

SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR ROMA CHILDREN

STEP BY STEP SPECIAL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

INTERIM REPORT



Report written by:

Susan Rona

Linda E. Lee

National Sections written by:

The Step by Step country teams of

Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR ALL PARTNERS
WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS PROJECT:

Step by Step Program Foundation

14 Batcho Kiro str.
1000 Sofia, Bulgaria
Tel: (+359-2) 9805712, 9804942
Fax: (+359-2) 9806508
[http:// www.stepbystep.bitex.com](http://www.stepbystep.bitex.com)
Executive Director: Emil Buzov
Email: emil.step@bitex.com

Step by Step Czech Republic

Prokopova 9
130 00 Prague 3, Czech Republic
Tel: (+42-02) 22-78-19-53
Fax: (+42-02) 22-78-19-53
[http:// www.sbscr.cz](http://www.sbscr.cz)
Executive Director: Vaclav Sneberger
Email: vaclav.sneberger@sbscr.cz

Ec-Pec Foundation

Rakoczi ut 22. IV./24.
H-1072 Budapest, Hungary
Tel: (+36-1) 486 2850
Fax: (+36-1) 266 3463
[http:// www.ecpec.hu](http://www.ecpec.hu)
Executive Director: Eva Deak
Email: deakeva@axelero.hu

Nadacia Skola dokoran

(Wide Open School Foundation)
Dr. Janskeho 19/16
965 01 Ziar nad Hronom, Slovakia
Tel/Fax: (+421-45) 672 3137, 671 6453
<http://www.skoladokoran.sk>
Executive Director: Eva Koncokova
Email: nsd@nsd.sk

Open Society Institute

400 West 59th Street
New York, NY 10019
<http://www.soros.org>
Contact information: elorant@sorosny.org

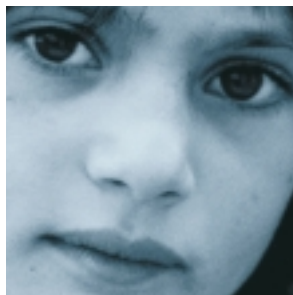
International Step by Step Association

P.O. Box 1018
1001 EA Amsterdam,
The Netherlands
<http://www.issa.nl>
Contact information: info@issa.nl

SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR ROMA CHILDREN: STEP BY STEP SPECIAL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

INTERIM REPORT

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Report written by:

Susan Rona, *Project Director*

Linda E. Lee, *Research Director*

National Sections written by:

The Step by Step country teams of

Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.

Design: Mark Chronister

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PREFACE

The issue of developing successful models for educating Roma children is of vital importance to Eastern and Central Europe. Most Europeans recognize that Roma cannot continue to be an underclass; they must be given the opportunity to live a life of dignity. Without equal access to quality education, this is not possible.

This project is based on the conviction that it is the educational system that must change to meet the needs of Roma children, rather than blaming the children for their lack of success. We were convinced that most of these children in special schools for the mentally handicapped were capable of achieving academically according to mainstream curriculum standards. We set out to implement a project that was the key to their success. After just two years of a three-year pilot project, we have evidence that the children are capable. We now know that there are solutions, provided there is commitment to changing beliefs, attitudes and pedagogy.

Having ideas and convictions is not enough without people to implement them. This project would not have been possible without the individuals and teams who undertook this enormous challenge. They worked closely and tirelessly to achieve the goals. As a result, this project continues to be an example of what is possible with true teamwork.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all the teachers, family coordinators and school directors in the four countries who agreed to work with us for the sake of the children. They are the true heroes of this project. Thank you for your hard work and for believing that it was possible.

I owe deep gratitude to the *Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian and Slovak teams* of the Step by Step Program: to the executive directors, *Eva Koncokova, Emil Buzov, Judit Lafferthon, Eva Deak, and Vaclav Sneberger* who sought out the cooperation of their Ministries of Education to implement this complex project, and then did everything possible to make it happen; to the master teacher trainers, *Stefka Dinchiyska, Mariana Kosseva, Peter Repisky, Iveta Nemeckova and Katalin Szabo* who trained and mentored the teachers and encouraged them to keep moving forward; to *Dobrinka Atanasova and Anita Meszaros*, our program coordinators without whose organizational skills we could not have managed; to the national researchers, *Vassil Stamov, Radka Varbanova, Ladislav Hornak, Katalin Oppelt and Tereza Osecka* who made sure that the national ministry criteria were met. I would also like to recognize our Czech researcher and colleague, *Mirka Novotna*, who passed away in July of this year but was still working on this project the day before she died.

The *national teams* were supported by a hard working and dedicated *international team: Dawn Tankersley*, the master teacher trainer, who introduced anti-bias education to the region and supported local master teacher trainers and all the teachers to implement the pedagogy; *Linda Lee*, of Proactive Information Services Inc., who led a team of researchers from four different countries and contexts and worked with great sensitivity and professionalism. Appreciation is extended to the staff of Proactive for their invaluable support to the international research.

I firmly believe the entire team would agree that this project would not have been possible without the vision, leadership, tireless effort and unique insights of *Susan Rona*, our project director.

Finally, I would like to express the appreciation of all team members to the Roma parents who embraced this project and inspired us all by their trust and belief in a brighter future for their children. Thank you for welcoming us in your homes and communities and for offering your hand in true partnership.



Elizabeth Lorant
Director
Children and Youth Programs
Open Society Institute, New York.
November, 2001





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STEP BY STEP ROMA SPECIAL SCHOOLS INITIATIVE INTERIM REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Roma children experience little success in schools in Central and Eastern Europe. While much research has examined the socio-economic conditions that contribute to their academic failure, very few models of successful education have been created. **The Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative** developed and tested a model that focuses on creating conditions that foster educational success for Roma children.

This pilot project, supported by the *Open Society Institute* in New York, has been in existence since the fall of 1999 in special schools in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and Slovakia and in special schools and remedial classes in mainstream schools in Hungary. The project operates under the auspices of the national Step by Step NGO's that are all members of *ISSA*, the International Step by Step Association. An international coordinating team works with national teams to support and monitor project implementation.

The project is based on the conviction that Roma children are mislabeled "mentally handicapped" and misplaced in special education. Our hypothesis was that, given appropriate conditions for learning, the majority of Roma children are capable of academic achievement to the level of mainstream curriculum standards. *Proactive Information Services Inc.*, an educational evaluation company, whose clients include ministries of education throughout Canada, was contracted to provide an independent test of the project's hypothesis and to lead a team of national researchers. Distinguished researchers from each country collected and analyzed additional data required by their national ministries of education.

Goals of the Project

- *To identify those Roma children who are misplaced in special schools, to improve their academic skills, and to integrate them into the mainstream education after three years,*
- *To develop a viable model of school success for Roma children for Central and Eastern Europe, and*
- *To propose changes in national education policies to support implementation of such a model.*

Major Research Findings

Overall, 64% of grade 2 Roma children in this study are misplaced in special education. With appropriate pedagogy and support, these children are capable of achieving the standards of the mainstream curriculum.

Research results also revealed that:

- *children in grade 2 special education pilot classes have higher rates of attendance than their peers in control classes (85% attendance compared to 73% attendance.),*
- *99% of Roma parents in the study place high value on education, and,*
- *pilot sites, where the project model was most effectively implemented, realized the greatest gains in student achievement.*

Factors Supporting Success

The project model, which proved effective, has five key components:

- *mainstream primary school curriculum to replace the special school curriculum,*
- *the Step by Step early childhood methodology as a vehicle for delivering the curriculum,*
- *anti-bias education for all teachers and administrators in the project,*
- *appropriate methodologies to support second language learners, and*
- *a Roma family coordinator/teaching assistant at each project site.*

Government action, on several levels, is required to address the situation.

Immediate Action to Support Transition of Students from Special to Mainstream Education

Governments may consider the following options for the transition of Roma children from special to mainstream education:

- *the integration of Roma children into mainstream schools, with appropriate pedagogy and support,*
- *a reclassification of special schools, in communities where local conditions warrant, as primary schools that teach mainstream curriculum and grant mainstream school diplomas. (This option should only be considered in communities where integration would create more hardship than benefit for Roma children.)*

Long Term Strategies

It is recommended that policy makers adopt a comprehensive approach to ensuring school success for Roma children to include: *prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.*

Prevention: refers to the investments that are made before children start school in order to ensure that they are successful once enrolled. We recommend that governments:

- *provide free, universal, high quality pre-school for all economically disadvantaged children,*
- *reform the whole system of special education, and*
- *reform the system of pre-service and in-service teacher education.*

Intervention: refers to all actions that are taken once children are in school, in order to ensure their continued success. We recommend intervention at two levels:

1. Educational Intervention to ensure effective integration of Roma children into mainstream education including:

- *formalization of the position of Roma family coordinator/teaching assistant,*
- *full day education programs for all Roma children, and*
- *additional academic support (such as tutoring or mentoring) for all Roma children.*

2. Economic Support to ensure Roma families have the financial means to send their children to mainstream schools, specifically:

- *allocation of financial subsidies for food, educational materials, transportation, boarding based on economic need, rather than the type of institution the child attends. This requires systemic changes so that special education is not financially attractive to poor parents.*

Rehabilitation: refers to strategies that support the casualties of the system so they can become functioning members of society. We suggest (as examples only):

- *community-based alternative “back to school” programs supporting further education or vocational training for Roma youth,*
- *community-based family literacy programs.*

This initiative has proven that Roma children are capable of academic success provided they are given the appropriate conditions for learning. It is time for governments to take action and initiate pro-Roma educational policies.

The Interim Report on the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative provides more detail on the project model and results. The full technical report on the research is available on request, as is a report on the Costs and Effects of the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative.



BACKGROUND

Context

Roma children experience little success in schools in Central and Eastern Europe. Much research has been done on the socio-economic conditions that contribute to their academic failure. Little attention has been paid to the pervasive institutional biases that force Roma children out of school and on to the streets. Furthermore, very few models of successful education have been developed for Roma children.

It is a commonly accepted belief in Central and Eastern Europe that many Roma children are “mentally handicapped,” are language-delayed and/or have disabilities such as dyslexia, or dysgraphia. The vast majority are then placed in special education institutions for the “mentally handicapped” or segregated into remedial classes in mainstream schools. In both cases, the academic expectations are much lower for Roma children than for children in mainstream education. Recent studies indicate that as many as 75% of Roma children in the region are in special schools.

Placement in special schools is determined by tests administered by psychologists and special committees. They are given in the majority language, a language that many Roma children do not speak or understand well. As the tests often use materials that are outside the children’s experience, these tests are culturally and linguistically biased.

For financial reasons, most Roma children do not attend preschool where skills in the majority language could be obtained. Their lack of fluency in the majority language and their perceived cultural/behavioral differences, combined with a lack of school readiness skills, result in their being labeled “mentally handicapped.”

Roma parents often agree to place their children in special schools without fully understanding the long-term consequences. However, even those parents who do realize that placement in special schools limits their child’s future, may consider that they have no alternative. They are dependant on the economic benefits that accompany special education. In some countries, children in special schools receive food subsidies, educational materials, transportation, as well as room and board. These economic benefits are incentives for poor parents to choose special schools. Parents may also be comfortable with the placement of their children in special education because, in many cases, they themselves attended the same special schools.

The result of these placements is that the re-integration of Roma children into the mainstream school system is extremely difficult. The gap between the curriculum requirements of special and mainstream education is virtually impossible to bridge.

Remedial classes in mainstream primary schools are often referred to in the region as “Gypsy classes” because of the overwhelming number of Roma children in them. The stated purpose of these classes is to help children “catch up” to their peers in mainstream classes. In fact, the curriculum delivered is of a much lower standard and many of these children end up being placed in special schools for the “mentally handicapped.”

Portrait of a Parent: Hristina's Story
BULGARIA

My name is Hristina. I am 24 years old and I have four children.

The reason I attended a special school was because my parents were very poor. There were many children in my family and my parents did not have money to send us to the regular school where they would have had to buy many things for school. I was never mentally retarded. Now I find when I look for jobs that I am unsuccessful because the diploma I was given said "Helping Schools," (special school) and this denies me the job.

My children now are in the same special school I attended because it is the only option I have. Children in the other school have to be well dressed. They have to have money to buy things like textbooks, notebooks, and pens. Without a job, I do not have the means to do this for my children.

Unlike my experience, the children who are included in this project are using the same textbooks that are used in other schools. They are provided with all the other things they need in order to learn. I hope that when my children finish school they will be able to get a school diploma that will give them a much better chance than I had to find a job.

I had no dreams for my future because my family was, and still is, very poor. So I dared not even to dream that anything could happen, do you see? But now I find my children have dreams. During play at home, one says that he wants to be a teacher; the other a policeman, and the youngest a doctor. It makes me happy that my children have such dreams and that they may have a chance of making them come true.

I want everyone to know that Roma people are not stupid; they are just very poor.

Hristina Dimitriova Vassileva
VRATZA, BULGARIA

Thus, from the age of six or seven a Roma child's future is predetermined. The educational system, by focusing on their deficits and believing that Roma children are incapable of academic success, perpetuates the cycle of poverty and exclusion. The vast majority of Roma children have little hope of going to secondary school or university and are doomed to a life of welfare or menial employment.

Rationale For The Project

In 1999, the Open Society Institute – New York funded a pilot education research project in four countries: Slovakia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Hungary. The project was motivated by the European Roma Rights Centre's litigation of human rights violations against Roma children by the Czech system of education in view of Roma children's over-representation in special education. While the Czech Republic was the focus for the litigation, the same situation exists in many countries throughout Eastern and Central Europe.

The pilot project is based on the conviction that Roma children are misplaced in special education and mislabeled as "mentally handicapped." The project's hypothesis was that, given appropriate conditions for learning, the majority of Roma children would be fully capable of mainstream academic achievement on mainstream curriculum standards. Proactive Information Services Inc., an educational evaluation company whose clients include the provincial ministries of education throughout Canada, was contracted to provide an independent test of this hypothesis.



THE PROJECT

Goals of the Project

- *To identify those Roma children who are misplaced in special schools
 - to improve their academic skills, and
 - to integrate them into the mainstream education after three years,*
- *To develop a viable model of school success for Roma children for Central and Eastern Europe, and*
- *To propose changes in national education policies to support implementation of such a model.*

Project Approach

Since the basic premise was that a significant number of Roma children in special schools are not “mentally handicapped,” the approach, by necessity, is a personalized one that emphasizes the following components:

- *building commitment among school staff to recognize the maximum potential of the children,*
- *developing teamwork at all levels of the project,*
- *regularly and actively supervising teachers on a professional basis,*
- *emphasizing professional development for all school staff, and*
- *committing to an objective and systematic evaluation research process.*

Management Structure

An international management team was established consisting of a project director, master teacher trainer and researcher, all having extensive experience and expertise in their fields.

The executive directors of the Step by Step NGO's in the four countries, who worked directly with the project director, each had their own national team including master teacher trainer(s), and researcher(s). Master teacher trainers and researchers also worked closely with their counterparts on the international management team.

Quality Control

A system of quality control, implemented from the beginning of the project, had the following elements:

- *high expectations of all staff for project success,*
- *monthly site visits by the national master teacher trainers, as well as regular visits by the international project staff,*
- *monthly reports by national master teacher trainers with feedback from the international master teacher trainer to include action plans for the month,*
- *systematic and regular data collection focused on elements of the model and desired outcomes with articulated indicators of success,*
- *regular national and international management meetings, and*
- *a formal feedback system for all aspects of the project.*

Portrait of a Teacher: Ivana's Story Czech Republic

I am a special education teacher with 17 years of experience. Two years ago, I was invited to join the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative where I received training on ways to change my teaching practice.

My classroom had been a traditional one with rows of desks and the teacher's desk at the front. The students sat in their desks and I stood in front of them talking. This new way of teaching is more like a workshop. The students can work individually or in groups; there is space for creative work; they have concrete materials to help them solve problems; and, they can use children's literature, encyclopaedias, and magazines to work on projects. In the beginning, I found the work very difficult. In the past, I only had to follow the teacher's guide. I finished one page and the following day, I started the next page. Now, although it is more time consuming, I develop my own lessons and prepare my own learning materials. I am not satisfied anymore with just using textbooks and the blackboard.

I had many doubts when the project began about what I had been asked to do. Sometimes I felt I wasn't teaching these children anything at all. I also worried that the children were not independent enough to be able to work this way. Gradually it became easier. I was surprised how creative and motivated the children were.

I just did a lesson about the human body. Before this project, I would have stood in front of the class and asked the children to memorize things they already knew or did not really understand. Instead, I brought in a model of the human body that the children could touch, take apart, and discuss. We did many different kinds of activities about the human body. This way the children learn to make their own judgments and to communicate better.

My colleagues at school see how much time I spend preparing for the children. This is true, but I see that the children are successful and are learning many new skills. Now they don't experience learning as a necessary evil, but rather as a pleasure. This makes my extra effort very worthwhile.

Ivana Sitteova

Prague, Czech Republic

The Model

The educational model was founded on the experience of proven effective educational practice. There are five key components:

- *mainstream primary school curriculum to replace the special school curriculum,*
- *the Step by Step early childhood methodology as the vehicle for delivering the curriculum,*
- *anti-bias education for all teachers and administrators in the project,*
- *appropriate methodologies for second language learners, and*
- *the placement of a Roma family coordinator/teaching assistant at each project site.*

Use of Mainstream Primary Curriculum

Use of mainstream school curriculum is the central component of the model. As long as children follow the special curriculum, they are taught approximately half the material offered to children in mainstream schools. With every passing year, it becomes increasingly difficult to re-integrate children into mainstream education. All schools in the project, therefore, use the state approved mainstream primary school curriculum and supplement it with individual education plans for those children who are unable to meet the standard. Implementing the mainstream curriculum has been the most difficult challenge of this project. It was necessary to convince experienced special education teachers that children, who they believed to be "mentally handicapped," would not be harmed by higher expectations as the children are intelligent and capable of meeting mainstream curriculum standards.

Professional and personal development for teachers (as described below) was needed to help teachers recognize that holding low academic expectations of Roma children prevents them from succeeding in school.

Step by Step Methodology

Step by Step, introduced to the region by OSI, is a child-centered early childhood methodology that is based on developmentally appropriate practices. Currently functioning in 28 countries in Eastern and Central Europe, Central Asia, and Haiti, Step by Step has been thoroughly

tested and proven to be successful. It is a methodology that has also been used effectively with Roma children in pre-schools and mainstream primary schools. Due to its success in working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds in the region, and an established infrastructure that provides on-going training and support for teachers, this methodology became the foundation for this initiative.

The Step by Step methodology is based on the following principles:

- *educational practices need to be developmentally appropriate,*
- *the approach to teaching in the classroom should be child-centered and based on individualization,*
- *skills are developed in activity centers through presentation of integrated thematic concepts,*
- *learning is an active process rather than a passive one, and*
- *parents are partners in their children's education.*

Anti-Bias Education

The basic premise of anti-bias education is that the academic performance of students will improve if educators adopt an anti-bias approach.

This approach requires educators to:

- *examine their own biases and explore how these biases manifest themselves in their work and every day life, leading to an understanding of how these attitudes and beliefs profoundly affect the academic success of their students,*
- *develop inter-cultural understanding and knowledge of Roma communities,*
- *develop tools to reach out to Roma communities and make them feel welcome in the school, and*
- *understand how the dominant culture reinforces myths and stereotypes that are detrimental to children's learning.*

Methodologies for Second Language Learners

As many Roma children enter school without proficiency in the official language of their country, the model includes methodologies that strengthen their skills in the official language.

Our methodologies are based on the following tenets:

- *increased proficiency in the first language (mother tongue) facilitates the development of second language skills,*
- *cultural relevance is absolutely essential, and*
- *emphasis is placed on the use of whole language (language experience) approach to teaching reading and writing, providing context and meaning.*

Portrait of a Young Roma Teaching Assistant: Eku's Story Slovakia

My name is Frantisek, but everyone calls me Eku. I was raised by my mother and my older sister, as my mother was always working to support our family. I am very thankful to my mother for all she did for us, and I love her very much.

How did I come to be working as a teaching assistant? One day my friends and I were rehearsing songs at the school where I now work. The principal heard us and approached me about taking this position.

The teacher I work with is called Zuzka. She treats me as an equal partner. I really like the atmosphere that this creates in the classroom. The children feel better about being at school because their culture and traditions are not just understood, but valued. When I started I was surprised how much my presence in the classroom helped the children. Because I speak Romani, I am able to explain words that they do not understand in the Slovak language. I found that the students began to express themselves more freely.

Another thing that I do is bring Roma culture into the classroom by telling the children stories in Romani. Some of the stories come from the community and others I make up myself. This has been so successful that Zuzka and I have invited the parents to the class to listen to and create stories with their children. I also bring Roma culture into the classroom through music. Music is very important to me. I enjoy sharing my songs with everyone and feel that the music enriches the classroom environment.

I think that the parents feel more comfortable because I am there. They see me as an ally. They know that I am from the community, that I speak the language, and that I listen to their opinions. The parents now have become our partners. Even if they do not have formal education, they contribute in their own ways. They come to the classroom to speak about customs and traditions from their own families or to prepare the children's favourite Roma meals. I think that, for the first time, they feel welcome at school and they have something to contribute.

I enjoy my work with the children and the school so much that I have started to study classical singing at the art school with the hope of becoming a professional music teacher.

*Frantisek (Eku) Mizigar
Kosice, Slovakia*

Roma Family Coordinator/Teaching Assistant

A special element of the model is the placement of an additional adult in each class who comes from the same community as the children.

The role of the Roma family coordinator/teaching assistant is to:

- *assist in the classroom (often translating for children who do not speak the official language),*
- *serve as a role model for the children,*
- *integrate Roma language, culture and history into the curriculum, and*
- *serve as a liaison between the family and school.*



RESEARCH RESULTS: PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

Methodology

Approach

Proactive Information Services Inc., a Canadian social research company established in 1984, was contracted to conduct an independent evaluation of the learning outcomes and project model for the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative. The researcher from Proactive Information Services Inc. worked as part of the project's international management team, ensuring that the evaluation was congruent with the evolving nature of the project while, at the same time, assuring a systematic and objective evaluation process.

An evaluation framework was developed at the inception of the project and was based on:

- *respect for each country's context, needs and curriculum requirements,*
- *the need for a common cross-country framework and broad mutual outcomes,*
- *the use of both cross-country and country specific data collection instruments, and*
- *an analytical approach designed to allow for judgements regarding the success of Roma children across project sites, but not intended to compare the success of one country to another.*

The evaluation framework focused on monitoring and assessing desired project outcomes. The project model was designed to achieve the following outcomes:

- *academic success, as evidenced by achievement of mainstream curriculum standards,*
- *appropriate conditions created to support academic success for Roma children, as evidenced by positive student behaviours and attitudes towards school, high levels of parent involvement, supportive parental attitudes, and classroom environments that support student learning.*

Together, these outcomes would set the stage for the successful integration of Roma children into mainstream education after three years.

Design

The evaluation design included pilot ("experimental") classes and comparison ("control") classes in each country. The control classes were selected on the strength of their similarity to the schools and communities of the pilot classes.

The evaluation design needed not only to satisfy the needs of the international project, but also to meet the specific research requirements of the education ministry in each participating country. Therefore, in addition to the international data collection, the research teams used standardized tests that were acceptable and recognized within each country.

Across the four countries, data were collected that provided comparative measures (pilot and control classes) on aspects such as student attendance and attitudes, teacher attitudes, parental involvement and attitudes. Data were also collected in all countries

High Expectations in a “Remedial Class” in Hungary

What are the consequences of having high expectations in classes where low expectations are the norm?

*In the pilot classroom in Pécs, teachers took on the challenge of increasing their expectations of the students in their so called “small size class” where curriculum standards are traditionally lower than in mainstream classes. The teachers chose to ignore those in the system who said that these students could not meet the high curriculum expectations and would be psychologically damaged by the erosion of their self-confidence. Due to their success in having 85% of the students meet the standards, the teachers came to the conclusion that their **belief in the students’ capabilities is the most important factor in how well students perform.***

The teachers give an example of one little girl named Ilike. She had been placed in the class because of an evaluation report submitted by the local school evaluation committee.

The report said:

“The child gets tired easily, is not mature enough to complete tasks. Due to a deficient vocabulary, she is often unable to understand instructions. Overall abilities are very poor, for which we suggest that her fine motor coordination, drawing skills and school vocabulary are not developed. She is not mentally disabled, but has extremely poor abilities.”

*Instead of believing that Ilike was incapable of working at the level of the mainstream curriculum, the teachers decided to change their approach. **They took the following steps:***

- *When the child became tired or bored they gave her a variety of interesting and motivating tasks,*
 - *They gave her responsibilities that raised her level of achievement and maturity,*
 - *They gave her the chance to learn through her own observations and experiments,*
 - *They encouraged her to become a teacher to the other children.*

Ilike is now in the 3rd grade and has become a confident learner who is enthusiastic about school. Her level of achievement has reached that of the mainstream curriculum. Beyond the fact that having high expectations supported student academic achievement,

the teachers observed the following changes:

- *There was an increase in all students’ self-confidence and willingness to try more difficult tasks,*
- *The students cooperated and helped each other more, acting as teachers and mentors to one another,*
- *The students became more independent, needed less teacher direction, and became better problem solvers.*

The teachers also believe that their own jobs are enriched by their high expectations for the students. They found they are able to be much more creative. They are no longer limited by a curriculum that only lets children progress to a certain level, stopping them from reaching their potential. In this classroom, everyone now experiences the joy of learning without limitations.



from the pilot sites that addressed student performance in relation to mainstream curriculum standards and teachers' implementation of Step by Step.

The international researcher was not asked to conduct a literature review as part of her work, nor was she required to undertake a financial analysis. (An analysis of the cost effectiveness of integration strategies is contained in a separate document entitled *Costs and Effects of the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Project*.)

Instrument Development

In year two of the project, curriculum tests were developed in each country by a team that included teachers, experts from universities or pedagogical institutes, Ministries of Education, the master teacher trainer, and the country researcher(s). The international master teacher trainer and researcher met with each team at the beginning of the development process. In each country, the tests were approved by a competent and nationally recognized authority as being appropriate to, and reflective of, the expectations of the mainstream primary curriculum.

Common interview protocols, questionnaires, and observation instruments were developed by the international researcher in collaboration with the teams from each country. Standardized forms for recording student attendance and parental involvement were also developed and used internationally. The instruments and recording forms were piloted in year one of the project and refined, as necessary, for data collection in year two.

Data Collection

Data were collected on a schedule established by the international researcher. Extensive, ongoing contact was maintained between the international researcher, national researchers, and those assigned to collect data at the country level. As data were submitted, questions for clarification were asked whenever necessary to ensure the quality and integrity of the data.

- *Classroom observations were conducted by the national master teacher trainers, with assistance from the international master teacher trainer to support consistent application. Observations occurred numerous times over the course of the academic year.*
- *Student attendance and parental involvement data were collected on an on-going basis and submitted twice a year to the international researcher.*
- *The questionnaire to school staff was administered in the spring of each year.*
- *Interviews with children and parents were conducted in the spring of each year.*
- *Curriculum testing was conducted with all students at the end of the academic year, in May or June.*

Country teams were also asked to provide information (as available) on an individual student basis regarding gender, ethnicity, and first language.

Analysis and Creation of Student Profiles

Data in raw form were forwarded to Proactive Information Services Inc. Staff at Proactive, under the supervision of the international researcher, performed the necessary

data support tasks (for example, coding of interview data). All numerical data were scanned and entered into a statistical package (SPSS version 10.0). Analysis was conducted on each data set.

Considerable attention was paid to the creation of individual student profiles. These profiles were created by combining selected data from the various data sets relating to a particular student. These profiles not only supported a broader range of analytical options, but also provided a basis for the longitudinal tracking of students.

In total, profiles of 323 students were created - 153 in pilot sites and 170 in control sites. Pilot and control sites had virtually the same gender breakdown. In both the pilot and control classes, over 80% of students (whose ethnicity could be determined) were identified as Roma.

Detailed results and discussion of findings are found in the full report on the international research.

Research Challenges and Limitations

Certain challenges are associated with conducting multi-site, multi-country evaluations, leading to a number of research limitations.

Impact of Personnel Changes on Data Collection: Members of the country teams changed over the course of the project for a variety of reasons (e.g., illness). These changes necessitated constant communication with new team members regarding all aspects of the data collection. However, in a few instances, changes in staff affected the frequency of data collection, such as the classroom observations.

Identification of Roma Students: In some countries the identification of Roma students posed problems as the racial or ethnic identification of individuals is prohibited by law. While this is understandable given the long standing bias and oppression of certain groups, it also complicates identification for research purposes related to initiatives intended to further social justice. For this project, the identification of Roma children was done either as family self-identification or through the assistance of the Roma family coordinator/teaching assistant. Where these options were not available, the child's ethnicity was not identified.

Identification of First Language: Teachers and Roma family coordinators/teaching assistants were asked to provide information on the child's first language at the time of entry into grade 1. The limitations are two-fold. Firstly, the information was collected after the fact. Secondly, the information simply indicated if the child spoke Romani only, the official language only, or some combination. The level of the child's language proficiency in Romani or the official language was not formally assessed across the project sites.

Differences in National Contexts: Hungary has been reported separately because of the difference in the national context for the project. In Hungary, the grade 2 pilot classes are remedial classes in mainstream schools, rather than special education classes in special schools. The grade 1 cohort represents special education classes in special schools in Hungary.

Portrait of a Community: Ostrava, Czech Republic

Building Trust

The Special School Ostrava-Mariánská Hora, located in Ostrava, has been implementing the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative for the past two years. The school

is unique, in the words of the principal, it is a “ ‘special’ Special School.” The school is ‘special’ because it was granted the option by the Ministry of Education to offer classes using mainstream curriculum, as well as classes using the special schools’ curriculum.

Ostrava, with a population of 320,000, has a high unemployment rate caused by the closure of mines and decline in industrial production. Social problems include substandard living conditions and a high incidence of drug and alcohol abuse.

In spite of these conditions, the school has been able to make a positive impact on the lives of its students and the community. In order to build trust they used different strategies.

- **The teachers and the Roma teacher assistants visit the community often, not as persons giving advice but as people who listen, share, and help the community search for possible ways to solve problems. In their visits, they establish confidential and safe opportunities for the parents to express their feelings. They talk about the future of the children and the role of the school in improving possibilities for the children.**
- **Parents are included in the classroom and are involved in the teaching process by expressing their views on what and how the children are learning.**
- **The children’s daily lives are an important aspect of the curriculum. Parents and children do homework assignments together which teach the children about their community, its history and traditions. The parents feel needed in the education of their children.**
The teachers feel that the creation of a partnership between the school and the family is a long-term process. The partnerships start by establishing contact with a few families and community connections grow from there. The job of the school is not to tell the parents what and how to do things, but to include them in ways that respects who they are. It is only by respecting and valuing all members of the community that everyone can work together to build a better future for Ostrava.

Influence of Selected Variables on Achievement: It could be hypothesized, for example, that children who had attended pre-school would be those most likely to demonstrate academic success. While other research suggests this is true, in this study records of individual children’s pre-school attendance were not available to the researcher, so the analysis could not be conducted. It could also be hypothesized that the child’s age would be related to achievement. In the grade 2 special classes, children ranged in age from 7 to 12. However, statistical analysis did not reveal any correlation between age and achievement of the mainstream curriculum standards. Finally, class size is a factor that might have an impact on student achievement. Classes in this study were all below the numbers that research in early childhood classrooms suggests makes a difference in achievement, so this was not considered.

Impact of Individual Model Elements: While the impact of some project elements was possible to isolate, others were more difficult. In some cases measures specific to the project components were created, while this was not possible for others. For example, while all sites had Roma family coordinators/teaching assistants, the effectiveness of the individuals might vary. There was no vehicle for assessing their effectiveness, making it difficult to determine the relative impact of this model element in relation to others. Furthermore, isolating the impact of project components is often difficult in educational programs and, in fact, may not be productive because the whole may be greater than the combination of its parts.

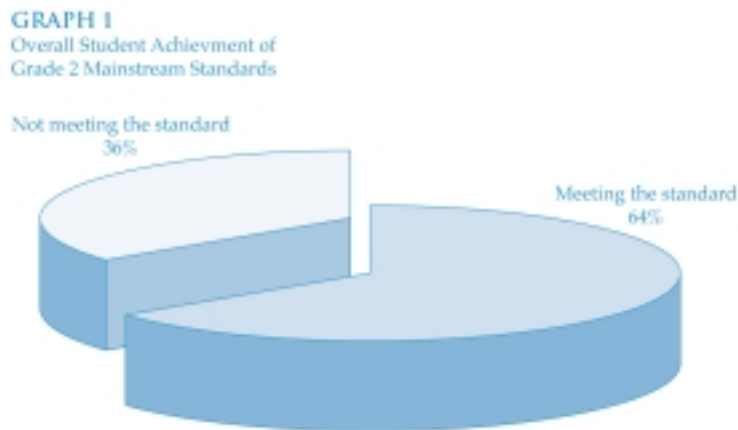
While the different contexts provided challenges, their diversity also represented a strength of project. Regardless of the country or the local context, Roma children were successful, suggesting that the pilot sites were not aberrations, nor were sites selected because of similar favourable conditions. Rather, the sites were reflections of the typical realities in which Roma children and families find themselves across the region.

KEY RESULTS

Student Achievement on Mainstream Curriculum

Roma children placed in special education can achieve the standards of the mainstream primary curriculum.

After two years, 64% of students in the grade 2 special education pilot classes (Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Slovakia) were achieving at a level where they could be integrated into mainstream grade 3 classes (**Graph 1**). Overall, 47% of the children would not require any additional support for integration, while 17% were meeting the standards at a minimal level and would require appropriate support to ensure their continued success.

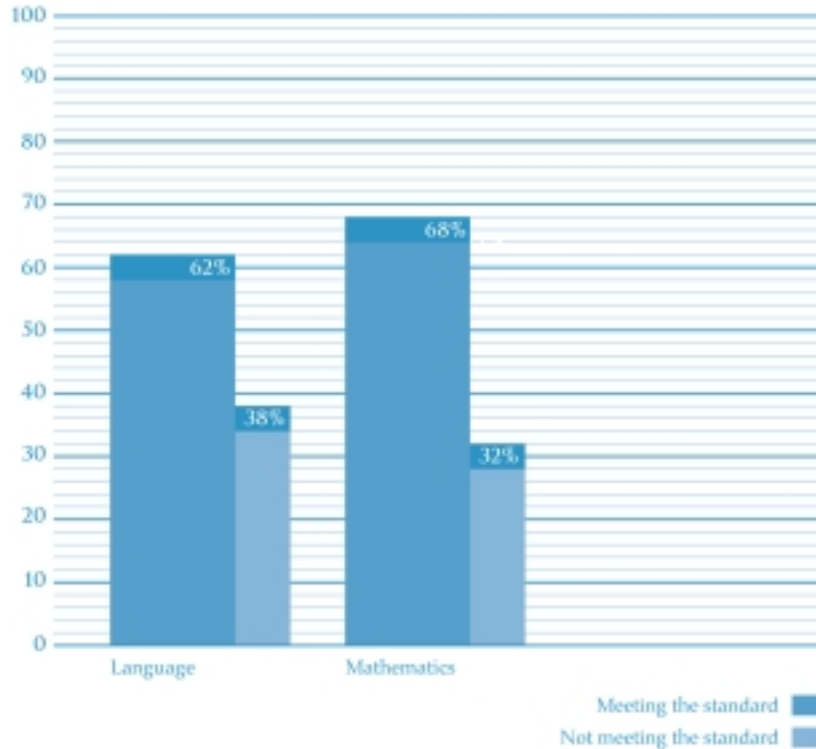


After two years, 62% of students in the grade 2 special education pilot classes (Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Slovakia) were able to meet the official language standards of the mainstream grade 2 curriculum. Overall, 68% were able to meet the mathematics standards (**Graph 2**).

Students who entered grade 1 speaking only Romani, with no knowledge of the official language of the country, were most likely to achieve the standards of the mainstream curriculum. All these students were at a level where they could be integrated. This suggests that a strong background in home language can be an asset rather than a deficit. It also suggests that children who enter school without any knowledge of the official language are most likely to be mislabeled “mentally handicapped”.

Of the grade 1 children in special education classes in Hungary, 65% (13 of the 20 children) were meeting the requirements of the mainstream curriculum after just one year. Seven of these children were able to meet the requirements at a level where they would not need additional support.

GRAPH 2
Grade 2 Students, Level of
Achievement in Language and Mathematics
Percentage %



Of the grade 2 children in remedial classes in Hungary, 86% (25 of 29 students) could be integrated into mainstream education, although the majority of these were assessed as meeting the standards at a minimal level.

Conclusion: *Data on student achievement indicate that the majority of students in the special education pilot classes are able to meet the requirements of the mainstream curriculum. While some children would need support to ensure their continued success, the results support the hypothesis that these children are mislabeled as “mentally handicapped” and misplaced in special education settings.*

Conditions Supporting Student Achievement

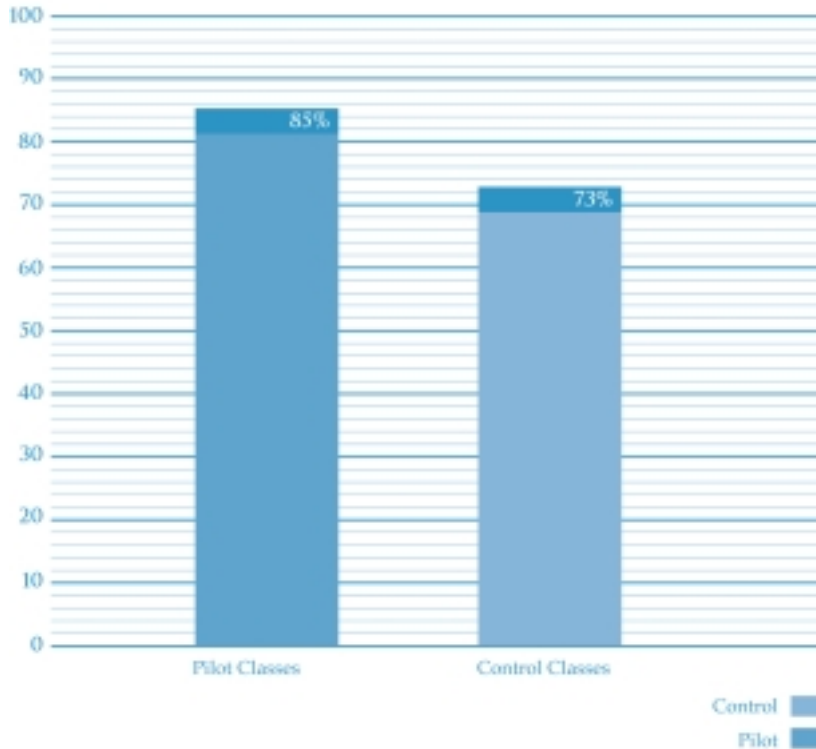
Student Attendance

Overall, children in grade 2 special education pilot classes have higher rates of attendance than their peers in the control classes.

In the grade 2 pilot special education pilot classes students attend at a significantly higher rate than the control classes. Overall attendance in the pilot classes is 85%, as compared to 73% in the control classes (**Graph 3**). It must be noted that this result is influenced by the particularly high rate of attendance in the Slovak pilot sites (91%). Regarding the high attendance in Slovakia, project staff offered the explanation that the comprehensive community approach played a strong role, possibly translating into a positive impact on student attendance.

There was no significant difference in the attendance rates at the pilot and control

GRAPH 3
Grade 2 Student Attendance
Pilot Versus Control Classes
Percentage %



sites in Hungary. The grade 1 pilot classes had an attendance rate of 87% as compared to 88% in the control classes. Similarly, at grade 2, the attendance rate was 90% in the pilot classes and 89% in the control classes.

Overall, the difference between the attendance of Roma and non-Roma students in the pilot sites was not significantly different.

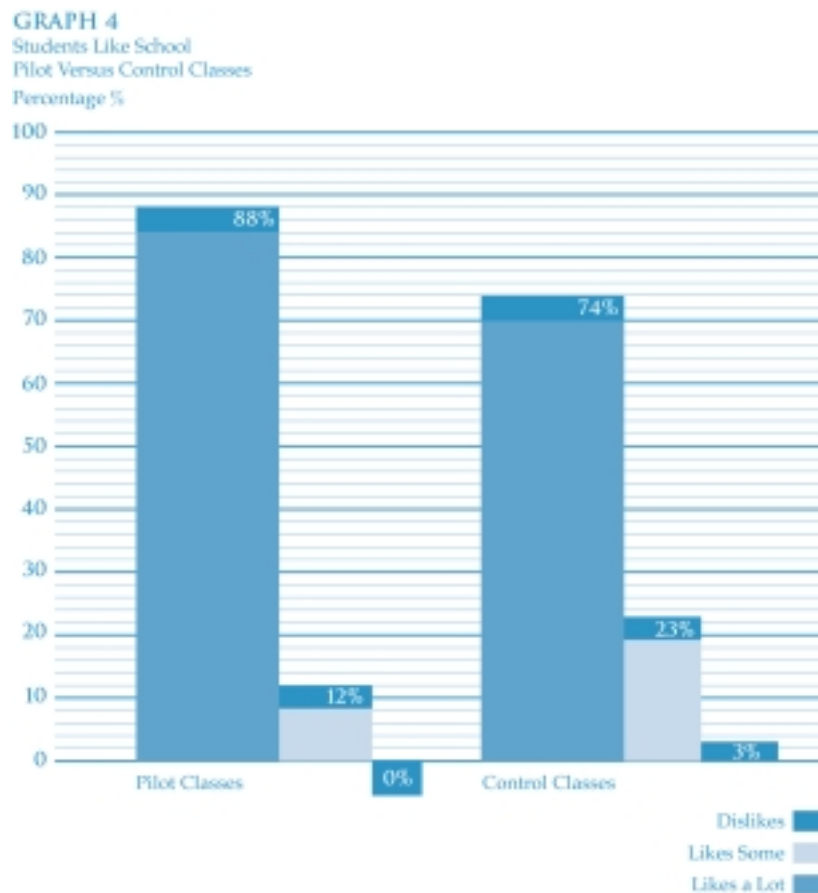
Further analysis confirms that student achievement is strongly related to student attendance in the pilot sites. Students with the best attendance are most likely to achieve academically.

Conclusion: *Given that attendance is clearly related to achievement, it can be affirmed that it is important for children to attend school regularly. Data on student attendance indicate that certain conditions in the pilot sites can have a significantly positive effect on attendance. Determining the specific conditions that support Roma children's attendance requires further exploration and should be considered a topic for future research. Furthermore, the data in this study show that Roma children attend school as frequently as non-Roma children, refuting the belief that Roma children are less likely to come to school than their peers.*

Student Attitudes Toward School

Roma children have positive attitudes toward school. Roma children in the pilot sites also report liking academic work.

Students were interviewed at both pilot and control sites. Student responses indicated that, while over three-quarters of all students like school, students in the pilot classes were more likely to do so (**Graph 4**).



While the same proportion of students in the pilot and control classes indicated they liked activities such as drawing/art, students in the pilot classes were more likely than those in the control classes to say they liked school for academic reasons, such as reading, writing, mathematics (**Graph 5**).

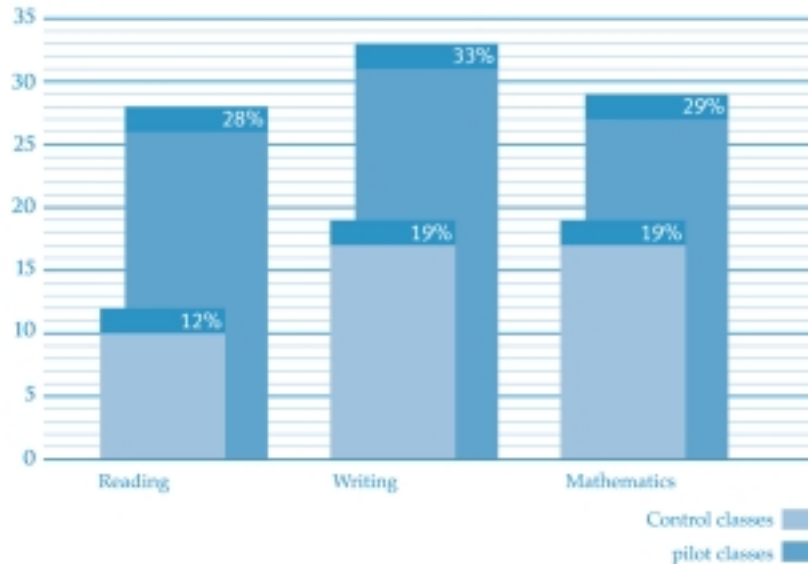
Conclusion: *Roma children like school. Children in the pilot classes gave academic reasons for liking school much more often than did children in the control classes. It appears that, if challenged in their learning and provided with the opportunity to learn mainstream curriculum, Roma children will not only learn, but will enjoy learning.*

Parent Involvement

Roma parents in the pilot sites became much more involved with their child's school, than did the parents in the control sites.

The frequency of parental contact with the school was significantly higher in the grade

GRAPH 5
 What Students Like About School
 Pilot Versus Control Classes
 Percentage %



2 pilot classes than in the control classes. The average number of contacts parents had with the school over the course of the school year was 46 in the pilot sites, as compared to 12 in the control sites. Parental contact included visits to the classroom, individual meetings with the teacher, and group meetings with school staff and other parents (**Graph 6**).

In the pilot classes, high parental involvement was correlated to student achievement, both in the official language and overall academic achievement.

Conclusion: *If valued and welcomed at school, as they were in the pilot sites, Roma parents will become involved in their child's education in concrete ways; they will come to school, visit classrooms and meet with teachers. Furthermore, the positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement suggests the importance of creating conditions that encourage and support parents' contact with the school.*

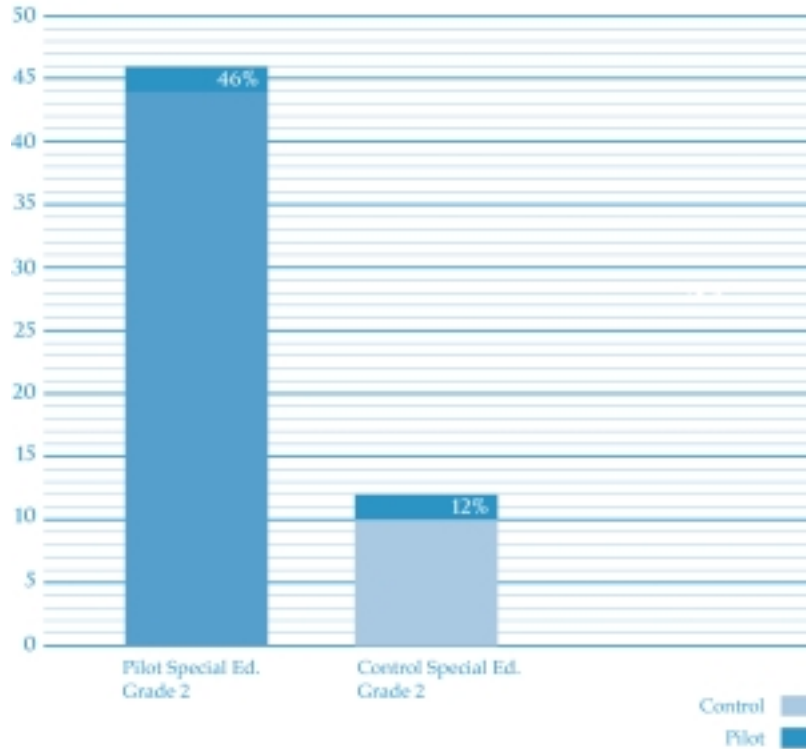
Parent Attitudes

Roma parents place high value on education and want their children to succeed. Parents of children in the pilot classes have higher educational aspirations for their children.

Of the 126 parents interviewed whose children were in the pilot classes, all expressed their belief in the importance of education. In fact, every parent but one interviewed from both the pilot and control sites expressed the same opinion, education is important (**Graph 7**).

Why did parents think education was important? The most frequent responses were that they wanted their child to learn basic academic skills and they believed their child needed school in order to be successful in the future.

GRAPH 6
Average Number of Parental Contacts
Pilot Versus Control Classes
Percentage %



Only a few differences emerged between parents of children in the pilot sites and those in the control sites. Parents in the pilot sites were more likely to say that their dreams for their child included continuing on to higher education, such as university or professional school.

Parents of children in the pilot sites also volunteered final comments about how much they appreciated the pilot program and how pleased they were with their child’s class and school.

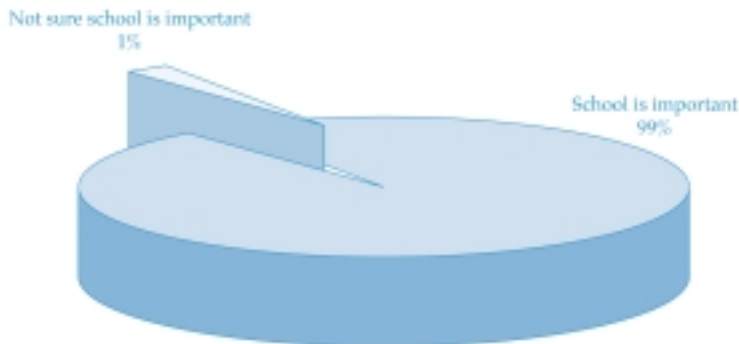
Conclusion: *Roma parents believe in the importance of education. Interviews with parents of students in the pilot classes also suggest that, if Roma parents see their children learning mainstream curriculum, they are more likely to have higher educational aspirations for their children.*

Staff Attitudes and Practice

School staff saw benefits, both personally and professionally, from their experiences in the project. Furthermore, those teachers who most fully implemented the Step by Step methodology realized the greatest gains in student achievement.

Staff in the pilot sites identified aspects of the Step by Step methodology and anti-bias education as some of the most important things they do to try and meet the needs of students in their classes. They also indicated that more information on Roma culture, strategies for involving parents, and training sessions would help them be even more effective in the future.

GRAPH 7
Parents Think School is Important
Pilot and Control Classes Combined



Student achievement was correlated with the implementation of Step by Step methodology; that is, classes where the greatest proportion of students were achieving to the standards of the mainstream curriculum were those where Step by Step had been most thoroughly implemented.

Almost all staff in the pilot classes (30 of 32 staff) believed that participating in this project would have long-term benefits for them. These benefits were most often identified as relating to improved teaching methods.

Conclusion: *Student achievement is clearly related to the implementation of good early childhood classroom pedagogy, such as Step by Step. Teachers in the pilot sites see the value of the pilot project, not only for their students but for themselves as well. They would also like to continue learning, not only about teaching methods but about Roma culture and families as well.*

Taken as a whole, the results show that the majority of Roma children in this project were inappropriately placed in special education when they could be succeeding in mainstream education. The research does not suggest that these “misplaced” Roma children will be able to cope if they are simply placed in traditional mainstream classes. However, it does provide compelling evidence that certain key elements, such as the ones found in this project model, are essential in order to guarantee quality integration. Furthermore, replicating elements of good educational practice, as demonstrated in the project model, would not only promote the learning of Roma children, but also would serve to benefit all children during the critical early years of schooling.



***Portrait of a Community: Jarovnice,
SLOVAKIA***

***Using a Comprehensive Community
Approach for Success***

Jarovnice is the largest segregated Roma settlement in Eastern Slovakia with a Roma population of approximately 3000. Although the community has always had substandard living conditions (no running water or sanitation facilities), the situation became even worse after the disastrous flood of 1998. Many homes were destroyed and many children were among the more than 40 persons who died. To rebuild, the people used whatever materials they could scrounge. There are still no services that improve the standard of living. Unemployment in the community is at 99%, and the majority of adults are uneducated and illiterate.

The issues surrounding the people's lives are complex. One of the most important factors was to break through the stereotypes and support the community's efforts to make their own decisions and help themselves. To accomplish this objective, a comprehensive approach, designed to involve people of all ages, was developed.

The project began with building a Community Centre that is maintained by the members of the Roma community. A number of prevention, intervention and rehabilitation programs are housed there.

***The Pre-school Program** is a school readiness program that focuses on helping children develop pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. The parents are actively involved in their children's education as helpers in the classroom.*

***The Teen and Technology Program** gives young people the opportunity to learn computer skills that are valued in the current job market. Through these classes their self-esteem is also strengthened as they develop competence in more and more complex tasks.*

***The Family Literacy Program** focuses on both young and older adult Roma dropouts who are illiterate. Instead of replicating a first grade reading class, the program takes the approach that these people already have knowledge and skills upon which to build literacy. The focus is not just on learning to read and write, but on the practical use of these skills in everyday life.*

***The majority of Roma children attend the special school in Jarovnice.** Here the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative has focussed on teaching the mainstream curriculum. The director of the school states that these children are placed in her school not because of any disabilities, but because of their language and cultural differences. She has found the students' progress to be remarkable and feels that using the mainstream curriculum is essential if students are to develop the skills and knowledge they need for their future.*

Regardless of the community's dismal conditions, Jarovnice has become an inspiring example of a Roma community helping itself.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative demonstrates that:

- 1. Many Roma children in schools for the “mentally handicapped” are capable of performing according to the standards of the mainstream curriculum, therefore,*
- 2. A large number of Roma children are mislabeled as “mentally handicapped” and misplaced in special education, furthermore,*
- 3. The system of testing and placement of students into special education is inadequate and possibly biased.*

The Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative tested a model that creates conditions designed to foster Roma children’s academic success. Schools where the project model was implemented most effectively showed the best outcomes in terms of student achievement, attendance, and parental involvement.

The project results suggest that, in order to ensure success for Roma children beginning from their early years of schooling, an educational model with the following components must be in place:

- a firm belief in the ability of all children to succeed, manifested in holding high expectations for children,*
- the use of mainstream curriculum,*
- the implementation of developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate classroom practice, supported by well-structured training and supervision of teachers, and*
- the addition of a Roma family coordinator to each class, bringing Roma culture and language into the classroom and linking school and home.*

In this way, the education system can provide Roma children with opportunities to participate in mainstream education and support them in ways that promote their success.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in the context of a changing global society which demands a reassessment of many aspects of the current education system. Not only do best educational practices need to be identified and implemented, but the curriculum of schools needs to be reconsidered in light of the knowledge and skills children will need to be productive and participating citizens in a democratic 21st century society.

More specifically, the experiences and results of this project point to short-term and long-term strategies for addressing the educational needs of Roma children.

Short-term Strategies

The future of Roma children, both in the project and in other special schools in the region, is affected by their current educational situation. As previously mentioned, longer-term changes in the education system are required, but more immediately, two short-term solutions are proposed.

This project is developing and implementing a thorough transition process for children from special to mainstream education at the end of the third year.

The project staff has developed two options:

- *the integration of Roma children into mainstream schools, with appropriate pedagogy and support,*
- *a reclassification of special schools, in communities where local conditions warrant, to become primary schools that teach mainstream curriculum and grant mainstream school diplomas.*

The option of reclassifying or “re-profiling” special schools would be advisable in communities where distance or other local factors would create more hardship than benefit for Roma children. It is further suggested that, in some communities, these schools may become “magnet” schools, staffed with the most highly trained teachers and equipped with educational materials and support that would be attractive to both Roma and non-Roma families. This option encourages de-segregation and reverse integration.

Long-term Strategies

Over the longer term it is necessary to address the educational system in three fundamental areas: *pedagogical practice*, *quality assurance* and the *systemic environment of schools*.

Pedagogical Practice

The model tested in this project has proven effective in promoting school success for Roma children. Although all elements of the project are inter-related and mutually supportive, the single component that the research has identified as most highly correlated with academic achievement is good early childhood practice.

The process of changing the attitudes and practices of school staff holds major implications for the design, delivery, and funding of professional development at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Therefore, it is recommended that professional development be offered for school staff who teach minority children. This professional development needs to include the following components:

- *good early childhood pedagogy (such as Step by Step),*
- *anti-bias education/training,*
- *methodologies for second language teaching, and*
- *specific training for teaching minority students (history, language, cultural norms).*

Quality Assurance

The Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative demonstrates that a clearly-defined system of management, with strong elements of quality control and accountability, is a prerequisite to successful implementation. Such a system helps to ensure the effective implementation of the conditions that support school success for Roma children. Therefore, it is recommended that a system of quality assurance be developed and implemented to ensure appropriate integration of Roma students.

The Systemic Environment of Schools

Although this project was aimed at addressing the most serious issue related to the education of Roma children, the lessons learned have policy implications for all Roma children in the region, whether they are in special schools, mainstream schools, or on the street.

The project shows that Roma children can be successful. It is the system that must adapt to meet their needs. A **comprehensive approach** is required to address the issues.

Therefore, it is recommended that a comprehensive approach to ensuring school success for Roma children be adopted to include: *prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.*

Prevention refers to the investments that are made before children start school in order to ensure that they are successful once enrolled.

Intervention refers to all actions that are taken once children are in school, in order to ensure their continued success.

Rehabilitation refers to everything that is done to support the casualties of the system so that they can become functioning members of society. Casualties of the system include street children, dropouts, the unemployed, and the unemployable.

While this project has focused on intervention, its results have pointed to potentially fruitful directions in both the spheres of prevention and rehabilitation. Therefore, policy recommendations are proposed in prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation.

Policy Recommendations for Prevention of School Failure

School Readiness: Children must be appropriately prepared to enter school in order to prevent misplacement in special education. Therefore, we advocate for free, universal, high quality pre-school for all economically disadvantaged children.

Placement System: As our study proves, the majority of Roma children are misplaced in special education. Therefore, we recommend the re-examination and reform of the system of special education, particularly assessment and placement. Assessment must be changed so it is developmentally, linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Teacher Training and Support: Merely placing students in the appropriate setting will not ensure success if teachers do not receive appropriate preparation and training. Therefore, we recommend a re-examination and reform of the system of pre-service and in-service teacher education. Changes should incorporate all elements of the model necessary to ensure school success for minority children.

Policy Recommendations for Intervention

Intervention needs to occur at two levels. First, at the educational level, appropriate support is required to ensure effective integration of Roma children into mainstream education. The second level requires strategies that will guarantee Roma families have the necessary economic support to send their children to mainstream schools.

Educational Support: As it was learned from the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative, specific educational interventions are required to support children's school success. Therefore, it is recommended that educational support be embedded in the educational system in the forms of:

- *A formalized position of Roma family coordinator (teaching assistant) with the persons selected for the position being respected members of the local Roma community,*
- *Full-day education programs for all Roma children, financed by the state, and*
- *State financed academic support (such as tutoring or mentoring) for all Roma children.*

Economic Support: Given the experiences of Roma families involved in the project, it is recommended that economic support is necessary to ensure equitable access to mainstream education. Therefore, it is recommended that economic support be available in the forms of:

- *Financial subsidies for items such as food, educational materials, transportation, and boarding based on economic need rather than the type of institution the child attends (i.e. financial allocations must be tied to the child/family, rather than the institution), and*
- *Changes to the system to ensure that special education is not financially attractive to poor parents.*

Policy Recommendations for Rehabilitation

The system has clearly failed to provide adequate education for the majority of Roma children. Faced with the ever-growing number of dropouts, high levels of illiteracy and unemployed, it is evident that policy changes must go beyond prevention and intervention. Therefore, the following ideas are presented for consideration: community-based alternative "back to school" programs, support for further education or vocational training for Roma youth, and community-based family literacy programs.

The lessons learned from the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative clearly hold implications for changes at the school and classroom levels. However, the implications for systemic reform are even more profound. If real opportunities are to exist for Roma children and youth to participate successfully in mainstream education, the system must provide appropriate support in schools, classrooms, and communities.

GLOSSARY

The following is a list of terms and their definitions, as used in this report.

Control (or comparison) sites: Special education or remedial classes with similar characteristics to those included in the project (for example, same proportion of Roma children, similar communities). These classes were used for research purposes in order to compare their results on selected measures to the results in the pilot classes.

Inclusion: A philosophy or value system which holds that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education. The philosophy of inclusion transcends the idea of physical location, incorporating basic values that promote participation and social interaction which result in a sense of belonging for students.

Integration into Mainstream Education: Students participate in mainstream education whether that be by physically placing students in mainstream classes in mainstream schools or by changing the profile of the special school so that students are taking mainstream curriculum and receiving recognition for achievement of mainstream education standards.

Integration into Mainstream Education with Support: Certain students are meeting the standards or expectations of the mainstream curriculum at a minimal level, but will require support to continue to achieve at this level and not fall behind in mainstream education. Support might include programs for academic support, such as tutoring/mentoring.

ISSA: The International Step by Step Association is a membership organization which promotes open society values in education, equal access to quality education for all children, strong family involvement and community participation. ISSA is a network of 28 national organizations which operate the national Step by Step Programs and represent a professional network of educators who cooperate across borders and nationalities.

Master Teacher Trainer: A qualified educational professional with extensive experience who trains teachers in new educational methodologies. A master teacher trainer not only develops and delivers training, but also coaches and supervises teachers in the classroom.

Mainstream Curriculum: The content, skills and concepts that children are expected to learn in mainstream education. The standards or expectations of the mainstream curriculum are, in all the participating countries, much higher than are the expectations in special education.

The Open Society Institute (OSI): A private operating and grant making foundation that develops and implements a range of programs in civil society, education, media, public health and human and women's rights, as well as social, legal, and economic reform. OSI is at the center of an informal network of foundations and organizations active in more than 50 countries worldwide that supports a range of programs.

Established in 1993 by investor and philanthropist George Soros, OSI is based in New York City and operates network-wide programs, grant making activities in the United States, and other international initiatives. OSI provides support and assistance to Soros foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Guatemala, Haiti, Mongolia, South, Southern and West Africa.

Pilot (or experimental) Sites: Special education or remedial classes selected to be part of the project and, therefore, having access to the support and expectations inherent in the project model.

Remedial Classes or Reduced Class Size (Hungary): A type of class found in a mainstream school, run by the local government, where class sizes are a maximum of 15 students. In order to overcome disadvantages or to “catch up,” students are deemed to need special educational treatment and methodologies. Curriculum standards in these classes are lower than in the mainstream ones. Often these classes are referred to as “Gypsy classes” because of the over-representation of Roma students. In Hungary most of these classes cease to exist after grade 3; students are then placed into mainstream classrooms or into special education.

Roma Family Coordinator/Roma Teaching Assistant: A Roma person from the local community who works collaboratively with the teacher in the classroom to support students’ learning, particularly (but not limited to), incorporating Roma language and culture in the classroom, and encouraging and supporting the meaningful involvement of parents.

Romani: Language of the Roma people.

Special Schools: Schools for children who have been labeled as “mildly mentally handicapped.” In Hungary special schools are called *Eltéro tantervu általános iskola* (Elementary School with Differentiated Curriculum). In the Czech Republic they are known as *Zvlastni skola*, *Specialni skola*.





The Long Road to School

KISKOROS, HUNGARY

Many Roma in Hungary live in segregated communities, often far from the schools their children attend. The education system does not provide transportation for the children. Neither public nor private transportation is readily available. The children have no option but to walk to school, regardless of the distance.

Some of the children who attend the special school in Kiskoros, where the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative operates, walk 10 kilometres every day to and from school. The children have to get up very early, leaving home when it is still dark. During the winter, they have to trudge through deep snow. They are afraid on the road because of the dogs and the people who harass them because they are Roma.

The children are often late and always hungry when they arrive at school. The teachers understand the reasons for the children's late arrival, so the school provides breakfast for the children before they start their day.

There is a widely accepted belief that Roma families do not care about education, but these children go through great hardship every day just to get to school.



STEP BY STEP PROGRAM - BULGARIA

Bulgaria, Sofia 1000, 14 Batcho Kiro Str., tel.: ++359 2 9805712, 9804942,
fax: ++359 2 9806508, e-mail: email.step@bitex.com, www.stepbystep.bitex.com

The Step by Step Program Foundation is a non-governmental organization working in the field of the Bulgarian education since 1994.

Vision

Quality education for the XXI century

Mission

The Step by Step Program Foundation in Bulgaria develops educational models concerning the implementation of the following activities through the use of the following democratic principles for education:

- *Offering equal access to quality education for children and adults,*
- *Offering educational technologies and strategies connected with the interactive teaching methods and organization of the school environment,*
- *Monitoring, evaluation and research of educational projects,*
- *Developing specific projects in the field of permanent education, as well as training and re-training teachers.*

Projects

The Step by Step Program Foundation develops specific projects in the field of education in order to create democratic educational models, which provide equal opportunities for quality education for everybody. All projects are approved by the Ministry of Education and Science and have a big impact and influence on Bulgarian education. The projects address different target groups and help to meet their needs. They are:

- *Infant and Toddler Groups Project – common project with OSI, New York*
- *Preschool Project – common project with OSI, New York*
- *Primary School Project – common project with OSI, New York*
- *Higher Education Project – common project with OSI, New York*
- *Children with Special Educational Needs Project – common project with OSI, New York*
- *Boards of School Trustees Project – common project with CRS*
- *Municipality – Model Site Project – common project with UNICEF*
- *Special Schools Project – common project with OSI, New York*
- *Promoting the Integration of the Roma – project of Council of Ministers, funded by Phare Program of the European Union*
- *Teachers for Multilingual – Multiethnic Europe – Socrates Project Materials and training have been developed for teachers, parents and administrators.*

Network

The Step by Step Program network includes 57 kindergartens, 32 mainstream schools, 3 helping schools and 5 pedagogical faculties evenly distributed throughout Bulgaria. At the moment the network includes:

Sites in the program	Number	Teachers, administrators and faculty trained	Children, students and family served
Infant and toddler groups	13	45	162
Preschool		592	8526
Kindergartens	57		
Classrooms	296		
Primary schools		280	
Schools	32		
Classrooms	280		6560
Helping schools		38	133
Schools	3		
Classrooms	13		
Pedagogical faculties	5	25	115

Through this network the foundation supports 15,381 children in total, including 515 children with disabilities and 1,635 minority children. Of them 2,400 children are living in very difficult social and economic conditions.

Since 1994, 25 faculty teachers, 440 student teachers, 92 principals, 1,500 teachers, 45 nurses and 140 parents from the Step by Step Program Foundation network have been trained in the specific training modules. Nineteen preschool sites and 7 primary sites have been equipped and now are functioning as training model sites.

Evaluation

In 1999 a USAID funded program evaluation was conducted in four countries: Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Romania and Ukraine by the Education Development Center, Inc., MA, USA. The evaluation concluded that the Step by Step Program offered equal access to quality education and encouraged the democratic processes in education.

Staff

There are five full-time employees and two part-time employees. All team members are experienced and good professionals in their field of work.

In Bulgaria, Step by Step involves four master teacher trainers, 25 faculty teachers who train preschool and primary student teachers in the pedagogical faculties, 18 preschool teacher trainers and 30 primary teacher trainers who are well prepared to conduct training.

Partners

In order for the goals to be more successfully fulfilled, the Step By Step Foundation works in cooperation with governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations from Bulgaria and abroad. Some of the partners are:

- *Ministry of Education and Science*
- *Open Society Foundation – Sofia*
- *Open Society Institute – New York*
- *Children’s Resources International (CRI) – Washington*
- *Centro de Profesores y Recursos (Teacher Training and Research Centre) – Barbastro, Spain*
- *Wide Open School – Slovakia*
- *Bulgarian National Committee for UNICEF*
- *Socrates National Agency*
- *Catholic Relief Services*
- *Shumen municipality*
- *Delegation of the European Commission in Bulgaria*
- *Inter-ethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation*
- *NGO Resource Center*

The Foundation is a member of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA).

SUMMARY OF THE BULGARIAN RESEARCH

The project Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative in Bulgaria has two main goals:

- *To assess the abilities of Roma students in special schools in order to determine which students can be integrated into mainstream schools,*
- *To promote a model of integration of Roma students into mainstream education.*

Students are currently placed in special schools according to the legislative requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science. All students have a diagnosis of “mild mental disability.”

The research project in Bulgaria includes three pilot classes in special schools in Blagoevgrad, Vraza and Sliven, as well as five control classes (three in the same schools and two in special schools in Samokov and Sofia).

The Research

The research deals with both the psychological and pedagogical aspects of integration. In the pilot and control classes the psychological status and language status of students have been studied. In addition, student, parent, and staff interviews have been conducted in both pilot and control classes, using the same methods and protocols. In the pilot classes academic achievement on mainstream curriculum was also assessed.

Results

The academic abilities of students in Bulgarian language and literature, as well as mathematics were specifically assessed in the pilot classes. Twelve students (46%) achieved the curriculum standard of mainstream schools and could be integrated into mainstream education. Some of these children would require additional educational support. There are differences across the pilot sites. For example, in one pilot site more than half the students could be integrated, while in another site only one student would meet the minimum standard for integration.

The research on psychological status (both the mean rating and the psychological dynamics) showed better results for the students in the pilot classes than the control classes.

The language status of students in the pilot classes is also higher than that of the students in the control classes, although there is variability across the pilot sites. In general, progress in vocabulary acquisition is noteworthy.

The attitude of students and parents towards school and education was found to be positive. However, the attendance of some students was still a problem. It is anticipated that the Roma family coordinator can play a significant role in connecting with families and helping to promote improved student attendance at school.

It should also be noted in the findings that the pedagogical teams in Bulgaria were well qualified. Teachers worked hard at implementing the Step by Step methodology.

Conclusions

The results of this project provide direction for further work in Bulgaria. It can be concluded that:

- *The Step by Step methodology, coupled with mainstream curriculum, supports Roma children's school success and should be more widely implemented,*
- *If individual plans were put in place to focus on areas of the child's academic difficulties, more students would likely be brought to a level where they could be integrated into mainstream education with support,*
- *The work of the Roma family coordinators and teachers is important, but could still be improved to strengthen the connections between Roma families and the school.*

For further information, see the full research report from Bulgaria.



STEP BY STEP CZECH REPUBLIC

Prokopova 9, 130 00 Praha 3
Czech Republic
Tel/fax: +420 2 22 78 19 53
e-mail: vaclav.sneberger@osf.cz

Step by Step Czech Republic is a non-profit organization that was established in 1994. It is a center for development and implementation of the Step By Step Program, as well as other projects that focus on reform of the system of education and the development of a civil society.

SBS-Czech Republic provides training opportunities for professional enrichment for in-service and pre-service teachers, as well as faculty in universities and teacher training institutions. SBS CR has obtained accreditation from the Ministry of Education for the further education of teachers and for the evaluation of the quality of educational programs in SBS pre-schools and primary schools.

Mission

Step by Step Czech Republic supports the development of a democratic society, improvement of quality and access to life-long education and motivates individual persons and communities to build a tolerant, multicultural society.

Long term goal

To increase the quality of education and to support lifelong education on all levels of society in the Czech Republic

Program Areas

- *Step by Step – child centered teacher methodology for preschool and primary school.*
- *Inclusion and integration – children and teenagers with specific needs (minority groups, children with special needs).*
- *On-going professional development for teachers and faculty.*
- *Publishing for children, parents and teachers.*

Services

The basic products of Step by Step - Czech Republic are four interdependent programs that are fulfilled and realized by the following services:

- *Training, seminars, summerschools.*
- *Technical, organizational and methodological support to teachers, schools and administrators.*
- *Publishing.*

Current Projects

- *Preschool Project – common project with OSI, New York.*
- *Primary School Project – common project with OSI, New York.*
- *Higher Education Project – common project with OSI, New York.*
- *Children with Special Educational Needs Project – common project with OSI, New York.*
- *Region Training Site Project.*
- *Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative – common project with OSI, New York.*
- *Web publishing project – common project with OSI, New York.*
- *Teachers for democracy project - project with RWCT Czech Republic.*
- *School exchange project – with Socrates office Prague.*

Network

The Step by Step Czech Republic network includes 45 kindergartens, 36 mainstream schools, 6 special schools and 5 pedagogical faculties evenly distributed all over Czech Republic. At the moment the network includes:

Sites in the program	Number	Teachers, administrators and faculty trained	Children, students and family served
Preschool			
Kindergartens	45	592	5360
Classrooms	237		
Primary schools			
Schools	36	280	7068
Classrooms	258		6560
Helping schools			
Schools	6	38	158
Classrooms	13		
Pedagogical faculties	5	25	115

Through this network the foundation supports 12,586 children in total, including 1,335 children with disabilities and minority children.

Staff

There are six full-time employees and several consultants working in the program. All team members are experienced and good professionals in their field of work.

The Step by Step involves four Master Teacher Trainers, 10 faculty teachers who train preschool and primary student teachers in the pedagogical faculties, 15 preschool teacher trainers and 19 primary teacher trainers who are well prepared to conduct trainings in the various Step by Step modules.

Partners

In order for the goals of the organization to be more successfully fulfilled, the Step by Step - Czech Republic works in cooperation with government institutions and non-government organizations from the country and abroad. Some of the partners are:

- *Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports*
- *Open Society Foundation – Prague*
- *Open Society Institute – New York*
- *Wide Open School – Slovakia*
- *Socrates National Agency Prague*
- *Step by Step Foundation Bulgaria*
- *RWCT program Czech Republic*
- *NGO Resource Centers*
- *New school Foundation Prague*

The organization is a member of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA).



SUMMARY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC RESEARCH

Currently, four schools in the Czech Republic participate in the international Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative. The project's aim is the same as the other three countries: to re-integrate children from special education into mainstream education after three years.

The research compares the results of the children from special classes using special curriculum (control classes) to those of children in the special classes using mainstream curriculum (pilot classes). The pilot classes use Step by Step educational methodology to implement the curriculum. A Roma teaching assistant works in the classroom and connects families with the school.

There are 33 children in the pilot classes and 44 children in the control classes. The research specifically investigates the children's skills in mathematics and the Czech language, their ability to understand verbal instructions, their intellectual abilities and motor skills. Tests based on the mainstream curriculum were also developed and administered to students in the pilot classes.

Results

Comparison of the results of the two groups showed significant differences between the pilot and control groups in all skill areas in favour of the pilot group. In the pilot group there were a large number of children achieving results comparable with the expectations of students in mainstream elementary schools. (Detailed results are found in the full report on the research done in the Czech Republic.)

Specifically, in the Czech language test based on the mainstream curriculum, 54% of children met the grade 2 standard. In the mathematics test, 73% of children met the standard. Overall, 64% of students achieved the level of the mainstream grade 2 standards.

The results of the curriculum tests are shown in the table below. The table shows the percentage of students who were fully meeting the standard and the percentage who were meeting the standard, but at a minimal level. Those who fully meet the standard could be integrated easily, while those at the minimal level would require support to ensure their continued success.

Level of Achievement	Students Meeting Grade 2 Curriculum Standards		
	Czech Language	Mathematics	Grade 2 Overall
Fully meeting the standard	37%	42%	33%
Meeting the standard at a minimal level	17%	31%	31%
Total Percentage Meeting the Standard	54%	73%	64%

Conclusions

Using the Step by Step methodology, coupled with anti-bias education helps children in special schools progress in all skill areas.

- *The majority of children in the pilot classes are able to learn and use the knowledge required by mainstream school curriculum by the end of grade 2.*
- *The above mentioned conclusions can be interpreted in several ways.*
- *Some children are misplaced in special schools.*
- *While Step by Step methodology and other features of the project help students achieve the same results as students in mainstream schools, there are likely other variables that have an impact, such as the teacher's pedagogical skills and the school environment.*

In order to guarantee our children's the right to education that is equivalent to their abilities, it is important to focus on:

- *teachers' personal and professional growth, including changes in teaching methodology,*
- *holding higher expectations of Roma children,*
- *the process of placing children into special education schools. This decision not only has an impact on nine years of elementary education, but more importantly, it influences the child's further educational opportunities.*

For further information, see the full research report from the Czech Republic.

The Ec-Pec Foundation



1072 Budapest

Rakoczi ut 22. IV. 24.

Tel: (36) 1 486 28 50

Fax: (36) 1 266 34 63

E-mail: ecpec@axelero.hu

Ec-Pec Foundation was established to promote the Step by Step Program in Hungarian schools and preschools with a special emphasis on the needs of Roma children and children with special needs. Ec Pec also aims to offer further development of the program where it has already been adopted.

The Foundation's Programs

The programs already started and those planned for the future have the mission of helping Roma children achieve success in schools. Our experience and research carried out in this field prove that social disadvantage is quickly transformed into educational disadvantage in the early years, and this situation is impossible to compensate for in later years. It is the view of Ec Pec that economic or social disadvantage does not affect abilities, only opportunities. Using an appropriate teaching methodology can be part of the solution, although we are aware that the problem is not purely methodological. Our philosophy is based on our conviction that positive change is impossible without the active involvement of the community. As a result, we cooperate not only with the children and the teachers, but also treat parents as our partners and work very closely with them.

Training of Teachers and Trainers

Our foundation has integrated the Step by Step Program into the national system of in-service teacher training. As a result, Step by Step training is available to all teachers under the Hungarian system of teacher re-training. Our goal is to offer training based on the latest research and information, and tailored to the needs of our teachers. We achieve this by updating and refining the Step by Step system by adding new ideas and elements. The newest components are anti-bias training for teachers and administrators, and multicultural programs for children ages 3-10.

Our trainings:

Basic Step by Step Training (60 hours)

Project planning – using activity centers (30 hours)

Cooperative learning and peer assistance (30 hours)

Child observation and continuous evaluation (30 hours)

Global writing and reading (30 hours)

Natural sciences – learning through experiences; research logs (30 hours)

We also provide an opportunity for our most talented Step by Step teachers to join our efforts as trainers. Since the Foundation was created, 23 methodologically well-versed and highly experienced teachers have become trainers of the Step by Step methodology. At present, our network consists of 90 teachers throughout Hungary who participated in our first training activities and are already using the Step by Step methodology in their classrooms.

A Network of Model Schools and Regional Centres

We are developing a network of model schools and regional centres in order to make our trainings less centralized and to build up a training and information system based on local needs and local expertise.

A Professional Network of Teachers

Within the Foundation we have a separate pedagogical forum, which aims at providing on-going professional development and opportunities for new initiatives.

Integrating the teaching profession: Roma Family Coordinators

Based on the success of the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative we would like to gain acceptance for the training of family coordinators and to find a place in the Hungarian educational system. This would ensure that the efforts of teachers working with Roma children are supported by trained Roma teaching assistants, who are accepted by the local Roma community and are able to incorporate Roma culture into the life of the classroom.

Current Projects

Partnership with Phare. The project has the goal of eliminating the discriminative effect of social disadvantages before children go to first grade. Most of the pupils placed in special need classes are Roma. We will initiate a “preparatory class” in our partner schools which, through the Step by Step method and child-centered educational methods, can combat these disadvantages.

We expect that the children will make up for any educational gap, and will be prepared to enter the first grade along with their peers, and will succeed in mainstream classes.

Human Resources of Ec-Pec Foundation

Full time staff:

Judit Lafferthon – President

Eva Deak – Executive Director

Anita Meszaros – Director of Methodology

Rozsa Mendi – Advisor, Project Manager

Katalin Szucs – Office Manager

We believe that our success is based on the co-operation with students, trainers, teachers, parents and the communities.

SUMMARY OF THE HUNGARIAN RESEARCH REPORT

Currently four pilot and four control schools participate in the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative. The project's aim is the same as in the three other countries: to re-integrate children from special education into mainstream education after three years. However, the sites in Hungary are somewhat different from those in the other three countries. In Hungary, during the 2000-2001 school year, there were two pilot sites with grade 1 children in special schools, and two other pilot sites with grade 2 children in remedial classes of mainstream schools.

Of the 105 children in the study, there were 60 boys and 45 girls. The total number of first graders (special school) was 44 (21 pilot and 23 control); for the second graders the total number was 61 (30 pilot and 31 control).

Testing

During the 2000-2001 academic year, curriculum as well as aptitude tests were administered. Aptitude tests were used to help show a full picture of children's capabilities. The research also paid attention to one of the potential reasons for children's developmental lags, namely the official language. As a result, three pedagogical tests were selected: Peabody (to test passive vocabulary), Gardner (to test active vocabulary) and PREFER (to measure general development and school readiness). These tests were administered in both the pilot classes and control group classes with similar populations.

Three curriculum tests were administered at each grade level in the pilot classes: a reading comprehension test, a writing/orthography test and a mathematics test. The tests were based on the National Curriculum standards and approved by Oppelt Jozsefne, Researcher, Bacs-Kiskun County Pedagogical Institute.

Grade 1 Special School Results

In terms of both active and passive vocabularies, children in control classes started their studies with a smaller vocabulary (34.72%) than those in pilot classes (45.68%). While this difference remained unchanged on output measurements, a distinction was observed in the rate of development (55.12% in the pilot and 48.7% in the control group). In terms of the active vocabulary, the pilot classes also achieved better results. This is probably due to Step by Step methodology which places great emphasis on verbal development.

In terms of the behaviour and knowledge index measured by the PREFER test, the pilot classes showed better results on both input and output testing, and the development rate was also significantly higher in the pilot classes (86.49% as opposed to 25.77%).

The summary of the academic test results of the first year pilot and control classes is as follows:

Special Schools – Grade 1

School	Pilot 1.	Control 1	Pilot 2.	Control 2.
Maths (%)	42,00	50,60	29,45	40,00
Reading (%)	69,79	45,23	65,90	29,16
Writing (%)	83,59	49,21	93,75	25,00
Average (%)	65,13	48,35	63,03	31,39

Grade 2 Remedial Class Mainstream School Results

In grade 2 the curriculum tests were administered in both the pilot classes and control classes because the children were in remedial classes in mainstream schools. Students in the pilot classes achieved significantly better results than the control classes on the curriculum tests.

The summary of the academic test results of the second grade pilot and control classes is as follows:

Remedial Classes, Mainstream Schools – Grade 2

School	Pilot 3	Control 3	Pilot 4	Control 4
Maths (%)	72,56	71,73	89,34	55,97
Reading (%)	87,25	66,00	86,57	62,57
Writing (%)	83,98	71,25	83,17	37,94
Average (%)	81,26	69,66	86,36	52,84

Conclusions

The research clearly indicates that the pilot and control classes produced significantly different results. Overall, children in the pilot classes achieved better results than children in the control classes, with the exception of the first grade control classes where students' mathematics scores were better than the pilot. This may be explained by the fact that the tests were based on traditional methodologies and textbooks, whose language is more familiar to children in the control classes. Students in the pilot classes are unfamiliar with these traditional methodologies. This may represent a limitation of the test.

Although the results are from the end of the 2nd year of a three year project, they prove that these children are misplaced in remedial classes and special schools established for the "mentally handicapped." As a result of an appropriate pedagogical approach with high expectations for academic achievement, they meet the standards of the mainstream curriculum.

For further information, see the full research report from Hungary.



Nadacia Škola dokoran Wide Open School Foundation

The Wide Open School Foundation began its work in 1994 and was legally registered as a foundation in 1996.

Vision

A democratic society which provides people with fundamental human rights.

Mission

Support social changes via internal school reform providing equal opportunities for all children and learners to reach their full potential. Encourage and motivate individuals and communities to create a democratic and multi-cultural atmosphere in the process of life-long learning.

Goals

- *Increase the quality of the learning and teaching at different levels of the school system and community.*
- *Foster society of lifelong learners where the entire community helps children to reach their full potential providing equal access to a quality education.*
- *To prevent discrimination against the most disadvantaged groups of the children/learners including children belonging to minorities or indigenous community, disabled children who are migrants, and displaced children who are living or working on the street.*

Program

1. Roma Minority Education Program

School improvement for Roma education

The purpose is to create effective schools and other institutions which are able to prepare Roma students to participate in building the democratic society for 21st century :

- *To provide instruction with renewed conviction.*
- *To integrate, socialize and prepare students in order to recognize and acknowledge prejudice and discriminatory behavior in themselves and others.*
- *To provide opportunities for school completion through a variety of options.*
- *Assist teachers and students to progressively master the competencies they will need in the 21st century: critical thinking, team work, communication skills, and living their lives in a multicultural society.*

Implementation of Activities

- *Training: teachers, administrators, parents, students, and other stakeholders.*
- *Research: Comprehensive Community Education, reintegration of Roma students from special schools to mainstream schools, implementation of the Roma assistant teacher position to the school system.*
- *Curriculum development (multicultural, anti-bias approach in cross-curricular context).*
- *Tutoring and mentoring of Roma students, especially "dropouts" from primary and secondary schools.*

Roma Community Development

The goal is to create multiple programs that address the unique needs of the Roma community and then to invite the community members to participate fully in these programs.

Implementation of activities

- *Establishment of community based management, history of the community and a summary of major trends.*
- *0-6 program for children and parents.*
- *After school activities (cooperation with Youth Center and youth clubs).*
- *Teen and technology program.*
- *School and job training programs.*
- *Community-advisory center.*

2. Systemic Change In Education

- *Co-operation focused on the development of educational strategy based on national level in the context of European Union Accession Process.*
- *Implementation of Open Society values into the school system.*
- *Support of the Slovak educational system via internal school reform.*

The context of the program is oriented to implement open society values into the institutional school system through the development of child/learner centered educational strategies at local, regional and national level in the context of the European Union.

Implementation of activities

- *Establishment of regional educational centers.*
- *Professional development of the core team.*
- *Training activities for students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members.*
- *Tutoring and mentoring activities for beginning teachers.*
- *Implementation of child/learner centered methodology - Step by Step Program to HED.*
- *Continual development of the Community schools and Community centers.*

3. Integration of Children With Special Needs

- *Encourage and support change of public attitudes.*
- *Adjustment of social and learning environment.*
- *Development of learning atmosphere and conditions, meeting individual needs of children.*

Purposes are to involve public and experts in the problem solving process of children and youth with special needs, development of support programs through common activities (education, prevention, and intervention), initiate establishment of volunteer community integration centers, and use the knowledge and experience of the previous PHARE LIEN Project with partial implementation summarized as follows:

- *Integration of children with disabilities in programs with their peers.*
- *Collaborative relationship with families.*
- *Pay attention to the unique needs of each child with recognition of the child's abilities, as well as disabilities.*

Capacities, Expertise and Experience

Since 2000 the Wide Open School has established an innovative model of child centered education in Slovakia based on the Step by Step Program in 13 regional centers. These regional centers are models of excellent preschools and primary school education.

Community Centers have been established in secondary schools and colleges. Faculty development in universities and teacher training institutions has been gradually increased.

There are 35 trained lecturers /trainers/ working in the regional centers. They are all qualified teachers involved in on-going professional development. The Wide Open School has fulfilled the requirements of the Ministry of Education and has received accreditation for its work in schools, as well as for its work in longitudinal studies and research which has transformed Roma education.

SUMMARY OF THE SLOVAK RESEARCH

This summary presents the results of the first two years of the pilot Step By Step Roma Special Schools Initiative. The report shows the results of ongoing research that started with the beginning of the Project in the 1999-2000 school year. The pilot project is being implemented in five special primary classes in different Slovak communities.

To promote equal education for Roma children it is necessary to provide a complex and integrated educational approach that will create the conditions for their well-balanced and effective cognitive and social development. Therefore, the main objective of the project is equal educational opportunity for Roma children who are inappropriately placed in special education. However, the project also has broader implications for the education of both children of the majority population and other minorities.

Hypotheses and Underlying Assumptions

Students in the pilot (experimental) classes in the special primary schools will be the beneficiaries of Step by Step methodology, individual educational plans, and anti-bias training.

Students in the pilot classes will achieve better educational results than students of the control classes because of the Step by Step methodology.

The achievement of the students in the pilot classrooms will be similar to the achievement of the mainstream primary school students. This will be grounds for placement students from pilot classrooms into mainstream primary schools.

Interactive learning and teaching methods, combined with on-going family involvement with the school, will result in increased parental interest in the education of their children. In turn, this will be demonstrated by accelerated social and cognitive development of Roma students.

Training of teachers and Roma teaching assistants in conflict resolution and building citizen participation will be necessary to support the overall implementation of culturally inclusive education.

Research Sample

The sample of five pilot classrooms with Roma students was selected (in Jarovnice, Spisska Nova Ves Kosice-Odborarska Roznava and Ziar nad Hronom), as well as of control classrooms (in Kosice-Inzinierska Presov Matice solvenskei Presov Vodarenska Chminianski Jakobovany and Banska Stiavnic).

Results - Cognitive Development and Selected Psychological Indicators

The Coloured Progressive Matrices - Raven is a nonverbal test of mental abilities that is seen as a suitable test for measuring fluid intelligence because it is deemed to be a 'culturally fair' test. The results of this test show that 34% of students from the experimental classes were able to adapt to the requirements of regular primary school without any help, while another 60% could do so with support.

The Heidelberg Test of Speech Development was used to compare improvement of speech and language abilities of the children in pilot classrooms with those in the control classrooms. If the importance of the speech and language development of Roma children is recognized in connection with their increased social competencies and general attitude towards education, the results indicate success. It is reasonable to state that positive results were achieved by the educational program in our experiment.

The Semantic Differential Test: "Hidden Me" provides evidence of differences in children's attitudes towards selected objects. Attitudes of children in the pilot classes were more positive than those of children educated in the typical curricula of special schools. Children in the pilot group also had significantly lower occurrence of negative attitudes when compared to children in the control classes.

The Children's Screening Test showed the progress of students in areas such as: perception stability, spatial orientation, hearing perception, sequential memory of words, expression, and, motor demonstration (e.g., fine motor skills). Better results were generally achieved by the students of pilot classrooms.

Results - Curriculum Based Tests

The underlying assumption of the Project is that the students involved are learning according to an individualized educational plan using the Step by Step methodology. Teachers were also required to teach according to the state curriculum of mainstream primary schools. Therefore, students were tested on the Slovak language and mathematics according to the expectations of mainstream primary schools.

On the Slovak language test, overall success in all pilot classrooms combined was 78%. Twelve of the 35 students achieved a score of 90 % or more on the Slovak language test. One student achieved a score of 100 %. The majority of the students scored in the 75% to 89 % range. Besides good results in the tests, we also observed improved communication skills and positive social interactions in the pilot classrooms.

The goal of the mathematics test (in written form) was to find out to what degree the standards of the state grade 2 mathematics curriculum for mainstream primary schools were achieved. The majority of students were able to achieve at a high level.

Approximately 80% of students in the pilot classes were at the level at which they could be integrated into mainstream primary education, although some of these students would require additional support.

Conclusions

Based on the results of our testing we can state that the goals set at the beginning of the project were achieved. The overall objective, to integrate the students from special schools into mainstream primary schools, will be achieved for many students. The results clearly demonstrate that the majority of Roma students are misplaced into special schools.

After two years, the efforts of the teachers and Roma teaching assistants in the pilot classrooms also show that the forms and methods of teaching used in this project are an appropriate educational direction.

Almost all test results were better in pilot classrooms, whether in increased intellectual capabilities, improvement of communication skills, social and emotional development, and speech and language development. Based on the analysis of the results, we are firmly convinced that Roma students are able to achieve the academic standards of mainstream primary schools if they have appropriate support from their teachers and their schools.

For further information, see the full research report from Slovakia.

