Case Studies

Appendix II

to the Final Report of the study

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in promoting educational attainment including social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and in fostering social inclusion

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Peter Moss
Thomas Coram Research Unit
Institute of Education University of London

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1. Introduction

This case study focuses on England and the period of the Labour government from 1997 to 2010, under the premiership of Tony Blair (1997-2007) and Gordon Brown (2007-2010). In particular it examines developments in early childhood education and care (ECEC) during this period – the first time, as will be discussed further, that an English government had treated ECEC as a policy priority – and its relationship with disadvantaged children and another government priority, that of reducing child poverty.

The study is in four main sections. Section 2 sets the scene by describing the situation – both for ECEC and child poverty – that confronted the incoming Labour government, the legacy of the long-serving preceding Conservative government, first under the premiership of Margaret Thatcher (1979-90), then under her successor, John Major (1990-96). Section 3 examines what the Labour government did both for ECEC and child poverty. It begins by giving an overview of policy developments during the 13 years of Labour government, then within this context looks in more detail at five areas in ECEC: governance and finance; the organisation and management of services; supply of services and participation in them by children; the workforce; and engagement with families. The section ends by reviewing evaluations of what the Labour government achieved in the two areas of child poverty and ECEC, and what can be said about the impact of the latter on the former. Section 4 offers some conclusions from the author about the Labour administration’s record: what it achieved and what it failed to do.

In addition to the main text, Annex One offers a detailed timeline for policy developments during the Labour government, as well as year-by-year child poverty estimates. It serves as a useful source of reference for the reader when getting (understandably) bemused, faced by the multitude of policy proposals, initiatives and changes that marked the Blair and Brown premierships; it can seem at times like being caught in a blizzard, unable to gain any sense of orientation or direction in the blizzard of directives that poured out of Whitehall, the seat of a very centralised government.

1 During this period, although much policy with a bearing on child poverty (e.g. taxation and benefits) remained with the UK government, responsibility for ECEC resided with the four countries that constitute the United Kingdom: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This case study focuses on the largest of these countries, England.
While the fields of child poverty and ECEC are quite broad, they do not of course cover much of the policy territory that touches on children and families, and which is virtually unexplored in this study. For example, the Labour government developed a range of other policies to help working parents, including introducing Paternity and Parental leave, extending Maternity leave and giving a right to parents to request flexible working. There was much activity in education, including the hugely ambitious aim of making all schools Extended Schools, offering a range of services for children, families and communities over and above classroom learning. I touch on this latter development below, in the context of Every Child Matters (ECM), a sweeping policy agenda for all children and encompassing all children's services and workforces, including ECEC. ECM was central to the experience of anyone working with children and families during the later years of the Labour Government, yet registered little with the general population and has now been air-brushed out of policy by the subsequent Conservative-led Coalition government who prioritise quite other agendas.

As a final word of introduction, it is worth locating the Labour government economically. The first period of the administration was a time of steady economic and employment growth, when Chancellor Gordon Brown declared there would be ‘no return to boom and bust’, and of increasing public spending. All this went into reverse with the onset of the financial crisis, the first sign of which in Britain was the run on the Northern Rock bank in September 2007, followed in 2008 by the more widespread banking debacle, which resulted in the cash machines coming within a few hours of closing down and the government having to spend huge sums to prop up major UK banks. Recession followed on – the deepest, indeed, since the Great Depression - and the economy contracted, not having recovered, at the time of writing, its position on the eve of the crisis. This set the scene for Labour to lose the May 2010 election and for a new Conservative-led coalition government that made large and rapid reductions in public debt its priority – the good times had gone, the age of austerity set in.
2. The situation in 1997

2.1 The ECEC legacy
Since the end of the Second World War, early childhood education and care had a low priority for successive governments, whether Conservative or Labour. ‘Childcare’ provision for employed parents (usually assumed to be needed by mothers, not parents) was treated, at best, with indifference, regarded as a private matter with the state’s role limited to a degree of regulation, plus some provision for children whose families were deemed to need ‘day care’ for social reasons. Education for young children (from 3 years up to compulsory school age of 5 years) depended on the interest, or otherwise, of individual local authorities, with a national government commitment in the 1970s to provide such provision for all parents who wanted it, not being delivered on; where early education was publicly provided, it was mainly in primary schools and for part-time (morning or afternoon) sessions. Amidst this general policy disinterest, a private sector existed under the legal and policy heading of ‘day care’, the responsibility of the health ministry: a small number of mainly for-profit day nurseries, offering full-time childcare; a large number of private, not-for-profit playgroups providing very part-time offers for mainly 3 and 4-year-olds; and private ‘childminders’, women offering paid care in their own homes, the main source of non-family childcare for working parents.

Change began towards the end of the 1980s, but driven by the demands of families, not government policy. Employment among women with young children began to rise rapidly, in particular better educated women choosing to return to work after maternity leave (Brannen and Moss, 1998). Whereas previously employment among women with pre-school age children had been low and overwhelmingly part time, allowing informal childcare arrangements to dominate, now a new generation of mothers emerged who needed more hours of childcare and more formal arrangements. The result was an explosive growth in private childcare provision in England. The number of places with childminders doubled between 1989 and 1997 (from 186,500 to 365,000), but this rate of increase was outpaced by private day nurseries, where places nearly quadrupled (from 46,500 to 173,500) (Department of Health, 1997); in less than a decade a large market in private for-profit childcare centres had emerged.

Under the last Conservative government, led by John Major, public policy showed signs of slowly moving. Some financial support for the childcare costs of low income families – the
‘childcare disregard’ for families on Family Credit – was introduced in 1994, a tentative and limited scheme of demand-side subsidy. In the same year, the government announced a new push for early or nursery education, with funding to go to any provider – not just schools but also private providers such as playgroups and nurseries – that could meet certain standards. Again a demand-side funding strategy was favoured, through the use of vouchers, which were introduced, on a trial basis, to four local authorities in 1996, shortly before the government fell at the 1997 general election.

Despite these moves, the situation that the Labour government inherited in 1997 was little changed from 1979: a system split between ‘early or nursery education’ (the responsibility of the education department) and ‘childcare’ (the responsibility of health); a diverse, fragmented and mono-purpose array of services, each serving a particular group of children and families with a limited offer (see Box A for main services); low public investment and provision inadequate to meet need or demand; and a workforce that predominantly consisted of low paid and low qualified childminders and nursery and playgroup workers. Not surprisingly, cross-national comparisons were consistently showing England (or the UK) near the bottom of the European league table. Last but not least, compulsory school age remained early (by European standards) at 5 years, with most children in practice starting school between 4 and 5 years, entering the first year of primary school (reception class) on a voluntary basis.

BOX A: Main ECEC services in England

**Day nursery:** centre for children from a few months to 5 years, mainly used by working parents and offering full day and all year care

**Playgroup/preschool:** centre for children from 2 or 3 years to 5 years, usually offering sessional provision of a few days per week in term-time only

**Nursery class:** class in primary school for 3 or 4 year olds, usually a morning or afternoon session during term-term only

**Reception class:** first year of primary school, but taking many 4 year olds, mainly offering a full school day in term-time only

**Childminder:** an individual caring for a child/children in her own home, mainly used by working parents and offering full day and all year care

**Children’s Centre** (post-1997): multi-purpose service for children and families, sometimes including early childhood education and care.
2.2 Disadvantaged children

In a paper from 1998, John Hills describes four central themes in the policies of the 1979-97 Conservative administration towards the welfare state: attempts to control public spending; privatisation; targeting; and rising inequality (Hills, 1998). As Hills puts it, ‘[i]nequality increased dramatically in the 1980s...Over the whole period from 1979 to 1995, the incomes of the poorest 10-20 per cent were little or no higher in real terms, despite overall income growth of 40 per cent’ (p.18). Poverty also soared. The proportion of the population with incomes below half the average (before housing costs), reached over 20 per cent in the early 1990s, more than double the rate in 1979.

The increase and level of poverty was particularly striking for children. David Piachaud and Holly Sutherland (2000) concluded that between 1979 and 1997,

the number of children in poverty has tripled...[by 1997/8] 11 million people were living below half the mean income level (before housing costs) and 14 million people were living below half the mean level of income on an “after housing costs” basis. This represents one-quarter of the population. Of this number, 4.5 million were children; one in three children were living in poverty (p.5).

Those most at risk of living in poverty included: families with four or more children; families with mothers aged 16-24; ethnic minority families; lone parents; and families without a working parent.

The causes of this surge in inequality and poverty were several and varied. Focusing on child poverty, Piachaud and Sutherland showed that

about two thirds of the poorest children were in families without a full-time worker and the biggest absolute increase was in single parent families, most of whom were not in paid work. But the most rapid growth occurred in families with one or two children and a full-time worker. Thus, the analysis of child poverty points to not one but a number of causes: there are more children in workless households and there are more children in “working poor” households (p.6).

Looking at the wider picture, Hills identified three main factors that had driven rising inequality and poverty:
Growing earnings inequality, in part linked to increasing premiums for skills and qualifications, in turn related in part to technological change;

- Rising unemployment and larger numbers receiving benefits, with a particularly rapid growth in the proportion of working age families without any family member in work;
- The change in policy towards price-linking benefit levels, rather than maintaining relativities with incomes.

Underlying this was a near doubling between 1979 and 1995 in the proportion of families with children headed by a lone parent - from 12 to 23 per cent. By the latter date, nearly 80 per cent of these parents depended on the state’s minimum income benefit.

Facing Labour, therefore, was a daunting legacy of child poverty and inequality, driven by a combination of factors in which low earnings for many in work and an increasing number of workless, welfare-dependent families both played an important part. It was in this context that Prime Minister Blair made an extraordinarily ambitious commitment in 1999: to ‘eradicate child poverty within a generation’, by 2020, a commitment subsequently given legal force by its inclusion in the Child Poverty Act, passed into law in March 2010, shortly before the Labour government’s general election defeat.²

² The Act actually commits government to reducing relative child poverty - i.e. children living in households below 60 per cent of equivalised median income before housing costs – to 10 per cent or less.
3. The Labour government, 1997-2010

3.1 Setting the policy context: new policy priorities

The Labour government that came to power in May 1997 attached a high priority, as already noted, to reducing and indeed ‘eradicating’ child poverty. It adopted a number of policies to support this aim. Some involved increasing direct financial support through, for example, the introduction of a Child Tax Credit and Working Families Tax Credit, a system of income related support; and above inflation increases in Child Benefit, a universal system of payments. Another measure was the Sure Start Maternity Grant of £500 per child for low income families. But it also sought to increase parental (mainly maternal) employment, with paid work identified as one route out of poverty. Right from the start, therefore, the government gave a high priority to ECEC, which it saw as an important means for raising employment and reducing poverty – but also for tackling a range of other social problems through ‘early intervention’.

The Labour government’s high and wide hopes invested in ECEC are expressed in a 2002 Inter-departmental Childcare Review, which sets out the many government objectives that ‘the availability of good quality, affordable childcare is key to achieving’:

Childcare can improve educational outcomes for children. Childcare enables parents, particularly mothers, to go out to work, or increase their hours in work, thereby lifting their families out of poverty. It also plays a key role in extending choice for women by enhancing their ability to compete in the labour market on more equal terms, helping them to overcome the glass ceiling, and by ensuring that they themselves may not face poverty in old age.

Childcare can also play an important role in meeting other top level objectives, for example in improving health, boosting productivity, improving public services, closing the gender pay gap and reducing crime. The targets to achieve 70 per cent employment amongst lone parents by 2010 and to eradicate child poverty by 2020 are those that are most obviously related. Childcare is essential for these objectives to be met (Department for Education and Skills et al., 2002, p.5; emphasis added)

Annex One provides a timeline of main policy initiatives related to ECEC during the Labour years. It gives some indication of the attention given to ECEC by government during this period, indeed of the sheer amount and density of policy activity. It was an astonishing turn
compared with the preceding 50 years of indifference and inactivity. Within this complex mass of policy, three main strands can be identified:

i. **A universal entitlement to ‘early education’**³: developing the previous government’s renewed interest, the Labour administration introduced a universal entitlement to early education, first for 4-year-olds, then 3 year-olds, initially for 12½ hours a week, then to 15 hours a week (announced in 2010 by the Labour government and implemented by the following Coalition government); in 2009, a scheme to extend nursery education to the poorest 2-year-olds was announced, but not implemented before the government lost power. The Conservative experiment with vouchers was dropped, replaced by supply-side funding (a ‘Nursery Education Grant’) paid direct to providers. But like the Conservatives, Labour pursued a market approach by opening the field to all providers who met certain standards – so as well as school-based provision in nursery classes, early education could be offered by day nurseries, playgroups and childminders.

ii. **Increased access to ‘childcare’**: the government sought to make ‘affordable’ and ‘high quality’ ‘childcare’ available. The main vehicle for this goal remained (as under the Conservative government) a market of private providers, but Labour intervened more actively in the market. They introduced an extensive system of demand subsidy, available to a substantial number of low to middle income families: the Child Care Tax Credit (1999). The 2006 Childcare Act placed new duties on local authorities, including securing sufficient childcare by conducting ‘childcare sufficiency assessments’ and managing the local childcare market. A programme – the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative – was funded to make ‘high quality, convenient and affordable childcare’ available for working parents in the 20 per cent most disadvantaged areas, providing some 45,000 new places mainly through private providers and with the intention that, once established, these nurseries would become self supporting. Last but not least, all childcare services were brought under a new central regulatory authority – OFSTED (also responsible for regulating early education and schools) – replacing previous regulation by local authorities; and the Early Years Foundation Stage was introduced in 2008, a detailed national frame incorporating a curriculum and standards for services for

³ I have placed ‘early education’ and ‘childcare’ in inverted commas here to indicate the terms used by the Labour government and to highlight that they are contested terms, indicating a split way of thinking about and acting towards early childhood services, a theme to which I return later.
children from birth until the end of the first (reception) year in primary school, to be followed by all registered ECEC providers.

iii. **Sure Start and Children’s Centres**: while the first two strands were both seen as relevant to disadvantaged children but not exclusive to them, this strand was specifically targeted, at least initially, at these children and their families. Sure Start originated in a 1998 report from a senior Treasury official, Norman Glass, prepared as part of the government’s first Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), intended to introduce a longer-term perspective to government spending and policy by setting three-year targets for public expenditure. While the CSR focused on individual departments, it also included three thematic cross-departmental policy reviews: on drugs, youth crime and services for children under 8 years. It was the last, led by Norman Glass, that recommended and led to Sure Start, based on some key findings including: the particular damage caused by poverty in the early years; the smaller share of public expenditure going to children under 4 compared to those at school; the lack of overall strategy for services for young children; wide variations in quantity and quality of early years services across the country; and the potential for the right kind of services to narrow the gap between poor children and the rest (Eisenstadt, 2012).

Sure Start was first announced in 1998, to be a targeted intervention programme for children under 4 years and their families in areas with high levels of poverty. Sixty ‘trailblazer’ Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) were named in 1999, with funding allocated for 250 SSLPs. Further funding brought the total number of SSLPs to 524 by 2002. In that year, Children’s Centres were first raised\(^4\) in a report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Childcare (Department for Education and Skills et al., 2002) as an effective way of providing good quality, integrated childcare and early years education as well as a range of other services for children and their families. In 2003, it was announced that SSLPs were to be replaced by Sure Start Children’s Centres (CCs), which would also in time absorb Neighbourhood Nurseries. CCs were subsequently developed in three phases: the first focused on the 20 per cent most disadvantaged areas; the second on extending CCs to the 30 per cent most disadvantaged areas, plus some in other areas; and the third on achieving full coverage in the remaining 70 per cent of the country. By 2010, when the programme was complete, there were 3,500 Children’s Centre, one in every community in England.

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\(^4\) Children’s Centres were, in fact, first proposed and some initially piloted in the 1970s; government then declined to take up and develop this model of service.
Although a universal service eventually, in the sense that CCs were in all communities and available to all families, they were differentiated according to the services they offered in different areas. *All Children’s Centres* had to provide (known as the ‘core offer’): information and advice to parents on a range of subjects including looking after babies and young children, the availability of local services such as childcare; drop-in sessions and activities for parents, carers and children; outreach and family support services, including visits to all families within two months of a child’s birth; child and family health services, including access to specialist services for those who need them; links with Jobcentre Plus for training and employment advice; and support for local childminders and a childminding network. But *CCs serving the 30 per cent most deprived communities* had in addition to offer integrated early education and childcare places for a minimum of 5 days a week, 10 hours a day, 48 weeks a year. CCs outside these areas need not include such full-day childcare unless there was unmet local demand, though all were expected to have some activities for children on site. Overall, therefore, Children’s Centres did not replace existing ECEC services, but supplemented them in providing some early education and childcare where the existing market was not able to fully meet demand; in most of the country, the focus was on the CC as an information and support service (Lewis, 2011).

Several broader points should be made about these developments. First, these three strands were linked together by inclusion in the national Childcare Strategy, first introduced in 1998 (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) and updated in 2004 (HM Treasury, 2004). The Strategy’s targets included: two million new childcare places (both for children under and of school age) by 2006, with 1.8 million achieved by 2004; 2,500 Children’s Centres by 2008, including a Centre in each of the 20 per cent most disadvantaged wards in England, extended by a pledge to create 3,500 Children’s Centres by 2010, providing access for all families; and a commitment to extend free early education places for three and four year olds to 15 hours a week by 2010.

Second the strands subsequently became part of a much wider children’s policy, sometimes referred to as the ‘Every Child Matters’ (ECM) agenda after a government Green Paper in 2003 (HM Treasury, 2003) produced in response to the report of an enquiry into the death of a young child, Victoria Climbié, killed by the relatives she lived with but failed by a succession of public health, welfare and education bodies. ECM placed a new emphasis on a holistic and integrated approach to working with all children, of both pre-school and school
age, including the adoption of a common set of outcomes to cover all services for children and the development of new integrated services including Children’s Centres and Extended Schools (which all schools were to become, providing at least a ‘core offer’ of services for children and families\(^5\)).

Finally, the story of SSLPs and CCs throws light on government’s somewhat restless search to find effective ways to tackle child poverty and other social problems, which led to recurrent shifts of policy. The story is analysed in an important article by Jane Lewis (2011). She begins by setting out the original thinking behind SSLPs:

"Sure Start was one of a number of social policy initiatives brought forward by the New Labour government in the late 1990s, which incorporated ideas about the importance of area-based initiatives (in health as well as education), of strengthening communities, of tackling social exclusion and child poverty in particular, of making interventions ‘evidence based’ and of ‘modernising’ public services by encouraging joined-up govt and an ‘integrated’ approach..."

"Sure Start was an early intervention programme, intended to bring together a range of services, including family support, health services and support for special needs as well as childcare and education, in disadvantaged areas. The aim was to ‘invest’ in early childhood...to improve children’s health and their social, emotional and cognitive development, and to strengthen families and communities in disadvantaged areas...The policy problem was identified by British policy-makers mainly in terms of family functioning and child poverty among the socially excluded, and the thinking behind the creation of Sure Start focused on finding a more integrated approach to tackling social exclusion among young children and families..."

"There were high hopes for Sure Start, which was seen as something of a ‘magic bullet’ that would, in the long term, help to reduce youth crime, teenage pregnancy, family breakdown and poverty (pp.71-3)."

\(^5\) Extended Schools were open from 8 am – 6 pm, and provided access to a range of services, including a ‘core offer’ consisting of: ‘wraparound’ childcare (i.e. before and after the core school day); a ‘varied menu of activities’ e.g. homework clubs, study support, and music, dance, drama and arts; parenting support (information sessions, parenting programmes); ‘swift and easy referral to a wide range of specialist support services’; and wider community access to Information Communication Technology (ICT), sports and arts facilities."
Underpinning this initiative was the principle of involving communities, parents and carers, focusing on parents or parents and children with an expectation on parents of accompanying their children to services.

The shift from SSLPs to CCs, announced in 2003 at the same time as the ECM agenda emerged, was prompted by a disappointing first evaluation of the impact of Sure Start Local Programmes and the findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project about the positive impact of good quality integrated education and care (both discussed further in 3.6). Alongside this shift was a transfer of responsibility to local authorities and a new emphasis for CCs on education and childcare. This transition from SSLPs to CCs marked, Lewis argues, ‘a substantial change in policy, which was nevertheless presented by politicians as continuity...[A] focus on support for children and parents gave way to emphasis on children’s cognitive development and parental employment’ (p.82).

Lewis adds two further reasons for the shift in policy, beyond the initial evidence of programme failure. First,

Sure Start’s ethos and practice became increasingly out of step with government policy in regard to childcare. The [new CC] emphasis on making provision for integrated childcare and education, linked to supporting parents into work, was very different from the relatively minor part accorded childcare in Sure Start local programmes, and reflected the way in which government’s thinking on childcare in relation to social exclusion had developed. SSLPs had often provided some childcare...[but] mainly in order to encourage parents to take part in other Sure Start activities, but their provision of formal childcare for working parents remained low (p.78).

Second, there was a more general change in the government’s thinking on services for young children as a result of the ECM agenda:

Stress was placed on the importance of prevention, together with a strong emphasis on children’s educational achievement. Integrated services for children were to be provided...the new vision of a universal network of integrated children’s services at the local level also meant the end of Sure Start as an area-based programme...By the mid-2000s, Labour politicians were speaking of the importance of “progressive
universalism”...which in the case of services meant universal provision, with the greatest help for those in need (p.79).

3.2 Governance and finance
The prioritising and development of ECEC policy was matched by major changes in governance. At national level, responsibility for all ‘childcare’ services, lodged previously with the health ministry, was transferred to the education ministry (then called the Department for Education and Employment or DfEE) in 1998, unifying ECEC policy making and administration. That department was, in turn, re-named the Department for Education and Skills (DES) in 2001, and two years later assumed responsibility for a further raft of children’s services, including child protection and other social services, again moved from the health department, this time in the new policy context of ECM and accompanied by the appointment of the first Minister for Children. Four years later, in 2007, the Department was again renamed, this time as the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), taking responsibility for youth justice and anti-social behaviour by young people. What, therefore, emerged over a decade was a new department covering virtually all non-health services for children and young people, and overseeing a broad and ambitious programme – Every Child Matters – intended to develop an integrated policy and service for this constituency. As the new name suggested, while education in schools remained an essential part of the department’s remit, this was now part of a much wider identity and responsibility.

Emphasis was also placed on inter-departmental responsibility for ECEC. The 2004 update of the 10 year childcare strategy, for instance, was published jointly by HM Treasury (reflecting the pivotal and proactive role in domestic policy of this department under Chancellor Gordon Brown), the Department for Education and Skills, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Trade and Industry. Even more striking was Sure Start, set up as a cross-departmental initiative, led by the DfEE, the Department of Health (DH) and the Treasury but with a steering group of six ministries; the lead minister and the Sure Start Unit, to manage the programme, were both in the DfEE, but day-to-day control resided with a health minister. In 2002, co-responsibility was transferred from the DH to the DWP, reflecting the shift in emphasis towards employment and childcare. At the same time, the administration of this part of ECEC policy, previously in a separate Sure Start Unit, was merged with other ECEC responsibilities, to form a single Early Years Division and Childcare Unit within the education department: a single group responsible for SSLPs, Neighbourhood Nurseries (both soon to become Children’s Centres) and the National Childcare Strategy.
This centralisation of responsibility at national level was matched by other moves to increase central direction and control. As already noted, in 2001 the regulation of childcare services was transferred from local authorities to the national agency for inspecting schools, OFSTED, which already oversaw early education in nursery classes and schools. The regulator subsequently acquired responsibility for the regulation of all services for children and young people, including social work and residential care, matching the reach of the DCSF.

In 2000, the Foundation Stage was introduced, a national curriculum covering the two years of early education (3 and 4 year olds) and the first (reception class) year of primary school. All providers receiving the Nursery Education Grant were required to conform to this document. In 2008, this was superseded by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), incorporating curriculum and standards for services for children from birth until end of the first year in primary school – a document encompassing the whole of ECEC. In two volumes – a statutory framework and practice guidance – running to 160 pages, the EYFS set out 69 early learning goals, educational programmes for each of ‘six areas of learning and development’ and assessment arrangements, culminating in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. The Profile involved assessing children in the final year of the EYFS on 13 scales, each divided into 9 ‘points’, with the procedure specified in detail in a handbook running to 90 pages. This dense and detailed network of norms and criteria left little scope for local interpretation or supplementation and was in the tradition of what Bennett (2006) refers to as the ‘pre-primary approach’:

Each child is expected by the final year to have reached pre-defined levels of learning in subject areas useful for school…. A cognitive curriculum is drawn up at central level, with the assumption that it can be delivered uniformly in all preschools, often by teachers who are not certified in early childhood studies.

Changes in governance were not confined to central government. At local level, the Labour government sought to develop structures that would support a more integrated approach to ECEC. Starting life in 1997, Early Years Development Partnerships had the remit of delivering the new early education entitlement, before becoming Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in 1998, with a wider remit of delivering the National Childcare Strategy. Although local authorities had ultimate responsibility for these Partnerships, the intention was to bring together a wide range of interests, including providers, business,
employment and regeneration interests. Over time, local authorities gained an even more central role, assuming responsibility for the CCs that replaced SSLPs and for managing the childcare market in their area, and were themselves re-organised to create Children’s Departments headed by Directors of Children’s Services, spanning ECEC, schools and other services for children and young people, the local counterpart of the national DCSF.

Overall, therefore, the Labour years were a story of major reform in the governance of ECEC compared with what had gone before. Emphasis was placed on cross-departmental working and cooperation. But at the same time, there was a strong move towards integration, consolidation and centralisation within education, ending with a ‘super’ Department at national level, a powerful national regulator and a prescriptive national regulatory document.

Funding also showed some changes, though with stronger elements of continuity with previous policy. The Labour government did discard the Conservative government’s voucher experiment in early education, turning instead to supply-side funding, with a grant paid direct to service providers. But childcare continued to rely mainly on parental fees, with a substantial development of the demand-side subsidy approach that the Conservative government had begun to introduce. An annual ‘market report’ on the UK day nursery market (Laing & Buisson, 2010) estimated that in 2009-10 the value of this market was £3.88 billion, which was ‘primarily funded by fee-paying parents - to the tune of £2.3 billion in 2009 -10’. Another significant source of funding was corporate spending through vouchers, i.e. some employers providing support for some employees: this increased ‘dramatically from 6.4 per cent in 2004 to more than a quarter last year’, making corporate funding of the sector ‘the engine for growth in recent years, bolstering demand as childcare benefits in the workplace have become increasingly popular with employers and their staff’ (Evans, 2010). Mike Brewer, of the Institute of Fiscal Studies, estimated that in 2006/7, parents spent £3 billion on ECEC in total in England (including not only day nursery fees, but fees for other forms of childcare such as childminders), of which £400 million was off-set by Childcare Tax Credit (i.e. 13 per cent of the total) (Brewer, 2009).

Government did provide some initial direct support to some new childcare providers, especially in disadvantaged areas (e.g. Neighbourhood Nurseries, Children’s Centres). But the presumption was always that this was short-term, ‘start-up’ funding, to be phased out as services became established, when they would be expected to be self-supporting through normal sources of funding, including parental fees subsidised by Childcare Tax Credit. There has, therefore, never been an ongoing system of supply-side funding for ‘childcare’ service.
There can be no doubt that public expenditure on ECEC rose substantially during the 13 years of Labour government, though from a low starting point. The main additional items were the costs of the early education entitlement; childcare tax credits to subsidise use of childcare services; and the SSLPs followed by CCs. Brewer (2009) estimated that total government spending on ECEC in England in 2008/9 came to £5.3 billion - or around 0.4 per cent of GDP\(^6\) - with the three items above accounting for just over three-quarters (77 per cent).

### 3.3 Organisation and management of services

The organisation of ECEC services in England did not fundamentally change during the 13 years of the Labour government. Most children accessing ECEC continued to go to the same types of services as under the Conservative government: day nurseries, childminders, playgroups, nursery classes and reception classes – the first two providing mainly for children of working parents and including full-time provision; playgroups and nursery classes mainly providing part-time sessional services; with reception classes mainly providing full-time school hours. What was added to this mix under Labour were Children’s Centres, which by 2010 had reached 3,500 in number.

As already noted, while Children’s Centres provided many services, only some were required to provide early education and childcare. The government-funded 2010 Childcare and Early Years’ Providers survey (Brind et al., 2011, Table 3.9) shows that 85 per cent or more of CCs were providing a wide range of parent and family support services: family support outreach and/or home visiting services; employment advice links to Jobcentre Plus; support for lone and teenage parents and parents with disabled children; literacy language or numeracy programmes for parents/carers with basic skills needs; support for families with drug, alcohol-related or mental health problems or a member in prison; support for particular ethnic minority groups; and relationship support. However, far fewer, only a quarter, provided full-time or sessional childcare, the proportion having declined since the previous year; though CCs in the 30 per cent most deprived areas continued to be more likely than those

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\(^6\) This estimate of public funding is at odds with that of OECD, which estimates the UK’s 2007 public expenditure on ECEC as 1.1 per cent of GDP (OECD Family Database, Chart PF3.1A). The OECD figures are, however, hard to credit, as they rank the UK third among OECD member states for public expenditure on ECEC, spending the same proportion of GDP as Sweden and more than France – despite both countries apparently having more extensive services and Sweden having a far better qualified and paid workforce.
elsewhere to offer on-site full-time childcare (37 per cent compared with 13 per cent elsewhere) and sessional care (28 per cent compared with 22 per cent).

To put the contribution of CCs to childcare and early education services – as opposed to family support services – further into perspective, the 2010 Providers survey records 16,100 providers of full-time childcare plus 8,300 providers of sessional childcare (e.g. playgroups), but just 800 CCs providing full-time childcare (ibid., Table 3.5a). Whatever their broader contribution to child and family well-being, CCs were never major players in the provision of basic ECEC.

The management of ECEC services also remained sharply divided under Labour. On the one side, school-based provision (nursery and reception classes) was generally in publicly-funded and managed primary schools. But on the ‘childcare’ side, day nurseries, childminders and playgroups were very largely privately managed. Childminders were self-employed and playgroups mainly privately-run, though with a majority (66 per cent in the 2010 Providers survey) managed by non-profit organisations. Day nurseries, by contrast, were mainly managed as businesses and for profit. In the 2010 Providers survey, 59 per cent were recorded as managed in this way, compared with 30 per cent run by non-profit ‘voluntary’ organisations and the remaining 12 per cent by public bodies (ibid., Table 3.5a). However, the Laing & Buisson market report indicated a larger share of day nurseries by value in the for-profit sector; these providers accounted for 81 per cent of the estimated £3.88 billion value of the UK ‘childcare market’ in 2009-10 (Laing & Buisson, 2010). Whether the discrepancy – between a 59 and 81 per cent share – is due to for-profit nurseries being larger than other nurseries or some difference in definition is unclear. Either way, though, the nursery sector is highly privatised, with nurseries mainly run as profit-making businesses.

The exception to this public/private split was Children’s Centres. The 2010 Providers survey showed just over two-thirds of the childcare services provided by CCs (66 per cent) were managed by public bodies (local authorities, schools or colleges), the remainder being evenly split between for-profit and voluntary providers (ibid.). Overall, the management of CCs was mainly in the public and non-profit sectors, either local authorities, other public sector organisations, e.g. nursery, primary school or primary care trusts, or voluntary organisations contracted to manage CCs by local authorities. Public provision of ECEC services still had some presence here.
3.4 Supply of services and participation

The supply of services increased throughout the period of the Labour government across most forms of provision. Day nurseries, which as noted earlier, were growing under the Conservative government, continued to increase after 1997 and throughout the next 13 years. In its 2004 update of the Childcare Strategy, the government could claim that

The National Childcare Strategy has delivered an additional net 525,000 new registered childcare places in England since 1997, benefiting 1.1 million children. By 2008 the number of childcare places will have doubled since 1997. These places are in a wide range of settings (HM Treasury, 2004, p.22) (NB. These figures include places for children of school age as well as under 5-year-olds).

Between 2005 and 2010, the number of places in full-time childcare for under 5s further grew by 40 per cent (from 511,000 to 716,700) (Brind et al., 2011, Table 4.1a). Places for under 5s in primary schools grew from 791,500 in 2006 to 825,500 in 2010, the growth in school provision being considerably less than for full-time childcare because such provision was already quite high in 1997 due to the active policy of a substantial number of local authorities. While, as already noted, Children’s Centres grew from none to 3,500 in less than a decade.

The period, however, also saw a falling off in some forms of provision. Places in playgroups were already falling before 1997 and continued to do so, down by 14 per cent between 1997 and 2001 and by 5 per cent between 2005 and 2010\(^7\). Similarly, places in childminders fell, by 16 per cent between 1997 and 2001 and by a further 12 per cent between 2005 and 2010. The demand for the former provision, offering short part-time hours, was decreasing; while the drop in the latter may reflect a switch to centre-based care.

By January 2011, nearly all children were taking advantage of the free early education entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds: 92 per cent of 3 year olds and 98 per cent of 4 year olds (Department for Education, 2011). The government-funded 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents (Smith et al., 2010) gives a broader picture of participation in ECEC services. In 2009, 35 per cent of children under 3 years and 86 per cent of 3 and 4-year-olds were attending a formal service. Among the younger group, informal childcare mainly by

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\(^7\) Due to changes in sources of national data, it is not possible to get comparable data showing changes in levels of provision across the period 1997 to 2010.
grandparents (37 per cent) was slightly ahead of attendance at formal services but well
behind among 3 and 4-year-olds (34 per cent). The main type of formal provision attended
by under 3s was day nurseries (17 per cent) followed by childminders (6 percent). Among 3
and 4-year-olds, over half (54 per cent) attended a school, 17 per cent a playgroup and 16
per cent a day nursery (ibid., Table 2.3). Average (mean) hours of attendance per week
were 18.3 for formal services used by under 3s and 21.1 hours per week for formal services
used by 3 and 4-year-olds (ibid., Table 2.6). In other words, average participation by under
and over 3-year-olds was on a part-time basis.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the 2009 Parents survey shows that participation was highest
among children from working lone parent families and dual-earning couple families. Both
work status and income were independently associated with take-up of formal services, a
term including childcare and early education provision. The clearest trend between income
and take-up can be seen in the take-up of formal care (across all children included in the
survey from birth to 14 years), where 36 per cent of children in the lowest income group
attended some formal provision (household income less than £10,000) compared with 58
per cent of children in the highest income group (household income £45,000 or more) (ibid.,
Table C2.1).

There was a statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and receipt of both formal
and informal childcare. The children least likely to receive formal childcare were those from
an Asian Bangladeshi, Asian Pakistani and ‘other’ Asian background (but not Asian Indian).
This remained the case even after controlling for socio-demographic characteristics,
suggesting, say the authors of the survey report, that these differences may be attributable
to cultural factors.

Children living in the most deprived areas of the country were less likely to receive childcare
than those living in the least deprived areas, with the report authors again commenting that
'[a]lthough some Government policies worked towards increasing the supply of childcare
places in disadvantaged areas (e.g. the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative), this pattern is
clearest for use of formal childcare’ (ibid., p.36). Fifty-one per cent of children living in the
least deprived areas of the country received formal childcare compared with 34 per cent of
those living in the most deprived areas. A factor that may account for this relationship is the
lower employment rates amongst families in disadvantaged areas; 63 per cent of families in
the most deprived areas were in work compared with 94 per cent of those in the least
deprieved areas.
This picture of less use of formal services by more disadvantaged children is confirmed from two other sources. First, a spin-off from the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents studied the take-up of the universal early education entitlement by disadvantaged families, going further into the relationship between universal access and actual usage. The conclusions from this secondary analysis work included that:

- Children from lower-income and larger families (i.e. with three or more children), those whose mothers did not work and those whose mothers did not have any academic qualifications were less likely to receive early years provision (i.e. the nursery education entitlement for 3 and 4-year-olds).

- Children from lone-parent families were more likely to receive early years provision than those from two-parent families when the analysis took account of differences in work status, income and other socio-demographic characteristics between these two types of families.

- The take-up of early years provision was similar for boys and girls, and it did not vary by whether the child had a long-standing illness or disability or by whether they had special educational needs.

- Compared with children whose mothers were White, children of Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers were substantially less likely to receive early years provision. However, once the analysis controlled for differences in socio-demographic profile between families from different ethnic backgrounds, the effect of ethnicity on uptake of early years provision was no longer significant.

- Children living in deprived areas were less likely to receive early years provision than those living in more affluent areas.

Overall, the authors concluded that

there was a strong association between the level of multiple disadvantage experienced by the family and their take-up of early years provision. In
families experiencing no disadvantage only 3% of children were not attending any early years providers, whereas the proportion was higher for families experiencing some or a lot of disadvantage, with the highest figure (13%) found among the most disadvantaged families.

There were differences in the types of providers attended by children depending on the level of disadvantage experienced by their families. Children from the most disadvantaged families were more likely to receive early years provision at nursery classes and less likely to receive it at playgroups/pre-schools, day nurseries and childminders, whereas attendance at reception classes and nursery schools did not vary by level of multiple disadvantage (Speight, Smith, Coshall and Lloyd, 2010, pp.2-3).

Second, analysis of the 2005 EU-SILC data for EU member states has looked at attendance by children under 3 years in formal services by the highest educational qualification of their mothers (a proxy for income and social class). In the UK, children of mothers with a degree-level qualification were three times as likely to attend services as children of mothers with a low level or no qualification (39 v 13 per cent) (Bennett and Moss, 2010, Table 5.5).

All the evidence points in the same direction: the more disadvantaged the child, the less likely he or she was and is to attend ECEC.

3.5 The ECEC workforce

Most research and well-informed reports (e.g. the OECD’s Starting Strong reviews) have emphasised the centrality of the workforce to quality of ECEC services. In a later section, I will consider what evaluations exist of the quality of ECEC services under the Labour administration. Here I will focus on the education and employment conditions of the workforce, serving as one indicator of quality.

Like the rest of the ECEC system, the workforce was split at the start of the Labour government in 1997 – and continued so at the end, in 2010. On the one side, school-based services – in nursery and reception classes – were staffed by teachers, with a qualification at
level 6 or above, supported by assistants, usually qualified at level 3. On the other side of
the divide were childcare workers, staffing day nurseries and playgroups/playschools or
working as childminders. Far more numerous than school-based workers, they began the
Labour regime as a poorly qualified group, many with no qualifications or qualifications
below level 3, and with low pay and other employment conditions. The low level of
qualifications in the childcare workforce can be judged by the requirements set in national
regulations for those working in childcare services:

- Every supervisor and manager working within registered full day care, sessional and out-
of-school settings should hold at least a full level 3 qualification appropriate to the post.

- At least half of all other staff should hold at least a full level 2 qualification appropriate to
  the post.

There were no specific qualification requirements for childminders, but they were expected
to undertake ‘a local authority approved childminders’ pre-registration course within six
months of commencing childminding’.

The Labour government set much store on improving qualification levels in the ECEC
workforce. In its 2005 consultation paper on a Children’s Workforce Strategy (part of its
wide-ranging and integrated ECM approach to children’s services), it spoke of ‘our plans to
create and support a world-class workforce which is increasingly competent and confident to
make a difference to the lives of those they support’ (HM Government, 2005, p.1) – an
ambition that included the ECEC workforce. To improve leadership in non-school settings,
the government sought a graduate leading all CCs by 2010 and all (mainly private) full-time
childcare settings by 2015. With this goal in mind and as part of its Children’s Workforce

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8 **Level 1 (foundation level)** – GCSE grade D-G, Foundation level GNVQ, Level 1 NVQ; **Level 2 (intermediate level)** – GCSE A*-C, Intermediate GNVQ, Level 2 NVQ; **Level 3 (Advanced level)** – A level, Vocational A level (Advanced GNVQ), Level 3 NVQ; **Level 4 – Higher level qualifications**, BTEC Higher Nationals, Level 4 NVQ (e.g. Level 4 Certificate in Early Years Practice); **Level 5 – Higher level qualifications**, BTEC Higher Nationals, Level 5 NVQ (e.g. Diploma in Higher Education and Playwork, Early Years Foundation Degree); **Level 6 – Honours degree** (e.g. BA Early Childhood Studies); **Level 7 – Masters degree**, PGCE, National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL); **Level 8 – Doctorate**.

Levels 1 and 2 are equivalent to **ISCED level 2** (lower secondary); level 3 is equivalent to **ISCED level 3** (upper secondary); levels 4 and 5 are equivalent to **ISCED level 4** (post secondary/non-tertiary diploma); level 6 is equivalent to **ISCED level 5** (a tertiary level degree); and levels 7 and 8 are equivalent to **ISCED level 6** (post-graduate university qualification).
Strategy, it introduced in 2006 a new graduate qualification, the Early Years Professional\(^9\). It also invested money in improving the qualifications of the remainder of the workforce, in particular seeking to increase the numbers qualified at a level 3.

Some progress was made in improving the level of qualification among the childcare part of the ECEC workforce. The 2010 Providers survey (Brind et al., 2011) shows the position at the end of Labour’s period in office. In schools, about two-fifths of staff had a level 6 qualification or higher, reflecting the graduate teacher part of the workforce; while a rather similar proportion were at level 3 or below, reflecting their assistant co-workers. In the childcare sector, the profile was very different, despite a substantial increase in qualification levels since 1997. Less than 10 per cent (8 per cent in full-time childcare; 7 per cent in sessional childcare; and 3 per cent of childminders) had a level 6 or over; around half had a level 3 (58 per cent, 57 per cent and 47 per cent respectively); while most of the remainder had a level 2 or 1 qualification or none at all (16 per cent, 21 per cent, 22 per cent respectively). Early Years Professionals were appearing in the workforce by this time, but were still a small part of it – just 4 per cent of workers in full-time childcare and 2 per cent of those in sessional childcare. Overall, just under a quarter of heads of full-time childcare services had a level 6 or higher qualification (i.e. were graduates), falling to 9 per cent of supervisors and just 2 per cent among other childcare workers (ibid., Tables 3a, 3b and 4).

In sum, despite improvements, the ECEC workforce – in particular the predominant childcare part of it - remained at a relatively low level of qualification.

Pay, too, remained poor, at least among the great majority of workers not employed in schools. In 2010, school-based workers earned on average around £14.50-£14.60 an hour, with teachers (at around £20 an hour) earning roughly twice as much as assistants (£10-£11 an hour). But among childcare workers, the average pay was around £8 an hour, more for heads (£9.60 per hour in playgroups, £10.80 in full-day childcare), much less for non-supervisory staff working directly with children (£6.70 and £6.60 respectively). This can be compared with the national minimum wage of £5.93 an hour in 2010, the London Living Wage (intended to provide for ‘a minimally acceptable quality of life’ in London) of £7.85 an hour, and the average national hourly wage of £14.65 (ibid., Table 17). Nor does this take

\(^9\)In the 2005 Consultation paper, the government had discussed other new graduate professionals that might lead an upgrading of the ECEC workforce, namely early years teachers (specialising in work with 0-5-year olds) and pedagogues. These options disappeared in the policy documents that followed, replaced by the ‘Early Years Professional’.
any account of other benefits, not least pensions. The workforce in schools are generally members of a public sector final salary pension scheme, including a substantial contribution from employers. Staff working in private childcare services are unlikely to have access to a similar scheme, and are too low paid to be able to support adequate contributions to a private pension scheme.

What this information points to, also, is the very hierarchical nature of the ECEC workforce. This is highlighted by secondary analysis of 2001-2005 Labour Force Survey data, focusing on 17 individual ‘human services’ occupations - across education, health, childcare and social care services - and seven variables: average hourly pay; total usual hours worked; average age; percentage with qualifications equivalent to level 3 or above; percentage in the non-private sector; percentage female; percentage white. From this analysis, three clusters of occupations emerged, organised in a very hierarchical order. Cluster 1 occupations, which include teachers, are on average better qualified and better paid than the other occupations; they work longer hours, have a lower percentage of female and a higher percentage of white employees, and are slightly older. Cluster 2 occupations, which include school assistants, are intermediate on qualifications, pay, hours, age and percentage female; they are the most likely to work outside the private sector and have the lowest percentage of white employees. Cluster 3, which includes nursery and playgroup workers and childminders, in other words the childcare workforce, has the lowest levels of qualifications and pay; they are more likely to work part-time; they are the youngest group, with the highest percentage of female employees and are the least likely to work outside of the private sector (Simon et al., 2008).

One respect in which the workforce was uniform, with no difference between school-based and childcare workers, was gender. Both in 1997 and 2010, there were very few men working in ECEC services – ranging between 1 and 2 per cent, with little difference between services.

3.6 Engagement with families
There is no comprehensive information on how parents engage with ECEC services, whether as consumers working the market; citizens seeking democratic participation; or needy clients requiring support. In particular, the whole field of full-time childcare (day nurseries and childminders) and school-based services (nursery and reception classes) has no recent work on this theme.
Playgroups providing sessional provision owe their origins, in large measure, to parent initiatives, with many run by parent groups or organisations with parent representation, and with a strong tradition of volunteer parent input to the daily running of the service (the ‘parent rota’). While there is no recent information on parent engagement with this type of session, two observations can be made. First, ‘parent’ (as is also the case throughout ECEC) has mainly meant ‘mother’ in practice, with fathers taking a secondary role, especially on the parent rota. Second, as mothers have increasingly entered the labour market, ‘parent’ engagement has come under pressure, both as more parents want more than sessional care and as fewer mothers are available to volunteer, with fathers not taking up the slack. One result has been a steady fall in places in sessional playgroups, noted above, though some of this is accounted for by some playgroups converting to become providers of full-time childcare. Another has been the steady growth of paid staff, making playgroups less reliant on voluntary labour including parents/mothers; the 8,300 sessional services included in the 2010 Providers survey employed 54,600 paid workers. So while playgroups remain more parent/mother-engaged than most services, changes underway have diluted this relationship somewhat over time.

SSLPs and, later, CCs have been the subject of some work on parent engagement. Among the key principles laid down in the first official Guidance for SSLPs was the importance of involving parents and carers: ‘the fundamental premise is that better outcomes can only be achieved with the active participation of parents’ (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). The initial SSLPs, as noted, were focused on parents and parents and children, and both they and subsequent CCs have given high priority to developing support services for parents (again mainly mothers, though some have also worked specifically with fathers). As well as these parent-oriented services, SSLPs involved parents in areas of management; for example, parents were represented on the partnership boards responsible for governance of all 12 SSLPs studied in depth by the National Evaluation of Sure Start, discussed further below (Ball, 2002).

The shift to CCs, and with it to management control by local authorities, may have also shifted the relationship with parents, reducing their potential influence. So while the first official guidance to CCs, in 2003, still spoke of the need to involve parents, this was to be achieved mainly by consultation and ‘to develop an understanding of community development rather than to encourage active participation, as had been the intention with SSLPs’. Lewis continues:
Children’s Centres were made part of ‘mainstream’ provision for young children in all local authorities, but it is less certain as to whether in doing so a Sure Start approach was mainstreamed. The local responsiveness that had let a thousand flowers bloom in terms of the nature and balance of SSLPs service offer gave way to a more specified service offer with an emphasis on integrated childcare and education for children in conjunction with links to Jobcentre Plus for their parents, and greater control by the local authority to make sure it happened (Lewis, 2011, p.77).

Despite this shift – from a more participatory, responsive and flexible model to a more regulated and prescribed model – it is worth noting that a criticism of the initial SSLPs, raised in the first report of the NESS, was their apparent failure to reach the most disadvantaged families.

[P]arents/families with greater human capital were better able to take advantage of SSLP services and resources than those with less human capital (i.e. teen parents, lone parents, workless households). The finding that an intervention has produced greater benefits for the moderately disadvantaged than for the more severely disadvantaged has occurred in other evaluations of interventions (National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2005, p.8).

3.7 Evaluations
In this section, I draw mainly on formal evaluation studies of child poverty reduction and ECEC services under the Labour government. In the final section – Conclusions – I offer some personal comments on the record of this administration.

3.7.1 Child poverty
The Labour government set itself targets for relative child poverty to fall by a quarter of its 1998-99 level by 2004-05, and by a half by 2010-11, way stations towards a final goal to ‘eradicate’ child poverty by 2020–21. The overall record is reviewed in a recent paper from the Institute for Fiscal Studies:

10 The Labour government target - to ‘eradicate’ child poverty by 2020–21 – included interim targets. The first interim target was for the number of children in relative income poverty in Britain to be one-quarter lower than its 1998–99 level in 2004–05, which was narrowly missed. The second interim target was for the number of children in poverty in the UK to be one-half of its 1998–99 level in 2010–11, this time using three definitions of poverty: a relative low income indicator, an absolute low income indicator and a combined relative low income and material deprivation indicator. The relative low income indicator used a poverty line of 60% of median household BHC income; the absolute low income indicator used a poverty line of 60% of the 1998–99 BHC median (in real terms); and the
The previous government had a target of halving the number of children in relative low (BHC) income poverty in the UK between 1998–99 and 2010–11, from 3.4 million to 1.7 million. We now know that this measure of child poverty fell by 1.1 million children over the period. This is by far the largest reduction since our consistent series began in 1961, but the target was still missed by the substantial margin of 600,000 children. The number of children in absolute low (BHC) income poverty more than halved between 1998–99 and 2010–11, falling from 3.4 million to 1.4 million (Cribb, Joyce and Phillip, 2012, p.5).

The IFS report identifies three distinct ‘sub-sections’ within the Labour government’s years in office:

The period between 1998–99 and 2004–05 saw rapid and large reductions in child poverty. In fact, the absolute low income indicator of child poverty was halved over this six-year period, falling by 1.8 million children, meaning that it was already at its originally targeted 2010–11 level by 2004–05; and the relative low income indicator fell by 700,000 children, missing the interim 2004–05 target only narrowly. But the period between 2004–05 and 2007–08 saw progress on all three of the indicators stall or go into reverse (although the precise turning point differed slightly across the three measures). By 2007–08, it had become clear that neither the relative low income indicator nor the combined relative low income and material deprivation indicator was likely to be halved from their 1998–99 levels by 2010–11: for example, the number of children in poverty according to the relative low income indicator would have needed to fall by an average of 400,000 per year between 2007–08 and 2010–11, having fallen by an average of 60,000 per year over the previous nine years. Nevertheless, 2007–08 did turn out to be a second turning point. All three of the indicators fell in the subsequent three years, with a particularly sharp fall in the relative low income indicator resulting from the large fall in median income (and hence the relative poverty line) in 2010–11 (ibid., p.77).

It is clear that a substantial reduction in child poverty was achieved under Labour. The government’s own targets were not met and the final fall in poverty owed much to the combined relative low income and material deprivation indicator classified a child as being in poverty if its household BHC income was below 70% of the median and it was materially deprived (as determined by answers to a series of questions about what its family can afford to do) (Cribb et al., 2012).
general fall in household incomes in the post-2008 recession (cutting the median income level against which ‘relative low income poverty’ is assessed). But, overall, the IFS concludes that ‘the recent reductions in this measure of child poverty [relative income poverty] are unprecedented since our consistent time series began [in 1961], and this has gone much of the way to returning relative child poverty to the kinds of levels around which it fluctuated throughout the 1960s and 1970s, before the sharp rises in relative poverty and inequality in the 1980s’ (ibid., p.78).

At the same time, the high levels of income inequality, again reached under the Conservative government, did not fall. The Institute for Fiscal Studies again:

During the 1990s, inequality stabilised around this historically high level, creeping up slightly during the late 1990s before falling back again during the early 2000s. It then began to increase again from 2004–05 onwards. Indeed, it was at its highest level since at least 1961 between 2007–08 and 2009–10 (0.36)....Income inequality in the UK fell sharply in 2010–11. The widely-used Gini coefficient fell from 0.36 to 0.34. This is the largest one-year fall since at least 1962, returning the Gini coefficient to below its level in 1997–98. Although this reverses the increase in this measure of income inequality that occurred under the previous Labour government, it still leaves it much higher than before the substantial increases that occurred during the 1980s (Cribb et al., 2012, p.2).

A similar conclusion is reached in a paper for the Resolution Foundation: ‘While this period [1997-2007] was not characterised by a marked increase in overall inequality, it was one of stable record-high levels of inequality following the previous dramatic step upwards in the ‘80s, as well as a continued growth in incomes at the top’ (Lucchino and Morelli, 2012, p.11). Another way of looking at this is that the proceeds of growth over recent years have failed to be distributed equally:

In 1977, of every £100 of value generated by the UK economy, £16 went to the bottom half of workers in wages; by 2010 that figure had fallen to £12, a 26 per cent decline. Indeed, the trend may be even starker: inclusion of bonus payments reduces the bottom half’s share to just £10 in 2010 (Whitaker and Savage, 2011, p.2).
The most important reason for this trend – accounting for 70 per cent of the falling share of value added going to the lowest 50 per cent of workers - was growing wage inequality, which meant that a smaller share found its way to these employees in the bottom half.

Overall, therefore, the Labour government was only able to stabilise inequality at a high level. But it did manage to cut child poverty. What explains this limited but real success, in reducing the child poverty level after 1997, and especially up to 2004? The IFS, looking back at Labour’s record in 2012, highlight two main factors. First, redistribution through the tax and benefit system:

...the reductions in income poverty among children since 1998–99 relied heavily on increases in fiscal redistribution towards low-income households with children. The poorest half of households with children are entitled to an average additional £77 per week (£4,000 per year, or 21% of net income) in net financial state support – that is, benefits and tax credits minus taxes – as a result of direct tax and benefit reforms implemented under the previous Labour governments (in current prices). This is in comparison with the situation in which Labour had simply increased benefits and direct tax thresholds in line with the public finance defaults that it inherited (which mostly means price indexation). Compared with a situation in which benefits and direct tax thresholds had been increased in line with GDP, the poorest half of households with children are entitled to an average additional £22 per week (£1,165 per year, or 5% of net income) as a result of reforms over the same period (Cribb et al., 2012, p5).

So child poverty fell, in large measure, because government pursued a policy of increased redistribution and prioritised families with children in this policy, ensuring them (along with pensioners) above-inflation increases in financial support. In a recent article, Mike Brewer of the IFS adds that financial support for a workless lone parent was about a fifth higher in real terms in 2010 than in 1997, and 36 per cent higher for a lone parent working part-time on a low wage. He adds that ‘had financial support merely risen with inflation, child poverty would have risen to around 4.3 million by 2010...[while our best guess is that it] fell from 3.4 million to 2.5 million, or by slightly more than a quarter’ (Brewer, 2012, p.33).

But there was a second factor, increased parental employment, especially among lone parents:
The performance of parents in the labour market is important too: between regions, parental employment and child poverty trends are closely related; the overall reduction in child poverty since 1998–99 has been helped by higher lone parent employment rates...

Lone parents had the lowest employment rates amongst [families with children] in 1998–99, with a majority out of work. However, over the next ten years, their employment rate grew by about 10 percentage points, such that the majority were in employment in 2008–09....Men and women in couples also saw increases in employment between 1998–99 and 2004–05, but this was much more modest, though from much higher bases...Men and women in couples then saw relative stagnation in employment rates up to 2008–09. All three groups then saw falls in employment during 2009–10 following on from the recession, with men in couples seeing the largest fall (Brewer et al., 2010, p.1, 45).

In his recent article, Brewer adds that ‘about a quarter of the fall in child poverty since 1998/99 can be linked to higher rates of employment among lone parents’ (Brewer, 2012, p.33).

ECEC policies, including the stimulus to the supply of childcare services and increased demand-side subsidies for parents using them, may have played some part in the increased employment among lone parents that contributed to reduced child poverty. But ECEC is unlikely to have been the only cause of increased employment (a growing economy for most of the period of the Labour government and other policy changes will have contributed), whilst as already noted the main cause of falling poverty was income redistribution.

However, the role of employment in poverty reduction was something of a two-edged sword. While growth of parental employment may have pulled some households out of poverty, it kept or pulled down others in poverty through a growing phenomenon of ‘in-work poverty’. This emerging problem gained official recognition around 2006 and a report on it, by the Rowntree Foundation in 2008, highlighted the significance of in-work poverty for undermining the government’s child poverty reduction targets:

After falling in the early years of the Labour Government’s anti-poverty strategy, the number of children in in-work poverty has now returned to the level that it was at
when Labour came to office. The net overall effect of policy on in-work poverty is zero.

By contrast, there has been a continuing fall in the number of children in poverty who belong to workless households. As a result, in-work poverty’s ‘share’ of total child poverty has been drifting up gradually, and has now reached, or exceeded, 50% (Kenway, 2008, p.4).

So towards the end of Labour’s years in power, it became increasingly clear that employment was not an automatic route out of poverty, and that many families with children with one or both parents in work were either in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty (Hill, 2012).

Moreover, one of the paradoxes of Labour’s policies was that its emphasis on developing ECEC, in part as a means of reducing child poverty through increasing parental employment, may have been at the expense of in-work poverty amongst the poorly paid childcare workforce – either now or later when retired. A similar situation arises in the also-increasing workforce caring for elderly people. In short, ECEC as currently constituted may play some role in alleviating poverty among some parents using childcare, while possibly raising it amongst some childcare workers.

3.7.2 ECEC services

Despite the high and systemic priority given to ECEC under the Labour government, no evaluation was made of the overall system, with its strong emphasis on marketisation and privatised services, its continuing split across key dimensions (see below) and its strong emphasis on parental fees and low-waged labour.

The only research into the workings of the market is an in-depth case study of two middle-class areas of London by Stephen Ball and Carol Vincent. They describe the ‘childcare’ market as it actually functions as a ‘peculiar market’, for seven reasons, the first of which is that ‘[t]he childcare market just does not work like markets are supposed to. As a practical market it is very different from a market in theory – and indeed it is a very inefficient market’ (Ball and Vincent, 2006, p. 38). Though small-scale, the detail of this study raises issues that suggest, at the least, that marketisation and privatisation of ECEC should not be taken for granted (for a further critique, based on a review of the literature, see Moss 2009).
Alongside the National Evaluation of Sure Start, discussed below, the Labour government funded a second large-scale research project: the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE). Working with a large sample of ECEC services and using the ECERS-R rating scale as a measure of quality, the EPPE study found variations in scores between different types of provision and providers:

The three types of provision managed by the [local education authority] had significantly higher scores for total ECERS-R when compared to other types of provision. The trends in the ECERS-R total scores are fairly consistent throughout the sub-scale scores. Of the six pre-school types, playgroups had the lowest mean sub-scale score for all 7 sub-scales; private day nurseries had the second lowest mean sub-scale scores for all sub-scales except language and reasoning in which they were rated slightly higher than local authority day nurseries. Nursery classes, nursery schools and combined centres were rated consistently high on all the sub-scales. The results show that, for ECERS-R, the Local Education Authority (LEA) provision generally scored highest followed by local authority day care, then private day nurseries, and finally playgroups (Sylva et al., 2004, pp.16-17).

In short, the highest ‘quality’, based on ECERS-R, was found in public sector providers and in school-based and integrated services. Private sector full-day and sessional childcare had the lowest scores. These assessments, it should be noted, were made in 2001, so they cannot be assumed to apply to later in the term of the Labour government.

One substantial source of non-research evidence can also throw some light on the workings of the system: the assessment by OFSTED inspectors of individual services. In its 2009/10 Annual Report, OFSTED collated these assessments to conclude that 72 per cent of centre-based services inspected were judged ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, compared with 66 per cent of childminders (OFSTED, 2010). But it also found, as in previous annual reports, a pattern of childcare provision being less good in the most deprived areas.

[I]t is evident that the more deprived the area, the lower the average quality of the provision... The relationship between deprivation and lower quality is particularly marked for childminding. In the most deprived areas, 63% of childcare providers on non-domestic premises were judged to be good or outstanding compared with just 52% of childminders. In comparison, in the least deprived areas, the difference in quality between the two types of provision is much less (p.21).
As already noted, children in deprived areas are also less likely to use formal ECEC services.

The subject of most research has been the SSLPs, which were the focus of a major, long-term government-funded evaluation – the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS). One important point made by NESS (and others) was that Sure Start as an area-based programme, targeting areas with high levels of disadvantage, missed many disadvantaged children who did not live in these areas. This was one reason for the extension of later Children’s Centres to every community. Another problem highlighted by the researchers was the way SSLPs were implemented:

[The researchers claimed] that while research evidence was critical in winning the argument for Sure Start at the beginning, it was overlooked in the detailed planning and operation of local programmes...each local programme was different in terms of the nature, volume and mix of services it offered. Nor did the initiative require the use of standardised programmes, for example to encourage good parenting. All of this made it very difficult to assess the outcomes...which is what the quantitative part of the National Evaluation hoped to do and which was particularly important for a government focused on outcomes rather than process...[Indeed] it was doubtful that findings from the evaluation could ever be conclusive, given the problems evaluators faced in establishing causal relationships for a programme that varied so much from place to place (Lewis, 2011, p.80, 81).

The two main reports published by NESS during the period of the Labour government provided somewhat different pictures of the effect of Sure Start. The first, published in 2005, provided, in the words of one of the research directors, ‘mixed news’ (Melhuish, 2010): ‘in particular, the National Evaluation found only modest benefits for the moderately disadvantaged and small adverse effects for those most at risk’ (Lewis, 2011, p.80). These somewhat ambivalent early findings, as already noted, may well have contributed to the shift from SSLPs to CCs, as a political reaction to the findings that seemed to make the former more difficult to defend.

However, the 2008 report, looking at children aged 3 and their families, gave a more consistently positive picture. All effects associated with Sure Start were beneficial, and these beneficial effects appeared to apply in all sub-populations and all Sure Start areas
studied’, attributed in part by the research director to SSLPs improving with time – ‘maturing’ - and through learning:

Latest findings differ markedly from earlier findings. In the early stages there was some evidence that the most disadvantaged three-year-old children and their families (ie. teen parents, lone parents, workless households) were sometimes doing less well in Sure Start areas, while somewhat less disadvantaged children and families benefited (ie. non-teen parents, dual parent families, working households). However, with changes to the Sure Start programme, the latest evidence indicates benefits for all sections of the population served. This indicates that Sure Start Children’s Centres have learnt from earlier findings and are now making sure that they serve all their populations, particularly the most disadvantaged, even though they are often the hardest to reach. Various explanations can be offered for the differences between the 2005 and 2008 findings. It seems likely that the contrasting results accurately reflect the contrasting experiences of children and families in Sure Start areas in the two phases. Whereas the three year-olds in the first phase were exposed to “immature” programmes - and probably not for their entire lives (because programmes took three years to become fully operational) - the three-year-olds and their families in the second phase were exposed to better developed programmes throughout the entire lives of the children. Also, programmes had the opportunity to learn from the earlier phase of the evaluation, especially with respect to greater effort to reach the most vulnerable households. Thus differences in the amount of exposure to programmes and the quality of Sure Start programmes may well account for both the initial adverse effects for the most disadvantaged children and families and the subsequent beneficial effects for almost all children and families living in Sure Start areas (Melhuish, 2010, para.14).

Edward Melhuish added that while the developments in Sure Start ‘seem to have borne some fruit in that the latest impact results are encouraging, and indicate the beneficial effects of Sure Start are spreading...it is clear that further developments are desirable. In the meantime it will be some time before the longer term goals of the programme can be realised, and hence the final verdict on Sure Start awaits further evaluation’.

A third report, on children aged 5 years and their families, was published by NESS in 2010, after the Labour government had left office. This, again, mainly contained positive results, though predominantly for parents and families, rather than children:
After taking into consideration pre-existing family and area background characteristics, the three sets of analyses comparing children and families living in SSLP areas and those living in similar non-SSLP areas revealed mixed SSLP effects, most being positive/beneficial in nature and a couple being negative in character. This was the case when effects were evaluated with respect to child/family functioning when the children were age 5 and with respect to change over time in child/family functioning from age 3 (or 9 months for worklessness) until age 5 (National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2010, pp.v-vi).

Children growing up in SSLP areas had better physical health and were less likely to be overweight than their counterparts in non-SSLP areas. Mothers reported greater life satisfaction, a less chaotic home environment and a better home learning environment and less harsh discipline; while there had been a greater reduction in worklessness among Sure Start families. On the debit side, mothers in SSLP areas reported more depressive symptoms and were less likely to visit their child’s school for parent/teacher meetings or other arranged visits - although the incidence of such visits was low generally.

The House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Select Committee drew a number of its own conclusions about Sure Start and Children’s Centres in a report published in March 2010, based on an enquiry conducted in the preceding months. Though not a research evaluation, the Committee’s report is based on consideration of a wide range of evidence. They found that Children’s Centres are ‘beginning to provide an excellent model for multi-agency working across professional boundaries that services for other age groups should seek to emulate’. They supported the Labour government’s goal of universal coverage, and considered it would be a ‘backwards step to consider restricting access again only to those living in areas which are generally categorised as disadvantaged’; resourcing Children’s Centres outside the most disadvantaged areas at a lower level may currently be a necessary compromise, but it was nevertheless regrettable. They were critical of several aspects of the programme, including ‘the speed of the rollout [which] has posed serious problems in some local authorities in terms of buildings, staffing and community engagement which could have been ameliorated by a more measured approach’. It was also, in their view, ‘a backwards step to end formal Department of Health responsibility for the Sure Start programme at ministerial level, a situation which has carried over to Children’s Centres’, contributing to local health services not being consistently involved in Children’s Centres,
and recommended ‘establishing joint DCSF and Department of Health responsibility for
Children’s Centres’.

Despite these critical comments, the Committee offered a favourable, indeed enthusiastic,
view of Children’s Centres and called for the government to hold firm in its commitment and
to adopt a long-term perspective:

Sure Start has been one of the most ambitious Government initiatives of recent
decades and its aims and principles have commanded widespread support.
Children’s Centres have been based on research evidence and a sound rationale,
but have not yet decisively shown the hoped-for impact. This should not be a cause
for panic. The nature of the problems which Children’s Centres are attempting to
address and the short history of the service mean that it will only be possible to
evaluate the full impact over the long term. In the meantime Centres must be given
financial and policy stability. It would be catastrophic if short-term financial pressure
on the service jeopardised the chances of realising and evaluating long-term gains
for children and communities.

Only universal coverage can ensure that all the most disadvantaged children,
wherever they live, can benefit from the programme; this was the right policy to
pursue. It is essential that the Government continues to fund the programme
sufficiently to maintain the universal coverage.

Children's Centres have a number of advantages over traditional public services in
engaging with those least likely to be in touch with them, but it remains perhaps the
most difficult of their tasks...Sure Start Local Programmes pioneered a community
development approach to meeting young families’ needs, a factor that was felt to be
-crucial to encouraging hitherto reluctant families to engage with services. There is a
measure of concern that this approach has not been preserved under local authority
management of Children’s Centres, and the experience and expertise of the Local
Programmes should be more consciously built upon in this respect.

Partnerships between education and care, health services, voluntary sector
organisations and other services supporting families are at the heart of the Children’s
Centre approach. These partnerships are working well in many places, but are still
too patchy. Among health agencies in particular there is a worryingly mixed picture, a
situation which is not helped by the distance between some GPs and Children’s Centres, and the failure at ministerial level to replicate the degree of joint responsibility for Children’s Centres that is sought locally (House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee, 2010, pp.9-10).
4. Conclusions

The Labour government’s record on child poverty was, to quote an IFS researcher, a ‘remarkable achievement, certainly without historical precedent in the UK, and impressive compared with other countries’ (Brewer, 2012, p.33). It showed the marked effects of a substantial redistributive policy, in conjunction with increased ECEC to support increased parental employment, especially in the English case for lone mothers. It is sad to recount that the progress in recent years seems set to be reversed, due to the effects of the banking-led recession and the new government’s austerity measures, with child poverty predicted to rise again over future years and expected to reach 24 per cent by 2020/21, instead of the target, enshrined in law, of 10 per cent (Brewer, Browne, and Joyce, 2011).

At the same time, the government failed to give equal priority to reducing inequality, a highly damaging condition as the work of Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) highlighted towards the end of the Labour government. While the government set an ambitious target for reducing, then eradicating, child poverty, it did not match that with a target to reduce income inequality (for example to the levels found in Nordic countries). Inequality continued high, fuelled by massive increases in income among a small elite at the top of the income pyramid and by the growth of low waged work for many at the bottom – epitomised by the poor wages and pension prospects of childcare and other care workers.

What the Labour government’s experience suggests is that ECEC, by itself, is not a magic potion for reducing poverty and exclusion. It has a part to play within a wider policy framework and a political and welfare regime committed to equality, democracy and inclusion, which includes inter alia a strong commitment to redistribution and comprehensive welfare benefits and public services – once again, the model adopted by the Nordic countries. It should also be added that while the integrated and low cost ECEC services in the Nordic countries are open to, and used, by all children and families, the fragmented and costly services in England sustain social division, replicating the later education system: well-off working parents are likely to use nannies and nurseries, while poor families are less likely to use any services at all while those that do are more likely to be using nursery classes in schools and Children’s Centres.

The Labour government did prioritise ECEC services and set itself some ambitious goals, not least ‘the Government’s vision of childcare services in this country becoming among the best in the world’. It made some progress. ECEC was recognised, for the first time, as an
important subject of public policy; it received sustained attention, investment and encouragement. Places increased, new entitlements were introduced, the workforce improved, and a new and important form of provision, Children’s Centres, became part of the ECEC scene. Responsibility for ECEC and regulation was integrated, within the education system, and in turn located within a broad policy framework encompassing all children and all services for them. All this was underpinned by substantial investment in research and data gathering, including for example large-scale and regular surveys of providers and parents and two major long-term research studies.

There were, however, some major drawbacks, that ensured ECEC in England was never likely to become among the best in the world. Integration of the split system stalled, leaving untouched the ‘wicked issues’ of funding and workforce, and retaining in practice two separate sectors – ‘early education’ and ‘childcare’ – with major differences in access, funding, workforce and type of provision. Worse, one continued to be seen as a public good, the other as a private responsibility. Structural divisions were compounded by conceptual divisions: England could not get beyond thinking and talking about ‘childcare’ to follow the true world leaders into a fully integrated public service for all children based on a holistic concept in which education and care were truly inseparable.

So the system remained not only split, but constituted of fragmented and divisive services, staffed by poorly paid women workers. Marketisation and privatisation were taken-for-granted, as was the system of demand subsidy for ‘childcare’, started by the Conservative government, and adopted and expanded by Labour. One consequence was that disadvantaged children continued to be disadvantaged when it came to mainstream ECEC services: with less access and poorer quality. Another was that a disadvantaged workforce continued to be disadvantaged, unable to escape impoverishment of qualification, employment conditions and esteem: private, for-profit providers, highly dependent on parental fees, could never support a well qualified and well paid workforce. Instead, the worst of both worlds prevailed, parents paying what seemed to them like a lot for services, while workers were paid little for their important jobs. This dilemma was never confronted head-on by a government that too readily adopted the rhetorical cliché of ‘world class’ services and workforces, without asking itself what this would really mean and whether it could be achieved in the current system.

Children’s Centres, an innovative form of provision, were introduced and rapidly extended. This was a genuinely bold and exciting venture, offering a model for re-forming the whole
provision of ECEC services in England: a new public institution to stand alongside a long established but recently re-formed public institution, the compulsory school becoming under Labour the Extended School. But this potential for re-form, to replace the confused and confusing system of existing services, was never pursued. Instead, CCs were always an ‘add on’ to existing ECEC services, never considered as the basis for a new, universal ECEC system. Their focus, despite some effort to enhance education and care services, remained family support, and they was never any prospect of them becoming a lead player in ECEC provision – now even less so with the Conservative-led coalition government removing the requirement that CCs in the most deprived areas offer full-time childcare.

The basic lesson, for me at least, is the need for a truly reforming government to ask critical questions, to think through answers, and to deliberate about alternatives before undertaking reform. The Labour government failed to look critically at the system it inherited and the alternatives to it, instead building in large part on what already existed. The effort that went into the development of SSLPs – the research reviews, the seminars, the discussion papers - was not replicated for the rest of the ECEC system. There was no point early on when that system was critically reviewed and different options set out, reviewed and discussed; consequently SSLPs, like CCs later, were grafted onto what, in my view, was and is a dysfunctional system.

This was a committed government, who did a lot in a relatively short period to get ECEC policy moving. But it was not reflective. Labour was in a constant hurry: seeking to do the very difficult (e.g. integrate services on the ground, build a new local infrastructure with local participation, spend large sums of money) in a very short time (Eisenstadt, 2012); restlessly moving from one initiative to another; demanding evaluations of new programmes or services while they were still in the early stages of development; treating them as new technologies needing to be tested not new public institutions requiring support to find their place in local communities and to discover and start to realise their potential. As part of its Modernising Government agenda, it made much of being evidence-based in its approach to policy, yet failed to follow this through from the rationale for to the design of policy; furthermore, it used evidence selectively and uncritically. Despite being in government

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11 Much reliance, for example, was put on evidence from just one country, the United States, and just three American longitudinal studies: Perry High/Scope (begun in 1962), Abecedarian (1972) and Chicago Child-Parent Centres (1983). A systematic review of the evidence on the ‘long-term economic impact of centre-based early childhood interventions’, cautions against generalising from these studies conducted in such specific spatial and temporal contexts:
It may be that the nature of English political life – with a maximum 5 years for any administration – encouraged this febrile approach, with change having to be brought about quickly in case of electoral defeat\textsuperscript{12}. But it may also be the product of a prevalent frame of mind, that eschewed context and complexity for predetermined outcomes, preferred centralised and managerial control to local democratic participation, and adopted an economistic understanding of ECEC services that saw them as a marketised commodity and as an investment that could bring high returns if properly managed and using the right human technologies. Whatever the case, policy making and implementation lacked deliberation and reflection and the longer-term benefits of organic and sustained growth.

Overall, it seems to me, the Labour government succeeded in improving the lot of disadvantaged children by being prepared to redistribute money and to develop an integrated and inclusive service of Children’s Centres and a wider integrated and inclusive approach under the aegis of the Every Child Matters agenda. But this success was tempered by serious failings: its reluctance to make its work on poverty reduction and ECM into a high profile political cause and mobilise public support for these radical projects; its disinclination to address inequality; its blindness to the growing problem of in-work poverty; and its continued support for a dysfunctional system of marketised and privatised ECEC that put disadvantaged children at further disadvantage and obstructed the creation of an integrated, inclusive and holistic system based on universal provision of Children’s Centres offering ECEC to all as well as a range of other services. The Labour government gave centre ground to child poverty and ECEC, much needed after previous neglect. But it failed to fully grasp the opportunities its renewed commitment opened up.

\textsuperscript{12} The burying of the Every Child Matters agenda by the Conservative-led government as soon as it took office lends some support to this sense of urgency – an ambitious and important approach simply disappeared by a new administration which, tellingly, renamed the Department for Children, Schools and Families as just the Department for Education.

These findings cannot be assumed to be generalisable elsewhere. The findings from these studies should not be used as justification for investment in similar enterprises in different populations and locations and time periods...[T]he results of the three studies are not easily transferable to modern contexts in countries such as England. The results indicated should therefore all be read with the caveat of ‘for the specific population in these studies’ (Penn et al., 2006, p.1).
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http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmchilsch/130/130i.pdf.


Annex One: timeline for developments in ECEC and related policies and levels of child poverty in England, 1997-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Government introduces Early Excellence Centres (EECs), to provide models of high quality, integrated services; eventually 107</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) announces Sure Start, targeted intervention programme for children under 4 and families in areas with high levels of poverty; funding announced for 250 projects by 2002 with 60 ‘trailblazer’ Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs); Sure Start programme to be managed by Sure Start Unit in Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and overseen by cross-departmental committee. Entitlement to free part-time early education (12.5 hours/week) for 4 year olds. Departmental responsibility for childcare provision moved to DfEE from Department of Health (DH). National childcare strategy set out in Green Paper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>‘Childcare credit’ introduced, a more generous demand subsidy for childcare costs administered through tax system. First 60 ‘trailblazer’ Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLP) launched: managed by Sure Start Unit in DfEE and overseen by cross-departmental committee. Government announces target to ‘eradicate’ child poverty by 2020–21, along with interim child poverty targets for 2004–05 and 2010–11.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 26.1%; 3.4 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>CSR announces further expansion of Sure Start, to reach one third of poor children by 2003/4</td>
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13 Poverty rate: Relative poverty - the percentage of the group with income below 60% of the population-wide BHC median income - using OECD modified equivalence rate and income before housing costs. Source: Cribb et al., 2012
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>Government announces plans for 900 <strong>Neighbourhood Nurseries</strong> (NN) in disadvantaged areas. <strong>Foundation Stage</strong> introduced, providing a curriculum framework for children from 3 years of age to the end of the first year in primary school.</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Launch of <strong>NN Initiative</strong>, to make high quality, convenient and affordable childcare available for working parents in 20% most disadvantaged areas. To be 45,000 new places by 2004. Start of <strong>National Evaluation of Sure Start</strong> (NESS).</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 25.7%; 3.4 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td><strong>Extended schools</strong> set up in 25 ‘pathfinder’ local authorities. Education Act gives extra powers to local authorities to prepare way for extended schools. Final wave of <strong>SSLPs</strong> approved making 524. <strong>Departmental responsibility for SSLPs moved</strong> from Department for Education and Skills and Department of Health to Department for Education and Skills and Department for Work and Pensions. <strong>Sure Start Unit merged with Early years Division and Childcare Unit</strong>: one group responsible for SSLPs, NNs and National Childcare Strategy. OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education) assumes responsibility for regulating childcare services. <strong>Children's Centres</strong> first raised in report of Inter-Departmental Committee on Childcare as effective way of providing good quality, integrated childcare and early years education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 23.4%; 3.1 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Report of inquiry into death of <strong>Victoria Climbé</strong>.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>W&amp;P Select Cttee warns <strong>not likely to be enough cc places</strong> to allow 2010 targets for child poverty and employment of lone mothers to be met.</td>
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</table>
SSLPs to be replaced by **Sure Start Children’s Centres** (CCs). First 32 CCs established. EECs and NNs to become CCs. CCs to be responsibility of local authorities, including funding.

**Departmental responsibility for range of services for children and young people moved** into Department for Education and Skills including children’s social services; first Minister for Children

*Every Child Matters* Green Paper; proposals include Children’s Trusts (CTs), common assessment framework, Sure Start Children’s Centres, Extended Schools (XSs) and a Children’s Commissioner

Final SSLPs awarded, reaching 524 built up over six rounds.

**School workforce remodelling programme** begins, with changed conditions for teachers including reduced workload and enhanced role for school support staff

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 22.6%; 2.9 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td><strong>Target for NNs</strong> of 45,000 new places reached in 1400 settings.</td>
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**10 year childcare strategy** published, including a pledge to create 3,500 Children’s Centres by 2010, providing access for all families, and a commitment to extend free early education places for three and four year olds to 15 hours a week by 2010.

**Phase One of CC programme**: additional funding announced to **rollout CCs** in each of 20 per cent most disadvantaged wards by 2008. Approximately 800 CCs opened in Phase One from 2004 to 2006. In 1st and 2nd phases, many of new CCS built on and subsumed earlier services including SSLPs, EECs, NNs and pre-existing nursery schools.

**Entitlement to free part-time early education** (12.5 hours/week) for 3 year olds
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 22.1%; 2.9 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>SSLPs start being wound up.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interim report by NESS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consultation paper on Children’s Workforce Strategy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Extended school prospectus published setting out ‘core’ offer’; all schools to be XSs by 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 21.3%; 2.7 million</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>Childcare Act places new duties on local authorities, including improving outcomes and reducing inequalities for young children and securing sufficient childcare, including by conducting ‘childcare sufficiency assessments’ and managing the local childcare market.</td>
<td>1,000 CCs (500 were converted SSLPs; 430 neighbourhood nurseries; 70 early excellence centres). Phase Two of CC expansion aims for 2,500 by 2008. Government response to Children’s Workforce Strategy consultation, including early years professional as new model; one in every children’s centre by 2010 and in every ‘full day care setting’ by 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 22%; 2.8 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Department for Children, Schools and Families created, taking responsibility for youth justice and anti-social behaviour by young people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 22.3%; 2.9 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Early Years Foundation Stage introduced, incorporating curriculum and standards for services for children from birth until end of first (reception) year</td>
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</table>
Phase 3 of CC expansion aims for 3,500 by 2010.

NESS report on impact of SSLPs on 3-year olds and their families.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 22.5%; 2.9 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3,100 CCs by October; 1796 provide full range of services.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Targeted offer of free, part-time early education extended to the most</td>
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<td></td>
<td>disadvantaged 2-year olds.</td>
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<td>Apprenticeships, Skills and Learning Act 2009 places a duty on local</td>
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<td>authorities to establish and maintain sufficient CCs to meet local needs</td>
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<td>2008-09</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 21.8%; 2.8 million</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>Target of 3,500 CCs reached.</td>
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<td>NESS report on impact of SSLPs on 5-year olds and their families.</td>
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<td>Child Poverty Act commits current and future governments to reducing</td>
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<td>the rate of relative income child poverty in the UK to 10% by 2020.</td>
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<td>New government: Conservative-led coalition with Liberal democrats.</td>
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<td>Entitlement to free early education for 3 and 4-year-olds increased</td>
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<td>from 12.5 to 15/hours per week for 38 weeks a year; announced by Labour</td>
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<td>government, implemented by coalition.</td>
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<td>2009-10</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 19.7%; 2.6 million</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>Entitlement to free, part-time (15 hours/week) early education to be</td>
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<td>extended to around 40 per cent of two-year-olds by 2015.</td>
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<td>New Child poverty Strategy published</td>
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<td>2010-11</td>
<td>Child poverty rate: 17.5%; 2.3 million</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>Revised EYFS following review in 2011. Statutory Framework for the Early</td>
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<td>Years Foundation Stage sets standards for learning, development and care</td>
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<td>for children from birth to five</td>
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ISSA Support for Educators and its Evaluation of Pedagogical Practice

Dawn Tankersley, Ed.D.
ISSA Program Expert

July 20, 2012

This case study has been prepared by Dawn Tankersley, Ed.D., with input from the International Step by Step Association (ISSA)

Abstract: The case study is sponsored by SOFRECO (France) as a contribution to a larger European Commission study on ECEC in promoting educational achievement, including the social development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and in fostering social inclusion. The case study falls into four sections: an introduction to ISSA, its vision and goals (Chapter 1); an outline of the purposes of the study (Chapter 2); ISSA practice and its evaluation (Chapter 3); and, conclusions from the evaluations (Chapter 4).

The purpose of the case study is to show the need to support the professional development of early childhood educators and to evaluate systematically early childhood practice. The central Chapter 3 of the study outlines: how ISSA recruits and trains its educators; how it supports its educators to improve pedagogical quality; and how it evaluates ISSA performance through both internal and external quality evaluations. An outstanding feature of ISSA evaluations is the use of experimental methodologies, that is, the methodology employed is clearly explained, can be replicated by others, may include a control group, and employs adequate statistical treatment of results.

The final Chapter 4 provides some conclusions from the ISSA evaluations, viz.

• Professional development needs to incorporate democratic practices
• Quality should be defined in competent systems with democratic, participatory structures
• Changing to democratic educational systems requires the use of multiple sources of influence
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ISSA Support for Educators and the Evaluation of Results

1. Introduction to ISSA
The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) is a membership organization that connects professionals and organizations working in the field of early childhood development and education. It promotes equal access to quality education and care for all children especially in the early years. ISSA’s concept began in 1994 with funding from the Open Society Institute (OSI) when a cohort of educators from 15 different countries introduced the Step by Step (SbS) Program into the existing government teacher training systems (Klaus, 2004). The program was a way to use early childhood education opportunities to foster democratic principles and actions in teaching staff, young children, their families, and communities (ISSA, 2002) through the implementation of a more child-centered methodological approach to education.

In 1999, 29 nongovernmental organizations implementing Step by Step Program\(^1\) established the International Step by Step Association (ISSA) in the Netherlands. Within its network, ISSA supports a wide array of programs that collectively provide a comprehensive set of educational services and advocacy tools intended to influence policy reform for families and children.

ISSA’s vision is: “with support from family and community, every child reaches his or her full potential and develops the skills necessary for being a successful and active member of a democratic knowledge society.” The association’s mission is to support professional learning communities and develop a strong civil society that influences and assists decision makers to:

- Provide high quality care and educational services for all children from birth through primary school with a focus on the most disadvantaged.
- Ensure greater inclusion of family and community participation in children’s development and learning.
- Ensure social cohesion and respect for diversity.

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

ISSA promotes:

- Equal access to quality education and care opportunities;
- Child-centered, individualized teaching and learning, combining high-level instruction with support for the needs of each child;
- Early childhood practices that focus on holistic child development;

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\(^1\) ISSA was established by the original 15 non-governmental organizations and 14 which had subsequently begun implementing the Step by Step Program in their countries.
• Development of skills and dispositions for lifelong learning and participation in a democracy;
• Recognition of educators’ many roles as facilitators, guides and role models in the learning process and as active members of their communities;
• Family and community involvement in children’s development and education;
• Community engagement in public education;
• Respect for diversity, inclusive practices, and culturally appropriate learning environments;
• Self-improvement and on-going professional development.

2. Purpose of this case study

Need for support for professional development

The first aim of this case study is to describe the resources and assistance that ISSA provides to its member NGOs (the ISSA Network), to help them provide support in their respective countries to educators at the kindergarten and primary school levels. In this context, ISSA’s support to the network focuses primarily on professional development opportunities provided for educators in order to continuously improve the quality of their practice.

As research from both the business and educational sectors reminds us, when professional development is left solely to the individual, it cannot be relied upon to take place. The Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe) report commissioned for European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture points out that high levels of systemic competences are required in addition to high levels of individual competences and include all of the layers of the system: individual, institutional, inter-institutional, and governance (EC, 2011, p.33).

Training has been the traditional way to develop individual competences. The Step by Step Program initiated by the Open Society Institute, for example, developed a number of highly effective training programs that served educator’s developmental needs. However, training alone is seldom enough to change behavior. Good training provides the rationale for change, and provides the models, processes, and even the skills to become more effective. However, if training occurs only at the individual practitioner level, without concurrent systemic changes, once educators leave the training environment, they return to an environment with a whole host of influences that can negate the training.

Authors from the business sector point out that multiple levels of influence are required to change behaviors that include: individual motivation and abilities, social reinforcement and support, and structural reinforcement and support (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, and Switzler, 2008).² Real change is influenced by motivation and

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² The authors of *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything* identify 6 cells of influence to change behaviors. Cells 1 and 2 are sources that influence personal motivation (the influence of pleasure or pain of the behavior itself – intrinsic or extrinsic) and abilities (the influence of ability, skill, knowledge, information). Cells 3 and 4 are sources that build social motivation (the influence of other people – through modelling, giving feedback, encouraging, thanking, praising, confronting, etc.) and abilities (the influence of other people – through creating opportunity, helping, coaching, supporting). Cells 5 and 6 build structural motivation (the influence of time, consequences, accountabilities, measures, rewards &
ability at the individual level. Teachers need new models and skills to change how they interact with children. That is the role that training plays. Teachers also need the desire to learn new capabilities and to apply them. That is the role of motivation. No matter how good the training program, unmotivated people will not learn or apply the lessons.

People also need encouragement and support from those with whom they interact. This is the social level and it is also critical for behavior change. Research from the business sector on managing change (Lombardo and Eichinger, 1996) reports that only 10% of learning from training is transferred to actual job performance, and 70% of what we learn is from job experiences or social learning. It is not that training educators to have more effective competencies is not needed. But it is necessary for many additional actions to occur after training in the areas of social learning, support, and encouragement to ensure that educators actually use their newly acquired competencies.

The educator’s social network plays an important role in encouraging increased reflection on the quality of educators’ practice. As Forman and Keen (2011, pg.5) point out, “Experience without reflection is a waste of time, often ineffective, and can be detrimental.” When others in the educator’s social network encourage development, model the new capabilities, create opportunities, coach and mentor them, and help them reflect on practice, then another powerful source of influence is added and the system becomes more competent. If the educator’s social network conspires against development (neither encouraging nor enabling others, nor helping reflect on practice), then even the best training will go unused.

Finally, the organizational setting, or structural level, plays an equally important role in changing educator’s behaviors and determining whether or not they use new competences. When educators return to their classrooms and find that nothing there has changed that would support the expected new behaviors, the power of the individual can fade. System changes at the structural level also have to be made which will support changes in practices. Such changes may include restructuring how educators are assessed and rewarded, providing ample resources, and providing time and opportunities to engage in reflection with others on practice.

In summary, real change in educators’ competences and practice requires good training and more: how others influence behavior or choice (the social level) and how the work setting (the structural level) is aligned with educators’ willingness and ability to adopt and use new competencies. The Step by Step Program’s experiences in professional development activities since its inception in 1994 mirror these findings that a more holistic perspective (good training and more) including multiple influencers at the social and structural level was required to support the development and application of new competencies.

The SbS Program recognized early on that training alone was not adequate to change teacher practice in a way that would improve the quality of early educational experiences for children; nor was it financially sustainable when funding for trainings became more limited. This paper will describe how ISSA and its members, the Step by Step NGOs, working in partnership with and support from the Open Society Institute and Open Society Foundations, used and continue to develop multiple and more sustainable sources of influence that support educators to make changes and to elevate incentives, career processes, and other work setting factors and abilities (the influence of school policy, available tools, processes, resources, budgets, and other work setting factors).
the competence of the system. This included additional professional development support at both the social and structural reinforcement and ability levels. In the beginning of program implementation, this was done through the establishment of on-site training schools at the community level, through forming links with teacher training institutes, and by obtaining approval from Ministries of Education of the curriculum as an official alternative to the traditional curriculum at the level of national institutions (Klaus, 2004, pg. 6).

As time passed, these areas were strengthened with the creation of model sites and mentoring systems that included mentor training, working with state inspectors and local educational authorities, working with parents and community members through parent advocacy training and training for educational nongovernment organizations, courses for teacher training and re-training institutes, and the development of both on-site and on-line professional learning communities that engage practitioners in professional exchanges and peer mentoring.

At the structural level, ISSA developed: educator Standards/Principles based on the Step by Step Program and ISSA’s mission, goals, and values; documents and protocols to help educators, administrators, education authorities, and community members understand and embrace ISSA’s Standards/Principles; a certification process for educators, and at the beginning of the program even help with furnishing classrooms. Most recently, structural support has included work by many of the ISSA Member NGOs in setting up the structure for professional learning communities. These structural resources gave educators the support they required to continue to work on improvement of quality with less input from NGO staff.

It should be noted that the elaboration of a professional development system that has multiple sources of influence has been a work in progress over the 18 years since the start of the Step by Step Program, and that ISSA has been and is continuing to learn about what needs to be added at a system level. A part of this lesson has been rethinking how to make systemic changes more financially sustainable, as funding sources for generous numbers and days of training, one-on-one mentoring, and support for a certification system has become less available.

Another example of a lesson learned is ISSA’s revision of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards in 2010 to the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy. ISSA and its members decided that it was important “to include lessons learned and new experiences developed in the region and to incorporate latest research findings in the field from across the world… It was also decided to move beyond standards as an instrument for assessment and evaluation to principles that demonstrate ISSA’s emphasis on inviting all stakeholders to discussion and on-going improvement of policies and practices (ISSA, 2010, pg.9).”

As the OECD (2001, 2006) has pointed out in the Starting Strong reports, the issue of defining and evaluating quality has to be placed in the context of democratic participatory approaches. Definitions of quality should also be regularly reviewed for understandings and practices for changing societal conditions (NESSE, 2009). When principles are “owned” and/or co-authored by the communities in which they are implemented, it increases the probability that efforts to improve quality will be sustained.

However, it has also been the case in ISSA that the Standards/Principles from the structural support area have become the cornerstone of ISSA’s professional
development process. It was found that when the ISSA Member NGOs focused teacher training around the *ISSA Pedagogical Standards*, they were able to improve individual practitioners’ teaching skills, influence the larger school community and culture, and broaden community involvement, as well as influencing a large number of policy decisions (Howard et al., 2010) – all of which are likely to sustain a movement toward greater quality in teacher practice.

**Need for evaluations of early childhood practice**

A second aim of this case study is to reference and describe the scientific evaluations of the Step by Step Program and ISSA’s programmes – in particular, their impact on educators and on the children and families served by ISSA’s programmes through its member NGOs. The topic is an important one. There is a widespread research consensus that the educator is a key interface between children’s learning and the curriculum. Far too often, however, early childhood staff in national systems do not receive on-going support and professional development opportunities, nor do they work within the framework of a competent system. In addition, evaluations of actual early childhood practice remain rare. Yet, both are needed in order to achieve quality pedagogy in early childhood services.

This study will describe both internal quality control studies, as well as several external evaluations of the Step by Step Program over a twelve year time span. These studies and evaluations used different methodologies, but they support each other’s findings. These include:

- A study done in 2011 identifying those focus areas/principles/indicators in the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* in which there is still a need for improvement in educators’ practices, and which differentiate the highest performing educators from the lowest performing in terms of providing quality practice in classrooms.
- A study carried out by USAID in 1998 for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the role of child-centered learning strategies in creating democratic, collaborative behaviors at the local level for the new democracies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

All of these studies reinforce the premise that in order to influence educators’ behaviors to change and become democratic, multiple sources of influence have to be used in a systemic way.

**3. ISSA practice and its evaluation**

**a. How ISSA recruits and trains its educators**

While all of the NGOs engage in the core activity of training educators in general child-centered practice, ISSA and its member NGOs have spread the program in the region through various mechanisms, once again, using a systematic approach which attempts to reach stakeholders both directly and indirectly, and which promotes reflective practice in educators.
According to the RAND Study (2008, pg. xiii-xiv) the Step by Step Program expanded in several ways:

- **In reach**, by being introduced to educators in preschools and primary classrooms in over 30 countries (basically through trainings and teacher manuals, but also mentoring).
- **In substance**, by developing a broader range of new ideas and practices, such as whole school improvement, inclusion of special needs children into mainstream classrooms, programs specific to Roma children and minorities (basically through training and mentoring), early childhood development programs such as parent education which support children who do not attend preschool, and developmentally appropriate children’s literature. (This implies approaching different areas and challenges of early education system comprehensively and the need to target specific populations as well as general groups.)
- **In sustainability**, by creating non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to administer the Step by Step Program and advocate for educational reform, by securing official Ministry endorsement, by influencing existing university-based teacher training programs, and by other means.
- **At the regional level**, by using ISSA as a platform to sustain and advance the focus on the early years.

An additional step to this process has been the clarification and promotion of ISSA’s values through the development and distribution of the *ISSA Pedagogical Standards/ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* and supporting materials that accompany them and the subsequent dialogue about them with all stakeholders.

In terms of training educators, the survey data gathered by RAND (2008, pg. xvi) showed that up through 2006, 68,000 educators had been trained in the Step by Step methodology and a conservative estimate of 1.5 million children had been exposed to the child-centered approaches it advocates. While this figure continues to grow, it is almost impossible to measure, because the number and kinds of trainings educators receive and the reach varies yearly among ISSA’s member NGOs. RAND also reported that in 2006, 23 countries were utilizing a network of geographically dispersed training centers, ten countries were providing trainings to teacher retraining institutions, 11 countries were working in pre-service teacher training institutions, and 1,200 faculty at pre-service institutions had been trained, meaning potentially tens of thousands of students had been exposed to the methodologies (xvii).

In the beginning of the Step by Step Program, these trainings were offered to educators in intensive 3-5 day workshops that were funded by the Open Society Institute and national Soros Foundations. Model training sites were chosen where new educators could see the methodology being applied and receive additional trainings as needed. The model training sites, as well as many of the original classrooms to offer the methodology, were furnished and given classroom materials to make it easier to serve as learning centers. Training of trainers and mentoring workshops were offered so that the ISSA member NGOs could easily expand their reach to other educators that were interested in implementing the Step by Step Program.

This approach differed from what had been offered in the past in the region as it included:

- Decentralized, school-based professional development (done at model sites) versus strictly centralized, university-based development;
On-going training instead of training which took place every five years;
An approach that translated theory into practice by focusing on practice;
Training delivered by practicing master educators instead of faculty who taught only theory;
Used an interactive constructivist approach instead of faculty-centered lecturing (Tankersley, Mikailova and Sula, 2012, pg. 130-131).

Specific training needs also arose in different locations, such as in countries where there were larger populations of Roma or where inclusion of special needs children became national education priorities, which required the development of new training programs. As the ISSA member NGOs had to look for additional sources for funding their operations, funders also dictated specific programs that they were interested in supporting, which required modification of existing or creation of new trainings, such as working with older students. In some countries, governments could no longer afford to provide kindergarten services, and thus community-based programs needed to be introduced. In other countries such as those that joined the European Union, child-centered practices became more the national norm and were more likely to be introduced in pre-service training, so the member NGOS in those countries were more likely to do other kinds of trainings or professional development activities (for example, adding Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking workshops to their repertoire of offerings). These changes created situations in which many of the member NGO’s have changed their focus from just offering professional development opportunities in child-centered practice in general, to working on many different kinds of initiatives and targeting different audiences.

More important than how many educators have been trained in the Step by Step methodology is the kind of impact the introduction of the program has made in the region. Educators can be trained in how to create environments that offer children choices, such as in the implementation of the concept of learning centers, in how to create a sense a community in the classroom, or in active learning techniques. As the CoRe Report (E.U., 2011) pointed out, however, it is much more difficult to train educators to develop essential underlying values of why to promote participation in democratic learning environments, why inclusive environments must exist in democratic environments and how to create them, why to promote the agency of the child and the family, and why educators need to become educational leaders and agents of change, because these values have to be part of a competent systems. The development of these values needs to be supported and reinforced by a systemic culture which recognizes, nurtures, and celebrates them.

b. How ISSA supports its educators to improve pedagogical quality

Child-centered educator training, teacher manuals and professional development modules

The Step by Step Program was introduced to educators in the region through a series of trainings that began with how child-centered education would look in kindergarten. Trainings were then added each year for how to create appropriate learning environments up through the 4th grade. The original training modules, teacher and parent manuals, and higher education courses were developed by international experts in early childhood education and development with funding and leadership from the Open Society Institute. Other training modules that were developed by the Open Society Institute were later added as needs were identified in classrooms such as classroom
management, cooperative learning, and workshops for middle grades. OSI also initiated and funded the development of resources to train and develop trainers and to educate professors to deliver pre-service, in-service, and post graduate courses within existing institutions of higher education.

In 2006, an important new initiative was added to the Step by Step Program’s resources with funding from OSI which assists parents and communities with limited formal preschool opportunities to prepare children for school. The resources could be implemented in a variety of settings including preschools, schools, health centers, and community centers and included how to train both parent facilitators and parents. These resources have been especially useful for work in Roma communities and other communities that do not have easy access to preschools or health services.

The resources for the Education for Social Justice in the ISSA Network were developed initially to support OSI and ISSA’s work in Roma communities. This has been one of the most challenging areas for educators working with ISSA’s member NGOs to address because of the lack of consistent systemic social and structural support for education for social justice. “Even for those who are committed to the process, it is a long journey requiring both mentoring support and networking to sustain personal energy and enhance professional capacity... Regardless of the challenges, those working in the Step by Step system on issues of social justice gain strength through being part of a network with common goals and values and through seeing change in individual classrooms, schools, and communities” (Lee and Vranjesvic, 2009, pg.37).

Success in changing pedagogical practice with trainings was not always as successful as had been anticipated. Many times educators would say that they were Step by Step educators when, in fact, they had made less than expected change in their practice. In other cases, educators would begin using the methodology, but slip back into previous practice when not receiving trainings or, even more importantly, mentoring on an ongoing basis. Changes in practice were more likely to occur when an entire school/kindergarten or portions of a school/kindergarten adopted the methodology, creating a critical mass, where school or center directors supported the change, and where critical on-site leaders (such as a methodologists or vice-director) were assigned the task of supporting educators to make the transition in applying new practices. In places where only a few educators worked with the new methodology, the transition was very difficult to achieve and sustain. This led ISSA to the conclusion that educators needed even more support in both the social and structural areas of influence.

**Pedagogical standards defining quality indicators**

After 6-7 years, it was decided that the Step by Step Program required more structure and more precise definitions, and examples of practice around its basic values and what child-centered education mean. Following the steps of other professional organizations/associations, ISSA developed and implemented educator standards as a pathway to defining quality in teaching practices in classrooms in member NGOs’ countries. The standards were a framework for programs/educators, mentors/teacher trainers, inspectors, administrators, etc. to improve and advocate for quality practice.

It should be noted that the original educator standards developed in 2002 did not include a standard on social inclusion, as it was assumed that this concept was adequately covered in the original six standards that included: Individualization, Learning Environment, Family Participation, Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning,
Planning and Assessment, and Professional Development. However ISSA and its member NGOs found that even with these standards, many children of traditionally excluded groups in the region, and especially Roma, were being denied their right to quality educational experiences. In order to address this problem, in 2005 ISSA adopted a seventh standard which deals directly with quality in social inclusion. This standard was retained in the revised version of the *ISSA Principles for Quality Pedagogy as Inclusion, Diversity, and the Values of Democracy*.

Howard, et. al. (2011) reported that the original *ISSA Pedagogical Standards* as well as their supporting documents and guides were translated and disseminated by virtually all of ISSA’s member NGOs. The most common dissemination strategies included using regional training centers as dissemination points, as a part of presentations and meetings, and on NGO websites. The *Standards* were referenced into most of the trainings, and many NGOs offered specialized trainings focused on individual standards. School directors and principals were trained to use the *Standards* for classroom observation and planning professional development for teaching staff. Individual educators were encouraged to use the *Standards* for self-assessment and reflection on their practice, and universities and teacher training institutes were encouraged to use them where partnerships existed. Assessments using the *Standards* were included in other funded projects, and they were disseminated by introducing them to stakeholders through conference presentations, community meetings, and roundtable discussions with educators and local education authorities.

In 2010, taking into account lessons learned from eight years of using the *ISSA Pedagogical Standards*, ISSA revised the *Standards* document in order to make even more explicit ISSA’s belief in equal opportunities and quality education, as well as to incorporate the latest research on early childhood education and development to improve the use of the document as a professional development tool. The *ISSA Pedagogical Standards* consisted of the 7 standards mentioned earlier and 32 indicators. The new *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* consists of 85 indicators distributed among 20 Principles in 7 Focus Areas, covering all crucial professional areas of educators’ practices promoting child’s learning and development using a focused approach.

ISSA continues to use the revised document, *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy*, to pursue its goals to promote equity, access, parental support, and community participation in ECD. The *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* and their supporting documents also strongly recognize and promote the important role of the professional as a knowledgeable, sensitive individual who guides and scaffolds children in their journey of exploration and learning and who works in close partnership with families as the first educators of their children and communities as a natural resource for learning and inquiry (ISSA, 2010).

**Teacher certification**

Along with the development of the *ISSA Pedagogical Standards* in 2002, ISSA also started a teacher certification system that included mentoring support in order to reach a level of practice whereby educators can reach an acceptable score to receive an ISSA certificate of teaching excellence. ISSA Teacher Certification was a voluntary process designed to encourage and recognize quality improvement and successful implementation of the *ISSA Standards* into daily classroom practices. Educator performance was measured through the use of an observation tool based on the *ISSA Standards*. 

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Those member NGOs that wished to certify were required to obtain authorization from ISSA that required countries to develop a formal system of certification. Establishing and maintaining reliability across certifiers was key to assuring levels of educator quality remained constant. To that end, a three-tiered system of reliability was established. At the highest level, three regional anchors were identified. Anchors maintained reliability among themselves and routinely worked with national certification coordinators in their regions. The national certification coordinators then worked with in-country certifiers to assure educators were being consistently and reliably observed, supported, and certified. (It should be noted that NGOs that were not authorized to certify educators were nonetheless involved in other efforts and activities to introduce the Standards and to use them for quality improvement at all levels of influence – individual, systems, policy).

The organizational structure and the procedures for identifying certifiers and supporting educators through the course of certification were generally the same across the ISSA network. A system for establishing and maintaining reliability among certifiers was developed, and educators working on certification were uniformly engaged in a process that included self-evaluation, observation by a certifier, development of an improvement plan, portfolio development, and a second observation from the certifier.

Certification training was consistent across all NGOs and included: training on the standards and the certification process, as well as participating in and achieving reliability with the regional or national certification anchor. On-going support for certifiers was provided through regular workshops and seminars on specific topics or identified areas of need. Certifiers engaged in periodic reliability checks throughout the year – often held in conjunction with regional trainings.

Although the results of certifier educators were disappointing in that only 329 educators were certified over a six year period, many lessons were learned in the process about how to promote reflection among stakeholders on quality. One of the most important lessons came about from the experience in the reliability discussion, and the role that dialogue about quality plays in creating environments that are more democratic, inclusive, and that empower children and families in the education process. Another lesson was the necessary development of tools to center the reliability discussions.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring was traditionally available to educators new to the Step by Step methodology. When the ISSA Pedagogical Standards were introduced, mentoring was expanded to include helping educators apply the Standards to daily classroom practice and/or reach certification. Mentors typically worked on a voluntary basis with some non-monetary incentives or, in some cases, NGOs are able to cover the costs of mentoring through other grants and projects. As more educators were trained and began using the Standards in their classrooms, the need for mentor support increased. NGOs subsequently implemented a number of strategies to build capacity, including local mini-trainings, provision of informal mentoring by experienced educators to less experienced educators in schools, and site-based mentoring by school directors, certified educators, and others.

Most NGOs provided mentoring to all educators, whether they were engaged in certification or not. However, the number and duration of contacts between mentors and educators as well as the ratio of mentors to educators varied greatly across programs. In many cases, the mentoring process was similar to that used to prepare educators for
certification, including classroom observations, meetings with educators, and developing quality improvement plans. Mentoring also included other supports in addition to classroom visits, such as helping educators to use the standards as a self-assessment tool, providing educators with resources and materials on the NGO website or through the regional training centers, “E-mentoring,” and developing and delivering on-line courses.

Mentors were selected from a broad pool of educators who met specific criteria and were available to work with educators in their regions. Selection criteria included mentors’ participation in specialized mentor training: demonstrated understanding of the Standards and child-centered methodology, and demonstrated observation, training, and interpersonal skills. Other criteria for mentors less commonly used by NGOs included: familiarity with national curricula and standards, reliability using the ISSA Standards as an observation tool, and possession of ISSA certification.

Most NGOs provided on-going support to the mentors through the creation of local mentor learning communities, regularly scheduled re-training meetings, special training on identified needs, visits from international mentors, and mentors working in pairs to learn from each other. In addition, a number of programs provided on-line mentor training and support by posting materials on the NGO website or creating interactive sites where mentors can exchange ideas and materials. To increase local capacity, new mentors were often trained on-site by experienced mentors.

Those NGOs who were certifying also included mentors in certification training, intensive Standards training, and participation in reliability exercises and discussions. Establishing reliability among mentors through advanced training and classroom observations proved to increase mentors’ focus on the work, deeper understanding of the Standards, ability to “translate” them into practice, provision of more concrete and focused feedback to educators, and more useful feedback and reporting to NGOs.

In a number of countries the concept of mentoring for quality became a national policy interest that also led to opportunities to provide training and presentations to universities and training institutes on how to create and implement a mentoring system. Direct training to university students was also used as a strategy to connect schools and universities and inform a larger effort to include mentoring in national teacher preparation systems. In some countries, NGOs were approached by local authorities and schools to deliver mentor training to build the school’s capacity to support new educators through mentoring.

The RAND Report (2008), however, does state that data from their survey indicated that maintaining a system of teacher mentoring was a challenge for many of the ISSA member NGOs. “Only four of 30 countries reported that it was easy to maintain a system. Lack of financial resources was the most significant barrier, followed by a rigid curriculum in the country and lack of resources for educators. … Follow-up visits to educators after basic training were not especially frequent” (xvii-xviii). The report goes on to state however that this difficulty did not mean that the NGOs had not been active in their efforts to promote quality, but that the most common types of activities were meetings for trainers or mentors, and that the ISSA Pedagogical Standards were incorporated in all projects.
**Professional Learning Communities**

With this information, ISSA decided that a less costly approach to mentoring that supported both the individual teacher as well as communities of teachers needed to be introduced. In addition, ISSA and many of their member NGOs were inspired by the concept of using democratic participatory approaches in professional development work that would also nurture critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection on what is quality practice. The most recent development in ISSA and some of its member NGOs has been the greater promotion of the concept of peer mentoring in professional learning communities. Building professional learning communities is a highly effective way to transform educators’ practice in early childhood centers and schools, resulting in higher quality and more democratic interactions, as well as increasing educators’ autonomy, decision-making, leadership and collaboration around professional issues. It can move mentoring from being a hierarchical practice whereby the expert tells the educator what they are doing wrong and how they can improve, to a more horizontal dialogue in which educators reflect on and share what is working well for them and how to build on their strengths.

Referring to the **ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy**, participants in the learning communities can identify the strengths and weaknesses in their own practice, and the school-based community can identify where they have made progress in recent years and where improvements are needed. The community makes the decision on the area of work in the future; either they can continue to develop their strengths, or chose areas that need improvement. Discussions should also occur about what a particular indicator suggests, why it is important, and how it is presented in their practice enriching the repertoire of ways to illustrate an indicator. The community then makes an operational draft plan of changes to be implemented together with indicators of success. Those who implement professional learning communities have also found it helpful to have meetings with an expert from the ISSA member NGO so that they can connect examples of their practice with theoretical concepts, with values, and with other principles (Tankersley, Vonta, and Bruic; 2011).

**ISSA quality improvement tools**

After the publication of **Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy**, ISSA developed additional resources to accompany it as part of the **Quality Resource Pack** to assist educators in understanding what the specific indicators under each of the Principles imply which include:

- **Putting Knowledge into Practice: A Guidebook for Educators on ISSA’s Principles of Quality Practice** – a reference book that describes in-depth each of the Principles of Quality Pedagogy and the related Indicators and makes the connection between theory, current research, and practice.
- Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality of Practices in Kindergarten/Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality of Practices in Primary School - specifically illustrate (for each level of education: preschool and primary school) each of the 85 indicators of quality in the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy, deconstructing how educators move on a continuum from inadequate practice, to a good start, to quality practice and then into transformational practice, with examples of practice at each level whereby they begin to create systemic change in the teaching paradigm and practice. This is meant to be an open document where practitioners can discuss and add examples from their own and others’ practice that would show the local context of how quality is implemented.
• **An Online Video Library on Quality Pedagogy** – a collection of short video clips of educators and children in classrooms (preschool and primary school), which illustrate how certain indicators of quality practice are being implemented. Once again this is intended to be an open resource where others can engage in dialogue about their interpretations of quality in local contexts and add additional videos for discussion.

• **Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices in Early Childhood Education Services for Children from 3 to 10 Years Old** – a condensed version of the Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality of Practices to rate/assess educator performance on a select group of indicators for project evaluation and for research purposes. Any use of this document is expected to be carried out by a person who is reliable with one of the ISSA Reliability Coordinators following a specific protocol.

• **“Educators that Make a Difference” – An Online Course for Kindergarten Educators** – an interactive twelve module-course based on the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy, to be taken by individual educators within a cohort of other participants facilitated by an ISSA Quality Expert.

Each of the resources from the *Quality Resource Pack* can be used individually and in combination with others, but always in connection with the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy as an overarching document. They are designed to create a framework that can be used in different ways to engage in dialogue about quality and to implement various initiatives/pathways around quality improvement in the early years at the individual, institutional, national, and international levels, which will strengthen a shared understanding of what quality means and how it can be improved. The *Quality Resource Pack* provides the opportunity to address a wide range of target audiences such as: educators (individuals or professional communities), pre-service and in-service training institutions, parents (individuals or associations), communities, policy makers, education authorities, pre-school/school administrators, evaluators, researchers, mass media, as well as the general public.

The ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy are disseminated widely through the work of members, via the ISSA website, and through other means. The accompanying set of resources from the *Quality Resource Pack* are offered to members as part of the services/benefits provided by ISSA to its members, in close connection with ISSA’s strategic goals.

**A new quality assurance and improvement strategy**

ISSA as an association has also adopted a new Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy which is based on the lessons learned from the Study on Implementation of ISSA Pedagogical Standards and their Impact on ECDE Policies and Practices in the Region of ISSA’s Network and Beyond (2001-2008). The main objectives of the strategy are to:

• Promote and keep as a priority the quality of early childhood education practices in the ISSA network.

• Continuously assure the shared understanding of quality practices in the ISSA network and at the local level.

• Support members in developing a quality implementation strategy by using the new resources in the *Quality Resource Pack* at the local level.

• Monitor the progress of implementing the *Quality Resource Pack* at the level of the ISSA network and at local level.
The development of the resources in the *Quality Resource Pack* and the adoption of the *Quality Assurance and Improvement Strategy* also coincided with ISSA’s and many of its member NGOs’ focus and direction in promoting professional learning communities as they provide a strong foundation for community learning and social support in a competent system. They are meant to encourage on an even greater basis the regeneration of knowledge, critical thinking, inquiry, and group reflection.

**On-line professional development and support**

ISSA finds it extremely important that all educators stay current on research developments and engage in dialogue about culturally responsive quality pedagogy. To this end, ISSA has implemented an on-line professional learning community where all of its members as well as partners and other interested parties have this opportunity. This on-line professional learning community supports the professional development of ISSA member staff and their partners through some of the following functions:

- **Intranet** – an internal communication tool for the network which includes news from members, network news, info on trends/resources, etc.
- **Collaborative Tool** to support the work of Groups around common interests. This serves as a tool to reach out to more and more ECD practitioners, bringing them together to share experiences and for joint knowledge creation.
- **Library of Resources** – Library of video clips supporting the ISSA Principles, Library of resources produced by ISSA, and Library of other relevant resources linked to the ISSA Principles.
- **Online Education** – support online courses offered by ISSA or its members. The first course is the result of a project funded by IBM – a Course for Kindergarten Teachers (under development).

ISSA has also created and implemented an online training course which included a learning community as an integral component of the course. The feedback from the pilot of the ISSA online course proved that it was a vibrant exchange online, a useful and meaningful professional development opportunity for participants. Among the things which participants seemed to value most are the following:

- The opportunity for self-study and for applying in practice some of the new things learned, with the opportunity to come back online to self-reflect, share with others about the experience, and obtain feedback from the moderator and the other course participants.
- The discussion forums, which are moderated by the course moderators, are highly valued by all participants, and are very dynamic and interactive. Participants share from their own teaching experience, provide information on useful links and websites, comment on each other’s ideas, etc. This aspect of the course – being part of an online learning community – makes this professional development opportunity a much more powerful experience than a traditional training, or self-study.
- The role of moderators was much appreciated, and participants gave positive feedback on how the moderators guided their work.
- The international aspect of the course was also a big plus for the English speaking group, allowing participants to gain insights into how universally valid principles of quality pedagogy are being translated into practice in contexts which are diverse in almost every way. The fact that participants were able to share photos and video clips of their classrooms was much appreciated.

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Technology is a new component to professional development that did not exist 20 years ago when the Step by Step Program began its implementation. As Vygotsky (1962) pointed out, learning is a social activity. Participating in and expanding social learning communities is an incredibly valuable asset, and now technology has provided the tools to explore, identify, and leverage the insights of others as never before (Forman and Keen, 2011).

c. How ISSA evaluates its performance

At different stages since the start-up of the Step by Step Program, the Open Society Institute, ISSA, and its member NGOs have engaged in various evaluations (internal and external) indicating commitment in measuring the impact on educators, children, and families, in assessing the sustainability of the work, and in providing information about how to improve ISSA’s work around quality, equity, and respect for diversity. “Evaluation has ensured the sustainability of Step by Step” (Klaus, 2004).

Three major evaluations will be described here. However, there have been others such as:

- **Case Studies of the Step by Step Program** (OSI, 2008) funded by Open Society Institute between 2003 and 2006, produced a series of thematic papers on children’s outcomes, family and community engagement, equal opportunities for each child to develop to his/her full potential, teacher training and professional development, enabling networks and partnerships, and sustainability.

- **The Roma Special Schools Initiative Evaluation Year 3** (Proactive Information Services, Inc., 2003) demonstrated that when educators used the Step by Step methodology combined with Education for Social Justice Training, Roma children misplaced in special schools could perform at comparable academic levels as their age counterparts in mainstream schools.

- **The Roma Education Initiative Final Report** (2006, pg. 31) that “suggested that school success for Roma students within a quality educational environment is possible, particularly when it is supported by a comprehensive, collaborative community approach.”


- **The Revised Review of the Step by Step Association** (Cavanaugh and Heimgaertner, 2012) funded by the Open Society Foundation to assess ISSA’s effectiveness at supporting the quality and sustainability of the ECD programs which have grown from OSI and OSF’s investment in the Step by Step Program.

**Internal quality control**

This Case Study describes two evaluations that were commissioned by ISSA and completed by outside evaluators to look at how well ISSA was doing in terms of its professional development activities and the impact it has made: A report from Diana Damean (2011) at the Centre for the Evaluation of Socio-Educational Profiles (Babes Bolyai University, Romania) to measure the level of quality teaching practices and to connect them to educators’ training levels, and the report from Mimi Howard on the impact of the **ISSA Pedagogical Standards** over a seven year period.
Internal quality control became a greater focus in the Step by Step Program after the publication of the original ISSA Pedagogical Standards and when the teacher certification system began to be implemented. Although with the revised version of the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy, certification of teachers has been replaced with more democratic professional development activities and reliability on how quality is defined is a continued goal.

In 2011, ISSA engaged in a study to identify those focus areas/principles/indicators where there is still a need for improvement in educators’ practices in order to identify indicators in the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy that differentiated the highest performing educators in terms of providing quality practice in classrooms. This study assisted ISSA to create the instrument: Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices in Early Childhood Education Services for Children from 3 to 10 Years Old with a reduced number of indicators that could serve as “proxies” for other indicators. The instrument was created in order to rate/assess educator performance for project evaluation and for research purposes. The Instrument allows systems and schools to more easily assess programs where additional training or professional development is needed, and to evaluate how specific professional development programs perform when preparing educators.

The following information is taken directly from the Damean (ibid.) report.

For the study a sample of 115 educators from 8 countries: Armenia (12.1% – 14 respondents), Bosnia and Herzegovina (7% – 8 respondents), Croatia (7.8% – 9 respondents), Czech Republic (14.8% – 17 respondents), Lithuania (26.1% – 30 respondents), Moldova (14.8% – 17 respondents), Serbia (8.7% – 10 respondents), and Tajikistan (8.7% – 10 respondents) were rated using the Instrument for ISSA’s Principles of Quality Pedagogy which is comprised of 85 teacher performance indicators summarized in 20 principles, pertaining to 7 focus area: (1) Interactions, (2) Family and Community, (3) Inclusion, Diversity, and Values of Democracy, (4) Assessment and Planning, (5) Teaching Strategies, (6) Learning Environment, (7) Professional Development. The instrument was completed by a rater who observed educators’ activity in class, examined their portfolios and conducted interviews with them. Based on these sources, the educators’ activity for each corresponding item was rated on a 3-step scale, as (1) Inadequate, (2) Good start, or (3) Quality.

The raters were comprised of a cohort of 13 people who had established reliability at a minimal 80% level (though this level of inter-rater reliability is still not as high as ISSA would like to achieve). It took five days of calibrating observation scores to reach the 80% level of reliability because members of the group were seeking a deeper understanding of how the Indicators defined quality and what kinds of actions we really wanted to see practitioners making in order to satisfy the spirit of each indicator.

In this study, a variety of demographical data was collected with the intention to understand if demographical factors had any correlations to how educators scored on the Indicators. This included information on what age level the classrooms were (62.21% were primary school educators and 34.78% were kindergarten educators); how much Step by Step training the educators had received (12% had no SbS training, 12% had attended 1-2 workshops, 27% had attended 3-5 workshops, and 11.3% had attended over 5; whether the educator worked as a trainer or mentor for other educators (63% had done training for other educators and 80% were mentors of other educators), and what level of quality the rater considered the educator (12.4% were considered low; 36.3%
were considered medium level of quality, 51.3% were considered high.) Of those educators that rated high, 24% of them had been certified under the previous ISSA Standards.

The demographical information also included the ethnic composition of the class (90% were non-Roma; 10% were Roma; classes with Roma children were found in only Serbia, Czech Republic, and Croatia); the children’s socio-economic status (4% were very poor rural from Tajikistan and Croatia, 31% were very poor urban, 45.2% were working class; and 20% were professional class).

Information was also included on whether during the observation, children worked in centers, in large groups, and in small groups. Nearly half of the children (49.6%) learned in learning centers. However, learning in large groups was a wide-spread practice (99.1% of the cases), while learning in small groups is also very popular (69.6%), both methods being used in parallel in the same class.

The average number of children in the classroom was 23. The only country that exhibited a significantly different pattern is Tajikistan, where the class size ranged from 25 to 33 children, with an average number of 29 pupils. In most cases, the teacher was alone with the children in the classroom. In 43.5% of the cases, there was another adult in the classroom helping the teacher, usually a teaching assistant or a family member.

Correlations between educators’ qualifications and their activity in the classroom were positive and statistically significant (p <.01). In other words, the educators who are certified, who are qualified as trainers or mentors, provide more quality performance in all assessed dimensions. Higher correlation scores are found between quality teaching and the SbS training received (number of SbS workshops attended), respectively the rating received from the evaluator, indicating a stronger relationship.

No significant relationships were found between the quality of teaching and having Roma pupils in the classroom, perhaps due to the very low number of classrooms with Roma pupils in the sample. Also, children’s socio-economic status and the number of other adults (except for the teacher) in the classroom did not seem to reflect in the quality of educator’s performance in class. However, a higher number of children in the classroom correlated moderately with a higher teaching quality for all dimensions except Inclusion and Diversity. Better teaching practices were found in the classrooms where children work in centers. Educators who work with children in small groups are more likely to report quality teaching practices regarding Inclusion and Diversity, Teaching strategies and Learning environment, even though the correlations scores are quite low (p>0.05).

Educators who are also trainers were more likely to work with children in small groups (p>0.05). The educators who attended more SbS trainings were also more likely to have a higher number of children in the classroom (p>0.01). The educators who received higher SbS ratings from the observers were more likely to work with children in small groups (p>0.05) and to have more children in the classroom (p>0.05). This data points out several things: educators who receive more training in child-centered practice more appropriately work in small groups with children and larger class sizes did not lower the level of quality. More experienced, well trained educators can work with larger numbers of children in appropriate ways that still indicate quality practice.

Mean scores, standard error of mean (SEM), and Cronbach’s alpha were calculated for each Principle. All scales report good internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha > 0.7). The mean scores for all principles indicated a slight tendency toward quality practices in
education concerning principles analysed. The principles with highest mean scores were in the Focus Area on Interactions and Professional Development (between 1.43 and 1.46). The principles with the lowest mean scores were in the Focus Area on Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy followed by Assessment and Planning and Family and Community.

Conclusions from the Damean report (2011)

When looking at specific indicators for the focus areas and principles, it becomes evident that even very well trained educators in child-centered methodology (who represent 51.3% of the sample) are still struggling with meeting quality practice. Less than 30% of the educators scored in the quality range in the Focus Area on Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy. The low scores in this Focus Area demonstrate that more professional development support beyond trainings is required in this area. The challenges that diversity create for educators are complex. Many times educators feel their role is to help children assimilate, instead of showing how differences are important. Other times they do not even recognize that differences may exist. Professional development strategies that promote greater reflection on specific environments educators work in, such as participation in professional learning communities, have shown to be more effective ways to address these issues (Urban, 2010).

The second lowest scores for educators were in the Focus Area on Assessment and Planning with only the level of a good start reached in some of this area’s indicators. These scores may have a lot to do with educators’ requirements to follow nationally based curriculums that often do not take into account children’s strengths, interests, and developmental levels. Many times these indicators are scored low because the level of activities being offered to the children in the classroom are too easy for them. The activities do not adequately scaffold children to the next level of development, but rather are only providing practice for what they already know, can do or understand.

The third most problematic Focus Area was Family and Community. This also connects to the low scoring indicator mentioned above from Assessment and Planning whereby educators include families in creating goals for their children. It shows up again in involving family members in decision making around both their learning environment with a 30% rating for quality and children’s learning, development and social life in the classroom with a 33% rating. Educators are also challenged with promoting opportunities for families to learn from and support each other as well as assisting families in obtaining information, resources and services needed to enhance children’s learning. It appears that although educators are doing a good job of reaching out to families, they are not proficient yet in empowering families to become real partners in the educational processes.

The data from this study was very informative about the Step by Step Program’s approach to professional development. It was interesting to note that educators that may have been certified under the previous version of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards having rated highly on those indicators, scored much lower in the revised version of the ISSA Principles of Quality. This indicates that the journey towards understanding of quality pedagogy is continuously in transition. These findings coincide with the CoRe Report (EC, 2011, pg. 25), which stated that “Assuming that the concept of quality in ECEC embeds by definition ‘values, implicit ideologies, subjective perceptions, and social constructions reflecting different cultures […] experiences, academic traditions, social needs and expectations’ (Bondoli and Ghedini, 2000), quality in this field needs to
be conceptualized as a result of a process of constant negotiation between all actors involved in ECEC institutions (European Commission Childcare network, 1991; Dalberg et al., 1999, 2007).

These results are also another indication that training alone is not enough to change teacher practice. Just demonstrating the use of different teaching methods is not adequate; educators need to reflect on what their own personal teaching philosophies are, and whether what they are doing in the classroom consciously or unconsciously supports those philosophies. They also need to reflect on whether what they are doing promotes the development of inclusive, participatory skills in themselves, in children and with families. This is an area that may be more effectively addressed in professional learning communities where the inclusion of diversity and empowerment of children and families in the learning process also are affected by the context.

**An evaluation of how the ISSA pedagogical standards have been used**

This study - *Implementation of ISSA pedagogical standards and their impact on ECDE policies and practices in the region of ISSA’s Network* - was commissioned to provide a comprehensive overview of how the ISSA pedagogical standards were used since their introduction by NGOs implementing the Step by Step Program across the ISSA network of member organizations. The study was developed by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from each ISSA member NGO and synthesizing findings into a report that described the impact of the standards on ECED practice and policy across the ISSA Network. Information was collected through a document review process and compiled into country-by-country profiles and a summative overview of both quantitative and qualitative findings across all NGO programs. In addition, three selected case studies took a more in-depth look at the work to implement Standards into practice and policy across all ISSA member NGOs. In these case studies, data was collected through surveys and interviews on how the Standards influenced: individual practice, educational systems and school and community culture, and national policy. By looking across and within countries, a comprehensive and contextualized overview of practices and impacts throughout the entire network emerged. The following is an excerpt from the Executive Summary of the Report.

**Influence on individual practice**

ISSA member NGOs utilized a number of strategies to introduce the Standards and their use for improving quality. Results of a survey indicated that participating in Standards training, using the Standards Observation Form for self-assessment, working with a mentor, and being a part of a learning community had the greatest influence on individual quality. Certification was least often identified. The NGOs reported improved teaching skills, increased efficacy, improved mentoring and educator support skills and recognition, career development, and elevated professional status.

Challenges encountered by some NGOs included: a) balancing the quantity of educators using the Standards and quality of implementation, b) maintaining reliability for mentors and certifiers; c) the lack of resources, classroom conditions, and variations in teacher skills and experience in some locations, and a lack of national and local understanding and acceptance of quality practice.

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3 28 of ISSA’s 29 member NGOs participated in this evaluation.
What worked the best at the individual practice level to improve quality included:

- The development of innovative mentor training models and reliability training for mentors;
- Intensive training and analysis of each standard and its application in contextualized settings;
- Use of the Standards for educator self-assessment;
- Training school inspectors and others as mentors;
- Linking the Pedagogical Standards to child outcomes.

**Influence on schools and communities**

Working with educators to implement the Standards in their classrooms in some cases led to influencing the larger school community and culture as well as building support from parents and other stakeholders across the community. The degree of influence was largely dependent on the scale of Standards implementation in a school — in some cases, just one or two educators were using the Standards in their classrooms and in other schools, many educators were engaged. The more educators working with the Standards there were in a school, the more widespread was the influence on the school in general and on the community as a whole. The use of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards created an atmosphere of increased peer support, greater support from school leaders creating a “culture” of quality, and broader community involvement.

Challenges to being able to influence schools included a lack of understanding of the Standards as a quality improvement strategy, involving parents in the process and poor program or structural quality and lack of resources.

What worked the best at the school and community level to improve quality included:

- Establishing peer learning communities;
- Training parents to be informed consumers and advocates for quality;
- Creating partnerships with teacher training institutes and universities;
- Conducting local public awareness campaigns;
- Creating networks of schools in the same region.

**Influence on education policy and practice**

Influence on national policy is a work in progress. In many countries, education policy has been undergoing enormous change and promising new policies have been put in place. Across the ISSA network, new policy priorities and agendas focused on improving the quality of education are on the rise. This represents a departure from old policy, which traditionally focused almost solely on the structural aspects of education systems.

As stated earlier, the ISSA Pedagogical Standards influenced a large number of new policy decisions and related documents across the ISSA network including the development or revision of new national curricula, teacher standards, early learning standards, and quality improvement guidelines. In addition, most NGOs have established working relationships with Ministries of Education and other pertinent national agencies and have influenced on-going and emerging thinking and direction new policy is taking.

The largest challenges were in political instability and in some countries, complex policy structures, developing a common understanding and definition of quality, and
misalignment of the ISSA Pedagogical Standards with other national education system requirements and guidelines.

What worked the best at the educational policy level to improve quality included:

- NGO participation on national task forces and working groups;
- Maintaining contact and communication with the Ministries of Education;
- Embedding or adapting standards to new national policies and practice;
- Establishing partnerships with international donor organizations and implementing new programs.

**External quality control**

*Evaluation of the Step-by-Step programme 1998 by USAID*

Below is a synopsis of USAID’s evaluation of the Step by Step Program very early on in the Program in 1998. While this study portrays a very positive picture of the results of the program, looking at those results through the more rigorous lenses of documents we use today to define democratic practices (for example the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy), there would probably be room for improvement in teacher practices especially in the areas identified in the study referenced earlier in the areas of inclusion and diversity, child and agency, scaffolding interactions, sustained shared thinking, among others. This shows that quest for quality should always continue to be a journey.

Also since this was written, the RAND report (2008) followed up on the effects of the Step by Step Program in the 30 countries that had implemented in varying degrees. This report stated 20% of trained teachers were fully implementing the Program, 77% were partially implementing it, and 3% were not implementing at all. The RAND report also mentions that sustainability is challenged in many of the countries in which Step by Step operate because the current lack of financial resources to maintain educator networks and follow-ups to trainings.

What the USAID study does show is that the work to create a competent system was visible in the Step by Step Program from its inception. The inclusion of parents and families acted as strong social support for the changes that were being introduced into the educational system. It also demonstrates the importance of building strong partnerships with Ministries of Education who can support changes through structural means which is also mentioned in the RAND report (2008).

The following condensed information is taken from the Executive Summary of the evaluation:

“The evaluation focused on Step by Step, an on-going and growing early childhood development program in the ENI sector. Working with host country researchers in four countries—Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, and Ukraine—Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) examined Step by Step’s impact on children, parents, and communities. First, we compared the educational performance and developmental progress of preschool children enrolled in the Step by Step program with children in traditional programs. They also investigated the program’s effects on families, educators, and school administrators. Third, using a range of methods, we examined Step by Step programs’ institutional capacity and uptake in key educational systems in order to gauge its sustainability. Finally, as with all IEQII initiatives, they sought to
build the capacity in applied evaluation and assessment techniques within host countries.

To evaluate the impact of Step by Step, a multiple methods including a quasi-experimental design and qualitative approaches was used. Quasi-experimental methods were used to compare two types of programs—Step by Step and traditional kindergartens—on measures of program quality and children’s learning. Qualitative data was also collected that addressed Step by Step programs’ sustainability and related capacity to stage other community-based initiatives. EDC’s research team worked closely with the staff of Children’s Resources International (the original trainers of the Program), in-country research coordinators, and the Step by Step leadership within each host country to refine study methods, develop and pilot test instruments, and gather and analyse data. Together, research methods and instruments were devised to address the seven main research questions. The findings below are organized by these questions.

**Question 1: Are the educational performance and developmental progress of step by step children comparable to those of children in traditional programs?**

Across all countries and on every dimension it was found that Step by Step children performed as well as, or in some cases exceeded, the performance of children in traditional programs. Overall, the academic benefits of Step by Step were most evident in the realm of mathematics, with significant effects favoring Step by Step in three of the four countries. Such findings could have reflected the emphasis on exploration in Step by Step classrooms. As children experimented with objects and quantities in different activity centers, they had opportunities to construct notions of relative quantity and, when educators joined them in their explorations, there were many occasions when discourse about mathematical concepts could occur.

Some differences favoring Step by Step were also seen in literacy learning, including receptive language. At first glance these findings were somewhat surprising since formal literacy instruction was emphasized in traditional programs. However, these findings were more understandable when viewed in light of the nature of teacher-child interaction in Step by Step classrooms, specifically its emphasis on extended conversations, daily book readings, and writing activities.

Overall, the assessments of creativity did not yield significant differences between children in Step by Step programs and children in traditional programs. An exception to this finding was in the Unusual Uses activity. Results here indicated greater creativity among Step by Step children, particularly in their ability to think in flexible ways. Such a finding provides evidence that Step by Step classrooms were, in fact, more effectively nurturing children’s creativity.

Finally frequency distributions for children from the two types of programs were inspected, it was consistently found that Step by Step programs seem to provide greater support to children who enter with less well-developed academic skills. This finding suggested that Step by Step’s child-centered approach enabled educators to implement a program that was responsive to children’s individual needs, rather than one that was dictated by a set curriculum. Since one of the critical components of Step by Step is individualizing the curriculum for children, the data indicated that educators are making such curricular adjustments skilfully.

**Question 2: What democratic concepts are children learning in step by step classrooms (e.g., making choices, taking initiatives, valuing individual expression, and contributing as a member of a learning community)?**
If one accepts the basic premise of this report—that high-quality, child-centered early childhood practice is consistent with democratic principles—then the results provided overwhelming evidence that children in Step by Step programs in all four countries were learning and playing in environments that promote democratic behaviors and ideals.

The principal data source for these findings was an adapted version of the Early Childhood Classroom Observation instrument (ECCO), which was used by trained data collectors as they observed Step by Step and traditional classrooms. The summary scores for the ECCO subscales provided important evidence of the overall nature of children’s experiences.

The ECCO had three global subscales:

- The Staff-Child Interaction subscale focused on how staff interacted with children, how staff managed behavior, and how values were inherent in their ways of interaction.
- The Curriculum subscale examined how the classroom day was organized, the quantity and nature of materials available, developmental areas that the classroom supported, and values inherent in the curriculum.
- The Physical Environment subscale focused on the overall organization of the physical environment and on nutrition and meal times.

Classroom observation data provided overwhelming evidence that Step by Step initial and expansion classrooms more often functioned in ways consistent with democratic values than did traditional classrooms. For each subscale, statistical tests revealed no significant difference between initial and expansion classrooms, and highly significant differences when initial and expansion classrooms were compared with traditional settings. Not only did initial and expansion classrooms display more highly valued democratic practices than did traditional classrooms, but the overall level of performance was also impressive. The mean subscale scores of 2.61 out of a possible 3.00 for Staff-Child Interaction and 2.60 for Curriculum reflected average ratings that fall between “partially met” and “fully met” across all items. Additionally, the mean score of 2.90 for initial classrooms on the Physical Environment subscale was very high, indicating that most classrooms fully met the requirement of each item in this subscale. Expansion classrooms also rated well on this scale (2.73), far higher than the traditional classrooms (1.60). Thus, the overall picture provided by the classroom observational data is that initial and expansion Step by Step kindergartens offer high-quality, developmentally appropriate experiences for children.

**Question 3: How do step by step educators and educators in traditional classrooms differ with respect to their approach to teaching?**

The findings revealed dramatic differences between educators in Step by Step and those in traditional programs. Step by Step educators, more than their counterparts, consistently encouraged children’s initiative and questioning. Therefore, it is not surprising that Step by Step educators, unlike traditional educators, were more comfortable with children’s inquiry. In other words, Step by Step educators did not feel that they must know “the right answer” before they allowed children to experiment and

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4 Initial classrooms were those that received materials and furnishings in addition to training and follow-up visits by Step by Step team members. Expansion classrooms only received training and follow-up visits.
explore. Instead they made the shift from teacher as expert to teacher as learner and facilitator—an important transition for educators carrying out a child-centered curriculum. The predictability of the scope and content of the traditional curriculum provided a measure of security: questions are anticipated; right answers were available; and being right is valued. With child-centered practice, educators must see themselves as learners who are experts in knowing how to find out. In this way, educators modelled important notions: curiosity was valued; exploration brought new knowledge; and learning was lifelong.

The data confirmed that these differences in behavior were undergirded by a significantly different system of beliefs. As measured by a beliefs and practices instrument, Step by Step educators appeared to share a system of beliefs about child development, children’s active learning capacity, and those teaching strategies that optimally promoted child development and learning. While there was virtually no difference between the means for Step by Step educators in initial versus expansion classrooms, differences between Step by Step and traditional classrooms were highly significant (p < .0001). … Step by Step educators shared the following convictions:

- It is an important goal for young children to learn to make choices as well as to pose their own questions.
- Children learn new ideas best through play and experimenting with materials.
- Children’s active learning capacity extends to the intellectual and social domains.
- Children’s roles should include involvement in establishing classroom rules, taking responsibility for tasks/jobs in the classroom, and developing skills for solving intellectual and social problems with other children.

The findings also indicated that the theme of continuous learning extends beyond classroom walls. Step by Step kindergartens had substantially altered their administrative structures so that educators had time to plan together and learn from one another as well as from their supervisors. They also had more opportunities to attend workshops on topics of their choice. The emphasis on continuous learning in Step by Step programs appeared to have acted as a catalyst that opened up decision making in unanticipated ways. Data from educators and kindergarten directors underscored that Step by Step educators had become decision makers not only about curriculum but also about the ways that kindergartens operate. Greater access to decision making and power, characteristic of democratic institutions, seemed to be taking hold.

The following quotation from a Step by Step director characterized the overall change in the tone of one kindergarten and was representative of many of the comments made by directors across all four countries: “Before Step by Step, discussions were formal and there was no consideration of suggestions coming from the staff with respect to the decision making process. Before, materials and toys for children were not available to them. Now they are displayed so that everyone can use them whenever they want to. Before, children’s work (drawings, collages, etc.) were displayed only for kindergarten educators. Now they are displayed for children and parents too. Before, parents were not allowed to come in the classroom; they had to leave their children in the entrance hall and did not see what their children were doing. Now the kindergarten promotes a permanent open-door policy.”

While Step by Step educators differed from traditional educators in many respects, they did share one common value. Both Step by Step educators and educators in traditional programs held similar academic goals. That is, educators in both programs reflected a strong national commitment to developing basic skills in preschool programs. If Step by
Step educators had neglected to meet these goals, the program would quickly have become marginalized.

**Question 4: To what extent are parents, extended family, and community members actively engaged in the implementation of the step by step program?**

Family involvement was, perhaps, Step by Step’s most extraordinary achievement. Initially, host countries were skeptical about inviting family members into the program even in a limited way—as classroom volunteers. Breaking down the well-established boundaries between the roles of parents and educators involved exploring new and uncharted territory. Yet, these first steps have led to an impressive range of family involvement activities and the welcomed presence of parents in Step by Step kindergartens.

The nature and extent of family involvement has been corroborated by all of the key data sources: kindergarten directors reported it; the data collectors observed it; and ministries of education remarked most favorably about its impact. Step by Step programs revealed their openness to parents in several concrete ways. Some of the most noteworthy findings in this arena were:

- One hundred percent of the Step by Step programs had active parent associations which contribute to the governance of the kindergartens.
- Family volunteers were observed in 90 percent of the Step by Step classrooms, but in only 20 percent of traditional classrooms.
- More than half of the families assisted with kindergarten maintenance (58 percent), constructed equipment and materials (53 percent), and donated cash (52 percent).
- In every Step by Step kindergarten, parent rooms were available; no such space existed in traditional programs.
- Every Step by Step kindergarten director reported that educators make home visits.
- Every Step by Step kindergarten director reported holding regular meetings with parents, and educators reported having regular conferences (between quarterly and monthly), significantly more often than in traditional settings.
- Reports were regularly sent to parents (two or more times a month in two countries; between two and six times per year in the other two countries) a rate only slightly higher than that seen in traditional kindergartens.
- Children’s work was sent home regularly, with this being a somewhat more common practice among Step by Step than traditional kindergartens.

What started as primarily a classroom volunteer initiative evolved into a way of working that valued the diverse contributions from family members and the community. As well, community members were reported to participate as classroom volunteers in 70 percent of the kindergartens and also provided a range of in-kind contributions. For example, 95 percent of the Step by Step kindergartens have been repaired and maintained by community members.

It is clear that families and community members contributed extensively to Step by Step kindergartens; there is also reason to believe they have been enriched by their participation. Kindergartens—with their access, openness, and shared decision making—created a climate which influenced the many volunteers who cross their thresholds. These adults, interested in the well-being of their children, grandchildren, and neighbors were engaging with democratic practices in dynamic and concrete ways.
Question 5: What is the potential for step by step schools to become centers for staging broader community-based activities such as elder care, health care, adult education, or distribution centers for goods and services?

Tackling broad social issues requires that Step by Step families and kindergarten staff alike have a deep understanding of the social, economic, and health needs within their communities. Interviews with kindergarten directors revealed their keen awareness of broader social concerns.

Many programs were exploring possible solutions to community problems others had already initiated activities to address the complex social, educational and economic needs of their communities. Kindergarten directors reported that programs were engaged in a range of community efforts - from donating goods to families in need to organizing health clinics for neighbourhood residents. Further evidence was found of emerging entrepreneurial skills among kindergarten directors that could be used as stage initiatives that responded to comprehensive needs of children, families, and communities.

Question 6: To what extent can the interests and energies of engaged parents also be directed towards other community development initiatives.

As noted earlier families played an active role in Step by Step. This role has led parents to advocate on behalf of the program to town officials, members of local education authorities, business leaders, and occasionally ministries of education. Data from kindergarten directors revealed that family advocacy focused on issues directly related to children and their education. For example, families in 17 of the 20 kindergartens advocated for increasing Step by Step enrollment. Twelve kindergartens report family advocacy efforts to expand the program into primary schools; and in eleven kindergartens families advocated for additional financial support for the program. Families have also advocated for other issues such as space and licensing.

Such advocacy was not surprising since it is the kindergarten that had been the galvanizing force around which families initially organized. These efforts do suggest, however, that families’ energies and efforts could be mobilized to address social problems beyond Step by Step. In fact, kindergarten directors indicated families were already contributing to wider community efforts by donating goods, and organizing health and education programs for community residents.

These reports from kindergarten directors clearly suggested that families were gaining experience and skills that would enable them to address broader community issues. Furthermore, Step by Step kindergarten directors reported that with additional resources, the program could provide both the impetus and support to carry out such community development initiatives.

Question 7: Can the Step by Step program become sustainable (economically and in practice)?

The extent to which education systems adopted and promoted Step by Step was the key to the future viability of the program. One of the guiding principles of Step by Step was that it supplemented but did not supplant government funding, therefore Step by Step required active government support to succeed. The most important government partner for Step by Step was the national Ministry of Education, an institution not only responsible for accrediting programs but also for charting the course for education
reform. The Ministry also regulates the certification of educators and their in-service training.

The findings indicated that Ministries of Education in all four countries had a deep understanding and appreciation of Step by Step. They provided Step by Step programs with substantial support in a number of ways. Ministries provided programs with direct and/or in-kind contributions; they also provided policy support, including permissions, waivers, and contracts that were necessary to enable the program to operate smoothly. Perhaps the most significant way Ministries supported Step by Step programs was by granting them official status. Such recognition indicated the ministry’s official acceptance of the program as a viable, alternative educational approach. At the same time, it also opened doors for programs, providing them with the independence and resources they needed to broaden the scope of their services.

Ministries of Education also began to take an active role in advocating for and promoting the program. For instance, Ministry representatives met regularly with Step by Step country team members to plan expansion efforts; they also connected interested educators and administrators with the program. Similarly Ministry representatives at the national and local levels disseminated information about the program by talking about Step by Step on the radio and television, writing papers to promote the approach, and organizing roundtable discussions.

Institutions of higher education also integrated Step by Step methodology into their ongoing work. As a result, large numbers of student educators were placed in Step by Step classrooms, new higher education courses about Step by Step methodology were introduced, and, in some cases, these new courses of study led to certification in Step by Step pedagogy. Taken together, this constellation of factors strongly suggested the program’s ability to become sustainable.

Much of the program’s success in developing a sustainable model can be attributed to two factors. First, the model was designed to engage a host of individuals in the decision-making process. Parents, ministries of education, leaders in teacher education, country teams, and kindergarten staff not only helped to shape the program’s current implementation—they were also well-poised to craft its future.

The Rand Evaluation (2008) ???

4. Conclusions from the ISSA evaluations

The three evaluations cited in this Case Study, as well as data ISSA has from other evaluations, reinforces several points:

- The Step by Step Program was able to make a substantial impact in the region due its work at the systemic level and not just by doing trainings.
- The work ISSA has done to date has in some cases not been enough to change attitudes about the need for social inclusion and inclusion of children with special needs, openness to diversity, and the values of democracy.

The lessons learned in this Case Study fall into three major areas that summarize both the results of the multiple evaluations of the Program, as well as ISSA’s own experiences of being change agents in educational reform and the promoters of a paradigm shift in how education practices were traditionally implemented in the former
Soviet Union and the countries formerly in its sphere of influence. These are areas in which additional policy support from the European Union level, as well as from national and local educational authorities, is still needed.

- Professional development has to incorporate democratic practices in order for it to promote education for democracy in school systems.
- Quality has to be defined in competent systems with democratic, participatory structures (OECD, 2006).
- Changing educational systems to be more competent and democratic requires the use of multiple sources of influence. (European Commission, 2011);

**Professional development needs to incorporate democratic practices**

Educators have to experience democracy in order to replicate its practices in their classrooms. This means that professional development has to also focus on how it can provide these kinds of experiences and support educators’ agency in their learning process and in their teaching profession. ISSA member NGOs have been on an 18 year journey to build educational practices that develop the skills necessary to being successful and active members of democratic societies. It began with a vision that this could be accomplished through work in early childhood education. It started by helping educators to see what the possibilities were for young children when they learned in classrooms that nurtured these skills. Part of this was accomplished through professional development opportunities that supported educators to become facilitators, guides, and role models in the learning process and as active members of their communities. It was also done by working to give parents and families a greater voice in the educational processes of their children.

As time passed, ISSA has realized however that it is not just about children’s need for agency in reaching their full potential. Educators also need this same consideration in the professional development opportunities in which they engage. One of the problems educators face today is that in many places, neither pre-service nor in-service education has presented the development of educator competences in ways that educators will be able to replicate in their classrooms. ISSA and its member NGOs have put a major focus in the last several years on how to support educators both at the in-service level and at the pre-service level, where it is possible to make the professional development process more democratic and inclusive, in a way that values the diversity of its members and the educators with whom they work. ISSA is addressing this diversity through the use of various professional development methods, from classic trainings, to mentoring, to empowering professional learning communities.

Having pedagogical standards was a positive move in ISSA’s history in that the standards provided additional structural support to educators and gave them a framework for defining their work. Certification of educators using the standards provided structural motivation for educators to change their practice and increase their level of professionalism. Having pedagogical principles over standards was an improvement, as the principles are more closely tied to values and, as such, are more open for dialogue. As Urban and Dalli (2008, pg.132) point out, “professionalism can be understood as a discourse as much as a phenomenon: a something that is constantly under reconstruction. Aiming to understand professionalism as a process rather than an object, then, inevitably draws attention to the actors and the relationships that link them.” In its experiences, ISSA has learned that providing a framework that defines quality and the tools for achieving quality practice has contributed to promoting horizontal dialogue among practitioners and other stakeholders.
The experience with certification brought up the initiative to train mentors to work more closely at the social support level with educators so that they could be certified. Professional learning communities whose members engage in peer mentoring are a step to greater democratic participation and professional experiences and provide additional sources of influence for change at both the social and structural levels. Having greater voice in what educators choose to work on also increases personal motivation, as then they have more ownership for the change, versus having it imposed upon them.

**Quality should be defined in terms of competent systems with democratic, participatory structures**

Quality of outcomes for children is closely related to the quality of early childhood experiences provided, which is also highly dependent on the competences of educators (Siraj-Blarchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden and Bell, 2002; Pianta, La Paro, and Hamre, 2006). One issue has been how these competences are identified. In most cases, they are defined in terms of both the level of qualifications and education (i.e. how many years of schooling or training the educator has received) and the educator’s skills, knowledge, and attitudes. The CoRe report (EC, 2011, pg. 25) points out, however, that the tendency to measure the educators’ skills, knowledge and attitudes through “instruments such as the ECERS, The Caregiver Interaction Scale, ITERS, the Observational Record of Caregiving Environment, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System,” etc., can also “narrow down the concept of quality to environmental aspects, to learning in a narrow sense, or to neglecting more social and relational aspects of ECEC as well as the meaning-making of children and parents themselves (Dalberg et al., 1999, 2007).” As the CoRe Report (EC, 2011, pg. 33) goes on to point out, the values that “move us toward a vision of early childhood education … underpin negotiated goals and collective aspirations.” Values are best developed in the context of reflective practice with input from various parties, and educator’s ability to engage in reflective practice may be one of the best indicators of quality.

In sum, competent educational systems have to create life spaces where educators, teachers, communities, etc. can work together to promote well-being, development, and learning for each child (ISSA, 2010) based on principles of democratic participation. All children are citizens now with voices, rights, and responsibilities. The role of not just the educator, but the entire system, is to provide quality early learning and development experiences in inclusive, democratic, participatory environments.

Another important lesson from ISSA and its member NGOs’ work is that quality is threatened by social and structural impediments to inclusive, democratic, and participatory practices. Having educators as agents of change and regeneration is a strong engine, but their power is limited by “hostile” systems that put too much pressure on the workforce and narrow the horizontal dialogue among all stakeholders in ways that are not democratic. As Lee and Vranjesevic (2009, pg. 38.) state: “At the system level, building allies and creating opportunities for systemic change are the major issues. A network of allies from multi-stakeholder groups is required…Concerted and multi-faceted efforts are required not only to sustain the successes that have been achieved at local levels, but also to push at the systemic barriers to ensure real inclusion of minority students within education systems; a daunting task indeed.” For this to happen, educators in partnership with their communities, have to use their voices as advocates for their children and act as leaders in the change process. It has been and will continue to be a journey in democratization.
Democracy is an ever evolving concept as more and more diverse voices help define it through the inclusion of those that have not traditionally been heard and in ways that value the diversity and the rights of all. Education should be about every person reaching their full potential and having agency in their own destiny, which can only occur in democratic environments. Education cannot be quality unless it is democratic.

**Changing to democratic educational systems requires the use of multiple sources of influence**

The Step by Step Program has always recognized the importance of looking at multiple sources of influence to help bring about the changes that are core to its mission. It focused not just on training, but looked at how it could also create social and structural support in a systemic way for educators that included how to bring parents and community members into the change effort, building relationships with Ministries of Education, providing training to pre-service education providers, creating tools for dialogue about quality such as principles of quality, creating professional learning communities, etc. The locations where the Step by Step Program was most able to influence early childhood education are places where ISSA and its members were involved in implementing comprehensive reform efforts, targeting levels of decision making and participation, and creating the space for dialogue to build shared understanding of child-centeredness and quality in early childhood education and care.

It will be only through further work at social and structural levels, that early childhood programs that promote democratic principles and support for the educators who implement them will survive and grow. ISSA and its member NGOs’ challenge is to continue to seek additional sources of influence to fulfil their missions.
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