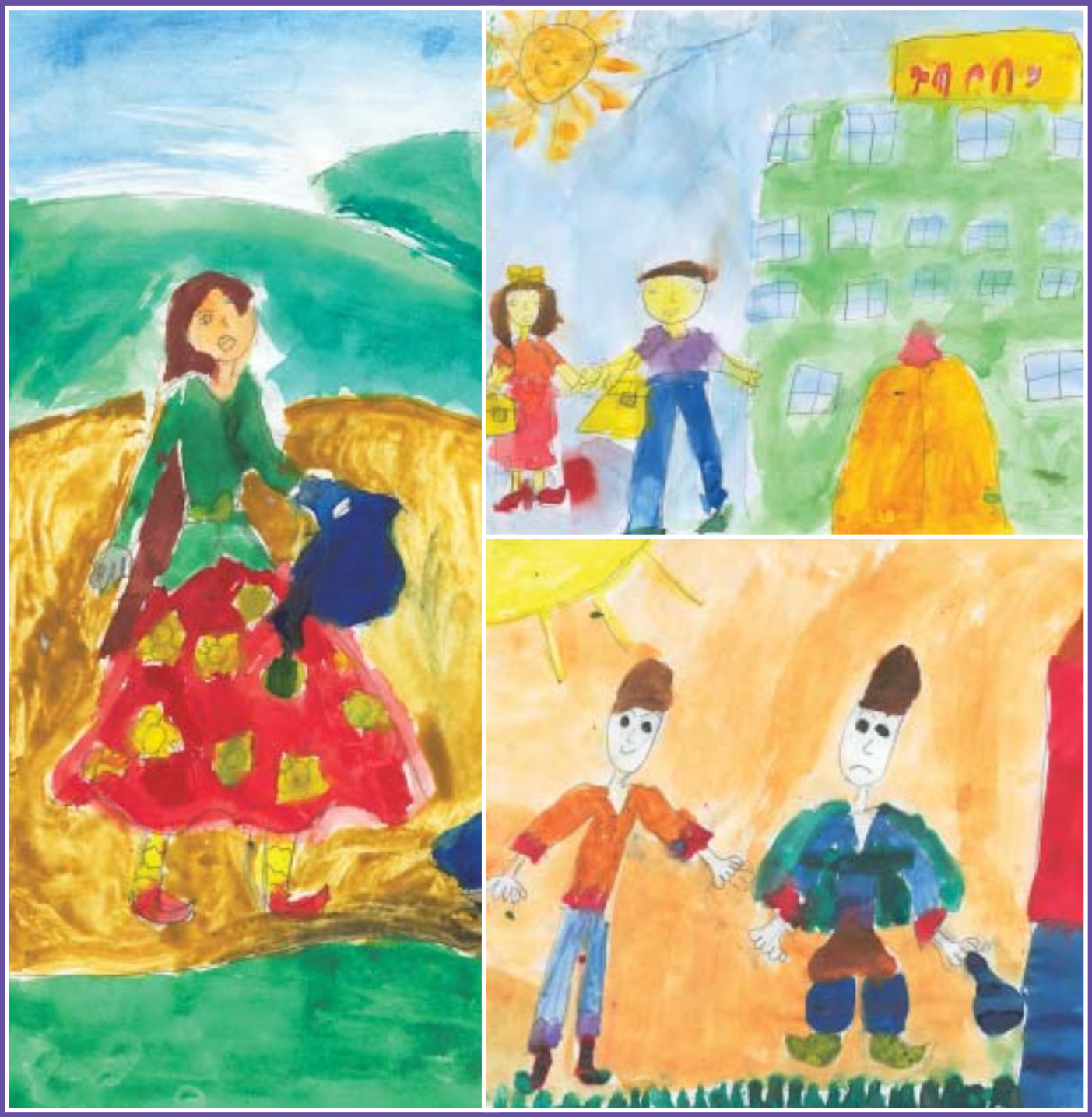
Educating Children for Democracy

The Journal of the International Step by Step Association

Step by Step Case Studies

Number 10, Winter/Spring 2006

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.



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 10

Step by Step Case Studies

Step by Step has accumulated a vast base of experience that could help inform international efforts to improve early childhood care, development, and education around the globe.

It was a time to celebrate, but also a time to "take stock." As the Step by Step Program approached its 10th anniversary, Sarah Klaus, executive director of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), wanted to chronicle a decade of efforts to reform early childhood education in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Mongolia, and the Americas. Step by Step had, during its first decade, accumulated a vast base of experience that could help inform international efforts to improve early childhood care, development, and education around the globe.

The Case Study Project

To tell the story of Step by Step—a program that began in 15 countries in 1994 and spread to 30 countries during its first decade—was, in itself, a daunting task. But the leadership of ISSA wanted to do more. Inspired by the vision of building capacity in the regions where the Step by Step Program is active, the Case Study Project aimed to develop a cadre of skilled researchers, adept at using qualitative case study methods in educational settings.

This ambitious undertaking was a team effort. Launched with the help of Hugh McLean, from the Open Society Institute, and supported by an international steering committee of qualitative research experts headed by Robert Stake, a research design and online curriculum was developed. Over 100 researchers and educators from more than 30 countries formed case study teams to engage in what Stake describes as "a more disciplined, experiential study of their own work."[1]

The Knowledge of Experience

Program evaluation has been a hallmark of the Step by Step Program. From its inception, educators and parents wanted to know: would an educational methodology based on individualization and learning through play positively influence the social, emotional, and intellectual development of young children? Is Step by Step in-service training effective in changing teaching behavior? These and other questions were addressed in a myriad of studies using pre- and post-tests, comparison groups, and statistical analysis.[2]

But the Case Study Project broke new ground. Seeking to understand the experience of educational transformation and capture lessons learned—from teachers, parents, program administrators, and children—a different methodology was selected; one that favored in-person interviews and on-site observation. And, unlike most multisite studies that replicate the questions investigated at each site, the topics chosen for study in each Step by Step country focused on a different aspect of the program. Taken as a whole, the Case Study Project sought to capture the multifaceted richness of the Step by Step Program.

This volume of *Educating Children for Democracy* presents seven of those case studies—from Armenia, Albania, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Haiti, Croatia, and

The Design of the Step by Step Case Study Project

The Step by Step Case Study Project provided a unique opportunity for the ISSA network to document and reflect on the experience of implementing the Step by Step Program over 10 years. With great enthusiasm, each country selected a team of researchers and proposed a topic for their study. At the international level care was taken to ensure that the breadth of the Step by Step Program would be represented by the topics selected for study. Over the course of six months, more than 100 researchers from 28 countries participated in an online course and two face-to-face seminars, and, with the support of an international mentor, each national team conducted a qualitative case study on their focus topic.

The project engaged an international Steering Committee including Larry Bremner and Linda Less of Canada; Teresa Vasconcelos of Portugal; Tatjana Vonta of Slovenia; Hugh McLean of South Africa; and Cassie Landers, Steffen Saifer, and Robert Stake of the United States. Committee members used their expertise in early childhood and primary education, educational reform, and qualitative case study methods to develop training and mentoring for the researchers and guidelines for the national studies. Six cross-cutting themes were identified and incorporated into plans for the national research studies, with the idea that the project could later produce a series of thematic papers:

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

The work was intense. Between December 2003 and December 2004, the Steering Committee met in person four times and kept up an active dialogue on the Internet-based course website established for the project. Each committee member mentored a cluster of three to five national cases. Mentors met their research teams at international seminars and kept up communication by email, phone, and on the website between meetings. In a few cases, mentors visited countries to assist with field research or with planning the case write-up.

The seven case studies summarized in this journal represent only a fraction of the project outcomes. Three full-length studies will be published this fall as chapters in *Multiple Case Study Analysis* by Robert Stake (Guilford Publications). Plans are also in place to produce several cross-cutting reports, addressing those issues that are most outstanding. Step by Step is much richer for this cooperative research project.

—Sarah Klaus, Executive Director, International Step by Step Association (ISSA)

Belarus. They cover a range of topics: parent education and involvement, center-based infant care and home-based early learning, ISSA standards and teacher certification, community development, journal development, and the development of Step by Step NGO/Ministry of Education relationships.

Each investigation contributes important insights to our understanding of specific program components. We learn from Slovenia that strategies to increase the quality of teaching need to be sensitive to educators' self-esteem—even an outstanding teacher experiences anxiety and trepidation about being observed and assessed. We learn from Croatia that professional journals can be an effective vehicle for building a community of educators sharing innovative teaching

practices; but also that limited resources make sustaining publication initiatives a challenge. We learn from Belarus that the relationship between an educational reform program and the Ministry of Education is crucial to the program's survival; and that the intricate dance of garnering legitimacy—as well as the independence necessary for innovation—requires the skill of an accomplished choreographer, even as the political rhythm might change.

Eyes Wide Open

The opportunities for critical reflection offered by the case studies also unmask truths that transcend the specific topics chosen for examination. The experience of the Te Kase school in Haiti helps us grasp the interconnectedness of educational reform and community development in helping families, especially from marginalized populations, raise children who can reach their full potential.

The case studies from Armenia, Albania, and Tajikistan illuminate the fundamental differences between Step by Step and traditional educational approaches, and the journey from faltering first steps to breakthroughs in attitudes and practice. There is the dad in Armenia who never spent time with his children, because he did not consider childcare something a man would do, who now helps and participates. There is the mother in Tajikistan whose initial skepticism about the program changed dramatically after she worked with children in the activity centers. And there are the differences in the children themselves. As one mother of two children explains: "The development of the second who goes to day care is beyond comparison with that of the first. She is better behaved, more organized, more self-responsible, more careful, more skilled, more linguistically active, and empathic."

No Turning Back

It is these tangible outcomes, experienced first-hand by teachers and parents, that fuel the engine of transformation. For the lessons learned about educational reform are not only about change strategies but also about the change agents themselves. These case studies offer a breathtaking view of the qualities of the people who make change happen. These are stories of resilience in the face of daunting obstacles. Poverty and lack of resources—schools with outdoor toilets, attended by children scheduled in quadruple shifts—do not deter Tajikistan Step by Step. These are stories about leadership, emerging in every Step by Step country from every level of program implementation. It is a teacher in Slovenia engaging in critical self-reflection so that she can gain knowledge to lead. And it is a group of parents in Belarus urging the teacher to change schools, together with the whole class, so that they can continue to implement Step by Step.

Finally, these are stories about an allegiance to a new set of values and democratic principles, born of personal conviction. External conditions may foster or impede reform efforts, but the knowledge gained by teachers and parents will endure. Supported by insights and visible achievements, this new approach cannot be discarded or ignored. Like the triumphant toddler, empowered by the ability to traverse the world upright, there is no going back to crawling.

"When we 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's impossible for us to go back to the old style."

Rochelle Mayer, EdD
Editor

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1 Robert Stake, 2005. *Multiple Case Study Analysis*. (New York: Guilford Publications): 114.

2 See, for example, Havlinova et al., 2004. "Measuring Psychosocial Outcomes in the Step by Step Program: A Longitudinal Study in the Czech Republic." *Educating Children for Democracy* (6): 20–25; and Kazimade et al., 2003. "Evaluation of the Step by Step Program in Azerbaijan." *Educating Children for Democracy* (5): 25–31.

Serving Children Outside of Preschool

The Family School: Parent Education in Armenia

Case Study Researchers: Gayane Terzyan, Yerevan State Pedagogical College, and Luiza Militosyan, PhD, Yerevan Linguistic University

"The most difficult profession is to be a parent."

—Lala Soukiasyan, parent from Martuny

The experience in Armenia demonstrates that parents and families themselves, with the right guidance and support, are a huge and largely undertapped resource for preparing children for school and for meeting early childhood development needs.

Introduction

Qaraglukh is a small and ancient village in Armenia where fewer and fewer children are born every year. There is no kindergarten. Villagers took part in a Step by Step pilot program to implement an innovative curriculum designed to help families prepare their kindergarten-age children for school. This case study focuses on the implementation of the Step by Step pilot parent education project in Qaraglukh, and also notes the effects of parent seminars in Yerevan and Martuny. It examines key policy issues related to reaching children and families outside of preschool, including the preparation for schooling by parents and families, the role of kindergartens in supporting home-based child development and providing support for young mothers, cooperation and collaboration among donors and other partners, and the ability of Step by Step to influence national policy through good program results.

Reaching Out in Qaraglukh

Gohar Pogossyan walks along the village street. Children playing on the edge of the road see her from a distance and run toward her.

"Hello, hello!" they greet her warmly.

"She is our teacher," one of the children explains to his friend. "She also teaches our mothers."

"Your teacher? Or your mother's teacher?" the friend asks, disbelieving.

"Both mine and my mother's," the first child says proudly.

"Mothers don't have a teacher!" the friend confidently objects.

"They do! Ask Mrs. Gohar," comes the reply.

The village Qaraglukh is located in the Armenian marz (district) of Vayk, on the southern side of the Vardenis Mountains. Some old dwellings from the fifth century still stand—the church, St. Mamas, was built in 1230. Today, the village has 220 farms and 930 residents. Many families survive on money sent by a family member working abroad, mostly in Russia. There are 184 pupils in the local school: 21 in tenth grade but only 15 in the first. The village has never had a kindergarten. The building that was constructed in

1996 to be a kindergarten was instead made available to villagers as apartments.

The village is not far from the town Yeghegnadzor, but the bus only goes there once a day: it leaves the village in the morning and comes back in the evening. Armenia is a small country, but the territory is very rocky and steep. Even small distances can be too far. This is the reason there are so many Armenian dialects that not only sound so different but that vary also in vocabulary and structure. Kindergarten No.5 in Yeghegnadzor is a model Step by Step center and an outreach partner in the pilot parent education project. Step by Step educators decided to deliver the training in the village, as they knew it was difficult for parents with little children to leave home for the whole day. The lessons were conducted at the village school.

"My husband is from Qaraglukh," says Gohar Pogossyan, who is also the director of Kindergarten No. 5. "I know the situation there very well. There is no kindergarten in that village and this is why we implemented our first outreach program there. The school principal was very happy, because the children there start school with a very poor knowledge of literary language and they

speak in the local dialect. In the year we offered the parent education program there, 12 out of 15 first-graders' mothers participated and we looked forward to a good first class at the school. The life in the village is very difficult. There is a lot to do for the household. But it's gratifying to see how those overloaded women make time for their children, what interesting work they bring and show at each seminar. Parents were inspired, therefore the results were good."

And mothers who participated in the program were enthusiastic: "These seminars helped me a lot," says Shoushan Amiryan, "especially the materials. I used to teach my boy numbers and letters, but now I do it in a more organized way and the methodology is interesting—teaching through play. Now I know what I should do, how I should do it, and in what order. My boy often brings his friends home, demonstrates the materials, and teaches his friends."

"We had heard a lot about the kindergarten in Yeghegnadzor that worked with the Step by Step Program," says Yether Michaelyan, another mother in the program. "My neighbor's grandchild attends there and my son was very interested. He often asked me: 'Mum, why don't I go to kindergarten?' When we began to participate in those seminars, my son was happy that the teachers from Ellen's kindergarten would come and teach him. The program materials helped us very much. I learned that I could combine teaching with my daily work. We have serious problems trying to turn from dialect to literary language. Children, of course, understand literary language, but they speak dialect at home. We have been working with our children the whole year. It will be interesting to see the results of our work once they go to school."

"This program also inspired me so much," Gohar Pogossyan adds, "because children in our villages are deprived of so many things and the social conditions are very poor. When children happen to see me in the village, they feel happy. 'Our teacher is coming,' they say."

Preschools in Armenia

Education has traditionally enjoyed high prestige in Armenia. By 1988 an extensive network of preschool institutions included 1,255 nursery schools and kindergartens enrolling 44.2 percent of all eligible children.

Social and political changes since 1988 had a huge impact on the educational system of the country, resulting in a diminished capacity to provide preschool education. The earthquake of 1988 was also a heavy blow, destroying 277 schools that accommodated more than 100,000 students.

Above all, however, the decline of preschools in Armenia can be attributed to the 1996 policy decision to decentralize education and place preschools under the supervision of local government. With this policy move, the extensive network of preschool institutions established during Soviet times was lost. The number of kindergartens sharply decreased, as did child enrollment in all preschool institutions. In many communities, the very survival of preschool education

was threatened. By the year 2000, the number of children enrolled in kindergartens was less than half of enrollment in 1990.

The Pilot Parent Education Project

In 2002 the Ministry of Education in Armenia approved a broad program of parent education that included the establishment of regional resource centers. The government and UNICEF initiated a pilot parent education project in five communities of Gegharkunik marz. Step by Step undertook the Early Learning and Preparation for School component of this project.

In December of 2002, the International Step by Step Association and Step by Step in Armenia, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and other partners, began implementing Step by Step's child-centered model of parent education in several marzes throughout Armenia. The project aimed to help parents whose preschool-age children did not attend kindergartens prepare their children for school. The hope was that children would reach school age not only healthy and well nourished, but intellectually curious, socially confident, and equipped with a solid foundation for lifelong learning.

The content of the materials was based upon existing Step by Step child-centered curricula and classroom activities. Age-specific sets of parent materials as well as a series of developmentally appropriate child activities and workbooks were developed. In addition, a four-day training workshop was designed, both to introduce trainers to the materials and to focus on how to work with parents and children.

The project was implemented through the 11 Step by Step training centers. Twenty-two experienced Step by Step teachers were selected to participate. They attended the initial training course and continued with on-site follow-up observations.

The project had a large geographic coverage: six kindergartens and five primary schools in four marzes. In the first 10 months 416 caregivers were trained, but the project's influence was wide: participants frequently passed the seminar materials on to their neighbors, relatives, and friends. Since the project included children of different age groups (5–7), as well as different learning abilities and backgrounds, parents were trained to expand or simplify the assignments to adapt them to the diverse needs of their children.

To monitor project progress, and to identify challenges faced by the parents and provide them with timely assistance, the trainers introduced the parent's monthly feedback sheet, trainer's notes for group meetings, and end of year sheets for recording the children's achievements.

Mothers' Clubs

In Qaraglukh, the parent seminars effectively became "mothers' clubs." These were especially successful in rural areas, where opportunities for information and communication are limited. Young women particularly looked forward to the seminar and consultation days. They had noticed an interesting

change: they spoke about different things. "Before, the most interesting theme of my talk with my neighbors was discussion of the events of the last series of a soap opera," says one mother. "Now we talk much more about our children and their success in learning."

Mothers in Yerevan and Martuny also flocked to the parent seminars. Suzanna Chibukhchyan, director of Kindergarten No. 184 in Yerevan, explains that despite their different backgrounds, all seminar participants believe that children who do not attend kindergarten desperately need preparation before starting school. "They became a community that shares the same concerns," Chibukhchyan says. "Most of the parents come to seminars and consultancies with their children. They bring the children, so that they can communicate with the children of the same age, play and interact with them. Children attend with pleasure. 'Today is our kindergarten day,' they say."

Tamara Farmanyan, a mother from the town of Martuny, comments: "Before, my husband never spent time with children, played with them or read books… he did not consider it to be something to be done by a man. He used to come home from his

work tired and just lie down on the sofa and watch TV. However, now, when the children ask him, he helps them, he participates. First, he got angry when I was attending the seminars. 'Why should a woman be out for four hours? What were you doing there all that time?' Now he feels comfortable with that. He likes the program."

Ani Ohanyan, also from Martuny, says, "We have formed a sort of mothers' club. The manager gives advice just like a friend, a mother. When we learn something new, we want to change ourselves. When we get out of our houses and have contact with each other we feel more relaxed and more comfortable."

"I can get lots of advice from these seminars," says Martuny mom Lala Sukiasyan. "Not only on education, but also on childcare, health, and interfamily relations. Even my husband has noticed that I have changed and that I became more tolerant and friendly."

Developing the Content

During a meeting with the authors of the Step by Step parent education program, parents evaluated the program materials and offered a number of interesting suggestions. They wanted more puzzles and math assignments, and more songs and poems. They thought the modules should include activities with scissors. They also wanted material to be developed for younger children.

As the material relies heavily on stories, parents felt that short, adapted texts with big letters were necessary so that children could learn to recognize letters. They also recommended that it might be useful to skip one episode in a picture story and let children complete it on their own, thinking out the missing part of the plot. Parents suggested that the readings include stories about school in order to introduce children to school before that scary first day. And they thought texts about the world, environment, and events surrounding the children would be interesting and educational.

Example of a Parent Trainer Workshop Helping Parents Prepare Children for School

Introduction
- An Introduction to Child Development for Parents
- Principles Underlying Home-Based Curriculum
- Basic Principles of Adult Learning
- Building Effective Partnerships with Families
- Parents' Expectations for Children's School Readiness

Curriculum: Introduction and Overview
- Teachers' Expectations (Standards) for School Readiness
- Developmental Domains Profile
- Introduction to the Curriculum Materials
- Principles Underlying Curriculum
- Overview of Monthly Themes
- Activity: Small Group Work—General Review of Months One to Three
- Matching Exercise: School Readiness Expectations and Month One Activities
- Small Group Work: What a Child Learns
  - What does this activity communicate to parents?
  - How might you extend/adapt the activity?
  - What problems might be anticipated?
- Summary: Guidelines Emerging from Small Group Work
  - Characteristics of Effective Parent Facilitators
  - Skills of Effective "Parents as Teachers"

Curriculum Review and Development
- Conducting Parent Groups: Facilitation Skills
- Parent Group Session Planning Guides
  - Group Work: Monthly Planning Guides—Months One, Two, Three
- Gallery Walk: Session Planning Guides (cont.)
- Songs and Poems: Identification and Activities
- Plenary Brainstorm: What to Do about Handwriting
- Common Problems in Early Learning
  - Pair Work Vignettes
- Parent Tip Sheets: Behavioral and Learning Issues in Early Childhood
- Project Planning and Management
- Designing Your Program: Project Planning Process
  - Who, What, Where, When, and How?
  - Materials Development
- Monitoring and Evaluation Instruments
  - Family/Child Enrollment Form
  - Parent Feedback Form
  - Facilitator Feedback Form
  - Child Assessment Form
- Project Administration and Coordination
- Summary and Reflection

Example of a Monthly Activity Module for a Parent Seminar
How to Use Learning Materials to Prepare Your Child for School

	Month 1 Theme	Activity
Literacy Activities	**Recognize letters**	• Learn the letters in the names of various family members • Game: "Matching Letters" • Read the picture together • Make a book together • Look for letters everywhere • Read a poem together
Math Activities	**Count, write, recognize, and present numbers 1–10**	• Find the matching cards • Read the picture together • Group the cards • Pick up the cards • Game: "Numbers All Around the House"
How to Teach	• **How to work with the materials** • **Keeping Track**© (every month fill in the calendar-diary with the child) • **How to make these activities useful for *your* child** (tips on how to adapt them to the child's age and capacity) • **Final thoughts**	

Policy Change and Systemic Effects

According to Ruzanna Tsarukyan, director of the Step by Step Benevolent Foundation, there is now effective cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MOE). "The parent education program is officially recognized by the MOE and was included in the *State Program for Education Development, 2001–2005*," she says. "The Ministry also encourages the application of Step by Step methodology and the creation child-centered classrooms."

An important achievement of the parent education project is that the 11 training centers have become community education centers, operating like "parents' clubs." Family members come to the centers for more than learning: they discuss many personal, family, and social issues with each other and the trainers. Especially in rural areas, such "clubs" address serious issues of isolation faced by young women who do not work outside the home. The seminars also helped many parents develop skills for self-discovery and self-realization as well as parenting. One of the mothers reports that while she was working on a drawing with her own child she discovered that she could draw well. Now she volunteers in a kindergarten to teach drawing. Very significantly, notes Ruzanna Tsarukyan: "Project participants testify to tangible changes that have taken place in their mentality, behavior, and attitudes. Most of them note that, as a result of this project, they think differently now and communicate with children differently."

The Ministry of Education and Science also evaluated the results of the pilot project, concluding that the project "supported state policy through promoting access to quality education and extending a high level of services to a vulnerable population." The project, in turn, has had its impact on the educational system—the project materials and methodology are borrowed and used by other educational institutions.

Reflections

Innovative and participatory approaches to early childhood schooling such as the parent education project provide flexible policy options. Universal state provision of preschools is, in any case, not achievable in the near future. Expensive, privatized alternatives are not the only options left for parents and communities. The experience in Armenia demonstrates that parents and families themselves, with the right guidance and support, are a huge and largely undertapped resource for preparing children for school and for meeting early childhood development needs.

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* This article was prepared by Hugh McLean, based on the full-length case study by Gayane Terzyan and Luiza Militosyan, PhD., *Preparing Children for School: Parental Education in Armenia*.

AHA! So Children Learn in Creches! Step by Step in an Albanian Creche

Case Study Researchers: Gerda Sula, MEd, Executive Director, Qendra Hap pas Hapi—Step by Step Center, Albania, and Milika Dhamo, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology and Education, University of Tirana

"All efforts in reshaping the creche into a child-centered approach have been focused on giving the message that young children grow better when they have the chance to develop secure attachments to significant adults in their lives. What we are asking from the caregivers is to move beyond the classical caregiver's role of nutrition and health care towards the more complex role of educators."

—Rebeka Pali, Step by Step representative

Background

The Albanian term for creche is *cerdhe*, meaning nest—aptly describing the place that provides safety, food, and nurture to infants while encouraging their growth and independence. Before Albania's political transition from totalitarianism to democracy, which began in 1990, the Ministry of Health administered institutional day care. Creches were responsible only for the health and basic care of preschool infants aged zero-to-three, and caregivers lacked early childhood education skills and training.

The introduction of Step by Step child-centered methodology in Albanian creches has played an important role in re-visioning education for the very youngest learners.

Today, creches are under the jurisdiction of local governments and health and care departments. Child-centered education reform is an essential part of the process of democratization, yet the Ministry of Education is not involved, nor planning to become involved, in the creche system. In this context, the introduction of Step by Step child-centered methodology in Albanian creches has played an important role in re-visioning education for the very youngest learners.

In 1999, Step by Step and UNICEF joined forces to launch a one-year project to create model creches in the cities of Tirana and Shkodra as part of a collaborative initiative to develop a creche network in Albania. During 1999–2000, staff at the Kombinat creche received extensive training and technical assistance in Step by Step methodology as well as furniture and materials to create a child-centered learning environment. The case study of Kombinat creche was conducted from March to May 2004, three years after the completion of the training and technical assistance provided by Step by Step, to evaluate how much Step by Step methodology is still present in its practice.

Kombinat Creche

Tirana, the heterogeneous capital of Albania, has a population of about 485,000, with 29 creches. Of the 331 caregivers who work in them, most are general secondary graduates, while some are nurses. They work in shifts, with an average ratio of one caregiver to six or seven children. The day care system serves only 10 percent of infants

in Tirana; the rest are cared for at home, usually by grandmothers or other family members while mothers work.

Situated on the southwest edge of Tirana, Kombinat is a fast-growing informal settlement of some 52,000 people (14,000 families) living in an area of 6.5 square kilometers (about 4 square miles) in conditions of acute economic and social privation and urban underdevelopment. Some 3,000 families occupy state property, such as abandoned factories, offices, and buildings that once were schools and kindergartens. These buildings are gradually being privatized and renovated, but 6,000 families remain squatters, without irrigation, water, electricity, or drainage. Kombinat has deep social problems, and despite a threefold population increase, has fewer schools, kindergartens, and creches than before 1990. For preschoolers there are four kindergartens, and only one creche.

Before and After

Kombinat creche before the implementation of Step by Step:

"The first time I visited the creche, I was shocked: it was a huge building in which only three rooms were functional—full of iron beds, and just a small space with a wood stove, a big crib, and an adult-sized table. The children were either in beds or

in the crib, because the caregivers were worried that the stove might burn them—and they were right. The caregiver took the children one by one to feed on her lap. She would smile and speak with a loving voice, hurrying the child to finish fast so that she could feed the next. The children were still using diapers because it was too cold to toilet-train them. The caregivers said they would potty-train them in spring, when it got warmer and children could stay longer in the bathroom. I remember the sounds of baby cries, caregivers' randomly released deep sighs, and heavily dragging slippers on the uncarpeted floor."

—Aurora Bushati, UNICEF Education Project Officer

Kombinat creche after the implementation of Step by Step:

"The locked gate opens onto a wonderful sunlit garden with birds singing among the dark green branches of the pine trees, blooming flowers, grass, and a very well-equipped playground. A nicely tiled path winds through the bushes to the creche building, from which comes the sound of folk music. Inside, there are shelves with toys, books, comfortable chairs for children, and halls smelling of baby powder and filled with drawings—some by the caregivers, and some by children. On the Parents' Information Bulletin are leaflets regarding child rearing and the menu of the day."

—Gerda Sula and Milika Dhamo, March 2004

Research Questions and Methodology

Our study of the Kombinat creche, which serves 120 children, investigated the implementation of Step by Step's child-centered methodology and how it encouraged the values of democratic citizenship and the development of civil society. Using methodological techniques of observation (14 days, approximately three to four hours per day), recording, and interviews with project participants, we posed the following questions:

- Is it possible to create new teaching behavior in caregivers, whose education is not field-related, through a one-year project? Which behaviors change, which do not, and why?
- How self-sustaining is the Step by Step methodology?
- How can a project adapt to a newly settled community with a fragile, emergent sense of citizenship and civic belonging?
- Does the Step by Step creche develop children to their full potential?
- Are families empowered to participate more actively in the life of the creche, and in the overall growth of the child?
- Do children of marginalized groups benefit from the program? Specifically, what

about children from low-income families (the majority in Kombinat), Roma children, and children with special needs?
- What is the impact of this model creche on other creches in the city of Tirana? Is knowledge and experience being shared, and, if so, how?

How Step by Step Was Implemented in the Kombinat Creche

"We were aware of the fact that the caregivers didn't have an education background; the zero-to-three institutions were created with the purpose of caring for the children while the parents were at work. The program encouraged caregivers to find out about individual children under their care, and to help their healthy and secure development. We collaborated with UNICEF in designing child-appropriate environments, and then UNICEF reconstructed the creche in Kombinat from the beginning. We worked with the caregivers to create warm, inviting learning environments, without leaving aside traditional cleanliness and safety. The methodology reinforced the need to establish a relationship of love, trust, and respect between the caregiver and the child."

—Rebeka Pali, Step by Step representative

At the outset of the program, caregivers received information and advice from early childhood development experts in key areas: how to support infants' and toddlers' emotional, social, cognitive, language, and physical development; how to recognize and respond to each child's temperament and interests; how to create a safe, healthy, and stimulating environment; and how to work with families and other professionals to ensure a quality program.

Caregivers and specialists undertook an intensive five-day basic training course and three-day advanced training, supplemented by research literature and professional materials. Six of the 20 Kombinat creche caregivers were trained in the Step by Step Program in 1999. They in turn trained their remaining 14 colleagues. The trainings, which caregivers evaluated as very successful, provided practical skills and information on:

- Creating a child-centered program for infants and toddlers linking caregivers with families.
- Creating a safe and healthy environment using materials that promote learning through play and exploration.
- Understanding the developmental stages of early childhood and using observation techniques to learn how to allow children to develop skills at their own pace.
- Working to build a team that joins together the program, family, and child.

A child-centered environment was created through on-site practical training. UNICEF provided appropriate furniture, and Step by Step donated toys and other materials. This was the first reconstruction of the creche since its founding in 1953. Technical assis-

tance, on-site visits, feedback, and support took place weekly during the first six months and monthly during the last six.

Three important publications were produced that year:

- *Creating Child-Centered Classrooms for Infants and Toddlers*. This curriculum guide provides all the necessary research information, practical techniques, and skills required by caregivers to apply Step by Step methodology. It was distributed to program participants and all creches in Tirana.
- *Manual of Creches' Administration.* This publication surveys the administrative problems common in Albanian creches and offers new ideas to solve them based on child-centered philosophy. It was distributed to creche directors (participating and non-participating) and local government agencies.
- *Learning and Growing Together.* This is a guide for parents of infants and toddlers on understanding and supporting children's growth. It was distributed both at parent meetings and to parents of children not attending creche.

Findings

The case study research documented the continued implementation of child-centered methodology at the Kombinat creche in key areas. Although the researchers noted the need for improvement, they observed enriched language interaction between children and caregivers, increased family participation and community involvement, and a greater emphasis on individualization of instruction.

Positive changes were noted in:

- Language interactions between caregivers and children
- Family involvement
- Community development
- Observation, planning, and individualization
- Learning environment
- Daily routines
- Physical development and support

Language interactions between children and caregivers

The research showed improved language interaction between children and caregivers. Caregivers are better able to respond to nonverbal cues, listen attentively and patiently to children, and monitor those with difficulties. Caregivers listen most keenly during activity time. They are knowledgeable on language development levels for specific ages, and understand that children develop individually. However, insufficient attention is given to expressing children's actions in words and to avoiding the use of infantilizing language interactions. Step by Step training emphasizes the importance of books for language development, but books are not placed in reach of children.

Family involvement

Family involvement has been a key reform. The institution is no longer closed to parents, who now share information beyond health and feeding issues with caregivers. Parent participation remains uneven, but all agree that relationships have changed dramatically for the better.

> *"My older child went to the same creche. It was so totally different from what you see now. …The main difference is that caregivers are very friendly. With time, I have become friends with some of them."*
> —Engjellushe Hekuri, parent

Parents participate in the enrollment and initial entry of babies into childcare, staying with their child during the first week to ensure a supportive environment for children's attachment and separation experiences. Information-sharing processes, including a questionnaire, help caregivers get to know families and babies better.

Community development

Kombinat creche is evolving into a community development center. Parent meetings, parenting classes, and conferences have been organized. Nevertheless, more parents attend celebrations than meetings. The creche has an elected parents' committee with decision-making powers. However, the committee spends much of its time managing funds collected from parents to provide food and materials, for which there is no state provision. In order to keep children in the creche, parents must pay $20 per month for food and also contribute toward the purchase of paper, pencils, and other teaching consumables. A third of Kombinat households live below the poverty line. Many children attend creche sporadically, due to inconsistent family

income. Without local government support for families in need, unemployed parents cannot enroll children in the creche.

Observation, planning, and attention to individualization

While fundamental Step by Step goals and methods concerning observation, planning, attention to individualization, and inclusion of children with special needs have been introduced, there is still much to be done to close the gap between understanding objectives and achieving them. Caregivers find observation a useful tool for organizing teaching strategies. The creche follows a weekly observation practice, focusing on two children and monitoring their developmental progress, temperament, and interaction with others. Planning has brought fresh perspectives to establishing child-centered learning environments, and trained caregivers have become sensitive to individual differences between children and their emotional development.

However, contrary to the principle of individuality, activities are selected by carers and all children are required to participate. Children need greater freedom to determine their activities. Rules are often stated in negative terms, and caregivers tend to deploy conditional love—both behaviors are contrary to a child-centered approach. Attention is given to children who show special needs, and caregivers are committed to raising awareness of the importance of specialized treatment and resources in this area.

Caregivers received information and advice from early childhood development experts in key areas: how to support infants' and toddlers' emotional, social, cognitive, language, and physical development; and how to work with families and other professionals to ensure a quality program.

Learning environment

We found the creche extremely clean and orderly. Toys are placed on reachable low shelves—an uncommon practice in Albanian creches. Marjeta Gogo, a caregiver for 22 years, remarks, "I thought that this was not very smart, as children would make a mess. But I see now that children learn to take care of things if the caregiver teaches them to." Tablecloths are neatly ironed, shelves and beds are tidy, and even the leaves on pot plants are polished. However, Step by Step training emphasizes education, and the environment seems overly, even excessively, orderly, suggesting too much time spent on cleaning.

Daily routines

Eating, dressing, cleaning, and toileting routines are used as learning opportunities. Because of the region's poverty children's diet in Kombinat is generally poor, and parents, most undereducated themselves, have little knowledge of children's nutritional needs. The creche provides a balanced diet, fresh food, appropriate portions, and timed feeding. Children help lay the table. They eat together, serve themselves, and use forks, knives, spoons, and napkins with ease. At home, children ask to help set the table as they do in creche. This was an area in which

we observed the sensitivity to gender roles encouraged by Step by Step:

> *"Once, the caregivers encouraged only girls to help with tables. Now it is both, boys and girls, they all love to. However, the families often undermine the elimination of gender differences, as the culture is largely masculine."*
> —Lavdie Lamce, caregiver

Physical development and support

When the day is warm and sunny, the children play outside in their wonderful garden, developing gross motor skills. Caregivers monitor their safety. Parents describe the garden as "the nicest place in the neighborhood." The playground is well equipped because UNICEF wanted it to become a community center where parents could bring children even if they were not enrolled in the creche. The hope was to serve as many children as possible, but unfortunately the intensity of this community's need makes the playground oversubscribed. Creche director Behie Gjakova reports that she is forced to keep the gate locked "because too many children would come, and it would be destroyed. This playground is the nicest thing in the creche."

Reflections

Parents bring their children to creche because they believe they will be better cared for and educated:

> *"The older was brought up at home, with the TV and looking at Grandma's back as she was doing chores in the kitchen. The development of the second who goes to day care is beyond comparison with that of the first. She is better behaved, more organized, more self-responsible, more careful, more skilled, more linguistically active, and empathic."*
> —Arta Likollari, parent

In every country where it has been introduced, Step by Step has looked beyond short-term emergency interventions to develop partnerships with government and other agencies and encourage policy reform. In Albania the municipality has started restructuring creche education and is demanding radical reform. So far 21 of Tirana's 29 creches have been reconstructed. The municipality encourages trainings with different donors, has introduced staff-development policies, and welcomes the contributions of NGOs to implementing advanced practices for infant and toddler development. It has hired a psychologist and aims to bring social workers into the creche system. Local government is setting up a new educational structure that will address more needs for children from ages 1 through 18. Step by Step has successfully trained local education professionals through the local training teams for pre- and primary schools, who now regard the maintenance of good standards as part of their job. Expanding this system would perpetuate and institutionalize government training of caregivers in child-centered methodology. Step by Step has also recognized the need for pre-service and advanced/university certification to support professional development.

In Albania, Step by Step has created new models replicable within the existing education system that promote child-centered methodology, educate children in the qualities of democratic citizenship, and seek to empower communities to build a strong civil society. And so it is, three years after Step by Step withdrew direct support, that the Kombinat creche is still applying Step by Step methodology. There is still a long way to go. It is often hard for caregivers, especially those trained as nurses, to reconceptualize their role as educators. Despite these challenges, the caregivers in Kombinat creche have made gigantic steps toward child-centered practice. The Albania case study showed clearly that some aspects of the methodology need more reinforcement, but there is no turning back:

> *"When we 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's impossible for us to go back to the old style."*
> —Behie Gjakova, director of Kombinat creche

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* This article was prepared by Rachel Holmes, based on the full-length case study by Gerda Sula, MEd, and Milika Dhamo, PhD, *AHA! So Children Learn in Creches!* The Application of Step by Step Child-Centered Methodology in an Albanian Creche (March–May 2004).

Promoting High-Quality, Child-Centered Teaching

The Professional Journey of Anja—One Teacher's Experience of the Step by Step Certification Process in Slovenia

"All these years I have been trying to change that part of me which calls for change and at the same time I have been trying to remain true to myself. … I have always felt the need and wish for personal and professional growth."

Case Study Researchers: Larry Bremner, MA, President, Proactive Information Services Inc. with Mojca Jurisevic, MSc, External Collaborator, Mateja Rezek, MSc, Master Teacher Trainer, Sonja Rutar, MSc, Master Teacher Trainer, and Tatjana Vonta, EdD, Director, Developmental Research Center for Pedagogical Initiatives "Step by Step Slovenia"

"To have a quality relationship with children and parents you always have to work at it—a quality group does not happen by itself."
—Anja, Step by Step preschool teacher in Ljubljana

A Concern for Quality

Step by Step took off quickly in Slovenia. In 1995, a year after it was introduced, seven preschools began implementing the program. By 2002, 220 preschool teachers were using Step by Step, with approximately 400 more using elements of its methodology in their classrooms. This success, although gratifying, produced a new challenge. Ongoing evaluation had been part of the implementation process from the outset, but the rapid expansion of Step by Step led to concerns regarding program quality in Slovenia, as well as in other countries implementing the Step by Step Program.

In 1999 the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) established a Task Force on Standards to address these concerns, comprising representatives from 10 countries, including Tatjana Vonta, EdD, director of the Developmental Research Center.[1] The Task Force developed the *Step by Step Program and Teacher Standards for Preschool and Primary Grades*, intended to ensure the development of child-centered programs "in which teachers facilitate learning in ways that are consistent with children's developmental levels, individual needs, interests, and different learning styles."[2]

The ISSA Teacher Standards include six areas[3] of emphasis (see Table 1).

The Pilot Certification Study

How can the ISSA Teacher Standards best be used to ensure program quality? In 2003, Vonta undertook a Pilot Certification Study in Slovenia to determine the validity of using the ISSA standards

Table 1

ISSA Teacher Standards
Standard 1: Individualization Teachers use their knowledge of child development and their relationships with children and their families to appreciate the diversity of each class and to respond to each child's unique needs and potentials.
Standard 2: Learning Environment Teachers promote a caring, stimulating, and inclusive classroom by organizing the environment in ways that best facilitate children taking learning risks, practicing democracy, and working both cooperatively and independently.
Standard 3: Family Participation Teachers build partnerships with families to ensure optimum support for children's learning and developmental needs.
Standard 4: Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning Teachers design and implement varied strategies to promote conceptual understanding and to encourage innovation, creativity, independent inquiry, social cooperation, and exploration within and across the disciplines.
Standard 5: Planning and Assessment Teachers create plans based upon national standards, program goals, and individual needs of children and use a systematic approach for observing and assessing each child's progress.
Standard 6: Professional Development Teachers regularly evaluate and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of their work and collaborate with colleagues to improve programs and practices for young children and their families.

as a teacher certification tool and to examine whether the certification process could be used as an effective strategy for professional development.[4] ISSA selected experienced Step by Step preschool teachers to train as certifiers. Certifiers learned how to observe and evaluate Step by Step implementation within the framework of the six Teacher Standards.

The Pilot Certification Study included the following components:

1. *Self-evaluation.* Using an instrument for self-evaluation, the teacher assesses the quality of her/his work.
2. *Classroom observation.* Using the ISSA standards, a trained certifier observes the classroom to assess the teacher's quality level.
3. *Professional development plan.* Following the observation, the certifier and teacher discuss the results. Working together, they create a plan for professional growth and quality improvement.
4. *Implementation and mentoring.* Over the next four or five months the teacher implements the professional development plan, with coaching from the certifier.
5. *Second classroom observation.* The certifier again observes the classroom to evaluate the teacher's attainment of ISSA standards. If the quality achieved is high enough, the teacher receives an ISSA certificate. If not, the teacher and certifier refine the individual development plan.

Anja's Journey through Certification

To develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between teacher certification and classroom practice, the Slovenian case study research team participating in the international Step by Step Case Study Project decided to follow the journey of one teacher who had completed the pilot certification process. Anja, a preschool teacher in Ljubljana, was selected because of the significant increase in her performance scores on the ISSA Teacher Standards between the first

and second classroom observation periods. For the case study, data from the Pilot Certification Study were supplemented with in-person interviews with Anja, her principal, and the certifier, as well as with parents and their children.

Prior to the certification process, Anja was recognized by her peers and parents of children at the school as being an outstanding teacher. The case study team examined what motivates a teacher who is already recognized for excellence to participate in the pilot certification process. The core questions that formed the basis of the study were:

1. What motivated Anja to participate in the pilot certification process?
2. What impact did the certification process have on her practice?

Anja's School

The Ljubljana preschool where Anja teaches is situated in an affluent neighborhood with an ethnically homogeneous population, reflecting the composition of Ljubljana—there are few recent immigrants or visible minorities. Ninety percent of the children attending the school come from dual-income families. Only 2 percent of the students are other nationalities, mostly children of foreign consulate representatives.

Opened in 1967, the school has approximately 600 students, ages one through six, and 70 teaching staff, 35 teachers and 35 teaching assistants. Between 90 and 95 percent of children entering the preschool at age one stay until they begin elementary school. The preschool is open five days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Children receive breakfast, a morning snack, lunch, and an afternoon snack. The school has an excellent reputation. Parents, who are actively involved in school life at many levels, subsidize the preschool fund.

Motivation and Values

By August 2004, Anja had been teaching preschool children for 31 years. She has been involved in Step by Step for eight years, and is currently the Step by Step coordinator in her school.[5] Anja loves children and wants to be the best teacher she can be. According to Anja's self-evaluation undertaken during the first stage of the pilot certification process, she holds high expectations for herself, achieves her goals, stands up for herself, is not afraid to disagree with others, values the opinions of others, and admits to her own mistakes. She regards "life as a process of change, transition, and permanency." Reflecting on her personal motivation, she says, "All these years I have been trying to change that part of me which calls for change and at the same time I have been trying to remain true to myself. … I have always felt the need and wish for personal and professional growth."

On her questionnaire Anja wrote, "I would like to know more about my weaknesses and strengths in teaching and hope it will help me be a better Step by Step coordinator." She also said that she felt responsible for the professional development and growth of the whole team, and regarded the certification process as a source of knowledge. As she put it, "You need knowledge to lead." Anja had the desire "to learn more, to get a better understanding of my practice … I wanted another person to observe me."

"I knew feedback would not be terrible. I was doing my best, but maybe I could do things a little differently."

Overall, the case study found that Anja's core motivations for certification were:

- The conviction that continuous improvement is a professional responsibility;
- A quest for validation of her teaching

Table 2

Certifier's Opinion about Teaching Style—First Observation

Standard 1: Individualization

- She trusts the children and gives them opportunities for self-initiated learning and independence. She gives the children enough time to organize themselves, supporting them with clear goals in mind.
- There is less attention to multicultural approaches, since the group is ethnically homogeneous.

Standard 2: Learning Environment

- She provides well-equipped centers of activities.
- There is less attention to the visual learning style.

Standard 3: Family Participation

- She involves parents in the classroom and organizes educational workshops for them.
- She has meetings for creating good relationships and a positive climate between families and the school and for sharing experiences and information.
- She recognizes children's interests and needs from conversations with parents individually or from the parents' group meetings.
- She is planning long-term cooperation with parents.

Standard 4: Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning

- She enables cooperative learning and social cooperation.
- In times of transition and during routine tasks, she gives the children opportunities for informal learning.
- Tasks are developmentally, individually, and culturally appropriate.

Standard 5: Planning and Assessment

- The teacher and children together plan daily activities and evaluate daily work.

Standard 6: Professional Development

- She is a Step by Step Program coordinator in the kindergarten. She is a trainer on Step by Step trainings and workshops.
- She is actively included in other educational trainings, with the aim of professional growth.

quality;
- The desire to obtain an objective view of her own practice;
- A wish to gain insight into her strengths and weaknesses to develop strategies for self-improvement;
- A commitment to develop professional tools and self-assurance for mentoring other teachers; and
- The desire to gain more self-confidence in her mentoring practice.

The Process of Certification

At the beginning, Anja was unsure of what to expect. Although she had volunteered for certification, she admits now that she had hoped not to be chosen. When she was selected, however, she threw herself into the experience. "I put my real self behind and was acting as my professional self," she says. The most important part of the process, she adds, was the "feedback from the certifier on how I was working with—and my relationship with—the children." Anja admits to having been "a little threatened at the beginning … but I knew feedback would not be terrible. I was doing my best, but maybe I could do things a little differently." Professionally, she found the pilot certification process gave her "inner strength," in that "it reinforced my beliefs about my practice."

Following the first classroom observation, the certifier shared the results with Anja (Table 2). Together they developed an improvement plan that Anja believed she could accomplish (Table 3).

After four months of working on the plan, Anja felt she was progressing according to the Teacher Standards. During this time, she

Table 3

Professional Development Plan after First Observation
Standard 1: Individualization **Goal:** Presentation of the families, their culture and family traditions. **Strategy:** Develop folders about families, which will recognize children's identity and help to build good self-esteem. Organize meeting with fathers, who are less involved in the school.
Standard 2: Learning Environment **Goal:** Rich environment for learning in a classroom. **Strategy:** Display plans, graphs, summaries, daily schedule, attendance, weather chart in the place for group meeting; present everything with attention to different learning styles.
Standard 3: Family Participation **Goal:** Keep parents informed about their children's work and learning in the group. **Strategy:** Display information daily on the board in front of the room.
Standard 4: Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning **Goal:** Develop long-term integrating units. **Strategy:** Children participate in planning based on constructive learning: *What I think I know/ What I would like to know/ How I will get the information about it.* Plan displayed on the wall.
Standard 5: Planning and Assessment **Goal:** Transfer from content-oriented planning to goal-oriented planning. **Strategy:** Define the goal first; then define content and activities.
Standard 6: Professional Development **Goal:** Improve teamwork with teacher assistant. **Strategy:** Share the tasks and responsibilities at work; share the power. Develop higher expectations of the teacher assistant.

worked with her mentor—the certifier—and had meetings with school-based pedagogues and other teachers in the school. She consulted with her teaching assistant and participated in a Step by Step workshop organized by the Developmental Research Center. She studied educational literature, reviewed her training and seminar records, and revised her documentation on observing and assessing children's development and the planning process.

Growth and Change

In Anja's experience, "Certification was the meeting point of theory and practice." It gave her the opportunity to see "what I had to change and how to go about it." As a result of the pilot certification process, and as evidenced by the improvement in scores from the second classroom observation (see Table 4), Anja's teaching has improved in quality. Discussing how reflective practice has become a bigger part of her teaching strategy, Anja says, "I think more about my work … I critically reflect on what I do to help and plan what I need to do to meet students' needs. … I always try to act from behind, not the center."

The certifier agreed that the pilot certification process had a positive effect on Anja's practice and the learning environment. "Anja has more interaction with her students. She is more open; animated. Now she thinks more about all children, not just those who question or who are bright. Before she was intrinsically good, but she has started to think more about meaningful learning, structured planning, and assessment."

Anja became a role model and mentor to others, able to share insights and knowledge with colleagues, helping in turn to improve their practice and improve children's learning outcomes. She described to colleagues how

Table 4

Anja's Scores on the ISSA Standards							
Scores	**ISSA Standards**						
	Individualization	Learning Environment	Family Participation	Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning	Planning and Assessment	Professional Development	Total
MAXIMUM SCORES	9	9	18	15	21	12	84
Anja's scores after first observation	*6*	*5*	*15*	*10*	*15*	*11*	*62*
Anja's scores after second observation	*9*	*9*	*18*	*14*	*20*	*12*	*82*

she had made adjustments to her pedagogy, including a revitalization of thematic teaching, the introduction of student feedback on classroom activities, and enhanced vehicles for parent contact.

Parents and children supported these findings, and were very positive. Anja was viewed as having an inclusive classroom in which children are engaged in diverse activities. Anja's "interaction with the children is more open," one parent reported. "There is deeper cooperative learning. She has girls and boys do things together; interaction is better." Another noted that she uses "more charts—visual things for children," especially when teaching mathematics. She was seen as skilled in her ability to motivate children—getting them to do things they might not otherwise want to do.

The high esteem in which Anja is held by parents was evident throughout the interviews. Parents said she requested and respected their opinions and input. They feel welcomed when they go to the school and mentioned field trips, picnics, and home visits as ways in which Anja involves them. They commented that Anja has a positive impact on children's academic learning and supports their social and emotional development: "She knows how to individualize very well. She gives the children the time needed for good performance; she encourages every child in strengthening her/his weak points." Importantly, parents regard Anja as "encouraging children to independence without unnecessary stress … every child has an opportunity to express her/himself in her/his own distinctive way."

Children don't distinguish between their teacher's performance before and after certification, but their enthusiasm for the learning opportunities and activities in their preschool classroom is demonstrated in interviews. Talking about class activities, some of the children described working with cubes: "I can build a ship or something like that." Others said they liked to work in the kitchen, or another activity area.

One child declared, "When we take a walk, we learn something new." Another said, "When we are in the woods and we find something we talk about it."

Art materials were available and children liked having the opportunity to work with them "because you can stretch them and make different shapes." One described how he had learned "about dinosaurs and how to build a bear's house." Another revealed she had learned "we should not shout and rage around … we should walk down the street calmly."

The principal and parents agreed that a very good teacher had become even better. A teacher's practice is not limited to teaching

methods, but also includes strategies for building relationships with students and their parents. The powerful combination of good pedagogy and a positive learning environment, where everyone is welcomed and valued, creates the necessary conditions for achieving student learning outcomes.

Reflections on the Certification Process

Anja's experience demonstrates clearly the importance of the pilot certification process, which supported an already high-quality teacher through collegial assessment and critical self-reflection, resulting in positive personal and pedagogical changes.

The benefits of the pilot certification process were also reflected in its impact on other teachers, who concluded that certification gave their colleague credibility in her role as a leader and mentor: "Giving the person importance." There was initial resistance to Step by Step from some teachers because they recognized that implementing a child-centered program requires additional time

The challenge that remains is how to engage reluctant teachers in a personal and professional development process that demands critical self-reflection. Perhaps the answer lies in sharing personal stories like Anja's.

and work. However, as the principal notes, "Many elements of Step by Step have been taken and implemented throughout the school."

The process is seen as augmenting staff skills and enhancing the reputation of the school, particularly among parents. A sustainable model for the delivery of this type of programming would be welcomed.

A potentially difficult issue remains. Anja, despite the accolades of others, still felt trepidation, initially, about involvement in the process. In this case, Anja had the strength to put aside her "personal self" and focus herself as a professional. Not all teachers may have the courage and resilience to place themselves in a situation that is perceived to be potentially high-risk. Indeed, it may be the teachers who most need help with their practice that are least likely to engage in the process. The challenge is to demonstrate to teachers that the certification process is not risky, and that the personal and professional benefits are worth any initial anxiety they might feel. Appealing to teachers' intrinsic motivation, the goal that originally attracted them to the profession—helping children learn—may be one answer.

It is essential to establish trust with the teachers to reassure them that the certification process will be nonthreatening. The process of certification has to be presented to the teacher as an ongoing process of personal and professional development, rather than as teacher assessment. Teachers need to be provided with individual support throughout the certification process.

Anja's experience shows the power of certification to create structures and processes that support teachers' professional learning. The challenge that remains is how to engage reluctant teachers in a personal and professional development process that demands critical self-reflection. Perhaps the answer lies in sharing personal stories like Anja's.

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* This article was prepared by Rachel Holmes, based on the full-length case study by Larry Bremner, MA, Proactive Information Services Inc., with Mojca Jurisevic, MSc, Mateja Rezek, MSc, Sonja Rutar, MSc, and Tatjana Vonta, EdD, the Developmental Research Center for Pedagogical Initatives "Step by Step Slovenia," *A Slovenian Case Study—Step by Step Pilot Certication Process: One Individual's Experience* (April 2004).

Notes:

1 Throughout the rest of the discussion, the Developmental Research Center for Pedagogical Initiatives "Step by Step Slovenia" will be referred to as the Developmental Research Center.

2 International Step by Step Association (2002). *Step by Step Program and Teacher Standards for Preschool and Primary Grades*. Budapest, Hungary: International Step by Step Association.

3 A seventh standard, on Social Inclusion, has since been added to the ISSA standards: 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.

4 For a report of the research study see "Teacher Evaluation Using ISSA Standards: A Tool for Professional Development and Quality Improvement" in *Educating Children for Democracy—Quality in Early Childhood Education*, Number 7, Summer/Fall 2004, 21–25.

5 In Slovenia each school implementing the Step by Step methodology has a Step by Step coordinator who is responsible for building a team of teachers and who acts as a bridge between teachers and the Developmental Research Center.

Families and Communities

Parent Engagement in Tajikistan: A Case Study of Kulob Secondary School

Case Study Researchers: Nurali Salikhov, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Russian Literature, Tajik Slavonic University, and Zarina Bazidova, Teacher, Dushanbe Secondary School No. 21

The participation of families in a range of activities, inside and beyond the classroom, is a core principle of Step by Step methodology.

"The parent is as much responsible for the children as the school."
—Sveta, grandmother of a first-grade pupil

Introduction

Parent involvement is a burning issue among educators: Step by Step recognizes that families have the greatest influence on a child's life and learning. The participation of families in a range of activities, inside and beyond the classroom, is a core principle of Step by Step methodology. In 2004, we undertook a case study of the involvement of parents in the implementation of the Step by Step Program in Tajikistan, focusing on Kulob Secondary School No. 2. Our research objectives were to use classroom observation and interviews with teachers, parents, and school administrators to:

- Define the role of parents in the educational system; and
- Assess the successes and failures of parent participation in the process of program implementation.

This research is part of the international Step by Step Case Study Project, which appraises the first 10 years of the Step by Step Program (1994–2004).

Background

When Tajikistan acquired independence from the USSR in 1991, centralized subsidies and funding for education ceased. Poverty was exacerbated by the 1992–1994 civil war. These events impacted forcefully on life in Kulob, an ancient city, situated in the south of Tajikistan. Eighty-seven percent of Kulob's population of 82,500 are

Tajiks. In the Soviet era, some 60 nationalities inhabited the city, but many left due to intensified ethnic tensions during the civil war.

Kulob has 10 secondary schools, two primary schools, three lyceums (one of them Turkish), one gymnasium, and one boarding school (*internat*), with a total of 20,186 students. There are no statistical data recording the number of students aged zero to six or six to 14. Kulob has a university, medical college, technical school, and music school. Some new schools have been built, while existing institutions are badly in need of repair. Schools suffer from overcrowding, insufficient electricity and fuel for heating, inadequate water supplies, and sewerage problems. Currently, all Kulob's schools have outside toilets. There is a shortage of textbooks, teaching materials, and furniture, particularly boards, desks, and chairs. Thirty-seven NGOs are now active in Kulob, many of which are involved in the educational sector, attempting to address these problems.[1]

History of Step by Step in Tajikistan

> *"We live in the 21st century. The times themselves require a new approach in the system of education."*
> —Jamshed Boboyev, Director of Kulob Secondary School No. 2

Step by Step was launched by the Open Society Institute (OSI) in Tajikistan in 2002, supported by the Ministry of Education and mentors from the Step by Step Education Initiatives Center in Kyrgyzstan, and with financial support from USAID.[2] Step by Step organized trainings for 204 teachers from schools and kindergartens, pedagogical universities, and in-service teacher training institutes, along with Ministry of Education officials. The program now operates in 40 primary and 64 preschool classrooms around the country, serving approximately 3,120 students and their families.

Kulob Secondary School No. 2 opened in the late 1970s, designed for 1,272 students. Today, 3,500 pupils attend. Despite new buildings and some renovation, overcrowding means the school has to schedule classes on a shift system (four shifts in 2004), and has old furniture. Of the 48 primary classes, 11 are first grades. Forty-six teachers—32 of whom have higher education qualifications and 14 who have specialist secondary education—work with first-grade students. Tajik is the language of instruction. Step by Step has been implemented in four classrooms, all of which now have new furniture: mainly desks and chairs, arranged as classroom activity centers.

Historically, parents participated by visiting the school at least once a month, monitoring good performance and behavior, and running a parents' committee that dealt with students' performance, school attendance, and extracurricular activities. However, over time this participation declined due to the pressures on families. Civil war, unemployment, migration, and an aggressive drug culture—Kulob is on the border of Afghanistan—mean that Tajik parents face a multiplicity of everyday problems. Life is not easy, particularly for women.

Parent participation is essential to children's education. Involved parents bring variety to school activities and supplement the talents of teachers with their own, whether drawing, sewing, or carpentry. As well as providing valuable practical skills, these crafts draw children away from negative influences, such as television and street crime.

Yet parent participation is essential to children's education. Involved parents bring variety to school activities and supplement the talents of teachers with their own, whether drawing, sewing, or carpentry. As well as providing valuable practical skills, these crafts draw children away from negative influences, such as television and street crime.

Case Study Findings

> *"It is true that parents took part in the process of education before. …They visited classes and were interested in how their children were doing at school and whether they behaved well. They also took part in the social life of the school and sometimes would provide help, either financial or in kind. However, parents have never been directly involved in the teaching process. Now the family can be directly involved in the process of education. They help teachers in conducting activities in class. They help children to do this or that task or activity, and they show lots of enthusiasm in this new role."*
> —Jamshed Boboyev, Director of Kulob Secondary School No. 2

First Steps

Immediately following their training, the school director and teachers held a meeting. As Gavhar, a mother, recalls: "The director told us that the school was joining the Step by Step Program, and that parent involvement is its cornerstone. He said that children would be taught at the activity centers and we—the parents—would be working with our children in the centers." Director Jamshed Boboyev emphasized that the program would qualitatively develop children's thinking, practice child-centered methodology, and encourage children to exercise choice in selecting their own topics and themes for study. "Parents have to be directly involved in the program," he explains. "They have to help teachers. Only on this condition can the program be implemented well."

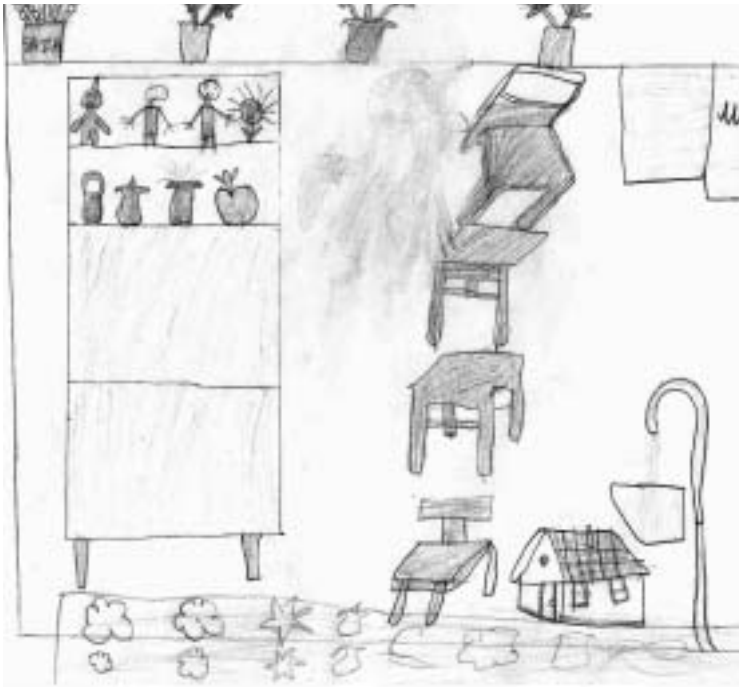
Most parents were interested and very enthusiastic. According to Hanifa, a mother: "We were very happy. At long last some new things have reached us here as well, and our children will make the first step—they will not be taught as before. These methods should change their viewpoint—the way our children see life." Most parents expressed their consent and readiness to help teachers. Teachers were asked to devise methods to involve parents. These included having them make teaching aids and encouraging them to participate in holiday festivities and celebrations organized by the school.

Parents started coming to classes from the very beginning. At first, the teachers felt ill at ease having parents in class, but the children were happy. Shirinmah, a mother, reports, "Every day my son asks me to come to school." Rajabgul, another mother, confesses, "Sometimes I feel a little ashamed because my daughter keeps complaining that I don't come to school often enough. She will say, 'Jamshed's grandmother comes every day and you come only once a week.' And I do feel sorry but I help her at home. She has changed—she really wants to study now."

Parents' opinions changed during the implementation process. At first, parents made the following observations:

- *"When I came into the classroom for the first time, I didn't like the way the lesson was conducted. The children were noisy*

and they could not move from one activity center to another in an organized way. Then I thought that this method is probably not particularly good because it puts the children off studying."
—Hilolby, a mother



- "*At first I was surprised. It was noisy there. The children could not understand lots of things. The teacher herself was at a loss. I could notice that the teacher felt embarrassed.*"

—Sveta, a grandmother

- "*Everything was surprising. The furniture was put in an unusual way. The children moving from one activity center to another was also unusual. The teacher was trying to organize the lesson in accordance with the new methodology. I could sense that she found it difficult. Then I started helping the teacher. It is important not to be afraid of doing good things however difficult they might be.*"

—Hanifa, a mother

However, parents rapidly saw significant differences between traditional classes and Step by Step classes. Everything looked different: the students sat facing each other and talked to each other and the teacher. Every child was free to express his or her opinion on any issue, share ideas, and find out the opinions of classmates. Parents started coming to school with increasing frequency. They watched the children, observed their work in class, and began to work in the activity centers. Lots of preparation was required to make this happen.

"Every day my son asks me to come to school."

Working with Parents

The key concern of Step by Step teachers was how to get parents working in activity centers. To help solve the problem, the teachers decided to devise a schedule, agreed upon in advance. Safargul, a teacher, explains: "I would keep inviting parents, saying, 'Do come when you have free time,' but nobody would come. Each of them was hoping somebody else would come. So I suggested that we should compile a schedule for parents to visit the school." When each mother was asked to choose a day suitable for her, the ice finally broke. Parents were asked to come the day before to discuss with the teachers what they would have to do in class the following day and how to help children in the activity centers. Parents often showed up for these planning meetings an hour before the classes started rather than the day before, but nevertheless, they were now coming at their allotted time.

As soon as parents got involved, they lost their initial skepticism about the program. Rajabgul, a mother, reports: "After I had visited three or four classes my opinion about the program changed dramatically. I worked with the children myself in the activity centers, and I noticed that the children were changing. My daughter now comes home and without any reminding she sits down to do her homework. Then she starts making something or drawing or making clay toys. I very much liked working in the activity centers with the children."

During our classroom observations, we noticed that most parents move from one center to another together with their child, without paying much attention to the work of other children. However, we also saw a mother who successfully worked with and took an interest in all the children. The teachers told us that the quality of participation depended on how well parents prepared in advance.

Most parents prefer to help in the arts or reading activity centers. Working in the science, writing, or math centers requires special knowledge. Step by Step teacher Nighina observes: "After classes, when looking through children's work, I would find mistakes. I knew that it was parents who helped children in these activity centers. I concluded: it is important to carefully select parents for work in the centers, or to thoroughly prepare them for this kind of work." Another teacher explains: "Not every mother can work in the writing activity center. You have to remind the children to sit straight, not to bend over the table, to hold their pens correctly. But some mothers don't know these kinds of things themselves. Many of them have no table or chairs at home where their children can sit and do their homework."

The Impact on Children

Children played an important role in getting their parents involved. Although teachers had told them that their mothers would be helping out and observing the progress of their work, children were so surprised when parents showed up in classes that they stopped listening to the teacher and sat staring open-mouthed at their parents! This quickly changed; children soon felt happier and more energetic because they tried to show themselves at their best for their parents. Teacher Jamila reports, "When a child can see his or her mother in class, he or she is happy and tries to be active. Children are very proud of their mothers when they see them helping other children."

The children agree and are pleased to share their feelings. First grader Saidali says, "My mother likes to work in the arts center. She often comes to the school. I like it when my classmates show her their work. Then I tell everyone that it was my mother who helped them." The teachers didn't anticipate this level of enthusiasm from children. According to teacher Nighina: "At the end of the school day when I would remind children whose parents were supposed to come to our class the next day, the students would run to me and say, 'Would it be possible for my mother to come as well?' 'May my mother come?'"

Not all parents have become involved. Some don't participate in the Step by Step Program because they cannot see any changes in their children. Others are prevented by adverse economic circumstances. Not all parents can come to school regularly, even if they wish to. On average, each woman has five or six children. Sharofat, a teacher, explains, "Many parents don't refuse directly to participate in the Step by Step Program. But they work from morning till night and they don't have time to come to the school. Sometimes a parent comes just before the class to tell me that she will not be able to help me that day."

"Teachers and parents develop a better understanding of each other. Before parents didn't know what their children actually did at school, or what their activities were."

During our research, we saw a father in class only once. He sat with his son, did not pay attention to the work of other children, and was ill at ease in the classroom. He was visiting for a week from Russia, where he had been for over a year trying to earn money. The teachers told us that they cannot hope for help from fathers. There are very few men in the town: some perished in the civil war; many are away working. Where both father and mother are present, they are able to give more of their time to the school. Taking these variables into consideration, we concluded that Step by Step provides equal opportunities for children with different economic backgrounds to get a quality education.

The Impact on Parents

- *"Surely we ourselves changed as well. I personally started spending more time with my child at home."*

—Arus, a mother

- *"I knew before that teachers' work is very difficult. But after coming to classes our mutual understanding of each other improved and now I have a great respect for our teacher."*

—Sveta, a grandmother

- *"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 starts helping the child with the homework."*

—Hilolbi, a mother

Sharofat comments that the transition in parents' attitudes since they became involved in the program is striking: "Parents have been changing as well. … They develop a very different view on the role of the school in educating their children. Teachers and parents develop a better understanding of each other. Before parents didn't know what their children actually did at school, or what their activities were."

In addition to working in the activity centers, parents are actively involved in other ways. Informal three-person parents' committees have been created in all Step by Step classes. There used to be very successful parents' committees in the traditional education system, but their role became very formal and bureaucratic. The school director explains the changes: "Parents' committees in Step by Step classes work less formally. They treat all issues in a more considerate manner and deal with the problems much quicker than others." Many more parents now attend school meetings. Involved parents practice inclusivity; as grandmother Sveta says, "Parents who do not take part in the program by helping in the classroom by all means should participate at the parents' meetings. They should know what their children do at school."

Teachers used to meet with parents in the classroom or the schoolyard, but now they have a special meeting room. Resources are limited, so there is not much furniture. Teachers said they would love to have some books on education and fiction for parents to read and discuss together. Parents also requested books in Tajik; they and their children very much like the books they received from the Soros Foundation—they are big, colorful, and beautiful—but they are in Russian.

The most common form of parent participation in school life is preparing holiday parties and festive events. When we visited the school, parents and children were busy getting ready for the spring holiday, Navruz. Parents and teachers celebrate children's birthdays—presenting small skits and performances, reciting poems, dancing, and singing.

Recommendations

Our case study showed that after only two months, Step by Step had a markedly positive influence on parent involvement. Teachers developed the following goals to enhance parents' participation in the Step by Step Program:

- Teach parents how to work in the activity centers so they can participate in math, science, and writing, as well as in reading and arts.
- Use a differentiated approach to parents—taking into account their skills, knowledge, interests, and preferences.
- Encourage parents to choose, rather than be assigned to, activity centers.
- Share experiences of parents' involvement with other schools and non-Step by Step teachers.
- Encourage all forms of parent participation.
- Provide more trainings for teachers on parent involvement.

Based on findings from the case study, other recommendations include:

- Encourage teachers to involve more parents in the activity centers.
- Organize one-day trainings for parents.
- Encourage teachers to vary the type of work to capitalize on parents' skills and maximize parent participation.

A key concern was raised for the future: "What will happen to our students when they finish Grade 4, the end of primary school?" Teachers worried that, after studying in Step by Step classrooms for four years, children will not want or be able to continue their education with old methodology; parents forcefully agreed. The solution is to teach the Step by Step methodology to secondary school teachers as well. Parents will be vital partners in the next steps toward expanding the program.

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* This article was prepared by Rachel Holmes, based on the full-length case study by Nurali Salikhov, PhD, and Zarina Bazidova, *Parents Are Critical: Parent Participation in Step by Step Tajikistan* (November 2004).

Notes:

1 Donors directly involved in the improvement of education and the construction of schools in Tajikistan include Save the Children (USA), Save the Children UK, UNESCO, USAID, UNICEF, OSCE, TB OSI AF (Soros Foundation), Aga-Khan Foundation, the World Bank, the Asian Bank for Development, Relief International, IREX, AED, and the Japanese government.

2 In 2003 Step by Step joined the USAID/PEAKS project. This project provides financial support to Step by Step and cooperates with NGOs that work in education and community projects.

The School Without Socks: The Te Kase School in Haiti

Case Study Researchers: Caroline Hudicourt, EdM, and Dominique Hudicourt, FOKAL's Tipa Tipa Program (Step by Step Program)

The children, bright and eager, walk up the stairway of their beautiful pink concrete school to their classrooms, leaving behind the schoolyard with its newly planted ornamental garden, their small homes made of clay soil blocks or palm tree wood, the pale green grass and the often dusty—or slippery and muddy—dirt road they have trudged here on. They chatter cheerfully, both disciplined and delighted, like children in happy schools everywhere. Not one of them, from the tiniest three-year-old to the most gangling sixth grader, wears socks.

To traditional educators, explains Veronique Phanor, director/principal of the Te Kase School on Haiti's Central Plateau, a citizen "is a person wearing a tie, always well dressed, wearing socks, perfectly waxed shoes, always clean." But at the Te Kase School, Ecole Marie Educatrice, "a citizen is not a person with a tie. It is a person who likes his environment and who adapts well to his own reality."

Not all that long ago, the children of Te Kase were required to come to school in shoes and socks like the city kids. But the charismatic local religious leader Brother Franklin Armand protested. Socks, he said, were made for children who drive to school in cars and walk on clean concrete, for children whose parents have washing machines and the soap to put in them. For peasant children walking to school through squishy mud, they were merely one more problem to take care of, one more piece of clothing to buy and wash, one more source of stress on parents' limited resources. In rainy season they keep children's feet hot and wet. In dry season they become flaked with dust. Today, the children of Te Kase no longer wear socks to school. Those who arrive with socks are asked to take

them off. During the rainy season they even remove their shoes, slipping their feet into plastic or rubber sandals, keeping their feet cool and dry and the classrooms clean.

The children of Te Kase "come to school to learn so that they can change the society in which they live," says Phanor, a former nun who left her congregation to marry and then studied public health as a nurse. "Even if they go to other places to study they should come back to their home to help the area. If they wear ties and beautiful shoes, they might not want to come back to the country and get them all dirty."

A Sense of Place and Possibility

The Te Kase School, just outside the major Central Plateau town of Hinche and about 100 miles northeast of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, is the most successful of the four pilot schools developed by Tipa Tipa, Haiti's Step by Step Program. It was funded and constructed in 1997 by FOKAL (Fondasyon Konesans ak Libete), a Soros network foundation. The small rural hilly community surrounding the school is poorly developed, partly because of the difficult roads. The clay soil that should be an economic asset makes the dirt roads and dirt airport extremely slippery and sometimes unusable in the rainy season, when the area is often inaccessible for days even by plane. The large, brightly painted concrete school built by FOKAL—a two-story, U-shaped structure housing 248 pupils from preschool through sixth grade—seems incongruous when viewed from above the surrounding hills. Most other buildings, including schools, are small tin or thatched-roof houses made of palm tree wood or soil.

Michele Pierre-Louis, FOKAL's director, says she was confident that the peasant community would welcome Step by Step. "Ask the parents what is the most important to them," she comments. "They will tell you their children's education, even if they are hungry. School is perceived as a gate that helps them get away from the peasant condition, and that enables the children to help their parents."

As impressive as the gleaming pink concrete is, the Te Kase School stands out from its surroundings in more intangible ways as well. It distinguishes itself even among Step by Step pilot schools in the quality of relationships it has built among the director, teachers, parents, and children, and by the intense involvement of parents in the school's activities. The success story of Te Kase is a story of community building. The parents, says parent coordinator Myriam Clerveaux, "are ready to do anything for the school. When they compare their children to others they see elsewhere, they realize that the school offers something extra. It increases their self-esteem, because they can talk and be listened to. Being aware of the program, they make sure the teachers follow it. They help fix the school materials; they encourage students to hurry to school." And among other Marie Educatrice schools—local schools supervised by Brother Armand's congregation, Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Incarnation —Te Kase stands out as a builder of democracy.

> "Ask the parents what is the most important to them. They will tell you their children's education, even if they are hungry."

"Tipa teaches democracy," says Lochner Etienne, a supervisor appointed by the congregation to monitor the community's schools.

"They work on democracy as a permanent theme: respect for others, self-respect, respect for the environment, and respect for the country. That's the type of education Haiti needs."

Community Assets

The Te Kase School's unusual success has been built on fertile, if often muddy, ground. The directors of FOKAL wanted to invest in rural, somewhat abandoned, communities, but they looked for communities with strong local structures already in place. Three of the Step by Step pilot schools in Haiti are associated with religious organizations and the fourth is connected with a peasant association. In the case of Te Kase, Brother Armand and his congregation offered support at every stage of the project. The area, known as Pandiassou, looks better every year, partly because of the 34 artificial lakes Brother Armand has built over the last decade. Fish are multiplying, water is pumped in to irrigate fields during the long dry season, and the land is slowly being reforested. "Brother Armand always says that when you first arrive in a fraternity you don't really do something for the people," says Brother Cenor Jonas, administrator of the congregation. "You listen to them. After a while, they tell you themselves: 'This is how I would like you to help us.'" In addition to the strong leadership of Brother Armand and Phanor and the enormous enthusiasm of community parents, Te Kase has a natural advantage: houses are crowded together, making it easier to build community. In many rural areas, children have to walk several hours even to get to school.

Like other Step by Step programs around the world, Tipa Tipa offers a child-centered pedagogy that develops children's autonomy, natural curiosity, and creativity. It works with children from birth to age 12, preparing them to become active and engaged citizens, encouraging their ability to make decisions, formulate hypotheses, and make critical judgments. The program values parents' participation in school activities and functions democratically: parents walk directly through principal Veronique Phanor's open door in their bare feet; children run in to speak with "Vero." Classrooms are clean, with activity corners for the youngest children and tables for the older ones. Tipa Tipa's goal is to offer poor rural children a method of learning comparable to methods common in wealthy developed countries.

Parents see the school itself as a great material and physical gift to the community. They are grateful for the toilets: the fact that here the children don't have to use the floor as their toilet and wipe themselves on rocks, Pierre-Louis says, "is a humanizing process." Tipa Tipa teaches hygiene along with the alphabet: "When they leave school to go home," says Marie-Maude Rodrigue, a community school supervisor hired by the congregation, "it's not the parents who need to tell them that they have to bring water and wash their hands before eating. The children know that good hygiene requires them to wash their hands before eating and after going to the toilet. It's a big change." Indeed, Clerveaux comments, the Te Kase children's emphasis on cleanliness sometimes offends other members of the community. When they ask to wash their hands before eating at the marketplace, she says, other adults are apt to scoff, "Oh! Who do they think they are?"

For peasant children walking to school through squishy mud, socks were merely one more problem to take care of, one more piece of clothing to buy and wash, one more source of stress on parents' limited resources.

Step by Step trains both teachers and par-

ents to treat children with respect. Corporal punishment—the most common method of discipline in Haiti—is strongly discouraged. "When adults make mistakes nobody beats them," Clerveaux tells parents. "And sometimes adults make very serious mistakes. Sometimes they might break a glass. If it is an adult it's not a problem. When it is a child who breaks a glass we feel obliged to scold or even beat him." She tells the true story of two boys in Port-au-Prince who were sent to fetch water. To save time they went to a neighbor's reservoir even though they knew they weren't supposed to. When one boy fell in the water,

"Tipa teaches democracy. They work on democracy as a permanent theme: respect for others, self-respect, respect for the environment, and respect for the country. That's the type of education Haiti needs."

the second was so afraid of being punished that he ran away to hide instead of getting help. His brother drowned.

Some parents feel "disarmed" when told not to use the whip because they have never known anything else. It is not unusual for parents to beg a teacher to beat their children if they don't behave. And even in Step by Step schools, some teachers still use corporal punishment; the teachers themselves were raised with the whip. But parents and teachers believe in the training because they see such encouraging changes in their relationships with their pupils, their children, and even with their spouses. "You feel it's a life-giving role, a role of love," says a parent.

Parents as Allies

The intensity of parental involvement is striking. One secret of Te Kase's success, says FOKAL director Michele Pierre-Louis, "is the relationship between the school and the parents." A parent adds: "The way parents are welcomed at school is very important. That's one of the main reasons why parents like the school." And Rodrigue points out that parents are grateful to be included in school activities. "That's what they like," she says. "They know they were alone in the bushes; now you put them among other people. They start feeling like they are people like everybody else. It's more interesting. Tipa Tipa says, 'Come to us. There is room for you in society. Whatever you know how to do, come and share it. Show us how you wove your basket. What you can do is important to our classroom.' It is important for the peasant to feel that he is not alone in the country."

Parents find the Step by Step training sessions particularly valuable. "Parents are always asking for more training," a parent says. "They would prefer if the training sessions for the parents lasted several days rather than just one day." Another parent adds, "It gives us new paths, new knowledge, to help our children better at home." Clerveaux tells a story about a Step by Step-sponsored parent meeting in a remote school. Some parents were given the wrong date and showed up a day early. Even though they had to walk as many as eight hours to be there, following a difficult muddy path—sometimes adding stones to the road to walk on, sometimes cutting through thick weeds—and even though some had to leave home at 3 a.m. to be on time, they all made the trek again the next day.

Parents say:

The school helps the children develop well, especially in their language skills.

Physically they are more developed.

When he sings, he seems more alive.

The children are more open.

When the children are at school they seem to feel at home, they look comfortable.

Even when the child is playing, he takes his time to play. Even when the child is making a house, he can tell you: this is such and such part of the house. Another child playing the same game will do it thoughtlessly. The Step by Step child takes time to do it well.

If they took them away to put them in a different school, you'd feel they would be going backward.

Challenges

Despite its many strengths, Te Kase struggles daily. Retaining teachers is sometimes a problem; state schools offer a

retirement plan, and Tipa Tipa teachers sometimes feel criticized by colleagues at other schools jealous of their pleasant working conditions. Sometimes it's difficult to match Step by Step educational materials with national exams. Step by Step's experimental approach to science, for instance, doesn't help children memorize the facts they need for the national science test. (Nevertheless, all sixth graders passed the national exams.) The children start reading in French in first grade even though their first language is Creole; they don't begin reading Creole until second grade. Parents are thrilled that their children are learning French, a language they feel will give the children access to levels of society the parents have been excluded from—but teaching children to read in a language other than their mother tongue goes against Step by Step methodology.

When members of the Te Kase community—teachers, parents, children—describe the school, certain themes recur: democracy, equality, freedom.

By far the biggest problem is money. The school lunch program has been cut off because of lack of funds and Phanor reports that paying teachers regularly is a constant struggle. Haiti is a desperately poor country; as Clerveaux points out, one reason for the Te Kase parents' enthusiasm is that because of the congregation's work in the area, their standard of living had improved. "To be able to give something, you have to have something," she says. When daily survival is at stake, parents cannot participate in school activities, and children cannot learn. If despite training other schools do not follow the Step by Step Program, she feels, it is because they lack space and materials. To many teachers and parents who would love to embrace Step by Step philosophy, financial conditions in Haiti make the luxurious Tipa Tipa classroom feel like an impossible dream.

Vision and Hope

Tipa Tipa's future is a challenge, but at the same time there is a lot of hope, because visibly something has changed in the student body," says Phanor. "This generation, which has followed that training within the Step by Step Program, will create a new society, a society with justice and respect for people."

When members of the Te Kase community—teachers, parents, children—describe the school, certain themes recur: democracy, equality, freedom. "The children have to be able to choose," says a parent. "You don't give them freedom to do whatever they want, but you have to let a child make some choices so that he can be aware that he is able to choose and discover what he likes. Before, parents did not know that."

Marie-Maude Rodrigue, one of the congregation's school supervisors, agrees. "The choice board is something very interesting,"

she says. "Because the student knows he is free to choose whatever he wants: 'When I go to the math corner, nobody tells me that I have to go to the science corner.' The student can say, 'I choose to go to the math corner.' That's a kind of freedom, the freedom to choose." And Lochner Etienne, the congregation's other supervisor, adds: "If tomorrow the child is going to be president, senator, or in any government position, he will not have any difficulty listening to other people's opinions because they will have told him to listen to others. There should be a high school that's using that same method."

One teacher from a different community who had just started the Step by Step training reports that he was so struck by the program's egalitarian perspective on male and female roles that he decided to help his wife around the house. Their relationship improved enormously, he says; a few months later she was eager, even excited, for him to attend another week of training.

Alinx Gauthier, director of another congregation school, says that if all schools were like Te Kase, "We would have Haitians with another mentality. If all the schools in the country followed the Step by Step model, after 10, 15, 20 years, school in Haiti would be like school in other countries."

The Step by Step experience, Phanor feels, is transformative. "If all the Haitians could behave differently and think differently, if all the children could be like ours, it would be extraordinary."

Teachers say:

Every day I see the face of our school change. Before, the children were different. When you talked to them they didn't listen. Now they behave differently. When you talk to them they understand; they act according to what you have told them. They used to fight a lot more than they do now.

We are relaxed with the children and we create activities.

I find more materials. When you find more materials, the work becomes easier for you.

To me the program helps because of the sitting arrangements in the classrooms. When the children sit around tables, you can do group work and individual work.

In other schools the kids are stacked up in piles. The Step by Step Program does not allow a classroom to have more than 30 children. It allows the work to flow better.

The program helps us to have a greater variety of experiences.

The school lies like a cooking pot on three stones: the parents, the child, and the teacher. If one stone does not function at the same level, if one stone is low, the pot will lean sideways.

Children Thriving

"Children are their parents' wealth," says a Haitian proverb. Children are also a community's wealth, a nation's wealth. But the blooming children in the science corner, or learning to read Creole, or washing their hands before eating, or working in the vegetable garden aren't worried about being anybody's wealth. Learning and playing, they look like children in good schools everywhere—except that none of them wear socks.

Children say:

What is in our books, the other books don't have.

The school helps us a lot in our work.

We feel comfortable when we are working.

We enjoy dancing.

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* This article was prepared by Carol Sternhell, based on the full-length case study by Caroline Hudicourt, EdM, and Dominique Hudicourt, *Community Mobilization: The Te Kase School in Haiti* (May 2004).

Photographs by Caroline Hudicourt.

NGO Development

Step by Step Journals in Croatia

Case Study Researchers: Boris Jokic, BSc, Assistant Researcher, Institute for Social Research, and Zrinka Ristic Dedic, BSc, Assistant Researcher, Institute for Social Research

Step by Step's two journals provide support, fresh ideas, and a sense of community for educators committed to the principles of child-centered education, and are a rich source of material even for teachers not yet exposed to Step by Step.

OUR FRIEND MISHKO

I decided to bring my "friend" Mishko to the first day of school. Mishko is actually a soft toy with messed-up hair and a long red nose, somewhat like Pinocchio. The role I first had in mind for him was to create a joyful atmosphere in the classroom and alleviate the fear that usually arises in children when they are faced with a new environment, a new situation, and an experience that they are not familiar with.

Once everyone was in the classroom the children and I sat in a circle on the floor, with the parents around us. I introduced Mishko as my friend, who is slightly shy but eager to meet each of them and their parents. The introductions started and Mishko moved from child to child. Everyone had a turn, and there was not a child who did not say at least a sentence about himself/herself and his or her mom or dad. The first contact was thus established in a simple way that children were familiar with, and as I predicted, soon enough Mishko played an important role in helping the children adjust to their new environment.

Mishko slowly became a real classroom pet, our mascot and a participant in all important classroom events. Every weekend, he goes home with one of the children where they spend time together. He has his own folder to which the children make contributions inspired by his visit to their household (drawings, pictures, essays). In his folder, Mishko now keeps records by each and every child on how he spent his exciting weekends. Writing, and thus contributing to Mishko's record file, has become a joyful activity for my first-graders, one that they see the purpose of.

Through such an approach creativity and conversation are encouraged and a child's vocabulary is expanded. Parents and children contribute together to the reports on the weekend activities in their home. These reports are a fruitful source of reading and speaking exercises, but also valuable because of the pride and self-esteem they spark in every child in the classroom.

From *Dijete, Skola, Obitelj (Child, School, Family)*
Written by Vesna Bedekovic, teacher, Petar Preradovic Primary School, Pitomaca

Creating a Professional Community through Publishing

Sonja Ivic, a first-grade teacher at the Vladimir Gortan Elementary School in Rijeka, teaches in one of Croatia's rare Step by Step classrooms. Rijeka is an old, progressive seaside town, Croatia's major port, a cultural center in the northern Adriatic region. Vladimir Gortan Elementary School, which introduced Step by Step five years ago, serves as a methodological center for pedagogy connected with the University of Rijeka. Even here, however—and despite tremendous interest from parents—only three of the school's 11 classrooms follow Step by Step

methods. Parents choose this school because of Step by Step, says principal Josip Sikic, and he would love to offer these classes to all pupils, but there are simply not enough teachers available who are educated in the Step by Step methodology. Those who are—like Sonja Ivic, and her colleague in second grade, Anastazija Balas—must build their community beyond the school's walls, often turning to educational journals like *Dijete, Skola, Obitelj (Child, School, Family)*, where Ivic read the story of Vesna Bedekovic's friend Mishko and wondered if she should introduce a similar friend in her first-grade classroom.

While both journals publish theoretical discussions of Step by Step principles, their strength—and their appeal to readers—lies in the articles by regular Step by Step teachers about real-life classroom experiences.

A key activity of Korak po Korak, Croatian Step by Step, is publishing. In addition to books—the Step by Step Book Series was established in 1998 in cooperation with local experts from the University of Zagreb—Step by Step publishes two journals, *Child, School, Family* (where teachers read the story of Mishko) and *Dijete, Vrtic, Obitelj (Child, Kindergarten, Family)*. Child, Kindergarten, Family, published four times a year, focuses on themes of interest to preschool teachers, presenting Step by Step theory but also giving examples from everyday Croatian classrooms. *Child, School, Family*, published three times a year, highlights themes of interest to elementary school teachers, focusing on implementation of the Step by Step Program in Grades 1–4. The mission of both journals is to aid Step by Step educators in their work and promote the program to a wider audience.

Implementation of the Step by Step Program in Croatia faces many challenges. The Croatian educational system is somewhat rigid—all programs must be approved by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sports—and educators face constraints of both space (two teachers frequently share classrooms) and curriculum (required curricula often don't leave room to explore pupils' interests). There are no schools in Croatia that exclusively follow the Step by Step Program. There are, however, many Step by Step classrooms scattered throughout the country—particularly in preschool programs—and hundreds of teach-

ers who have completed initial training in designing child-centered educational programs and creating child-centered classrooms. While not all of the teachers who complete training use Step by Step principles in their practice, many do and others would like to. Step by Step's two journals provide support, fresh ideas, and a sense of community for educators committed to the principles of child-centered education, and are a rich source of material even for teachers not yet exposed to Step by Step.

Teachers report that the journals are a key source of material on curriculum and pedagogy, especially valuable for thinking about the next day's class and organizing content.

Josip Sikic, the Vladimir Gortan principal, is an enthusiastic subscriber to *Child, School, Family*, but says that the two copies of each issue that his school receives are not nearly enough. And at Bacun kindergarten, in a residential area on the northern outskirts of Zagreb, preschool educator Sanja Kobescak reports that copies of *Child, Kindergarten, Family* fly off the shelves. "Two copies are not sufficient," she says, as educators never know when they will need to consult the journal. Because of working conditions at Bacun—shared space, dilapidated building, and strict management—Kobescak is unable to implement the full Step by Step Program, but she is committed to its principles and an eager reader of the journal. She is also a private subscriber—rare in Croatia, where the price of an issue, 42.7 kuna or about $7, is considered very high. "We're desperate for good educational materials here," Kobescak says. Neither Ivic nor Balas, the Vladimir Gortan teachers, subscribes to the journals on her own, but both read them eagerly in the school library or the principal's office, and both have themselves contributed articles.

The History of the Journals

Child, Kindergarten, Family began publishing in 1995 and immediately became well known among preschool educators, playing a vital role in establishing the Step by Step Program in Croatian kindergartens. *Child, School, Family* was launched officially in 1998, but the precursor *Bulletin for Teachers (Bilten za Ucitelje)* was distributed in 1997, the year Step by Step entered Croatian elementary schools. Both journals are intensely practical

in their focus. While both publish theoretical discussions of Step by Step principles, their strength—and their appeal to readers—lies in the articles by regular Step by Step teachers about real-life classroom experiences. Even articles about scientific theory, such as "How Does the Brain Learn?" (the theme of the third issue of *Child, School, Family*), include practical suggestions and useful advice for teachers. This blend of theory and practice, of educational experts and local teachers, gives the journals their special flavor, making them accessible and interesting to readers.

Each issue is likely to be organized around a main theme—"The Child-Centered Classroom," for instance, or "Emotional Intelligence"—accompanied by a variety of related practical articles written by primary school teachers who endorse Step by Step. The journals also include regular columns (such as "The Educator's Diary" in *Child, Kindergarten, Family*), articles about child-centered teaching practices in other countries and cultures, translations of scientific texts relevant to the current theme, and articles about school-parent cooperation. The writing style is almost always simple, straightforward, vivid, and personal. While the journals are intended for educational scholars, teachers, and parents, generally parent interest—as readers or writers—is minimal. Teachers would welcome more parent participation, both in the journals and in their classrooms. "I don't have enough time to properly introduce the philosophy and ideas behind the Step by Step Program," Ivic comments. "The journal can help me explain the details."

The journal editors—school program manager Sanja Brajkovic and preschool program manager Helena Buric—work out of the Step by Step office in Zagreb. Both editors say they particularly value the scientific articles, but most teachers who read the journals disagree. Teachers like Ivic and Balas report that the most interesting and useful articles describe teachers' personal experiences and everyday teaching techniques or solutions to problems. "It's very helpful to compare my experience teaching to someone else's," Ivic says. "It gives me new ideas, and I think it makes me a better teacher." Ivic's colleague Anastazija Balas agrees, but adds, "The scientific parts are also good, in a way that you don't need to reinvent the wheel." Kobescak, the preschool educator at Bacun kindergarten, says the personal experiences are her favorite sections of the journals. She also stresses the importance of pictures, noting that classroom layout is very important in Step by Step methodology. Where the editors might stress theory, the teachers want to read about practice. Both editors say they are aware of this discrepancy and plan to follow the teachers' wishes—but also worry that descriptive accounts of classroom experiences are likely to become repetitive.

Class preparation is very demanding, particularly in Step by Step classrooms. Teachers report that the journals are a key source of material on curriculum and pedagogy, especially valuable for thinking about the next day's class and organizing content. Ideas discussed in journal articles may be copied wholesale or adapted to individual needs and resources. Some teachers say that they consult the journals more frequently than any formal curriculum because the contents of the journals are more diverse, more imaginative, and more practical. Even past issues, Balas points out, can contain valuable solutions to current problems. And communication doesn't feel one-sided, Ivic notes, "because the authors are all real teachers." Teachers also welcome articles on the sensitive topic of teacher-parent interaction and enjoy comparing their experiences with those of educators in other parts of the world. Teachers say they particularly value:

- Receiving feedback or being encouraged to reflect on their own work;
- Being confronted with other teachers' practices;
- Learning new approaches and being motivated to try them out; and
- Publishing in the journals themselves, thus increasing their professional visibility and self-esteem.

Whatever their financial struggles, *Child, Kindergarten, Family* and *Child, School, Family* offer Croatian teachers something many find priceless: a community of child-centered educators who believe that every child can think and learn and that every voice should be heard.

Sustainability

Despite the enthusiasm of educators, the journals' future is not assured. Although subscription prices are too high for ordinary Croatian readers, they are not high enough to

cover printing costs. Originally it was hoped that the journals would be profitable, providing a source of funds to help support local Step by Step efforts, but according to Nives Milinovic, country director of the Step by Step office in Zagreb, in fact the local organization loses money with each issue. The key problem is that the subscription base is too low. "Not enough work has been done to raise the number of subscribers," Milinovic says. The circulation goal has always been 1,000 copies, but neither journal has ever had more than 600 subscribers. Few institutions subscribe to more than one copy and teachers say that the cost of an individual subscription is too high. In the beginning the journals were funded both by subscriptions and by the Open Society Institute, but now they are independent and are hoping to become self-sustaining. The obvious solution is to broaden the subscription base, but as Milinovic remarks, "That's easier said than done." Another approach is to sell more advertising, but both editors, Sanja Brajkovic and Helena Buric, feel strongly that the proportion of ads should be kept as low as possible. Currently ads take up one or two pages at the end of each issue.

While *Child, Kindergarten, Family* is widely recognized among preschool and kindergarten educators throughout Croatia and has a fairly stable subscription base—currently around 550—*Child, School, Family* is less successful. The competition in this market is stiff, with several other journals targeting the same market, elementary school educators and parents. Large publishing houses even distribute free journals and bulletins, hoping to then sell textbooks and educational materials to the same readers. And both journals were affected by serious financial problems in 2003: although issues of the journals were prepared, no money was available for printing and subscribers never received their copies. Milinovic, who assumed her post well after this setback, says that Croatian Step by Step is still struggling to regain subscribers' trust.

Moving Forward

Journal readers, contributors, and the editors themselves offer suggestions for improvement, including:

- Improve quality by developing consistent criteria for accepting articles. Currently almost all submitted articles are published.
- Improve graphic design. Both editors feel that the design is not attractive and could be livelier and more colorful.
- Improve quality of photographs. Many are blurred and unappealing. Educators particularly value photos of classrooms and other workspaces as sources of information and inspiration.
- Devote a section of the journals to children with special needs. Inclusion is an important aspect of the Step by Step Program, one many people are unaware of. The journals can serve as a significant resource in this area—and this focus can help differentiate Step by Step from other educational programs.
- Target parents as contributors and readers. Not only would this approach expand the potential audience; teachers say it would be very interesting to them and to the parents to read about children's classroom experiences from the parents' point of view.

Whatever their financial struggles, *Child, Kindergarten, Family* and *Child, School, Family* offer Croatian teachers something many find priceless: a community of child-centered edu-

cators who believe that every child can think and learn and that every voice should be heard. Vesna Bedekovic of Pitomaca, the teacher who charmed her small pupils with her cuddly, disheveled friend Mishko, and her distant colleague Sonja Ivic, eagerly reading about Mishko in her own school in Rijeka, may never have met in person—but their minds have met, and together those minds can slowly change their world.

A STORY FROM DUBRAVA

We live in a time of disturbed social relations between people. There is an increase in interpersonal distrust, disaffection, disinterest, denigration, exploitation, violence. Of course, no teacher wants these negative social phenomena in his/her classroom. We desire cooperation, interpersonal respect, tolerance, resolution of conflicts through argumentation. However, our pupils and their parents are immersed in the given environment and it is only to be expected that it has had an influence on them, too. So, how can we make our classroom, a small world inside the big one, a home for tolerance, cooperation, and empathy? The answer is: through multiple activities that affirm such positive social phenomena. These activities take place in the classroom on a daily basis, and are repeated outside the classroom, with the parents.

There are a variety of activities that involve parents and contribute to cooperation, tolerance, and parental engagement, such as:

1. Classroom festivities;
2. Field trips involving children, parents, and teachers;
3. Parent workshops;
4. Cooperation on classroom decoration.

Here we shall describe the possible options for classroom festivities. The purpose of a classroom festivity is to display the pupils' achievements and creative abilities, but also—and why not?—to highlight parental achievements, abilities, and cooperation. In the part of the festivity where children perform, it is good to present to the parents as varied a repertoire as possible, to include perhaps—in addition to recitations, songs, acting, and dance—an acrobatics performance, magic tricks, communal dancing, or solo recitals.

It is very interesting to see parents in the performing role, and it is very useful to them to gain the experience of public performance and everything that accompanies it (stage-fright, excitement). Of course, public exposure is uncomfortable to many people, so it is possible that some parents may refuse to participate, upsetting their children. Because of this, we pick an act, such as choir singing, that will not force any single parent into the spotlight.

Understanding the benefits of this idea, the parents of my class agreed to perform a number of acts at our end-of-school party. Accompanied on accordion by a father of one of the pupils, the parents sang a couple of popular songs. One of the mothers then read a poem, one of her own, about the children in the class and their teacher. Such parental acts require rehearsals, which give the parents an opportunity to get to know each other and socialize and can be combined with parent-pupil field trips.

Is it at all necessary to stress how much such communal engagement of pupils, parents, and teachers contributes to a better social climate in the classroom, strengthens our bonds, and enhances the joy of socialization?

From *Dijete, Skola, Obitelj (Child, School, Family)*
Written by Kresimir Calic, teacher, Marija Juric Zagorka Primary School, Zagreb

* This article was prepared by Carol Sternhell, based on the full-length case study by Boris Jokic, BSc, and Zrinka Ristic Dedic, BSc, *Evaluation of Step by Step Journals in Croatia*.

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

Case Study Researchers: Steffen Saifer, EdD, Educational Consultant, USA, and Irina Lapitskaya, Project Director, Belarusian Parents and Teachers League Step by Step

This case study addresses the research question: *Is national education reform best implemented and sustained within the system, outside of it, or some other way?*

The subject of this case is the Belarusian Parents and Teachers League Step by Step. Researchers used documents (decrees, memos, articles, and letters), observations, and interviews as their primary tools. Interviews were conducted during the spring and summer of 2004 with Step by Step Program staff, teachers, and parents as well as administrators and Ministry officials.

Background and Context

In all countries in which Step by Step operates, the Ministry of Education—the formal state system of schools and programs—is its most critical "partner." The Ministry of Education typically controls all aspects of the education system in the country. Relationships between Step by Step programs and Ministries of Education range from close partnerships to separate fiefdoms with little communication or acknowledgement. Most Step by Step programs, however, operate somewhere in the middle and are continuously negotiating the relationship. Even if the relationship is apparently stable, the situation could potentially change quickly with the turnover of just one key Ministry staff person. And, as there are a large number of people involved with Ministry programs—from regional authorities to classroom teachers—there are always both allies and detractors within the system. This is especially true when the reform represents a dramatic departure from traditional education.

It may be possible to work inside the system but maintain the role of a change agent, or to function far outside the system and still have a significant impact on it.

This issue of the relationship between Step by Step programs and Ministries of Education can be characterized by the concept of *location*—working inside or outside the system, "on the border," or some other way. Although location is only one dimension of reform, it is a critical one because Step by Step is countrywide in scale. All educational reform programs must reside somewhere on the location continuum and usually change locations over time, either by volition or necessity. In addition, *how* a program operates in any of these locations varies. It may be possible to work inside the system but maintain the role of a change agent, or to function far outside the system and still have a significant impact on it.

Location has a strong affective component to it. Step by Step staff can *feel* very distant from the Ministry and its programs and personnel yet have many cooperative agreements and practices in place, or have no formal relations with the Ministry but enjoy strong, positive relationships with many officials.

This case study explores the dynamics involved in negotiating location in one country. The success, and even the very survival, of the Step by Step Program in Belarus, as in

many other countries, has depended on expertly negotiating its location in relation to the Ministry's system.

On the Border: Step by Step in Belarus

The metaphor of location provided staff of the Belarusian Step by Step Program with a clear way to analyze their relationship with the Ministry. They viewed themselves as operating primarily from the border and as having done so since the beginning of the project in 1994. Still, they report, there have been times over the past 10 years when they have been more "inside" or more "outside." Sometimes the shift was strategic, sometimes serendipitous, and sometimes necessitated by circumstances.

When the staff of the Belarusian Step by Step Program sought to implement a new initiative on the inclusion of children with disabilities, they went first to the Ministry for support, assistance, and access. However, when they received an unenthusiastic response, they went to various regional, district, and city entities where they found some supporters interested in the ideas and the training. In places where there was no district support, they enlisted principals and teachers who were excited about the initiative. In this way they made "forays" from the border to the inside system in creative and responsive ways. The initiative continues strongly to this day—there are many schools throughout Belarus where children with disabilities are fully included in classrooms. Had Step by Step been more inside, staffers may not have been able to go around top management. Had it been too far outside, they may not have had adequate access to local schools.

The View from the Ministry

A former high-ranking Ministry of Education official, Mr. G., who worked extensively with the Step by Step Program in its earlier years, characterizes the location of the program as outside, but having the support of the state. "You can't work without state support," he comments. He believes that Step by Step is now moving too far to the outside and would better assure its future by accepting a secondary role and working to obtain the support of the Ministry and its various entities.

Another former Ministry of Education official, Dr. L., who also has a long history with Step by Step, says, "Some periods of time were friendly, some were neutral, some were hard. It was not through the fault of the program. Administrators are generally not interested in deep theoretical issues but in ensuring that things are working well. By sidestepping the theoretical issues and focusing on methods, Step by Step was able to find acceptance." Of particular importance, Dr. L. notes, was the ability of Step by Step Director Irina Lapitskaya—who successfully maintained a nonthreatening balance of personal and businesslike relationships—to establish mutual goals with the Ministry. Step by Step staff negotiated the inside/outside dynamic by working on the border: focusing on methods to avoid conflict over content, finding points of collaboration, and keeping relationships friendly but professional.

Fortunately the Step by Step Program is a reform system focused not on content, but on methods, and came with significant financial resources. It was able to assist with some issues of concern to Ministry officials, as well as to regional and local school staff, while also meeting its own goals. The primary issue of mutual concern was better alignment of teaching methods with the social changes taking place, but there were other issues. These included making kindergartens places where children were happy to attend (and

where parents were happy to send their children), improving adult/child ratios (achieved largely through family involvement and collaborations with colleges, youth groups, and other organizations), and improving the physical environment.

Middle school students in Minsk—all of whom started in Step by Step as kindergartners—show their facility with active learning methods. Photo by Steffen Saifer 2004

"A reform program should teach people to fish, not feed them fish, and continue to develop better fishing rods," comments Dr. L. This maxim has clear implications for the issue of location: it is crucial to work both inside and outside in a methodical way. The border may be the ideal place to do this. Moving at times to the outside allows the distance necessary to see problems clearly so the right improvements to the "fishing rod" can be made. Being on the inside is necessary to help the fishers use the new "rod," to see if it is effective, and to plan further improvements.

The View from the Field

As teachers and principals operate very much within the system, they provide an important perspective on the issue of Step by Step's location. The three educators interviewed all work daily within the system while also working with Step by Step. They describe three distinct views of location.

Ms. H., a principal in a mid-sized industrial city who is active both in Step by Step and in national and regional educational activities, views herself as living in both places at the same time. She is fully engaged in the work of the system *and* the work of Step by Step. However, her description of the day-to-day integration of Step by Step in her school sounded like a compromise. The school provides the option of traditional classes, but uses some Step by Step methods in these classes and some traditional methods in Step by Step classes. Although this principal feels "bi-cultural"—comfortable and facile in both places—such an approach may dilute program implementation.

Ms. N. is a teacher in a Step by Step primary program who views Step by Step as being on the outside: a separate, independent, but very small "state." "When we 'Steppers' meet, we feel we are citizens of this state and we serve it," she says. She views Step by Step as existing above the state system because she believes that it provides a higher quality education for children, which for her is the "main thing." Ms. N. strongly believes that it is advantageous to be as separate as possible from the state system, but recognizes that some support and acceptance from the state is necessary. She feels that the best way to gain this acceptance is for the program to be strong and united, a force to be reckoned with, not a collaborator. Illustrating this point of view, she explains what happened in her former school after a supportive assistant principal left.

> *"Some of the parents suggested changing schools, together with the whole class, as there was a newly opened school in the neighborhood. It was a shock; I was prepared to leave the school myself but not together with the children. The parents insisted, and I and a parent went to this neighboring school to discuss the matter. The principal was greatly confused, but did not refuse and told us to come back at the end of the summer. Finally he agreed to accept the whole class. The school had their own regulations and traditions but no Step by Step teachers. But they had strong primary school teachers and a very good parent committee. Our class easily joined this school.*
>
> *But in the old school there was a very good Step by Step environment with activity centers, furniture, and learning resources and we all missed it. The parents*

decided to arrange the same environment and we managed to do this; even the colors were the same. However, there was a conflict with the school administration because the posters that we put on the walls were going to spoil the walls. I explained that we couldn't do without them and the administration got interested as to why and attended our lessons to find out. As a result, a process developed for me to train five teachers in Step by Step."

Clearly there is a strong correlation between views of location and actions. Compromising and negotiating are "border" actions; finding a new place to continue to work is an outsider action.

The third representative from the field, Dr. R., is a faculty member of a teacher retraining institute. His view is that the program works on the border and that this is the ideal place to be. "It is very dangerous

The "journal within a journal" is itself a good metaphor for location. It is a way to be inside, while still being separate and distinct.

to stay both completely outside or completely inside," he says. "It is just here that double standards crop up." However, like Ms. N., he views this border as being *above* rather than adjacent to the state system. "Only this position gives the freedom to shift from outside to inside and vice versa," he explains. Dr. R. expressed admiration at the ability of Step by Step to negotiate a place "above" over many years. "They have mastered the situation from inside, but have a strategy of their own; they are not subordinate to the state system," he comments. "They are mobile and flexible and amaze me with their ability to speak in the language of the state, but to say what they think."

These perspectives on location appear to be related to the different roles of the speakers. A principal must meet the needs and demands of many stakeholders and is a visible representative of the system. Teachers feel compelled to take a strong stand on behalf of the approach they believe in and use daily. A teacher trainer is not directly engaged in the system and is charged with encouraging growth and change; thus, like the Step by Step leadership, the trainer views operating on the border as advantageous.

A Place on the Outside: Step by Step Becomes a Nongovernmental Organization

In 1998, the Step by Step Program made a strong move to the outside by establishing itself as a nongovernmental organization (NGO). This was encouraged and supported by the Open Society Institute (OSI). From OSI's perspective the move was helpful in sustaining Step by Step and in establishing institutions of civil society. From the analytical perspective of this study, however, it can also be viewed as a strategy to establish a location on the outside. After six years of having NGO status, the Step by Step Program staff still view themselves as functioning primarily on the border, but moving more to the outside.

The emerging strength of the program and its ability to work with the Ministry on a more equal basis can be seen in a recent event: the publication of a Step by Step journal within *Public Education*, the major Belarusian journal of elementary education published by the Ministry of Education for the Minsk Region, the capital and largest city. Journals have long had an important role in education in Belarus, being the primary means of disseminating new information and creating a sense of shared practice. In 2003, Step by Step negotiated an agreement with the Regional Ministry, the first formal agreement in many years with any Ministry entity, to publish its journal within the Ministry's journal. In each issue of *Public Education*, Step by Step now has a substantial section devoted to its program. The first issue focused on standards and the new teacher certification process based on these standards. Subsequent issues will explore each standard separately. Although the standards and the certification process were developed collaboratively by the nearly 30 countries of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), they were interpreted and presented in a completely Belarusian context by the country's Step by Step director, Irina Lapitskaya. This strategy was a way to keep from being perceived as *too* far outside by the Ministry.

This issue of *Public Education* included 70 pages devoted to Step by Step.

The "journal within a journal" is itself a good metaphor for location. It is a way to be inside, while still being separate and distinct. Lapitskaya was surprised when, for the first time in Step by Step's 10-year history, she received an award from the Ministry of Education to recognize her agency's contribution to the journal.

Findings and Reflections

The Belarusian Step by Step staff see themselves as having operated on the border from the beginning of the program but feel they are now moving to the outside. As evidence they point to the establishment of the program as an NGO and their journal within the Ministry of Education's journal. Teachers, parents, and Step by Step staff use such terms as "Steppers" or "Stepniks" to refer to themselves. These terms indicate their sense of being part of a distinct, unique group and their desire to embrace an outsider identity. Most interviewees viewed moving to the outside as a positive direction, as long as Step by Step maintained strong relationships with teachers and other staff in the field and collaborations with the Ministry. Few viewed moving fully from the border as a realistic option now or in the foreseeable future.

Life on the border is difficult, even if it can be effective.

Yet working on the border is very challenging. One staff member describes her constant fear of writing the wrong word in a memo to a Ministry official, a word that might result in a canceled training session or severed relations with a school. On the border, the timing and content of every decision and every communication must be carefully considered. This staff member's description of being on the border included both positive and negative adjectives—*caution, limited freedom, creativity, maneuvering, long-term change*—while adjectives for inside were only negative and adjectives for outside only positive. Although she recognized that being on the border might be necessary, she did not see it as anywhere near ideal.

While most interviewees visualized the border as a line between two adjacent "territories," a number of others saw it as suspended in space separating "above" from "below." This image conveys three qualities: being better and more progressive; being able to see the insiders more clearly, from a sharper perspective; and being "unbound"—having greater freedom than insiders.

Areas for Further Research

A survey of a substantial number of teachers, principals, regional administrators, parents, and others in several programs would shed light on the important question of whether roles determine views about location. Another area for further research is to understand the pattern of location over time. Is there a typical or ideal pattern and time frame? What factors influence the pattern and timing and how do they operate? Is there an optimal amount of time a program should work on the border or other location? How do other aspects of the work of reforming education interact with or relate to location? Is location as important to successful reform as the clarity and power of the ideas being promoted?

Conclusion

The issue of location provides a helpful way to analyze the work of large-scale educational reform programs such as Step by Step. Even if there is little that program staff can do to control its location, it is important to *know* the location—where it has been and where it may be going—as location is critical to the program's impact and sustainability.

The best or ideal location appears to be a matter of timing and context. It is not ideal to be on the outside without the respect and trust of those on the inside. It is not ideal to be on the inside if one is forced to compromise unduly or is indistinguishable from other insiders. Nor is it ideal to be on the border if one is torn painfully in opposite directions or paralyzed by fear of stepping over that line.

The Step by Step Program in Belarus provides one example of the dynamics of location. Building the program has been a challenging process requiring great effort and care: life on the border is difficult, even if it can be effective. It has also been a successful process: the program is thriving and continues to grow.

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* This article was prepared by case study researcher Steffen Saifer, EdD, based on the full-length manuscript *Inside, Outside, or On the Border? Negotiating the Relationship between Step by Step and the Ministry of Education System in Belarus over 10 Years.*

ISSA Network News

Parenting Education and Early Learning

With support from the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) and the Open Society Institute (OSI), new parenting and early learning materials have been developed to help parents and other caregivers provide the best possible environment for their young children. The goals of the new materials are to increase parents' confidence and strengthen families by:

- Offering child development information and alternative parenting techniques;
- Fostering effective communication between parents and their children;
- Enhancing parents' skills in providing rich literacy and numeracy experiences; and
- Promoting parent/school partnerships.

The new materials include:

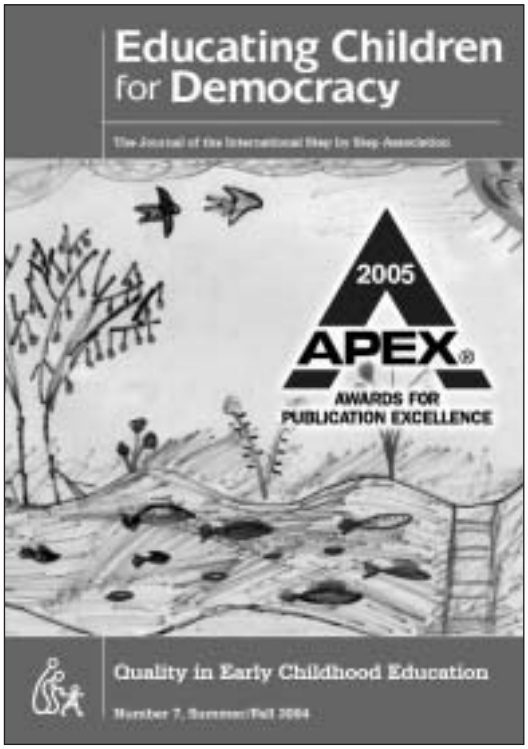
1. *Parenting with Confidence: Enhancing Children's Development in the First Three Years* and *Parenting with Confidence: Enhancing the Development of Young Children.* Designed for use in parent groups or with individual families in or outside the home, the *Parenting with Confidence* program includes materials for parents of children birth through age three and parents of preschool-age children. The birth-through-age-three materials cover such topics as "The Amazing Newborn," "Social and Emotional Development," and "Feeding Right from the Start." The preschool materials cover such topics as "Understanding Your Child's Brain Development," "Play—An Adventure in Learning," and "Early Literacy Development."

2. *Getting Ready for School.* This nine-month home-based curriculum focuses on early literacy and numeracy skills to help parents prepare children, ages four through six, to arrive at school with enthusiasm and ready to learn. Parents are introduced to the home-based curriculum in monthly parent meetings. Then they engage in early learning activities with their child in their own home. The curriculum includes a training guide, facilitators' guide, parent activity guide, and children's activity sets for each month.

3. Parent Booklets. Ten booklets, for parents of children from birth through age six, contain practical information on cognitive, emotional, social, and language development. The booklets can be widely distributed both within Step by Step settings and among other care providers serving young children and their families.

All of the parenting education and early learning materials are available in both English and Russian. For information about obtaining copies of these materials, contact Laura Liliom at ISSA/Budapest (lliliom@issa.hu) or Karen Weber at OSI/New York (kweber@sorosny.org).

Award-Winning Journal



Educating Children for Democracy, the professional journal of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), has won two APEX Awards for Publication Excellence for its Summer/Fall 2004 issue (Number 7), *Quality in Early Childhood Education*.

The first award in the category Education and Training Writing went to "Hands Across the River: Child-Centered, Theme-Based Curriculum Development in Georgia." Marika Shonia and Nino Kheladze, in collaboration with Leila Engman, captured in words and pictures the essence of teaching and learning in a Step by Step classroom. "Hands Across the River" documents active learning and the value of cooperative planning, parent involvement, and community participation. Rochelle Mayer, editor of the ISSA journal, adds: "This article exemplifies *Educating Children for Democracy* at its best—sharing experiences of educational transformation that can serve as a guidepost for those interested in child-centered teaching methods."

The second award, for Journal Design and Layout, recognizes the work of graphic designer Jim Herrmann. He produced an artful issue featuring a photo essay illustrating the award-winning article "Hands Across the River," an eye-catching cover design, and dramatic use of reverse graphics illustrating "God, Turn Me into a Bug," a moving story of a young Romany boy in Croatia.

The APEX Awards for Publication Excellence program is sponsored by Communications Concepts. Close to 5,000 entries were submitted for the 2005 competition in a wide range of categories. It is a great honor to receive this recognition for outstanding work.

Congratulations all around!

Robert Stake Publishes Multiple Case Study Analysis

Robert Stake of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne, Step by Step Case Study Steering Committee member and country case study mentor, has published the book *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, a text that provides an effective process for studying multiple cases within one complex program. Showing the reader how to design and analyze multicase studies, the book provides clear guidelines for:

- Balancing the common issues across the group of cases with the unique features and context of each case;
- Identifying primary research questions for the study;
- Gathering and reporting data on the individual cases;
- Conducting multicase analysis and formulating key findings, themes, and assertions; and
- Reporting and summarizing the multicase study.

The book features three full-length case study reports from the Step by Step Program (Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine) as well as an in-depth analysis of the Step by Step Case Study Project. Published by Guilford Publications of New York, it will be available for ordering later this fall. For more information, contact Taryn Paladiy at the Open Society Institute (tpaladiy@sorosny.org).

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: Rakoczi ut 22./IV./24., H-1072 Budapest, Hungary, tel: +36-1-486-2855, fax: +36-1-266-3463; 400 West 59th Street, New York, NY 10019 USA, tel: +1-212-547-6918, fax: +1-212-548-4610.

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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