma family interest in the formal education of their children. Relations between the Roma and non-Roma communities have been strengthened, especially between representatives of the municipality and the Roma parents and community leaders.

Inclusion: Children with Disabilities—Latvia, Mongolia, and Ukraine

Disability Policy and Practice

This set of case studies offers a glimpse into Step by Step's response to families of children with disabilities. Through observation of Step by Step classes in Latvia, Mongolia, and Ukraine, the authors document how the child-centered Step by Step methodology is readily adapted to meet individual learning needs of these children.

An important indicator of a vibrant democracy is the extent to which people with disabilities participate actively in society. Children with disabilities must have access to high-quality, appropriate education. In the former Soviet Republics, children with disabilities were hidden from the public in boarding schools or at home, and were treated according to diagnosis but without the experience of growing up with ordinary children and teachers. Specialization created a large cadre of professional caregivers often opposed to inclusive education because of lack of appropriate training. Such inequities are only slowly being acknowledged.

Against this background, Step by Step promotes inclusive education, a system in which children with disabilities attend their local schools and learn in classrooms alongside their peers. The following activities are supported to achieve this objective: dissemination of best practices for children with different types of disabilities; development of fiscal and administrative procedures to sustain programs; and development of advocacy and community-awareness programs.

Taking a Closer Look at Inclusion

The case study from Latvia presents the experiences of two families with special-needs children. Qualitative methods, including observations, photos, video materials, interviews, and questionnaires, document the experience of being mainstreamed into a Step by Step classroom. This case also underscores parents' need for concrete information, expected outcomes, and support. Parents' needs change along with their children. The varying types of parental support needed at different stages form a little-understood component of service provision. The case study from Mongolia poses three questions regarding the integration of inclusive education within a preschool education college. How has inclusive education been integrated into the existing course? What was the impact on faculty and students? What aspects need improvement? Ukraine tells the story of one child diagnosed with autism and his parents. Observations and interviews provide insights into teacher training, parent involvement, and relationships with institutions and the media.

Step by Step promotes inclusive education, a system in which children with disabilities attend their local schools and learn in classrooms alongside their peers.

These cases highlight the complex challenges inherent in the training of classroom teachers. There is demand for additional training and supportive educational material. The need to reform policy and legislation in order to meet the tremendous demand for services is a common theme throughout the cases. Creating responsive and developmentally appropriate services for parents as their children move from preschool to primary school is a complex and rarely acknowledged requirement. These cases powerfully illustrate what can and must be done.

Highlights of "Educating Children with Special Needs: Parent Involvement in Latvia"

Case Study Researchers: Elfrida Krastina, Daiga Zake, Zenija Berzina, and Sandra Kraukel

This case study investigated the experiences of two families of children with special needs who participated in the Step by Step Program. One family has a child with a mental disorder and the other has a child with a physical disability.

Qualitative methods were used for assessment, including observations, photos, video materials, interviews, and questionnaires. We learned that:

- Both children were successfully included in Step by Step schools.
- A teacher remarked of one child, *"Initially indifferent, apathetic, and sleepy, she has become interested in her surroundings, especially other children. She enjoys bright colors and bright objects, especially bright scarves. Children were full of understanding and willingness to help. Her expressive and comprehensive language skills improved. She is able to use her hands. By holding her hands, I helped her to draw lines on paper. Her eyes are sparkling now. The mother's openness toward and trust of the teachers was critical."*
- The second family experienced a similar impact. Their child was initially shy but learned how to play and interact with other children. His ability to follow instructions showed marked improvement. Cooperation with parents improved slowly. The parents' intense interest in their child's successes and failures remained constant. They could freely express their concerns and feel supported. Initially controlling of their child, they gradually gave him more independence as they became more trusting of staff.
- Step by Step had a positive impact on the development of both parents and children. Parents recognized the benefits of being around other children without disabilities.

Highlights of "Inclusive Education and Higher Education in Mongolia: The Preschool Education College"

Case Study Researchers: Dari Jigjidsouren and Narrantuya Sodnomjav

The study investigated the integration of an inclusive education curriculum within the Mongolian Preschool Education College. Data were obtained through focus groups with students and faculty, student interviews, faculty questionnaires, and classroom observations. We learned that:

- The faculty felt uncomfortable teaching inclusive education without the necessary practical experience. *"I am not very confident. We know some theory but we have never worked with and don't know how to work with children with learning difficulties."*
- Most teachers reported that the training had a positive impact on their courses, but lacked awareness of its effects on student knowledge and doubted their abilities to implement the strategies in the classroom. One professor commented, *"Students might not have mastered perfect skills and methods, but at least they have understood that children with special needs deserve to be educated and brought up together with other children."*
- Student feedback reflected faculty concerns. There was some confusion among students over the term "inclusive education." Definitions included "learning difficulties," "children from vulnerable groups," and "non-Mongolian-speaking children." Faculty stressed the need for increased skills in the assessment and diagnosis of children with disabilities.
- Lack of books and other resources, including visual aids and equipment, were a primary concern. Lack of practical hands-on experience was also a major problem as students had no opportunity to visit inclusive kindergartens. *"We study theory and methodology. We do not know how to incorporate them into practices."* Students felt the need to increase their skills to work with parents of children with disabilities.

Highlights of "Inclusive Education: Influencing Children, Teachers, Parents, and State Policies in Ukraine"

Case Study Researchers: Svitlana Efimova and Natalia Sofiy

The research team evaluated the impact of the Step by Step Program on inclusion by selecting a child with a disability placed in an inclusive first-grade classroom taught by a Step by Step teacher. They chose "L," a child diagnosed as autistic, attending Maliuk School in Lviv. In this case study, we learned that:

- Last year "L" would talk to neither teachers nor children. Now he was talking to his two teachers and social worker and interacting with two girls who regularly befriended him. His teacher originally opposed passing "L" from kindergarten to first grade, but getting to know him and his mother better, and becoming familiar with Step by Step methodology, she accepted him and became an advocate for inclusive classrooms.
- For "L's" mother, the opportunity to bring her son to Maliuk Center was a great relief. It strengthened her belief that everything with "L" could be worked out. She said: *"My son has unique skills...he is a very interesting personality."*
- The problems of organizing an inclusion advocacy group were highlighted in an interview with Volodymyr Kryzhanivskiy, the director of a parent-based health improvement center. An engineer and the father of a boy with cerebral palsy, he sought equal education for his son. He was ignored until he and fellow advocates formed a nongovernmental organization (NGO), Shans. Ultimately, inspired by Hospital #18 in Moscow, they built a center for assistance and education, not only for children with disabilities, but for parents, caregivers, and advocates.

Reaching Children Outside of Preschools—Albania, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Macedonia

Innovations in Parent Education

One of the major challenges facing educators and policymakers around the world is the provision of quality services to the greatest number of children and families possible. Where formal preschools reach only a small percentage of children, flexible and creative alternative models are in great demand. Step by Step is reaching out to children and families without access to quality preschool programs. The development of community learning centers that address the learning needs of both parents and children is a high priority. Working in collaboration with a range of existing childcare providers and systems, Step by Step is developing a variety of parent education models and materials. The goal of these efforts is to provide parents with the knowledge and skills to create more effective home-learning environments. Four cases from Albania, Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Macedonia illustrate the tremendous possibilities of these exciting innovations.

Home-Based and Community Alternatives

Step by Step Armenia developed a home-based nine-month school-readiness curriculum in order to respond to the growing number of children arriving at primary school without the necessary early-learning skills. While the materials were designed to increase children's math and literacy skills, the authors reported a range of unexpected positive benefits to parents, families, and communities. All participants requested additional learning materials and requested that the program be expanded to include younger and older children. Recognizing the critical importance of the first three years of life for later development, Albania has integrated a parenting education program into an existing creche serving families characterized by multiple social problems and chronic unemployment. Through interviews with parents, and observation of caregiver-child interactions, the long-term impact of Step by Step training on the creche and its staff was investigated. The authors explored ways to reach out to a greater number of families with young children.

The case from Kazakhstan explores how one kindergarten equipped with the problem-solving skills embodied in Step by Step methods managed to survive despite dire economic circumstances. In addition, the case offers a moving account of how the kindergarten opened its doors and created a family resource center serving the community's most at-risk families. In Macedonia, the authors describe a children's Creative Center—a museum that provides informal learning opportunities for children and their families. With their emphasis on learning through play, Step by Step methods have greatly influenced the design of the activities. Through focus groups and interviews, the case examines the impact of the center on children's development and explores new directions to strengthen and enhance its programs.

The goal of these efforts is to provide parents with the knowledge and skills to create more effective home-learning environments.

This interesting set of case studies highlights the potential for alternative strategies to complement Step by Step center-based programs. The authors also point out the shortcomings of these initiatives, including limited coverage, program sustainability, resistance of firmly entrenched traditional models, the difficulties of creating consistent and holistic content, and the challenges of encouraging the involvement of fathers and other family members.

Highlights of "AHA! So Children Learn in Creches: Step by Step in an Albanian Creche"

Case Study Researchers: Milika Dhamo and Gerda Sula

This case study focused on the impact of a one-year training project, undertaken jointly by Step by Step and UNICEF, to train caregivers of children from birth to age three in a creche in the city of Kombinat. This rapidly expanding and newly settled community near Tirana suffers from chronic unemployment and high rates of violent crime. We learned that:

- Some key elements of Step by Step have been incorporated into the daily life of the creche, but others have not. The study observed the caregivers' strategies for language development, identifying improvements and shortcomings. The importance of books and reading materials is stressed by Step by Step, but they were not readily available.
- Progress was observed in the involvement of children's families in the creche, which was previously closed to parents. The dramatic change in parent interaction with caregivers, however, tended to focus on health and feeding rather than a holistic understanding of child development. Parenting classes were offered, but their quality and effectiveness was inconclusive.
- Caregivers reported difficulty in changing their role from caregiver to educator. Most were trained as nurses with skills for caring for sick children. *"When we first heard what was asked of us during the training we thought that we couldn't make it. It was so much more than what we were used to doing. But we got better step by step, and now it is impossible for us to go back to the old style."*

Highlights of "Preparing Children for School: Parental Education in Armenia"

Case Study Researchers: Gayane Terzyan and Luiza Militosyan

This case study documents the success of a pilot program designed to help parents prepare their four-to-six-year-old children for school. The materials were designed to increase children's preschool readiness skills, but feedback from facilitators and parents indicated a range of unexpected benefits. We learned that:

- Parents experienced increased confidence in their teaching skills and greater understanding of children's learning capacities. They discovered new personal strengths that resulted in improved parent-child relationships.
- Parents noted marked changes in their children: *"The work enabled us to reveal our children's abilities and talents. I thought before that my son could do nothing except be naughty. Now I am convinced that he is very talented. He already acquires knowledge required for school. He has a very good memory."* And: *"Before the program, my son didn't want to go to school. He said, 'If I do something wrong, they will punish me at school.' But now when he has learned a lot he looks forward to attending school."*
- All family members—grandparents, siblings, and fathers—were interested in using the materials. The status of mothers in the family changed as a result of their participation in the program. Older family members began to respect their opinions, and husbands who showed initial resistance were convinced when the material had a positive effect on their wives and children. Grandparents also participated.
- All facilitators, as well as parents, indicated that the program should be expanded to include materials for younger as well as early primary school children and parents.

Highlights of "Bobek Kindergarten in Kazakhstan: Keys to Survival"

Case Study Researcher: Zhumagul Taszhurekova

In 1999, government-supported preschools throughout Kazakhstan were closed due to lack of funds. This study documents how the director of Bobek kindergarten and her team responded to this challenge. We learned that:

- The director of Bobek kindergarten motivated families to contribute their time and energy to keeping the school open. Cooperation with mass media and support from local education authorities became part of the formula for success.
- An innovative program initiative, "Working with the Community," was developed. With small external start-up funding, Bobek renovated an unused area of the kindergarten into a family resource center. The activities of the center included a parent education library, home visits, group activities for young children, and celebrations.
- The most profound benefit of the program was its impact on parents. *"I am thankful to my neighbors whose children attend the kindergarten. It was they who invited me to come to the center. For the first time in many years, I feel useful and important to my children." "We parents learn to communicate, share grievances and achievements, and help our children. It seems to me that adults also learn to live a new life and hope for a better future."*
- The researchers described the center as a small island of joy and happiness. Even fathers were seen mending old furniture and making toys. The children have become more cheerful, open, and confident.
- The director's will, optimism, and determination were responsible for the continued operation of the kindergarten and the development of the community center.

Highlights of "A Place for Everyone: The Children's Creative Center in Macedonia"

Case Study Researchers: Suzana Kirandziska, Darko Marchevski, and Atina Tasevska

The Children's Creative Center (CCC) was launched in 1997 by the Step by Step team in Macedonia to provide informal learning opportunities for children ages three through twelve and their families. Since only 12 percent of Macedonian children attend kindergarten, a major objective of the center is to provide opportunities for all children to experience interactive learning. We learned that:

- Parents were attracted to the space and environment. There is a studio where children can paint and use clay. Another area displays three different Macedonian houses representing different cultures and different historical periods. A maze is filled with math games and activities. Linkages with the Faculty of Arts and Drama give children the opportunity to explore the dramatic arts. There is also a planetarium, a computer center, and a small library.
- Parents attended for the opportunity to interact with their children, recognizing the center's ability to inspire creative thinking and problem-solving skills.
- Some parents noted that program quality was uneven. They commented on old materials, poor management, no clear strategy for future development, and limited financial support. Suggestions were offered to increase the center's visibility, design more activities for older children, and facilitate transportation to the center.
- Additional recommendations were made to organize exhibitions in collaboration with schools; increase teachers' awareness of the range of educational opportunities available at the center; provide more parent education programs; and strengthen outreach to children with a range of special needs and learning disabilities.

Family and Community Engagement—Haiti, Moldova, Russia, and Tajikistan

Partnerships with Families

Families have the greatest influence on a child's life. The active participation of families is an integral component of the Step by Step Program. Teachers and families must work together to develop mutual relationships based on communication and respect. The involvement of parents in all aspects of school planning and decision making reinforces Step by Step's democratic principles. Parents are involved in a range of activities, including parenting-education programs, formal and informal parent associations, making learning materials, and participating in classroom activities.

Step by Step seeks to develop a reciprocal relationship between the school and the community. Teachers use the community as a resource for learning by inviting community members into the classroom to share their experience, cultural traditions, skills, and knowledge. Links with the community go beyond the classroom and include provision of additional resources, school improvement programs, and community-school partnerships. Families and communities play a critical role in long-term program sustainability.

Documenting the Dynamics of Parent and Community Involvement

The four case studies from Haiti, Moldova, Russia, and Tajikistan highlight some of the creative ways parents and communities contribute to the development of quality preschool and primary-school initiatives. The authors provide insights into some of the most challenging aspects of these partnerships and the ways in which roles are shaped over time.

The case studies from Haiti and Moldova illustrate the power of community links. In Haiti, most children do not attend school. As illustrated in this case study, one Step by Step village school has managed to improve these odds. The school belongs to the community, and teachers and families engage in joint problem solving. The Moldova study examines the role of a partnership between Step by Step and the World Bank, in which one village school became a catalyst for democratic change. Step by Step communities learn that they hold the power for change when they assume responsibilities and engage in active problem solving. The cases from these two countries raise some fundamental issues. What are the essential principles of community development and participation? What elements foster sustainable community participation over time? Can we begin to identify characteristics indicative of a community's desire to enhance the lives of its members?

The cases from Russia and Tajikistan examine the degree to which parent involvement in the classroom has been accepted by teachers and parents. Of particular interest is a discussion of factors influencing parents' motivation to participate, which examines why some are more receptive than others to the Step by Step learning environment. The cases illustrate that the Step by Step program changed the attitudes of teachers and parents. Parents began to see their child's unique personality. Teachers began to see children as open, friendly, free, and competent. This is a significant achievement in societies where children's opinions and individual differences are traditionally neglected. Genuine involvement of families in their children's learning, instead of delegating this function to the state, brings an individual into the life of the community, thus accelerating the progress of civil society.

Step by Step communities learn that they hold the power for change when they assume responsibilities and engage in active problem solving.

While the challenges of sustaining both community and family participation are at times daunting, Step by Step programs have had a profound impact on the lives of the communities and families who participate in them, as these cases illustrate.

Highlights of "Community Mobilization: The Te Kase School in Haiti"

Case Study Researchers: Caroline Hudicourt and Dominique Hudicourt

This case study illuminated principles of community development that contributed to the success of the Te Kase School. We learned that:

- Parent participation is fundamental. Parents help maintain school equipment, they work in the school vegetable garden, and the parent association produces embroidered craftwork. Trainings offered to parents empower them to encourage their children and support their learning activities.
- Strong and progressive leadership is essential in motivating community members to take action. The progressive attitude of "Brother,"a well-known charismatic leader of the area, has been responsible for much of the community development.
- The beauty of the physical design of the school gave parents a sense of pride, self-respect, and respect for others. The school gave the community hope.

Highlights of "Sustaining Democratic Change: The Role of Partnerships in Moldova"

Case Study Researchers: Cornelia Cincilei and Valentina Pritcan with contributions from Svetlana Semionov and Valentina Lungu

In 1999, a joint initiative between Step by Step and the World Bank's Moldovan Social Investment Fund (MSIF) targeted both the physical rehabilitation of rural schools and curriculum reform through the introduction of democratic educational practices. Only villages that organize themselves, prioritize their needs, and commit themselves to a 15 percent local contribution to the general project cost can get MSIF support. This study focused on how this initiative became a catalyst for change in the Chiscareni community and its school. We learned that:

- During the MSIF school renovation project, parents and teachers came together for the first time to discuss school needs and decided to donate the value of two working days toward the community. They registered the Parent Teacher Association to continue the work started by this project.
- The project mobilized the whole school and community. *"The Step by Step Program changed the teachers, they have changed the students, and now these students are further changing their teachers."*
- Youth initiatives included an ecology summer camp and newspaper, leadership-development programs, cycling tours, a local youth council, an antidrug campaign, a bicycle-parking project, and business skill development through a youth-run disco.
- The issues of the locus of control and "agency" of creating change are important in understanding how change occurs and if it can be sustained. Communities have learned that it is within their power to change their condition if they unite their efforts, assume responsibility, and take the initiative to solve their own problems.

Highlights of "Involving Families in the Preschool Teaching and Learning Process in Odintsovo, Russia"

Case Study Researchers: Elena Yudina and Alina Kulikova

This case study examined the impact of Step by Step on the attitudes and practices of both teachers and parents toward encouraging active parent involvement in the classroom. A range of parent involvement activities, as well as challenges, were noted. We learned that:

- Parents are involved in school festivals and celebrations, and are invited to the classroom to speak about their work or about specific cultural traditions. They are periodically asked to observe "open lessons." There are regular parent meetings.
- Although it was understood that parents could participate in the class, the purpose for their participation was not obvious. Some parents felt that visiting classrooms was intrusive and similar to inspection.
- Real partnerships with a clear specification of roles have not yet been achieved.

Highlights of "Parents Are Critical: Parent Participation in Step by Step inTajikistan"

Case Study Researchers: Nurali Salikhov and Zarina Bazidova

This case study raised the question of how best to involve and motivate parents, while recognizing the tremendous stress and responsibility in their lives. We learned that:

- Open invitations to parents to come to class and help in the activity centers were not effective. A schedule was drawn up, based on parent availability, and parents prepared material in advance.
- Most parents preferred to work in the arts or reading centers. Science, writing, and math centers were threatening to those without the necessary background. Parental contributions needed to be matched to skills.
- Heavy workloads limited many parents from participating, especially working fathers employed out of the town.
- Parents reflected on how the program had changed their attitudes toward the school, teachers, and their children. *"I knew before that teaching is very difficult work. However, after coming to classes our understanding of each other improved. Now I have a great respect for our teacher. I can see some changes in my husband as well. He can see that I pay more attention to our children and he likes that. He started helping our child with homework."*
- Children enjoyed having their parents participate in the classroom. *"My mother likes to work in the arts center. I like it when my classmates show the teacher their work. Then I tell everyone that it was my mother who helped them."*

Building a Network of Networks: Step by Step NGOs and the ISSA Network—Belarus, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia, and "A Region with a Voice"

NGOs as Change Agents

Since the collapse of the Soviet socialist bloc, professional networks, grassroots movements, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have grown exponentially. Many provide services; others are engaged in advocacy campaigns to influence policies. Some have evolved into complex international advocacy networks. The network of Step by Step NGOs dramatically illustrates the growth of this movement. Beginning as an educational program in 15 countries, Step by Step transformed into an international network of 30 NGOs engaged in large-scale educational national reform and regional advocacy. They have formed a transnational advocacy network, the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), which dynamically voices the needs, concerns, and interests of these powerful national NGOs.

What role do educational NGOs play in the current complex environment? Whom do they represent? What are the relationships among NGOs, states, and donors? How independent are NGOs? With whom do they build alliances to pursue their missions? How has the ISSA network been so successful? What challenges lie ahead in the next decade?

Four national cases studies combined with an ISSA study explore these issues from both national and international perspectives. At an international level, the ISSA case study analyzes the role of ISSA as an international advocacy network and documents the strategies leading to its success. Illustrating the different political, economic, and social contexts, the case examines the roles of national Step by Step NGOs, their relationships with governments and civil societies, and the implications for affecting national, regional, and international policy. Country case studies from Belarus, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia provide an opportunity to examine these roles within particular contexts.

Theme and Variation in Step by Step NGOs

The case study from Belarus examines the relationship of Step by Step to the Ministry of Education. The authors suggest that to maxi-

mize impact, each Step by Step NGO has to accurately assess its position in relation to the standard governmental system of education, determining where it would be most effective.

In Croatia, Step by Step journals support a network of educators. While the impact on teachers' professional development has been positive, the economic future of the journals is uncertain. Through interviews with editors and subscribers, the authors assess the factors that place the journals' futures in jeopardy. The case concludes with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of various alternative strategies.

Reform policies must be translated into practice in order to sustain community trust, participation, and hope.

Cases from Kosovo and Serbia examine Step by Step's pivotal role in shaping and guiding educational policy reform. This powerful position was earned in part because of Step by Step's ability to translate policy principles into skills-based practice, thereby providing an immediate concrete model available for all to see. The Kosovo case provides a cautionary note, suggesting that reform policies must be translated into practice in order to sustain community trust, participation, and hope. In Serbia, because of its respected position Step by Step influenced legislative support to promote professional development as well as child-centered curriculum reform. Yet recent political instability has forced a reexamination of the overall reform process. These two case studies highlight some of the obstacles encountered along the road to reform, including interdependence with weaker bureaucracies, insufficient planning and management capacities, and lack of coordination among subsystems.

This collection of case studies powerfully illustrates the urgent need for change. It is imperative to remove old systems and replace them with alternative methodologies that reflect the vision of open civil societies. Yet the process is slow, confused, and requires astute managerial skills. ISSA and its members must continue to renew their insights, evaluate their positions, and adapt their methodologies in response to an ever-changing kaleidoscope of influences.

Highlights of "Inside, Outside, or On the Border? Negotiating the Relationship between Step by Step and the Ministry of Education System in Belarus over 10 Years"

Case Study Researchers: Steffen Saifer and Iryna Lapitskaya

This case study addresses the question of whether national education reform is best implemented and sustained within the system, outside of it, or "on the border." Through observation and interviews with Ministry of Education officials and teachers of children in Step by Step classrooms, we learned that:

- For the most part, the border has been an effective place to accomplish the program's goals. For example, when the staff of the Belarusian Step by Step Program sought to implement a new initiative on the inclusion of children with disabilities, they first contacted the Ministry of Education for support. Receiving an unenthusiastic response, they approached regional, district, and city entities until they found supporters interested in receiving the training. This enabled them to make connections with those inside the system at different levels. There are now many schools throughout Belarus where children with a variety of disabilities are full members of the school community.
- A recent formal agreement with the largest regional branch of the Ministry and an unprecedented award to the director from the Ministry indicate that the program has gained credibility as an outside organization. According to the agreement, an entire section of the major elementary education journal published by the Ministry will now be devoted to the Step by Step Program. The Ministry views this as a way to strengthen their journal and increase circulation, while Step by Step sees it as a way to validate their work. This "journal within a journal" is a powerful metaphor for location, being inside the system while still separate and distinct.

Highlights of "Evaluation of Step by Step Journals in Croatia"

Case Study Researchers: Boris Jokic and Zrinka Ristic Dedic

Step by Step in Croatia publishes two journals. *Child, Kindergarten, Family* focuses on preschool education and has published 29 issues since its inception in 1995. *Child, School and Family*, started in 1997, covers the primary school environment and has published 11 issues. The main role of the journals is to provide a place where Step by Step teachers and other professionals exchange ideas, problems, doubts, and solutions. By studying the journals we learned that:

- The journals complement and support the Step by Step curriculum and play a significant role in lesson planning, containing information easily adapted to meet teachers' needs.
- Differences in schools' access to the journals were highlighted, including obstacles to access caused by poor administration and management.
- Variation in the quality of the articles submitted is a concern. There are few standards, and almost all articles submitted are accepted.
- Due to financial difficulties, promised publications were not produced. There is a limited subscription base and the total circulation for both journals has decreased from 1,000 to 600. The office must regain the trust of subscribers, as well as attract new subscribers.
- The journals' sales prices are not high enough to cover printing costs, yet they are too high for individual subscribers. Although the prices are appropriate for institutions, sustaining the journals will be difficult.

Highlights of "Step by Step Program in Primary Schools and Curricular Reform in Serbia"

Case Study Researchers: Aleksandar Stojanovi, Vesna Zlatarovi, and Milena Mihajlovi

This case study examined the role of Step by Step in primary education reform in Serbia. From interviews with Ministry of Education officials regarding Step by Step first-grade classes, we learned that:

- Parents and teachers are extremely satisfied with the results of Step by Step classes.
- Notable improvement was reported in the children's self-confidence.
- The significance of teamwork and cooperative learning was substantiated.
- Tensions arose among teachers in schools where only some classes were Step by Step.
- Descriptive grading and systematic observation of children under Step by Step, while innovative, made keeping pedagogical documentation complicated because of dual pupil assessment requirements, both descriptive and numerical.

From interviews with teachers, school principals, pedagogues, and psychologists, we learned that:

- Step by Step training on the teacher's role and teamwork helped teachers achieve greater professional competence and security.
- Children are more active, creative, involved, motivated, independent, and satisfied, and are achieving good results; there is greater respect for children's individual traits.
- Classrooms are better equipped and the atmosphere has improved.
- Cooperation with parents has increased; parents are more involved and satisfied.
- The interest of non-Step by Step colleagues in Step by Step methods has been heightened.
- More complex paperwork is required.
- Some skepticism still exists.

Since 2004, the Ministry of Education has indicated that it plans to revert to older concepts of curriculum and pedagogy. However, the Step by Step Program is still being implemented and public reaction to this reverse of policy has been extremely negative.

Highlights of "Primary School in Gjakova: Lessons from the Past, Hope for the Future in Kosovo"

Case Study Researchers: Ganimete Kulinxha, Dasamir Berxulli, and Eda Vula

This case study explored the challenges of reforming an educational system weakened in the aftermath of war, and the potential of Step by Step to influence this process. Emu Duraku Elementary School in Gjakova, 85 kilometers from the capital, Pristina, was chosen as the focus of the study. Gjakova education facilities were badly damaged during the war. The majority of students are Albanian, with a small minority of Roma, Ashkaki, Egyptians, and Bosnians. Exploring the source of hope provided by this school where diverse children study alongside one another was a central aspect of the study. We learned that:

- The process of designing and implementing new curricula is difficult, requiring astute managerial skills. The new first-grade curriculum still requires revisions in order to more closely reflect the philosophy of child-centered learning. Teachers require more training than anticipated.
- Step by Step methodologies need to be adapted to address real-life constraints: limited space and high child-to-teacher ratios. Greater attention needs to be placed on the social and emotional needs of children who have been exposed to trauma.
- The motivation to support community involvement in the school exists, but the specific roles and needed skills require further clarification.
- Further development of Step by Step methods require closer collaboration among regional education structures, school staff, and the program director.

Highlights of "A Region with a Voice: The Role of the Open Society Institute's Step by Step Program in Developing Professional Networks of Early Childhood Educators in Southeast/Central Europe and the former Soviet Union"

Case Study Researcher: Iveta Silova

This study documents how Step by Step—a two-year pilot project initiated by an international foundation in 15 countries—has transformed during the last 10 years into a worldwide network of 30 NGOs engaged in large-scale national reform and regional advocacy. The Step by Step Program is uniquely defined by its emphasis on the development of civil society at multiple levels. These include: ensuring that children will learn skills that will guarantee their active participation in society as adults; providing and encouraging parent and community engagement in children's education; and developing a vibrant and active third sector in early childhood education to ensure high-quality programs for all children. We learned that:

- One of the key achievements of Step by Step has been the development of an extensive network of independent NGOs, professional associations, and parent-teacher associations. This network provides education services to communities and serves as an independent voice in national education reform and policy development. In 1998 these local NGOs formed the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), which advocates internationally the interests of early childhood educators from the countries of the former socialist bloc.
- Despite their contributions to the development of open societies, and their influential voices in shaping civil society, many NGOs remain dependent on donor funding and have established only tenuous links with local communities.
- Aiming to instill democratic values and behaviors within the most undemocratic regimes of the region, some struggle to pursue their missions. NGOs have often been perceived as problematic organizations, committed to fundamental reforms, but funded by donors who demand short-term results.

ISSA Network News

Making Strides: Inclusion of Children with Disabilities Worldwide

The Open Society Institute (OSI) and the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) are achieving favorable results by supporting Step by Step countries in the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education classroom. Working with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) to offer technical assistance, training, and mentoring, OSI is providing countries with new knowledge and skills to assist teachers directly in the classroom, as well as to equip families and administrators in advocating for policy reform, forming strategic partnerships, and fundraising.

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In August 2004, regional trainings held in Tallinn, Estonia, offered forums for the dissemination of disability training methods and modules. Led by CEC and hosted by the Estonia country staff, these two regional "trainer of trainers" workshops attracted teams from 19 Step by Step countries. The teams learned about instructional approaches and best practices for the inclusive classroom. During this premier event, trainers introduced a new set of disability modules for the preschool and primary levels, "Instructional Strategies for Children with Disabilities in the Early Childhood Classroom" and "Instructional Strategies for Children with Disabilities in the Primary Classroom."

In-country trainings and/or mentoring have offered more customized technical assistance and learning opportunities to countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, and Ukraine. Countries have engaged in instruction at preschool, primary school, and higher education levels based on their identified needs.

Several countries have also made strides through recent grant support to national projects. Ukraine finalized a two-year project, funded by TACIS, to explore the impact of inclusive education on children with disabilities, children without disabilities, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education. CEC worked with Ukraine to develop a tool for the evaluation of their grant and participated in the final presentation in September 2004. Results revealed the positive impact of teacher training and teacher motivation, highlighted a positive shift in the attitudes of stakeholders, and brought awareness of the importance of NGOs and partner organizations as advocates for the educational rights of children with disabilities. The evaluation also showed that while equal access to quality education was a priority in the national education doctrine, existing legislation still supported education at special schools. However, Ukraine showed positive trends, including increased capacity of Step by Step NGOs to serve children with disabilities, new knowledge and skills imparted to teachers via trainings, improvements in children's social and academic performances, and increased parent satisfaction.

Through a partnership with World Vision, the Azerbaijan

Ministry of Education, and OSI, the Open Society Institute-Assistance Foundation Azerbaijan Step by Step Program is piloting a one-year, inclusive early childhood development program to improve teaching practices, policy, and societal attitudes toward children with disabilities. This community-based model of inclusion could be expanded nationally if the pilot project is successful. In support of this effort, CEC trainers are conducting classroom observations and teacher mentoring in these schools to enrich their subsequent training discussions with practical and helpful examples.

At the recent 10th Anniversary Conference in Budapest, ISSA devoted a strand to the topic of inclusion of children with disabilities, featuring current results from those countries that completed case studies on disability topics, including Mongolia, Latvia, and Ukraine. Mongolia's report on the integration of inclusion in higher education acknowledged that faculty and students both need additional training and materials to fulfill this goal. Yet it identified the great willingness of the faculty to incorporate this type of training. The Latvian study of two families with children with disabilities found that the Step by Step classroom was well suited to include children with both mental and physical disabilities. Elements of the Ukraine study are discussed above. Interest across ISSA was evidenced by this well-attended session.

There have been many achievements in the arena of inclusive education, but the obstacles are also many. Ensuring the success of inclusive education in the Step by Step classroom will require increased funding for programs, the creation of national policies that mandate funding to inclusionary sites, ongoing professional development of staff, and the integration of general and special education professionals and practice.

In the next year, the ISSA network, OSI, and CEC will strengthen the Disability Initiative through increased educational efforts and support for countries that have made consistent progress toward creating inclusive classroom environments. As a result of trainings on disability topics, mentoring, greater commitment from professionals, and the desire of parents that their children be included in their communities, many countries are now better prepared to create inclusive classroom environments that not only welcome children with disabilities and their families, but also promote their success.

ISSA Quality Early Education Initiative

As part of our efforts to best describe the ISSA activities that utilize the ISSA Teacher Standards, the Mentoring for Quality Improvement and Teacher Certification projects are now organized under the Quality Early Education Initiative. The purpose of the initiative is to support teachers in continuous professional development by providing a framework for quality teaching practice and a spectrum of services and materials to assist both mentors and teachers in the implementation of the standards. Quality teaching practices are the key to providing children with the skills necessary to become active participants in their communities and ISSA is committed to supporting quality efforts in the classroom.

As part of that commitment, ISSA funded "Regional Anchors"—people trained to reliability on the ISSA Certifier Instrument—to support countries that are in the process of, or have started, developing Teacher Certification systems. These "Anchors" are responsible for conducting practice observations with certifiers in their geographical region to ensure a level of consistency across countries. Regional events for certifiers will also begin this year, further expanding the ISSA professional development network. In 2004, nine countries completed Teacher Certification, Initial Reliability Training and began to establish professional development systems with the goal of certification. Fifteen teachers have already received certificates and we expect

that number to increase dramatically in 2005!

Additionally, the standards implementation guides for teachers and mentors have been completed and many countries are using them as a primary resource for supporting quality in the classroom. To further assist ISSA countries in establishing solid, sustainable systems for mentoring teachers, a workshop to review the mentoring materials and discuss strategic planning will be held the last week in September for countries who joined the network in the first years of its establishment. Newer member countries are receiving the Mentoring for Quality Improvement training on an individual basis. And to support the development of quality mentoring for teachers in all countries, a project is under way to map existing governmental and organizational mentoring activities. This will help strengthen existing arrangements instead of automatically creating new positions and structures that are difficult to sustain.

Fifteen teachers have already received certificates and we expect that number to increase dramatically in 2005!

Finally, the Quality Early Education Initiative is reaching out to western countries in hopes of forming partnerships around quality professional development for teachers, utilizing the strengths of the ISSA membership and widening our network. At least one collaborative proposal is being written and it is our hope that by the end of the year the Quality Early Education Initiative will have received funding from outside partners to strengthen this work. For further information about the Quality Early Education Initiative, please contact Stephanie Olmore at Stephanie.olmore@cudenver.edu.

George Soros Receives Prestigious Caring for Children Award

Georgetown University honored George Soros with its Caring for Children Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of his exemplary work for the betterment of the world's children, noting particularly his efforts to reform and expand early education in Central and Eastern Europe to prepare children to live in democratic societies. The award, presented by Georgetown University's Phyllis Magrab and Geraldine Waldorf, opened ISSA's 10th Anniversary Conference, held in Budapest in November 2004. Mr. Soros participated throughout the morning session as Step by Step teams and staff presented a history of the Step by Step Program, including ISSA's latest initiatives to develop quality early education programs and to promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education classrooms. Before he left, Mr. Soros presented each Step by Step team celebrating their 10th anniversary with a personally signed certificate of appreciation.

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.

For information about becoming an ISSA member, please visit our website at http://www.issa.nl/join. You may also contact ISSA by e-mail at admin@issa.nl or through 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: +36-1-266-3463.

Subscribe to Educating Children for Democracy

Educating Children for Democracy is the professional journal of the International Step by Step Association. It is intended for teachers of children from birth through age 10, faculty who instruct preschool and/or primary school teachers, and other educational professionals interested in child-centered teaching methods.

The annual subscription (two issues, published in English) rate is: $30 or €24; single copies are $15 each or €12. *Educating Children for Democracy* is distributed free to ISSA members.

If you would like to subscribe to *Educating Children for Democracy*, please visit our website at http://www.issa.nl/journal or contact Laura Liliom at +36-1-486-2855 or lliliom@issa.hu for more information.

Guidelines for Authors

Educating Children for Democracy encourages submission of articles written by teachers, parents, faculty in institutions of higher education, and other interested educational professionals serving children from birth through age 10. We seek:

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.
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.

Information for authors on the preparation, submission, and review of manuscripts is available on the ISSA website at http://www.issa.nl/journal. Manuscripts may be submitted through the Editorial Associates in member countries or to:

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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 age 10.