



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

Competent Educators of the 21st Century

PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY PEDAGOGY



ISSA's Vision

With support from family and community, every child reaches his or her full potential and develops the skills necessary for being a successful and active member of a democratic knowledge society.

ISSA Mission

ISSA's mission is to support professional communities and develop a strong civil society that influences and assists decision makers to:

- provide high quality care and educational services for all children from birth through primary school (birth through 10 years old), with a focus on the poorest and most disadvantaged;
- ensure greater inclusion of family and community participation in children's development and learning;
- ensure social inclusion and respect for diversity.

ISSA's overarching goal is to promote inclusive, quality care and education experiences that create the conditions for all children to become active members of democratic knowledge societies. ISSA does this through: raising awareness of the importance of quality care and education, developing resources, disseminating information, advocating, strengthening alliances, and building capacity to create conditions where all children thrive.

ISSA Promotes

- Equal access to quality education and care opportunities;
- Child-centered, individualized teaching and learning, combining high-level instruction with support for the needs of each child;
- Development of skills and dispositions for lifelong learning and participation in a democracy;
- Recognition of educators' many roles as facilitators, guides, and role models in the learning process and as active members of their communities;
- Family involvement in children's development and education;
- Community engagement in public education;
- Respect for diversity, inclusive practices, and culturally appropriate learning environments and methods; and
- Self-improvement and ongoing professional development.

Competent Educators of the 21st Century



ISSA'S PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY PEDAGOGY



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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

...education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26.2.

The early years have received unprecedented attention from the research community, the public, and political bodies during the last several decades. Several important studies have been conducted, such as the High Scope study in the USA, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Study in the United Kingdom, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Reports Starting Strong I and II, to mention just a few. Many countries have set ambitious goals to increase both quantity and quality of early childhood development and education provisions for young children and their families. The rationale behind these goals is based on economic, as well as neurobiological, educational, and social arguments. At the individual level, early childhood experiences have been recognized as a key factor in building strong foundations for learning and successful participation in community throughout life; at the societal level this period in the life of the child and family plays a crucial role in promoting inclusion and strengthening social cohesion; from the economists' point of view, the best return on investment comes from investments in the early years. Regardless of the arguments and agendas, it is crucial to ensure that the interests of the child are at the heart of any policy and practice relating to the early years, and that the child receives adequate support through high quality early years services.

The *International Step by Step Association (ISSA)* shares the vision of early childhood as a life space where educators and families work together to ensure access to early childhood services that promote well-being, development, and learning for each child based on the principles of democratic participation. Since 1994, the Step by Step Program, an initiative of the Open Society Institute (OSI) strongly supported by George Soros, has been a symbol of change in the preschools, primary schools, and communities of Central, Eastern, and Southeast Europe and Central Asia. It has been a symbol for empowering educators and other early years professionals, families, and whole communities to support the development and learning of each child to his or her full potential. Equal access to education and care opportunities, child-centered, individualized teaching, a holistic



approach to the child's development, inclusion, the significant role of families and community involvement, and culturally appropriate learning environments and approaches have been the core principles of the program from its very beginning.

In 1998 ISSA was established by the non-governmental organizations implementing the Step by Step Program. To ensure that changes brought to the region included improvements in the quality of early childhood experiences, one of the first activities undertaken by ISSA was the development of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards.

ISSA's mission is to support professional communities and develop a strong civil society that engages in partnerships to influence and assist decision-makers in providing high quality care and educational services for all children from birth through primary school, with a focus on the poorest and most disadvantaged. ISSA promotes inclusive, quality care and education experiences that create the conditions for all children to become active members of democratic knowledge societies. ISSA does this through raising awareness of the importance of quality care and education, developing resources, disseminating information, advocating, strengthening alliances, and building capacity to create conditions where all children thrive.

Educators throughout the regions where ISSA works have been empowered by implementing the Step by Step Program; the ISSA Pedagogical Standards, summarizing the main steps towards child-centered, interactive pedagogy, served as the backbone in their constant striving towards better quality teaching and more meaningful support to children's development and learning. ISSA's work has especially helped those working with very young children in preschool settings, helping them to view themselves as decision-makers and not just mere implementers of prescribed curricula and plans within their "assigned professional identity." The Step by Step Program was built upon the theoretical underpinnings of the work of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Piaget, Bruner, Erikson, Dewey, Kamensky, Vygotsky, and others, and has created positive changes at several levels, including: educators' interactions with children in the classroom, educators' professional development, relationships with families and communities, etc. At the same time, the role of the educator has been crucial; as emphasized in the developmental theory of Lev Vygotsky, educators are responsible for the pace and course of development of their children. *Educators that make a difference* can be the unofficial title of those receiving the ISSA Certificate of Excellence based on assessment using the ISSA Pedagogical Standards.

ISSA and its member organizations have been recognized for being a source of innovation in the region. The ISSA Pedagogical Standards have always promoted professional discussions and encouraged educators, program managers, educational authorities, and others to follow the

developments in the field and the changing situation and needs in the region. To remain on the frontline of innovation ISSA decided to revise the Pedagogical Standards to include lessons learned and new experiences developed in the region, and to incorporate the latest research findings in the field from across the world. ISSA's decision to revise the Pedagogical Standards was a natural step to demonstrate that the definition of quality and the way to improve it in practice is not a static, easily decided issue with one correct answer. The quest for quality is built on lively exchange of knowledge, experiences, and dispositions of all involved stakeholders. The process of revision included extensive consultations with many prominent ECD experts from around the world as well as a study on how the previous version of the Standards was used in the ISSA countries. It was decided to move beyond standards as an instrument for assessment and evaluation to **principles** that demonstrate ISSA's emphasis on inviting all stakeholders to discussion and ongoing improvement of policies and practices.

After a participatory process of revision, ISSA is happy to launch *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy* and hopes that this document will encourage professional discussion, will build and expanding partnerships, will help to improve practices and will bring change into the lives of young children in the countries of the ISSA network and beyond.





While discussing the approach to early years and what it means for everyday practice, ISSA invites you to think about the future of your community, country, and the world, what learning looks like and means in the 21st century, and what we can and should do to provide maximum support to help each child to grow into strong, confident, and happy members of our societies.

International commitments, research findings, and practice: What the world is saying about the early years

ISSA's approach to quality experiences in early years is based on the principles manifested in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC). Four basic principles summarize the foundations for work with young children: the right to life, survival, and development; the right to non-discrimination; the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children; and respect for the views and voices of the child. There are also more specific articles addressing the rights and responsibilities of parents and the duties of governments to provide appropriate assistance for families and provisions for young children. All of these principles should guide policies at any level, and professionals working in the field should receive guidance on what these principles mean for their everyday practice.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child further spelled out in *General Comment 7* how countries should interpret the Convention with regard to young children. One of the goals articulated in the document has direct links with the ISSA approach to early years: it says that the goal of education is to empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem, and self-confidence, and that this must be achieved in ways that are child-centered, child-friendly, and reflect the inherent dignity of the child. This is where the role of the practitioner is crucial, and to meet the demands of the role, it is necessary to support his/her initial training and ongoing professional development.

There are several other major international documents including the OECD Starting Strong reports which describe the research basis and examine the conceptual, social, economic, and cultural factors that influence early childhood policy. The Council of Europe program "*Building a Europe for and with Children*" aims to support the implementation of international standards in the field of children's rights by all Council of Europe member states and, in particular, promotes the implementation of the CRC. The European Commission has strongly expressed its position regarding quality of education in its member states. EU members are expected to cooperate better in order to make school systems more relevant to students' and employers' needs in the knowledge-based Europe of the future. Attention is increasingly devoted to the preschool period as an important period in

the life of the child. In 2007 *Children in Europe* proposed ten principles as the basis for a European approach to early years services, expressing both an agreed platform and challenges for the sector. At “Early Matters,” a European Symposium on Improving Early Childhood Education and Care in October 2008, a set of Conclusions were developed and disseminated, leaving “little doubt that ECEC is crucial and requires more funding and support.”

Discussion about quality is always present. However, *what* constitutes high quality in education is a complex and multi-faceted matter, including structural conditions (e.g. group size, adult/child ratio, etc.), as well as process factors (e.g. sensitivity of the adult, quality of interactions and curricula, etc.). Unfortunately, the language of quality, as well as initiatives and policies, sometimes create unintended consequences as they legitimize the proliferating maze of regulations in early childhood education, and often undermine, instead of support, professional autonomy. ISSA enters this discussion from the point of view of a practitioner working with young children on a daily basis. Through its quality initiatives and Pedagogical Standards that described quality practices, ISSA has promoted the crucial role of the practitioner. We argue that while there is a solid amount of research findings, quality is still a concept that needs to be explored, developed, agreed upon, and



implemented according to the cultural background and needs of the learning community, rather than presented as a universal solution for all situations and people. ISSA believes that democracy forms the foundation of the preschool and for this reason, early years activities should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values.

Striving for quality: Background and history of ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy

ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy were first published in 2001 under the title of *The ISSA Pedagogical Standards* as a network-developed tool that defined quality in teaching practices and the classroom environment and captured the changes that had occurred in the region since 1994 when the Step by Step Program, an initiative to promote democratic principles in early childhood development and education, was launched. The Program was built on the belief that each child has the right to receive maximum support for the development of his or her full potential, and this work should be done in partnership and close cooperation with families, communities, and professionals.

The ISSA Pedagogical Standards were developed by early childhood development and education (ECD) professionals from ISSA member organizations with input from experts around the world. The Standards were intended to help practitioners, preschool, and primary educators to improve



their everyday performance through the principles of learner-centered, interactive pedagogy, development of life-long learning skills, and cooperation with families and communities. The Standards promoted the idea that processes—how programs and relationships are structured and implemented—are as important as outcomes, that educator preparation and professional development should better connect theory and practice, and that policies should be developed in a way that promotes educators' autonomy in decision making on professional issues, taking into account the needs of children, their families, and the community.

The Standards were widely shared with various stakeholders in the ISSA region and, in several cases, served as a resource for the development of national educational framework documents, educator training programs, etc. Discussion about quality and the role of the educator empowered parents to appreciate the work of educators and to be more actively involved in their children's learning. Developed by early childhood experts from countries transitioning to democracy, the Standards offered a unique perspective on the connections between early childhood education and open society, providing bases for revisiting concepts and improving practices according to the needs of individuals and communities. The Standards and the set of supporting materials provided effective tools to implement diverse forms of professional development, including self-assessment, mentoring, training, and certification as recognition of exemplary practice.

After the Standards were launched, ISSA's member organizations – the NGOs implementing the Step by Step Program – with technical assistance from ISSA and with ongoing support from and in partnership with OSI, used the Standards in different ways, depending on their capacity, expertise, national context, and needs. Over the years, training programs and implementation strategies have been continuously developed throughout the network to support the implementation of the Standards as a way to promote quality pedagogy. Regional events to establish and maintain quality reliability (a common understanding of quality) among the experts within the ISSA network based on the Standards added international value to the efforts of the national NGOs and promoted a new way of professional development. The best professionals were trained to become mentors to assist educators in improving their performance based on the ISSA Pedagogical Standards. Outstanding performance was rewarded with an ISSA Certificate of Teaching Excellence – international recognition of quality practice. A number of other resources were published and distributed within the ISSA network as well, such as a *Mentoring Guide* with examples of how to support educators of different experience levels and *Making Standards Come Alive*, a teacher self-assessment tool. Educators involved in the process became more sensitive and reflective practitioners, and their observation and communication skills, self-esteem, and reputation were all improved.



As member NGOs and ISSA worked with the Standards over the years, there has been continuous shared learning and developed understanding about quality support in the early years. The impact of this work has been captured recently in the *Study on the Implementation of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards (2001–2008) and their impact on ECDE policies and practices in the region of ISSA's Network and beyond*, providing rich material on the ways that change in education can be promoted systemically in diverse political, socio-economic, and cultural environments.

Since the 2002 version of the Standards was published, new research findings in the field of ECD, brain development, and other related fields have been released, including research defining quality pedagogy. In 2006, taking into account these new findings and lessons learned, ISSA began updating the Standards. In this revision, ISSA felt a need to make even more explicit its belief in equal opportunities and quality education, as well as to incorporate the latest research. ISSA also sought to improve the use of the Standards as a professional development tool.

A Core Group of Quality Experts consisting of ISSA representatives worked on the revision process in consultation with other ECD experts from around the world with the support of OSI, ISSA's Program Committee, and ISSA's Advisory Board. Keeping the tradition of approaching the development of the Standards as a collaborative effort, drafts were discussed during meetings of experts from the ISSA network, as well as at ISSA Council Meetings, to ensure that they reflect common beliefs and are relevant to the needs of the region.



ISSA's approach to quality ECD and “Competent Educators of the 21st Century”

Originally, the ISSA Pedagogical Standards consisted of six areas: Individualization, Learning Environment, Family Participation, Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning, Planning and Assessment, and Professional Development. These standards were based on ISSA's core values and addressed areas where the most significant changes in practice were needed. They were also related to the structure of the professional development activities during the implementation of the Step by Step Program in the region. In 2005 an additional area was added: a standard on social inclusion to emphasize respect for diversity as an integral part of quality pedagogy and democratic society. The social inclusion standard challenged educators to reflect on their own beliefs and everyday practice and to help children recognize and respect diversity.

Competent Educators of the 21st Century consists of seven focus areas that reflect ISSA's main beliefs about quality pedagogy and identify ways to aspire to excellence:

1. Interactions
2. Family and Community
3. Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy
4. Assessment and Planning
5. Teaching Strategies
6. Learning Environment
7. Professional Development

According to ISSA members, these areas are crucial to ensure high quality support for children's development and learning. The seven areas promote practices that are guided by humanistic and socio-constructivist principles, emphasizing developmentally appropriate practices, individualized approach, and the idea that learning occurs in interaction, and is a dialogue between children and adults, as well as between children, which is marked by respecting each other, stimulating and giving autonomy to the learner, and assuming that children are competent and full citizens even while they need support from adults. ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy recognize and promote the important role of the professional as a knowledgeable, sensitive individual who guides and scaffolds children in their journey of exploration and learning and works in close partnership with families as the first teachers of their children and communities as a natural resource for learning and inquiry.



From the very beginning, ISSA's Pedagogical Standards have always been built upon ISSA's values. In the process of revision, some aspects of these values have been emphasized even more strongly, such as:

- The rights-based approach to education which emphasizes the responsibility of educators to implement more inclusive practice.
- The agency of the child and her/his involvement in his/her own development, with a strong emphasis on the promotion of children's autonomy, initiative, sense of individuality, and identity, while supporting and acknowledging the development of multiple identities.
- The young child as a citizen now with a strong voice, rights, and responsibilities; and the role of educator to support him/her to be a responsible member of society, to develop a sense of empathy and concern for others, to develop an openness and respect for diversity, to acquire skills to form, express, and justify their opinions, to listen respectfully and be tolerant to the opinions of others, and to resolve conflict.
- The development of life-long learning competences, including interpersonal and civic competences, awareness about environmental issues and sustainable development, intercultural understanding, entrepreneurship, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills.



Who can benefit from ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy: Target audiences and potential application

It is our intention that this document will serve as a framework for building and strengthening partnerships with a wide range of audiences, as each of us in one way or another influences children's early years experiences.

We invite *national and international stakeholders and decision-makers* to engage in discussion on how to provide better support to educators within pre-service and in-service programs to help them not only to acquire theoretical knowledge, but also to learn how to become thoughtful and reflective practitioners and to see their role in developing future generations. The ISSA Pedagogical Standards have already been used to inform the development of national documents, such as Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)¹, program standards, and others. ISSA is happy to continue this cooperation by offering our vision and rich theoretical base collected and incorporated into a comprehensive set of materials.

We encourage the *international community of ECDE professionals* to join us for discussion on how such frameworks and benchmarks can help to advocate for ongoing support for high quality teacher preparation and continuous professional development. So far, the Standards have been used to help educators understand how to improve the quality of early childhood experiences as well as child outcomes in different national contexts and to approach professional development in the broader framework of child-centered, interactive pedagogy. ISSA invites the international ECDE community to broaden the dialogue and cooperation on quality pedagogy, expanding the use of ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy as a tool to advocate for quality education for every child.

We address *higher education faculty*, those who would prepare future educators to use this document in teaching programs as a tool for observation, discussion, and reflection at the classroom level, as well as a resource for exploring the anatomy of change in the approach to ECDE in the region. The set of supporting materials developed by professionals from the ISSA network, **Putting Knowledge into Practice**, can be used for developing pre-service and in-service courses as well as rich material for independent studies. ISSA member organizations in each country are glad to engage in partnerships and offer their expertise and resources.

We trust that *practitioners* will be inspired by ISSA's *Principles of Quality Pedagogy* and will find the supporting materials useful for engaging in professional discussions, monitoring, and improvement of their own practice, as well as developing learning communities for mutual support both at the school or preschool level and internationally. Teachers and others working with young children increasingly realize that they are and should be agents of change, as they play a crucial role in

** ISSA Members have worked closely with national educational authorities and UNICEF to develop, pilot, and implement Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) in several countries, including Armenia, Tajikistan, Georgia, and others."*

developing self-esteem and self-confidence, lifelong learning skills, the disposition for living and working with others, and respect for diversity. They need space for their own development on a personal and pedagogical level, to be able to model and share these qualities with the children in their charge. In the English version of the publications in ISSA's Resource Pack on Quality Pedagogy, we use the term *educator* to refer to all practitioners working with young children from birth to age 8/10. Those who will translate these resources are encouraged to use the most relevant term or terms if they are different for practitioners working with different age groups.

We hope that the principles reflected in *The Competent Educators of the 21st Century* will not only help *parents* to make better choices and advocate for quality programs for their children, but will also help them to appreciate the important role of all people who support their children's development and learning on a daily basis. We hope that this document will excite some ideas in parents themselves on how to engage in more meaningful interactions with their children and to use the home learning environment to support children's natural curiosity.

We offer to *everybody* to use the principles included in *The Competent Educators of the 21st Century* as a starting point for discussion on what we want our societies to be in the future, and what we can do to help our children create and live in such societies.

There are several important conditions for an innovation to become sustainable. It must support the goals of education and produce better learning outcomes to maintain educators' motivation



and to convince external stakeholders like parents, administrators, and policymakers. Another important condition is the degree of independence that educators have while applying new ideas and tools in their classrooms.

The ISSA *Principles of Quality Pedagogy* offer a framework for innovation, self-assessment, and improvement, and urge the user to explore new territories in wonderful interactions with children. ISSA's experts have put together principles that, we hope, will inspire, suggest, and guide our thinking and practice; it is not meant to impose or restrict. This is why ISSA is proud to offer them to the international community of practitioners and everybody who cares about children.

Who made this work possible

All theory is lifeless if it is not proven by examples of practice. Principles of good pedagogy do not make sense if they do not create happy experiences, success, and achievement in children, professional growth and satisfaction in educators, and the recognition of parents, families, and communities.

Thanks to the unique long-term trust and support of the Open Society Institute (OSI), the Step by Step Program and ISSA have been able to develop an extensive body of evidence that the principles of quality pedagogy are recognized and incorporated in the region at all levels, from policies to everyday practice. OSI and ISSA share the urge to promote, improve, and sustain quality and make it accessible to each child in the region.

The everyday work of thousands of educators, caregivers, school administrators, NGO activists, and their partners in 28 ISSA member countries for more than a decade gives credibility to the ideas presented in the ISSA *Principles of Quality Pedagogy*.

An exceptional group of knowledgeable and dedicated experts from the ISSA region have contributed endless hours to discussing and defining what lies at the heart of quality pedagogy. It has been hard work, but it also has been great fun. It has built the level of expertise in the region. It has also raised the credibility of the organization and its voice in the international arena of ECDE. Our work has been guided, supported, and encouraged by outstanding professionals from different parts of the world engaging in respectful professional discussion where each participant has both gained and contributed.

ISSA expresses its gratitude and appreciation to each of you who have joined your voices with ours in pursuit of the highest quality early years experiences for children.

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PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY PEDAGOGY



Principles of Quality Pedagogy: Focus Areas

1. **Interactions**
2. **Family and Community**
3. **Inclusion, Diversity, and Values of Democracy**
4. **Assessment and Planning**
5. **Teaching Strategies**
6. **Learning Environment**
7. **Professional Development**



1. Interactions

Interactions between adults and children, as well as peer interactions, are of key importance to supporting and influencing children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. They are also crucial in promoting children's learning on an ongoing basis by encouraging them to develop and exchange knowledge, experiences, feelings, and opinions. It is through interactions that children develop a sense of self, a sense of being a member of a community, and knowledge of the world.

The role of the educator is to provide opportunities for children to engage in interactions, to participate in processes to co-construct knowledge and meaning, to support their learning and development in a caring way, and to model respectful and supportive interactions among all adults involved in children's lives.

Interactions that demonstrate and foster meaningful and respectful exchanges among all participants in the process, where everyone's voices are heard, promote children's development as self-confident learners and as contributing and caring members of society.

PRINCIPLES

1.1

The educator interacts with children in a friendly and respectful manner that supports the development of each child's construction of self/identity and learning.

1.2

The educator's interactions promote the development of a learning community where each child feels s/he belongs and is supported to reach his/her potential.

1.3

The educator engages in purposeful, reciprocal interactions with other adults to support children's development and learning.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator's interactions are warm and caring, expressing appreciation and enjoyment of children.
 2. The educator's interactions with and expectations of children are consistent with the process of child development and learning.
 3. The educator interacts frequently with individual children throughout the day, building on their strengths and stimulating their learning and development.
 4. The educator's interactions are responsive to each child's emotional, social, physical, and cognitive strengths and needs.
 5. The educator provides opportunities for children to make choices and to have those choices realized and respected by others.
 6. The educator's interactions with children develop their initiative, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and leadership.
1. The educator facilitates peer interactions among children to promote their social development, building shared understanding, mutual support, and a sense of community to help them reach learning and developmental goals.
 2. The educator offers activities that help children learn to distinguish feelings, to recognize them in themselves and their peers, and to communicate about them.
 3. The educator promotes democratic values by encouraging every child to express his/her opinion in an appropriate way and participate in decision making.
 4. The educator promotes and supports the development of children's language and communication in multiple ways throughout the day.
1. The educator engages in respectful social interactions with families, other staff members, and community members, and models and promotes such interactions.
 2. The educator cooperates with other professionals in the school and community to promote children's development and learning.



2. Family and Community

Strong partnerships among educators, families, and other community members are essential for children's learning and development. Recognizing the role of the home learning environment and family as the first educational and social setting of a child, the educator must build bridges between the school and family/community and promote ongoing two-way communication.

The different compositions, backgrounds, lifestyles, and characteristics of the families and communities of the children must be taken into account in order to support children's learning and development. The educator's sensitivity and responsiveness to families is demonstrated through appreciating the multiple ways that families can contribute to the learning of their children, the life of the classroom, and the school.

By facilitating effective communication and interactions among families, school, and community, the educator supports the shared recognition of everyone's interests in and responsibilities toward the education and future of children and promotes social cohesion on a larger scale.

PRINCIPLES

2.1

The educator promotes partnerships with families and provides a variety of opportunities for families and community members to be involved in children's learning and development.

2.2

The educator uses formal and informal opportunities for communication and information sharing with families.

2.3

The educator uses community resources and family culture to enrich children's development and learning experiences.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator invites and welcomes family members into the classroom and finds ways for all families to participate in the educational process and life of the learning community.
 2. The educator involves family members in shared decision making about their children's learning, development, and social life in the classroom.
 3. The educator involves family members in decision-making concerning children's learning environments.
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1. The educator regularly communicates with families about their children, their learning and development, curriculum requirements, and events in the classroom.
 2. The educator regularly communicates with families to learn about a child's background in order to gain insights into the child's strengths, interests, and needs.
 3. The educator promotes opportunities for families to learn from one another and to support each other.
 4. The educator keeps information about families and children confidential.
-
1. The educator takes children into the community or brings community members into the school in order to enhance children's learning and socialization.
 2. The educator assists families in obtaining information, resources, and services needed to enhance children's learning and development.
 3. The educator uses knowledge of children's communities and families as an integral part of the curriculum and their learning experiences.
 4. The educator offers information and ideas for parents and family members on how to create a stimulating home learning environment and helps to strengthen parent competences.



3. Inclusion, Diversity, and Values of Democracy

Promoting the right of every child and family to be included, respected, and valued, to participate, to work toward common goals, and to reach their full potential with a special focus on the most vulnerable is integral to quality pedagogy. It is crucial that everyday practice reflect the beliefs embraced in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and national documents.

The educator serves as a model and assures that through everyday experiences, children learn to appreciate and value diversity and to develop the skills to participate. The educator promotes recognition of diverse needs, effective cooperation toward common goals, and respect for special interests and needs of particular children or groups. Each child is to be perceived as an active participant in the educational process, as an individual, and as an equal member of the community and larger society.

PRINCIPLES

3.1

The educator provides equal opportunities for every child and family to learn and participate regardless of gender, race, ethnic origin, culture, native language, religion, family structure, social status, economic status, age, or special need.

3.2

The educator helps children understand, accept, and appreciate diversity.

3.3

The educator develops children's understanding of the values of civil society and the skills required for participation.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator is aware of her/his own beliefs, attitudes, and experiences and how they affect communication with children, families, and teaching.
 2. The educator treats each child with respect, dignity, and consideration and provides equal opportunities to engage in the life of the school.
 3. The educator treats every family with respect, dignity, and consideration and finds ways to involve them in their child's education.
 4. The educator uses language and activities that avoid gender and other stereotypes.
 5. The educator makes adaptations to the environment and to learning activities so that children with different capabilities, educational needs, and social backgrounds can participate in most activities.
-
1. The educator appreciates and incorporates into his/her teaching the diversity that exists among the children, families, and within the community.
 2. The educator uses opportunities to draw children's attention to the diversity that exists outside the school in a respectful manner and affirms its presence.
-
1. The educator strengthens children's appreciation and respect for different preferences and points of view, and helps children develop skills to express their views appropriately.
 2. The educator assists children in understanding how stereotypes and prejudices can influence their attitudes and behaviors.
 3. The educator encourages children to treat others with equity, fairness, respect, and dignity and to expect the same from others.
 4. The educator introduces the concept of personal responsibility in caring for the environment and provides opportunities for children to practice the concept.



4. Assessment and Planning

Quality pedagogy recognizes the roles of assessment and planning in promoting learning that enables every child to succeed. The educator combines developmentally appropriate expectations, national requirements, freedom for creativity and exploration, and the interests and needs of individual children and groups of children into a cohesive framework. The assessment-planning cycle supports each child's development and learning, building upon children's natural curiosity, previous knowledge and skills, interests, and experiences.

It is important that the process promotes the development of self-assessment and lifelong learning skills and dispositions. By systematically observing children and using other appropriate strategies, educators create educational long-term and short-term plans centered around the interests and needs of individual children and groups, providing both scaffolding and challenges for future achievement.

The educator develops plans based on what children already do, know, and understand, and identifies what is needed to support each child to reach his or her full potential. Plans accommodate the diversity of learning styles and abilities of individual children and are modified when necessary. Children, families, and relevant professionals are included in the assessment and planning cycle. The process is both focused and flexible, taking into account how learning is progressing and what is happening in the life of the child, the community, and the world, determining where improvements can be made and identifying the next steps.

PRINCIPLES

4.1

The educator regularly and systematically monitors each child's progress, learning processes, and achievements.

4.2

The educator plans for teaching and learning based on information about children and national requirements.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator uses systematic observation and other diverse and developmentally appropriate formative assessment tools that reflect on the process and outcomes of learning and development.
 2. The educator assesses the level of children's involvement necessary for meaningful learning and participation and makes adjustments in activities accordingly.
 3. The educator ensures that the assessment process takes into account and builds upon children's strengths, individual needs, and interests.
-
1. The educator plans activities that are based on the developmental levels and interests of the children to enable them to acquire relevant competences.
 2. The educator balances planned activities with child-initiated activities and choices, including finding ways to support children's individual leaning styles and paces.
 3. The educator uses a comprehensive planning approach that provides for a balance of individual, small group, and whole group learning experiences.
 4. The educator plans for a sufficient variation of activities to keep children engaged and to provide new challenges for them.
 5. The educator's plans and actions are flexible enough to acknowledge and incorporate changing conditions and children's needs and interests.

4.3

The educator includes children, families, and relevant professionals in the assessment and planning process.

1. The educator assists children in becoming skillful at self-assessment and making decisions about their own learning and behavior based on clear and consistent criteria.
2. The educator guides children on how to evaluate others' behaviors and work.
3. The educator and family members share information regarding children's progress and interests and together create short-term and long-term individual goals.
4. The educator includes relevant professionals in the assessment and planning process where appropriate.



Between the extremes of abstract and over-simplifying universalism and relativism which makes no higher demand beyond the horizon of each particular culture, one needs to assert both the right to be different and receptiveness to universal values.

—UNESCO, Jacques Delors,
Learning: The Treasure Within





5. Teaching Strategies

A quality pedagogical process builds on the belief that care, learning, and nurturing form a coherent whole, and that every child's well-being and engagement are prerequisites for learning. While recognizing that learning happens in different ways and in diverse situations, the ultimate goal of the pedagogical process is to set high but achievable expectations for each child, and to promote curiosity, exploration, critical thinking, and cooperation, so that every child develops the skills and dispositions for lifelong learning.

The strategies educators use to promote learning should reflect democratic values; cognitive development and academic achievement must be combined with social development. Strategies should develop the skills children need to become responsible members of society, such as a sense of empathy and concern for others and openness and respect for diversity. Educators should provide children with opportunities to form, express, and justify their opinions, as well as to make choices and intelligent decisions and to reach consensus. The educator is responsible for making the decisions and choices about which teaching strategies provide the best support for each child to be successful as a learner and to achieve outcomes defined by national requirements and personal development goals.

PRINCIPLES

5.1

The educator implements a variety of teaching strategies that actively engage children to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions as defined by national requirements, and which build the foundation for lifelong learning.

5.2

The educator uses teaching strategies that support children's emotional and social development.

5.3

The educator designs activities taking into account children's experiences and competences to support and expand further development and learning.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator uses a range of active-learning strategies that address all developmental areas of a child in a holistic manner.
 2. The educator offers activities that encourage exploration, experimentation, independent inquiry, and creativity.
 3. The educator uses strategies to promote higher-order thinking and problem solving.
 4. The educator recognizes, values, and creates diverse opportunities for informal learning outside of direct instructional time.
 5. The educator shares learning goals with children and encourages children to reflect on their learning processes and outcomes.
 6. The educator encourages children to use available, developmentally appropriate technologies to support their learning and to develop skills required for active participation in an information society.
-
1. The educator offers activities that foster children's sense of individuality and identity.
 2. The educator uses strategies that build children's autonomy and initiative.
 3. The educator uses strategies that promote children's self-regulation.
 4. The educator uses strategies that help children build positive relationships and cooperation with others.
 5. The educator supports the development of children's abilities to resolve conflict.
-
1. The educator connects learning new concepts and skills with children's previous knowledge and experiences.
 2. The educator provides an adequate amount of effective scaffolding to children according to their needs and progress.
 3. The educator encourages children to set goals and expectations for their own work and to reflect on the results of learning.
 4. The educator integrates learning experiences so that children can see the interrelations among learning concepts and everyday experiences and can apply them in real situations.

5-4
The educator uses strategies that promote democratic processes and procedures.

1. The educator models and applies processes and procedures that encourage meaningful cooperation and support among children.
2. The educator uses strategies that promote children's participation and understanding of responsibility and its consequences.
3. The educator uses strategies that help children learn about boundaries, rules, and limits, and learn to respect the rights of others in a democratic society.
4. The educator offers opportunities for children to make choices both in the learning process and other situations and helps to develop an understanding of the consequences of choices made.

Careful the things you say, children will listen. Careful the things you do, children will see. And learn. Children may not obey – but children will listen. Children will look to you for which way to turn, to learn what to be. Careful before you say, “listen to me.” Children will listen.

—Rapunzel’s Mother, from the Stephen Sondheim’s musical *Into the Woods*







6. Learning Environment

The learning environment greatly influences children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. By creating a physically and psychologically safe and stimulating environment that offers a variety of developmentally appropriate materials, tasks, and situations, the educator encourages children's learning through independent and group exploration, play, access to diverse resources, and interaction with other children and adults.

By ensuring that every child feels welcomed, the educator gives children the message that every individual is respected, that each child and family is an important part of the classroom community, and that every child has opportunities to benefit from the shared community space and resources and to participate in maintaining them. By offering children a secure environment and accommodating specific learning needs, the educator encourages children to work cooperatively, to engage in different kinds of activities, and to take learning risks. Outdoor areas of the school and community resources are also valuable components of a rich learning environment.

PRINCIPLES

6.1

The educator provides a learning environment that promotes each child's well-being.

6.2

The educator provides an inviting, safe, healthy, stimulating, and inclusive physical environment that promotes children's exploration, learning, and independence.

6.3

The educator provides an environment that promotes children's sense of community and participation in creating the classroom's culture.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator creates an environment that ensures each child's sense of belonging and comfort.
 2. The educator shows respect for children by being interested in their feelings, ideas, and experiences.
 3. The educator creates an atmosphere where children are encouraged to express themselves.
 4. The educator creates an environment that stimulates children to take appropriate risks for development and learning.
 5. The educator encourages each child to develop attachment and an individual relationship with her/him.
-
1. The educator ensures that the learning environment is physically safe and easily supervised.
 2. The educator ensures that the space is inviting to the children and comfortable for them to engage in a variety of activities.
 3. The educator organizes the space into logically defined interest areas that support learning and development.
 4. The educator incorporates varied, plentiful, accessible, and developmentally appropriate materials that stimulate children to explore, play, and learn.
 5. The educator encourages children to participate in planning, arranging, and maintaining their environment.
 6. The educator modifies the physical environment to meet the needs of individual children and groups of children.
-
1. The educator communicates clear expectations for behavior and involves children in creating rules when appropriate.
 2. The educator creates an environment that is built upon democratic values and promotes participation.
 3. The educator uses consistent routines to promote children's self-regulation and independence.
 4. The educator guides children's behaviors based upon knowledge of each child's personality and developmental level.



7. Professional Development

Quality pedagogy is implemented by educators who continually engage in ongoing professional and personal development, reflect on their practice, and work cooperatively with others modeling enjoyment of the process of lifelong learning. The educator's responsibility is to implement requirements set by national authorities in ways that are based on the belief that every child can be a successful learner. It is also to provide the best support for each child's development and learning.

The educator models and shares the enjoyment of learning and the skills that foster it, responding to new challenges in everyday life and work, changes in society, increasing amounts of information, and the rise of new technologies. Through active participation, critical reflection, and partnerships with others, educators improve the quality of their professional performance, promote their profession, and increase their ability to advocate for quality education for all children.

PRINCIPLES

7.1

The educator continually improves his/her competences to reach and maintain high quality in the teaching profession according to the changing demands of today's world.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator recognizes the importance of lifelong learning by participating in a variety of personal and professional development opportunities.
2. The educator reflects, assesses, seeks feedback, and evaluates the quality of his/her pedagogical practice and level of professional teaching knowledge and makes appropriate changes when necessary.
3. The educator works cooperatively to enhance the overall quality of her/his own practice and that of the profession.
4. The educator acts as decision maker in the profession using knowledge, skills, and independent and critical thinking.
5. The educator engages in public community activities to promote the importance of quality teaching and access to quality education for every child and respect for the teaching profession.



For me as parent, the professionalism of the teachers is important. My trust for the teachers is very high and when I know that teachers improve their knowledge and skills, it helps me to concentrate on my work during the day.

—Parent, Slovakia



RESOURCES

Resources

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ABOUT ISSA

About ISSA

ISSA – Promoting Quality Education and Equal Opportunities from the Start

The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is a membership organization that connects professionals and organizations from 29 countries – primarily in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – working in the field of early childhood development and education. Since its establishment in 1999, ISSA has built upon the substantial investment and success of OSI's Step by Step Program and upon the vibrant network and movement resulting from the program, with the aim of improving the lives of children and their chances for success in life. Over the years, ISSA has grown to become the pre-eminent early childhood development network in CEE/CIS.

STRATEGIC GOALS FOR 2010–2012

1. Promote accessible and equitable care and education for young children in the region:

Contribute to the development of full potential and to assure equal access to quality care and education for all children, as an imperative of children's rights, with special emphasis on children from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, from isolated rural areas, and from other vulnerable groups, such as ethnic/language minorities and children with disabilities.

2. Promote high quality and professionalism in providing care and education for young children:

Contribute significantly to promoting and implementing quality care and education for all children, with special emphasis on development and education in the early years, and for children of preschool and primary school age.

3. Promote civil society participation, community-based ECD, and parental education:

Help ensure greater support for and inclusion of the family, as well as community participation in children's development and learning.

4. Enhance the capacity of the ISSA network to deliver its strategy:

Develop the skills of its membership, ensure good governance practices and management systems to achieve its program/advocacy goals, and to build the association's sustainability in the medium to long term.

ISSA Provides Its Members With:

- Professional development and capacity-building
- Information-sharing and networking
- Technical support in design and implementation of ECD programs
- International advocacy
- Participation in joint projects
- Publications
- Annual conferences and other events

ISSA Services – grounds for cooperation and partnerships:

- Resources, technical assistance, and training in ECD, in a variety of areas including creating child-centered, interactive, inclusive environments in preschool and primary classrooms; supporting education that values democracy, diversity, and social justice; promoting parent empowerment; and offering bilingual education, among others.
- Training, mentoring, and support for reaching a common understanding about quality pedagogy in ECD, based Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy.
- Training for adults in education for social justice, advocacy, parenting skills, curriculum development, and project design and implementation.
- Training programs/modules, curricula, and teaching materials for different audiences.
- Illustrated children's picture books that are available in different languages and include guidelines for educators and parents.

ISSA MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

ALBANIA	Qendra Hap pas Hapi
ARMENIA	Step by Step Benevolent Foundation
AZERBAIJAN	Center for Innovations in Education
BELARUS	Belorussian Parents' and Teachers' League Step by Step
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step
BULGARIA	Step by Step Program Foundation
CROATIA	Open Academy Step by Step
CZECH REPUBLIC	Step by Step Czech Republic Foundation
ESTONIA	Hea Algus
GEORGIA	Center for Educational Initiatives
HAITI	Step by Step Program/Tipa Tipa
HUNGARY	Ec-Pec Foundation
KAZAKHSTAN	Community Foundation Step by Step
KOSOVO	Kosova Education Center
KYRGYZSTAN	Foundation for Education Initiatives Support
LATVIA	Center for Education Initiatives
LITHUANIA	Center for Innovative Education
MACEDONIA	Step by Step Foundation for Educational and Cultural Initiatives of Macedonia
MOLDOVA	Step by Step Educational Program
MONGOLIA	Mongolian Education Alliance, Step by Step Program
MONTENEGRO	Pedagogical Center of Montenegro
ROMANIA	Step by Step Centre for Education and Professional Development
RUSSIA	Russian Foundation for Education Development «Soobschestvo»
SERBIA	Centre for Interactive Pedagogy
SLOVAKIA	Wide Open School Foundation
SLOVENIA	Educational Research Institute, Centre for Educational Initiatives—Step by Step
TAJIKISTAN	Branch Office of the International Organization of Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation in the Republic of Tajikistan
UKRAINE	Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation
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ISSA – An innovative network of early childhood development professionals and organizations primarily in Central/Eastern Europe and Central Asia, working to make quality early childhood education accessible to all children

