From Tacit to Explicit: Nonformal and formal education as key factors for meaningful learning

Resources, Experience and Approaches from ISSA

Roma Decade Meeting, Poprad, Slovakia, November, 2009

20th anniversary - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Opportunity to re-commit to its messages:

- **UNCRC guarantees the right of every child to be treated "without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status."**

- **General Comment 7, recognizes and emphasizes early childhood as a particularly critical period for the realization of child rights.**

Practices in European countries

- Important progress has been made in the field of **children's rights**

- Yet, Roma children continue to be discriminated against through their limited access to or exclusion from quality early childhood services, which contribute to high school drop-out rates and/or low education outcomes – less success in life.

- Continuous efforts are needed to ensure that policies, measures and practices are constantly improved and adapted to the CRC standards.

About ISSA – Joining to advocate for and improve access and quality

- **The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) connects professionals and organizations working in ECD. With a network of partners across the globe, ISSA has as core members 28 NGOs in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia that implement the Step by Step Program initiated by OSI in 1994.**

- **Expanding the network of ISSA members in the region.**

- **ISSA promotes <u>inclusive, quality care and education experiences</u> that create the conditions for all children to become active members of democratic knowledge societies.**

ISSA's 3 goals in formal and nonformal education

- Promote **access and equity** of care and education for young children in the region

- Promote **high quality and professionalism** in providing care and education for young children

- Promote **civil society participation**, community-based ECD services and parental education

ISSA's Core Beliefs

All children need stimulating quality early childhood development experiences that honor their unique characteristics and provide love, warmth, and provide strong foundations for positive and successful learning experiences throughout the life

All families need encouragement and support from their community so they can achieve their own goals and provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children

Children are already citizens of our communities, countries, and global society and as such require and deserve their rights and needs to be put on the first place and their voices heard

The Golden Triangle

To improve the well being and life chances of young children is a matter that concerns all segments of society and should, therefore, also draw on all these segments.

The "golden triangle": **informal**, **nonformal** and **formal** ECD (van Oudenhoven and Jualla)

ECD should not be restricted only to formal approaches – informal and nonformal ECD have great potential in their own rights and can significantly enhance formal ECD. Resources available in the family or in the community should not be ignored, but built upon and enhanced.

Definitions: Education in the broadest sense

- "...fostering and supporting the general well-being and development of children and young people and their ability to interact effectively with their environment and to live a good life" (Moss)

- "…a pedagogical approach where care, nurturing and learning form a coherent whole" (Swedish preschool curriculum)

- ECD = **all activities** geared at promoting the well-being and healthy development of young children – academic and social learning skills

Definitions: Informal Education – *Education by All*

- Activities that are not officially controlled by written agreements or regulations.
- "Informal ECD takes place in the family, in the interaction between parents and children, among the children, in the spontaneous encounters between people, things and the children, both inside and outside the house."
  (van Oudenhoven and Jualla)

Definitions: Nonformal Education Community-Based Education

- Activities are governed by agreements, happen on a voluntary basis and without governmental interference, although they should function within the framework of the law.

- Examples: parents groups, play groups, home-based care, or home-visiting programmes.

- Degree of nonformality may vary between rather loosely to strictly organized.

Features of Successful Informal and Nonformal Education

- focus the attention on the whole child – no separation between development at physical, cognitive or social levels

- can be mixed age groups

- lower cost than formal education

- validate, build on, further develop strengths already present in families and communities.

- can more easily answer to specific needs in contexts of diversity

CHALLENGE: understanding, ensuring and assessing **quality**

Definitions: Formal Education – Center-Based Education

- "Statutory forms of provision framed by statutory laws introduced and monitored by central or local authorities. ECD is part of the established system and is characterized by formally-trained teachers, an officially-backed up curriculum and standards, external monitoring and inspection, and ongoing financial inputs." (van Oudenhoven and Jualla)

- Examples: centre-based kindergartens and the 'downward-extended' classes of the basic schools (preparatory year)

CHALLENGE: understanding, ensuring and assessing **quality**

Research defines what is important in ECD experiences

Results of research demonstrate that the **quality of experiences** that children have in ECD programs is what determines whether the programs are effective in helping children be successful later on in school and in life in general.

Programs that provide **quality experiences** for children have in common:

- quality of interactions between adults and children - building vocabulary and extending children's thinking
- quality of climate and emotional connection that adults and children have
- regard for children's interests and motivations
- quality of support in the home learning environment

Access without quality is of little merit

ISSA's definition of **Quality**:

- Inclusiveness: equitable access to high quality services for all children
- Child-centred, child friendly pedagogy with well-being, needs and interests of the child in central place
- Highly qualified professionals
- Systems of supportive supervision and ongoing professional development
- Stimulating, physically safe and healthy learning environment
- Involvement of families and communities

ISSA Standards

Competent Teachers of the 21st Century: ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy

1. Ability to engage in quality INTERACTIONS with children
2. Partnerships with FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES
3. Focus on INCLUSION, DIVERSITY AND VALUES OF DEMOCRACY
4. Appropriate use of ASSESSMENT of children and PLANNING for activities
5. Use of appropriate TEACHING STRATEGIES that focus on the development of the whole child
6. Creation of child-centered LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
7. Ongoing PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Seven Focus Areas of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards

Interactions	Families and Communities	Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy	Assessment and Planning	Teaching Strategies	Learning Environment	Professional Development
Quality interactions on different levels are of key importance in pedagogical processes to promote in children a positive sense of self; belonging to a community; and supporting their social, emotional and cognitive development as the basis for life-long learning and future success.	Quality pedagogy recognizes the importance of the role of family and community for children's development and learning. Building partnerships and strengthening participation in the educational process recognizes everyone's interest and responsibilities in ensuring that all children thrive.	Quality pedagogy promotes the right of every child and their family to be included, respected, and valued; to participate; to work towards common goals; and to reach their full potential with a special focus on the most vulnerable. Through everyday experiences, children learn to appreciate and value diversity and develop the skills to participate as active citizens.	Quality pedagogy recognizes the roles of assessment and planning to promote the ongoing processes of learning where every child can succeed. They combine developmentally appropriate expectations, freedom for creativity and exploration, national requirements, and the interests and needs of the individual and groups of children into a cohesive framework.	Quality pedagogy is achieved through teaching strategies that promote active learning and are based on democratic values. Holistically planned, diverse, and meaningful activities promote children's well-being and engagement as pre-requisites for development and learning.	Quality pedagogy takes place in well-planned, physically and emotionally safe, and stimulating environments that promote democratic values and each child's development, learning, and sense of belonging as a member of the classroom community.	Quality pedagogy is implemented by teachers who continuously engage in ongoing professional and personal development, reflect on their practice, and work cooperatively with others modeling enjoyment of the process of life-long learning.

1.1

The teacher 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 teacher'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 teacher engages in *purposeful, reciprocal interactions* with *key adults* to support children's development and learning.

2.1

The teacher promotes *partnerships with families* and provides a variety of opportunities for families and community members to be involved in school life.

2.2

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

2.3

The teacher uses *community resources and family experiences* to enrich children's development and learning experiences.

3.1

The teacher provides *equal opportunities for all children and families 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 teacher helps children understand, accept and appreciate *diversity.*

3.3

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

4.1

The teacher *regularly and systematically monitors* each child's development, learning processes and achievements.

4.2

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

4.3

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

5.1

The teacher implements a *variety of teaching strategies that actively engage children* to develop knowledge, skills and dispositions as defined by national curriculums and that promote life-long learning.

5.2

The teacher uses teaching strategies that *promote children's emotional and social development.*

5.3

The teacher designs learning activities taking into account *children's experiences and competences* to support and expand further learning

5.4

The teacher uses strategies that *promote democratic processes and procedures.*

6.1

The teacher provides a classroom learning environment that promotes each child's emotional well being.

6.2

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

6.3

The teacher provides an environment that promotes the children's sense of community and participative management of children's behaviors.

7.1

The teacher continuously improves his/her competencies so as to reach and maintain high quality in the teaching profession according to the contemporary trends and demands of today's world.

ISSA's Revised Standards – Seven Focus Areas

1. Interactions

2. Families and Communities

3. Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy

4. Assessment and Planning

5. Teaching Strategies

6. Learning Environment

7. Professional Development

Impact of *ISSA's Standards* between 2002-2008

The ***ISSA Pedagogical Standards*** were found to effectively influence:

- Individual teachers and their daily classroom practices

- Existing education systems designed to prepare, improve and monitor teachers

- The development and institutionalization of new national education priorities, policies and practices

- Understanding of quality among different stakeholders

# Preparation of Teachers and Paraprofessionals

In Formal Education

- required level of education/training for persons working with young children – not only diplomas but also competences – teachers with *right minds and right hearts*
- Often professionals in CEE/CIS regions need additional competences (skills, knowledge and attitudes) to work with diverse populations, since such competences were not part of their formal preparation.
- Importance of ongoing professional development

In Nonformal Education

- Paraprofessionals can be effective if supervised by well trained professionals.
- Paraprofessionals that come from the community also help bridge connections between families and formal educational institutions.

Informal, nonformal and formal – reinforcing each other

Informal

Nonformal
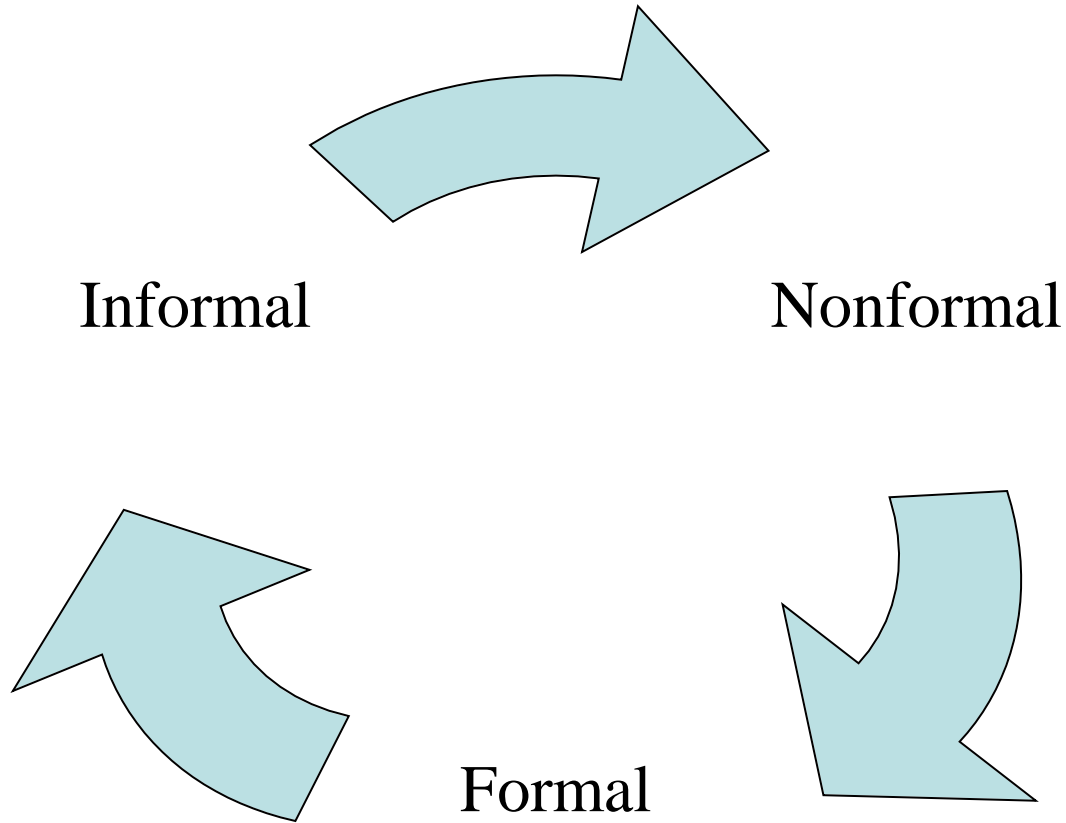
Formal

From tacit to explicit

- It is important to recognize children's existing knowledge and competences and to link/translate them into requirements and expectations of formal learning
- Teachers have to be trained and sensitized how to connect the child's curiosity and learning outside the school (life) with curricula (school).
- Belief in the potential of **every child**

ECD as meeting places Building social cohesion

Comprehensive ECD can model, reflect and teach **social inclusion**. Sustainable results in community-based programs where children and families from **different community groups participate together**, based on the common interests of parents.

Additional components:

- parents' personal self-development
- greater interaction and communication in the community
- more effective use of resources
- greater emotional involvement

Case Studies from ISSA network :

Albania, Armenia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Macedonia and Slovakia

Education for Social Justice

ISSA offers 3 training modules to go beyond mere tolerance of differences, and aim at transforming schools and education systems to be more open to diversity and inclusion:

- ***Education for Social Justice: A Program for Adults*** presents the background to the subject, theory, and activities for adults engaged in any profession;

- ***Educating for Diversity: Education for Social Justice Activities for Classrooms*** presents classroom-based learning activities for early childhood educators to use in their work with children;

- ***Effective Teaching and Learning for Minority-Language Children*** presents the background to the subject, theory and activities for teachers of minority-language children who are learning a second language; promotes the use of the children's own language and culture in the classroom. [Awarded Honor from EU]

Community-based Programs and Support to Families

Integrated Teaching Materials for Extended Early Childhood Programs and Parent Education

- *Parenting With Confidence 0-3. Enhancing Children's Development in the First Three Years*

- *Parenting With Confidence 3-6. Enhancing the Development of Young Children*

- *Getting Ready for School: Fun Activities for Caregivers and Children*:
    - **Children's Materials,**
    - **Parent Activity Guide and**
    - **Facilitators Guide**

Support to Families Promoting Early Literacy

- ISSA's **Reading Corner** Children's Books: 32 titles to date created by authors and illustrators from the ISSA network. List of titles available in the Online Bookstore at www.issa.nl.

- **Opening Magic Doors: Reading and Learning Together with Children**

  Activity kits for caregivers and family members taking care of   children ages 2-3, 4-5, and 6-8. Each kit includes an activity book and four different age-appropriate children books. http://www.issa.nl/rc_kits.html

Principles for Inclusive ECD Provisions

- ***ECD provisions should be affordable for all families*** Subsidies to attend formal pre-school centers or other kinds of provisions need to be made available for Roma families.

- ***ECD provisions should be close to parents and local communities***. Parental involvement in the everyday working of the school can increase school success.

- ***ECD provisions should be responsive and closely linked with other services***. Pre-schools or other ECD programs should work closely with community groups and social services to ensure that efforts are coordinated, and that the school is truly responsive to community needs and interests.

- ***ECD provisions should offer flexible programs that meet users' needs.*** All-day access may not be what's needed.

Principles for Inclusive ECD Provisions

- ***ECD provisions should be managed openly***. School management should become more inclusive of its community members.

- ***ECD provisions should provide environments that are physically and emotionally safe and secure***. Teacher attitude is one of the most important determinants of teaching quality.

- ***ECD provisions should use child-centered teaching methodologies and pedagogy***. Interactions should promote a positive sense of self and sense of being part of a community. Build on each child's strengths.

- ***ECD provisions should involve parents and community members in a meaningful way***. Strengthen links and support them to create home learning environments that support children's development and learning.

Principles for Inclusive ECD Provisions

- **_ECD provisions should ensure that the curriculum reflects diversity_**. A good curriculum not only transmits knowledge but also develops skills and instills social values.

- **_ECD provisions should provide stimulating and democratic learning environments_**. Children should not only learn about democracy but experience it through participating.

- **_ECD provisions should use formative assessment as the basis for planning learning activities_**. Plans should build on children's previous knowledge and be differentiated to provide for individual children's interests, needs, and learning styles.

- **_ECD provisions should ensure that teachers have a strong understanding_** of child development and knowledge of the families and communities in which they work.

Arguments for Roma inclusion in ECD – the *why* and the *how*

- It is important to approach Roma inclusion from the point of view of **fairness, equity and rights**, rather than only from the argument of **economic efficiency** and **human capital development**. The arguments we use (the *why*) have implications for policy and implementation (the *how*).

- Children should not be **given** rights; set conditions so they may **exercise** their rights.

- A **multi-sector integrated approach** is vital.

- ECD is **not the magic cure** for complex social problems

Placement of Roma children in Special Schools or segregated catch-up classrooms

- **Segregation = Discrimination,** a denial of the right to an education which supports development to the full potential.

- Every child has the right to **quality education** – we need to ensure that mainstream schools are ready for children and parents are offered support.

A fair and quality assessment (Amicus Brief in Ostrava case):

- evaluates both knowledge and psychology

- works in the best interest of the child, supporting his/her development not limiting it

- is child-centered and takes into consideration the developmental stage of the child

- Is culturally and linguistically appropriate for the child

Argument for ECD experiences longer than one year

Research demonstrates that educational experiences which are **longer duration, less intensity and less frequency** give better long term results for success in school (and in life) than short duration and high intensity.

Recommendations: Call for **Creativity, innovation, flexibility!**

- Ongoing age- and culturally-appropriate quality ECD services from birth, that include informal, nonformal and formal experiences.

- Support for transitions from nonformal to formal, and from Kindergarten to school

- Catch-up classrooms are <u>not</u> the answer: they are segregatory by nature, are often not quality since they focus on discrete pieces of knowledge, do not build on what children already know, are not connected with families and communities

In Conclusion

Because Roma children are entitled to **high quality learning and development experiences** which focus on the development of the **whole child** and not just academic competences in the early years, ISSA's key messages are:

Four Key Messages

1. Roma communities and families should be supported to **nurture and expand the potential of children** and channel it to successful formal learning. Special emphasis to **very young children** (birth to 3). Comprehensive services that incorporate culture and the needs of the families.

2. Preparation for school is not about a single year preparatory class – **it is a blend of diverse forms and experiences of informal, nonformal and formal education**, building the basis for successful learning throughout life.

3. Placing Roma children in special schools is **a denial of the right to an education which supports development to their full potential**

4. **Caregivers, teachers and decision makers** with "right minds and hearts" will make a difference. Pre-service and in-service trainings - competences to work in multicultural context. Policies supporting good practices for benefit of all children.

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Thank you!

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