INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

Roads to Quality

Strengthening Professionalism
in Early Childhood Education and Care Systems

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A Methodological Guidebook for using ISSA's Quality Resource Pack

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Foreword

Driven by its mission to create democratic societies in which young children benefit from high quality and equitable services, more than 10 years ago ISSA embarked on the challenging journey to define the quality of early childhood development services.

Known for its focus on the quality of processes that embody the everyday reality of early childhood services, ISSA has taken forward the task of contributing to the international discourse around quality in early years by proposing an approach and tools that lead to increasing professionalism. Necessarily, there is a marked difference between defining quality and putting it into practice, with many stakeholders involved in this complex process. With our focus on improving and enhancing the quality of childhood services from an international perspective, based on extended dialogue and reflection, it is apparent that young children have been always at the heart of our programmatic endeavours.

In ISSA's view, practitioners working in early childhood development services play a key role, as they are seen as agents of change. For this reasons investment in their professionalism is crucial.

Competent Educators of the 21st Century is the core document ISSA developed in 2009 (based on a previous version "ISSA Pedagogical Standards" drawn up in 2003) aimed at creating a shared vision of what quality means when looking at the methodologies employed by practitioners in early childhood education and care services. The document has been the leading framework for inspiring and supporting ISSA's members' work, primarily in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia, towards quality improvement, by working in close partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations in their respective countries.

Building on its members' experience for more than 20 years in promoting a child centred pedagogy among practitioners, parents, administrators and decision makers, in the last 5 years ISSA has embarked on developing a Quality Resource Pack which includes arranging resources aimed at translating the Quality Framework into practice. Having said that, a quality framework with supporting resources and tools do not on their own necessarily lead to long term change.

An important outcome of this process is called "Roads to Quality". This is more than a guidebook explaining how these resources can be used to increase the quality of practices in early childhood education services. It stands for ISSA's approach towards practitioners' professional growth and nurturing their professionalism. It stands for the systemic change in early childhood education systems that should reflect the concern to invest in professionalism. As a democratic and inclusive professional learning community, ISSA promotes learning within its network, while at the same time bringing in knowledge and innovation from outside the network. Based on its long experience in working with practitioners, mostly in challenging contexts, ISSA has articulated an approach that embeds the values and practices that

are considered to lead to meaningful and sustainable mechanisms for continuous professional growth. The result of years of members' continuous involvement in the professional development of educators in their country—lessons learned, experience gleaned from partners, reflection upon reaching long term results through investment in professionals and in improving the more hostile environments in which early childhood practitioners work—is the basis upon which ISSA now articulates its shared vision of how high quality practices can be sustained. There is not simply one way this goal can be achieved, rather there are many 'roads to quality', and many factors that contribute to the journey towards it.

With this guidebook, ISSA proposes not only a Quality framework for early childhood education practices—including a range of resources supporting its translation into practice—but also a "know-how" approach that reflects the consistency between scaffolding children's development and learning, and scaffolding practitioners' professional growth in such a way that each achieves their full potential.
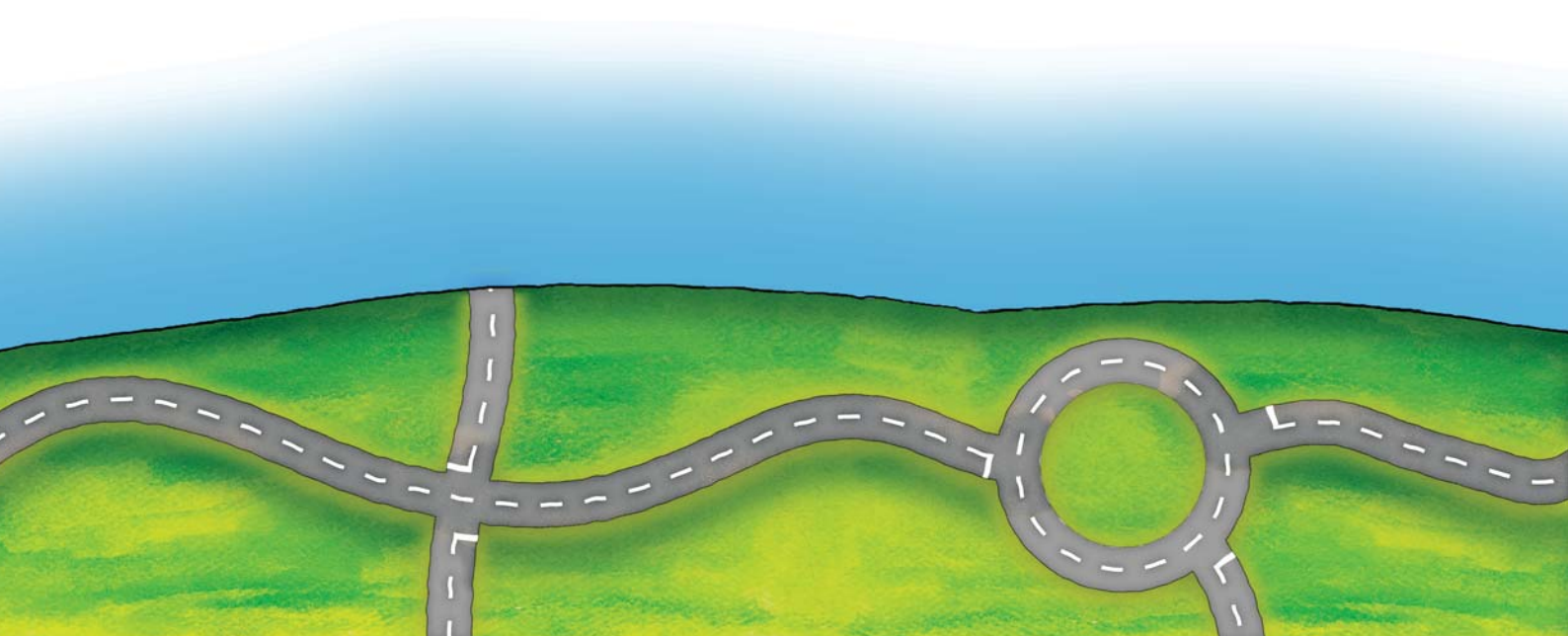
Overview

This is a Guidebook for those who work in the professional development of early childhood educators at the policy, program, pre-service and in-service provider, and setting levels. In alignment with ISSA's goal to build societies that are more democratic, it proposes an empowering and democratic approach to professional development using the resources in ISSA's Quality Resource

Pack to structure that approach. Beyond explaining the resources in the ISSA Quality Resource Pack and how they can be used by different audiences, this Guidebook details how to use the resources when mentoring/coaching educators, in professional learning communities and for advocacy/educational diplomacy purposes.

Chapter 1

explains ISSA's approach to professional development, with the research and organizational development literature that supports it, and outlines why observation is key to its implementation.

Chapter 2

explains each of the resources in the Quality Resource Pack—who can benefit from their use and how.

Chapter 3

introduces a methodology for mentoring from the work of Bob and Megan Tschannnen-Moran's *Evocative Coaching* and reiterates how to use each of the resources in the Quality Resource Pack when engaging in mentoring.

Chapter 4

is focusing on how to build a professional learning community within services and amongst services using the Quality Resource Pack and introduces the inspiring WANDA methodology for expanding the skills of practitioners and strengthening professional learning communities.

Chapter 5

reveals the potential the resources have for advocacy and education in promoting excellence in early childhood practice.

We envisage pre-service and in-service providers, program directors, mentors/coaches using the Guidebook to work with individual educators (in the case of mentoring/coaching) or to help with creating and facilitating groups of educators (in the case of professional learning communities). These may also be used in setting up training on how to be a mentor or facilitate in a professional learning community.

We see pre-schools/schools, professional learning communities using the Guidebook to create professional learning communities and to help educators be able to be involved in peer-mentoring/coaching processes within those communities.

We also invite policy makers, education authorities, and program directors to use the Guidebook as a platform for dialogue and action on how to create more effective, efficient and democratic professional development approaches in early childhood systems, how to support educators' professional growth and to put in place mechanism for assuring sustainable improvements in services.
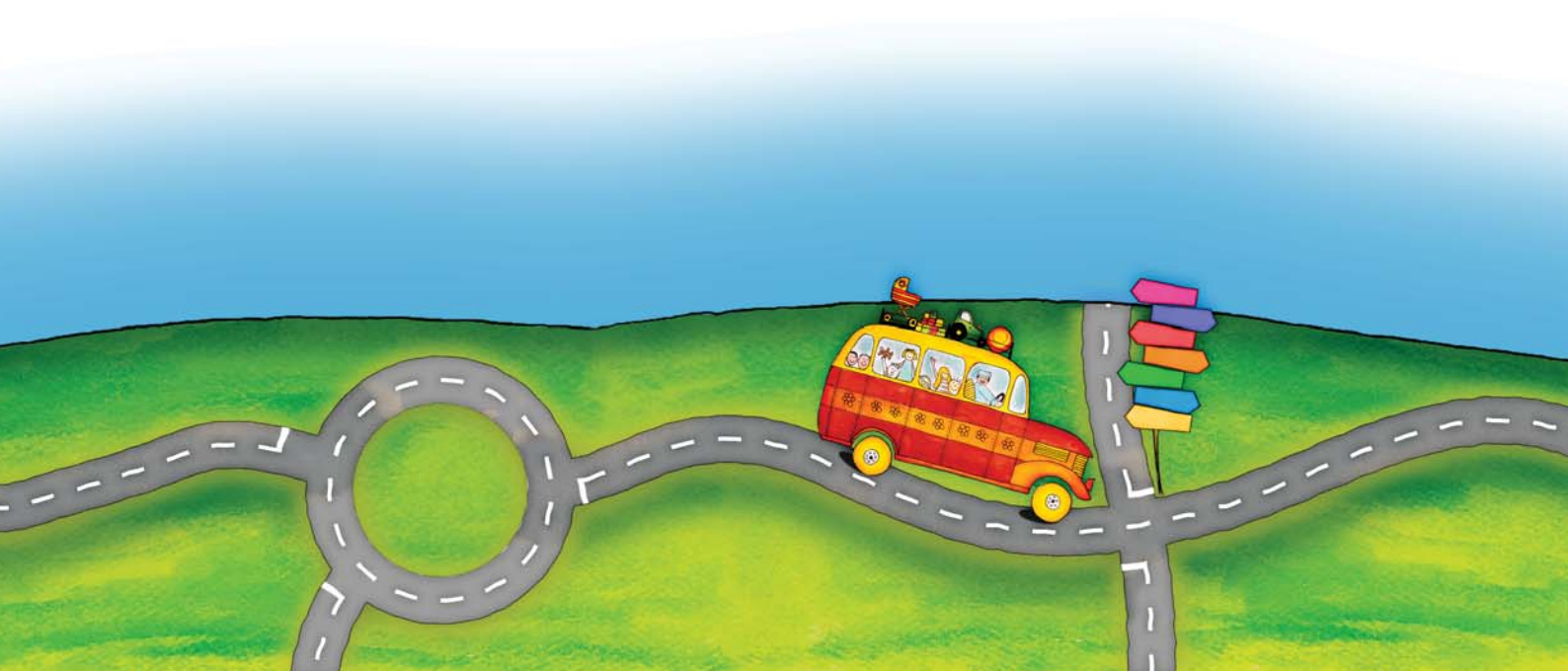
The Roads to Quality

Introduction

We know that continuing professional development is central to the professionalization of early childhood development (ECD) services. Professionalization is important because children whose educators engage in professional development activities have higher outcomes in schools and in life. Professional development affects the quality of teaching, which in turn affects children's development.

The topic of professionalization of those who work and manage in early years settings has been on both national and international agendas recently, along with discussions concerning the need for quality coupled with access to services. What, however, does professionalization mean? Peeters (2008) defines professionalization in the field of early childhood care and education (ECCE) as "the development of various actions and initiatives whose intention are to develop and realize competencies" (Peeters, 2008:49). It assumes that teachers must be reflective practitioners or teacher researchers who must continually question their pedagogical practices and, together with the parents and the children, must create an educational practice that is constantly being renewed and improved (Peeters, 2008: 48).

ISSA believes that professionalization is less to do with "becoming a technical expert focused on prescribed routes and outcomes" with regards to children and much more about "becoming a democratic professional that values reciprocal relationships and places children, families and communities at the centre of their work" (Miller and Cable, 2011: 8). This book addresses how to become a democratic professional, the kinds of professional development activities that contribute the most to it, and what kinds of resources and tools best support those activities.

> Change, complexity, and uncertainty are part of life in the 21st century and practitioners and those leading and managing practice need to be able to reflect on and respond to what this means for the children and families they work with and the environments in which they work.
> —Miller and Cable, 2011: 149

ISSA, as an association of members who are providers of pre-service and in-service professional development, agrees that the development of educators' competences is done through activities that promote reflection. It also agrees professionalization is not just the development of competent practitioners, but of competent systems in which those practitioners work. Professional development in pre-service and in-service provisions has to support educators' ability to engage in reflective practice and social construction of knowledge, professional values and practices.

Building on its vast experience in working on nurturing professionalism, ISSA believes that the professional development of educators can be best facilitated through systems that:

- promote the development of a shared understanding on the concept of quality practices;
- promote democratic values and practices in professionals' preparation and development;
- provide mechanisms of ongoing collegial support for professional development.

This book specifically promotes, addresses and illustrates these points and expands traditional thinking about the kinds of activities that are most meaningful to the professional development of early childhood educators. It focuses on professional development activities that use observation, evocative mentoring, professional learning communities, appreciative inquiry and advocacy for the profession and for children and families.

ISSA believes that quality teaching and professionalization of ECD can only be achieved by educators who continually improve their competences to reach and maintain high quality in the teaching profession in line with the changing demands of the world today. These are educators who:

- reflect, assess and seek feedback on the quality of their pedagogical practice.
- work cooperatively with others to enhance the overall quality of their learning practice and that of the profession.
- act as decision-makers in the profession using knowledge, skills and independent and critical thinking.
- engage in public community activities and advocacy to promote the importance of quality teaching and learning and access to quality education for every child and respect for the teaching profession.

The book introduces the resources in the ISSA *Quality Resource Pack* (QRP) and shows different ways in which the resources can be used to establish professional development frameworks in early childhood education systems to improve early childhood practices and to create conditions where democratic professional development processes can grow and thrive. This Guidebook proposes ways in which programs can use the resources in the *QRP* to increase the level of professionalism of their educators through engaging in more collaborative, democratic and constructive approaches to professional learning.

The book aims to be a resource for organizations that provide professional development activities at the individual, institutional (centre, program, school), national and international levels. This includes: teacher pre-service and in-service organizations, education authorities, school leaders, methodologists, NGOs, international organizations, policy makers and other key decision makers.

ISSA's Approach to Professional Development

Learning to be professional in any profession has traditionally been facilitated through training (pre-service and in-service), reading, listening to lectures, etc. In this book, ISSA is challenging this view by talking more about using social processes to empower and support educators in their professionalization.

SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Adults learn just as children do through social construction processes whereby they actually formulate knowledge through collaborating with others. Learning is more than the assimilation of new knowledge by learners; it is an active process based on experiences and cultural context. Constructivist learning environments provide multiple representations of reality as a broad range of representations, avoiding oversimplification and reflecting the complexity of the real world. It requires social negotiation, rather than competition among learners, to enable recognition and critical reflection.

It also requires inter-subjectivity which is the process whereby two participants who begin a task with different understandings arrive at a shared understanding (Newson & Newson, 1975). This creates a common ground for communication and shared understanding as people are able to adjust to the perspective of the other. To create shared understanding, learning needs to take place in real-world settings rather than as presentations of abstractions that are removed from the context to daily realities.

> In order to professionalize ECD staff, it is essential that each individual him/herself makes a major contribution to this process; he/she must be a co-constructor of this continually evolving professionalism
> —*Peeters 2008: 48*

DEMOCRATIC APPROACHES

ISSA's vision since its inception as an association of member organizations which were implementing the Step by Step Program has been to promote the well-being, development and learning for each child based on the principles of democratic participation. However, educators also have to experience supportive professional environments and democracy in order to replicate its practices in their classrooms.

The ISSA member organizations have been on a 20-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 democratic participation could be fostered through practices in early childhood education through helping educators to see what the possibilities were for young children when they learned in

classrooms that nurtured the skills, habits and attitudes of democratic participation. Part of implementing this vision 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.

ISSA has focused on professional development activities for educators that also provide democratic experiences, supporting educators' agency through their learning process and in the teaching profession. Oberhuemer (2005: 13, in Peeters, 2008: 48) states: "Democratic professionalism is a concept based on participatory relationships and alliances. It foregrounds collaborative, cooperative action between professional colleagues and other stakeholders."

ON-GOING COLLEGIAL SUPPORT

If learning is seen as a social constructivist process, then educators learn more when they can ask each other for advice, ideas and help. Teaching has historically been an activity that was done behind closed doors and in isolation from colleagues, with the exception of occasionally having an administrator or inspector in to do an evaluation. Having educators work together on teams has increasingly received the attention of researchers and policy makers as a way to improve teaching. It is never good to feel alone, especially when taking on new challenges or trying new things. Feeling supported by others can bring forth new ideas, motivation, energy and commitment to everyone. It helps reduce stress, feelings of isolation and despair.

Through sharing individual experiences, knowledge, practices and professional values with others, educators can become more confident in their work. By asking others for their opinions, views and experiences—and actively listening to their comments—not only is learning taking place, but educators become closer as a community; one that is working together to best support the development and learning of the children with whom they work.

EDUCATORS AS ADVOCATES FOR THE PROFESSION AND FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

ISSA also sees educators as advocates in the professionalization of ECD. Educators have immense power to be agents of change. Unfortunately, educational systems neither acknowledge nor cultivate that power. Educators become better professionals when they are able to empower themselves and their colleagues to raise their level of professional practice to improve the quality of teaching in their classrooms and schools, in addition to advocating for better learning environments for all children.

A Methodological Guidebook for using ISSA's Quality Resource Pack

Most Effective Kinds of Professional Development: Insight from Research

Educators themselves consider professional development to be central in their professionalism—and show a willingness to be involved in training—even when not required to do so (Fukkink & Lont, 2007).

However, which professional development formats are more effective in increasing the teaching practice quality of early childhood educators has not yet fully been answered (Barnett, 2003) leading to the question: Which on-the-job professional development approach is most likely to improve the quality of care and education for early-childhood children?

To help answer this question, Gerda Sula (2013) in her doctoral research study, reviewed findings from research studies focusing on the issue of professional learning and its effects on educators' performance. Some research initiatives have targeted the use of teacher quality assessment measures, observing practice before and after engaging in professional development activities (Garet et al., 1999). Others have focused on instruments that measure increases in teacher knowledge and/or self-reported changes of teaching practices as a result of professional development education (Mueller, 1995). However, it is still not clear whether effects found using these measures correspond to effects on quality seen with observational measures (Fukkink & Lont, 2007). Experimental research in this field is scarce—and the research methodology used is not consistent—so the findings cannot be generalized to strong causal claims.

Sula's research looked at the early childhood system in Albania, aiming to understand what types of professional development had a higher impact on educators' performance. The research focused on a subgroup of educators—more specifically early-years professionals—because, studies with this population have yet to identify how the professional development process can better be sustained—keeping in mind the increasing number of children with a variety of needs, children from various socioeconomic backgrounds and exceptional children. Nor have previous studies focused on how the professionalization of educators of young children in the context of a post-communist country, such as Albania, where professional development has undergone major changes in a relatively short period of time, just as in all other areas of professional and personal life.

Sula (2013) documented that early childhood educators who worked in teacher study groups[1] as a form of participation in professional learning communities[2] significantly improved their practice over those who just attended training at the beginning of the year. She also documented that if

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1. A teacher study group here refers to a form of a professional learning community based on a process defined by Tichenor & Heins (2000). It entails small groups of teachers having monthly meetings with a facilitator to discuss readings on research-based teaching strategies, integrating those strategies into their practice during the following month, followed by group reflection on what occurred during the previous meeting. Teacher study groups differ from training in that the professional development objectives are spread over a period of time instead of being a one-time event. This allows for teachers to become proficient in using different strategies and gives them time to reflect on their learning.

2. In this case, the teacher study group was a form of a professional learning community initiated and facilitated by a leader outside the group of educators working in the school and not educator initiated.

educators participated in both training events—at the beginning and in teacher study groups—there was not a significant increase in quality practice over those that participated in just the teacher study groups.

This research is important in that it demonstrates that:

> when educators are involved in democratic professional development processes, such as teacher study groups/professional learning communities, the quality of their practice increases.
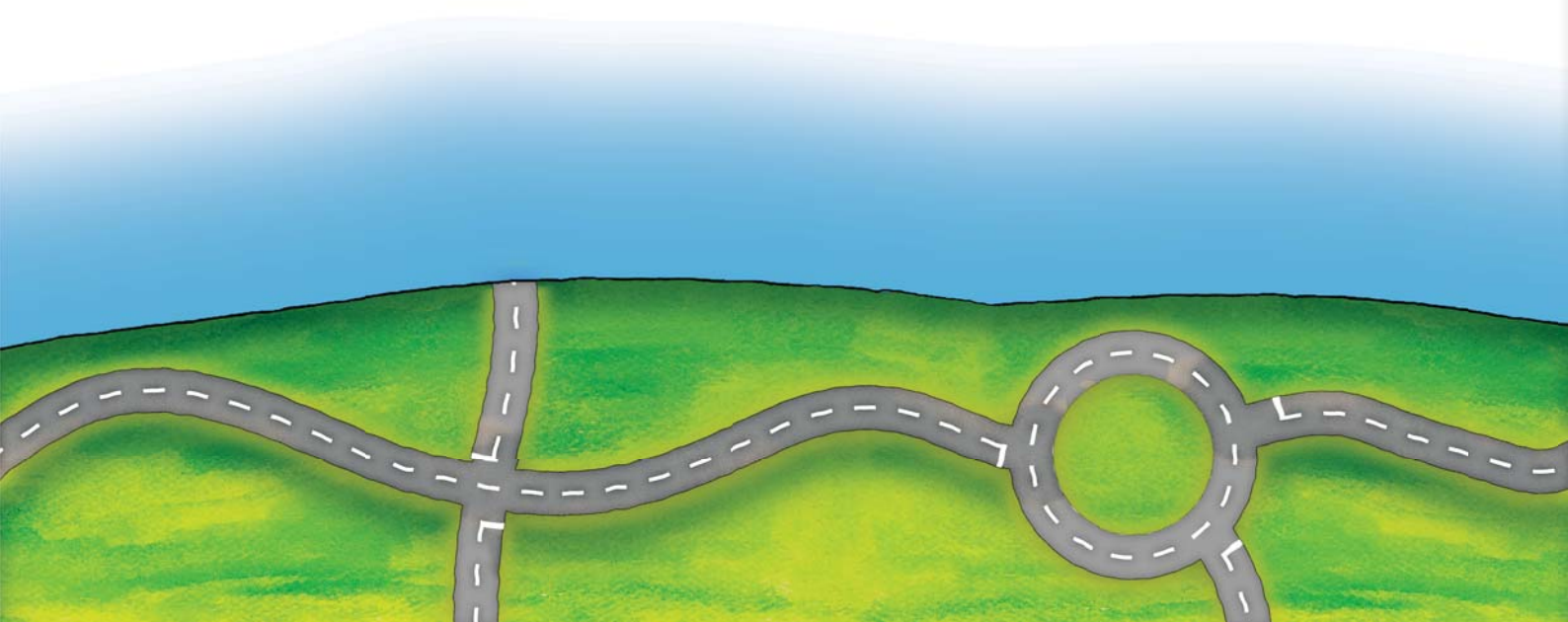
RESEARCH DESIGN

The experiment was designed to examine the effects of the following.

a. Training (18 hours of training over four days at the beginning of the school year) as a more tradi-
    tional, static and out-of-context form of professional development.

b. Teacher Study Groups (TSG) as a subgroup of Professional Learning Communities, which are
    a process-oriented form of professional development offered in natural settings and spread
    throughout the school year (two-hour sessions once a month for nine months).

c. A combined form of professional development: training + TSG, offering knowledge development
    and skill building opportunities during a four-day training event at the beginning of the school
    year, with once-monthly study-group sessions.

d. A control group, looking at early-childhood teachers' knowledge of and impact on their peda-
    gogical practices in school-based kindergarten settings, with no training or study group require-
    ments.

The *ISSA Professional Development Tool's* quality continuum was used—a tool that many teach-
ers in Albania are familiar with (Tankersley, Brajkovic & Handzar, 2012). An early version of this
document was part of the development of the National Teacher Standards (Ministria e Arsimit dhe
Shkences, 2010) in Albania. Although this tool is composed of seven focus areas, only four were
selected for this research: a) interactions; b) assessment and planning; c) teaching strategies; and,
d) the learning environment—this was due to the interest in teachers' professional development, as
proposed by the Ministry of Education and Sciences.

The tool was tested for internal validity with a group of 50 pre-school teachers in Albania, where
teaching quality was evaluated observationally. The tool requires observations being registered by
a trained observer, in addition to conducting interviews for the issues that could not be observed
during class. The cut-off for the inter-rater reliability score was set at 80%, which minimizes
possible bias from the evaluation of different observers. Each teacher was assessed by the same
observer prior to and following intervention. The inter-rater reliability was performed prior to
both intervention periods. The rating were conducted using the experimental double-blind format
so that the trained observer was unaware of both the intervention of the teacher and the group
to which the teacher belonged. The double blind data collection ensures that claims for causality
in an analysis are valid if observed.

POPULATION AND RECRUITMENT

Participants consisted of all the teachers working in the preparation classes, which are programs for five-year-olds not previously enrolled in the pre-school education system in Albania, with the aim of easing the transition to formal school at six years of age.

All forms of professional development in the focus of this research were certified by the Albanian accreditation system for ongoing professional development. Both the training and the teacher study group received the same number of credits. The combined form was assigned double the number of credits, offering to successful teachers an eight-credit certificate at the end of the program. Teachers were recruited to participate through the fact that the program was offered free of charge. All agreed to participate. Participants were informed of the need for an observer to visit their classroom for 45–90 minutes at an agreed-upon date and time twice at the end of two consecutive school years, and that the observer had to have access to the documentation. The teachers were also informed that an interview would follow each observation related to issues that the observer didn't manage to verify during the observation. The instrument was provided to each teacher. School directors were also informed about the dates, content, and requirements for the program, and made this information available to their staff.

MAIN FINDINGS

1. **The effects of training at the beginning of the school year tend to have less of an impact on teachers' performance than that of Teacher Study Groups.**

The training group constantly performed significantly worse than the Teacher Study Group (TSG). This was true in all separate focus areas and in the whole instrument. Even though this form of professional development includes some of the characteristics considered critical in improving teacher knowledge and skills—and in increasing their practice, such as: a) active learning; b) coherence; c) duration; and d) collective participation (Ball & Cohen, 1999). These data confirm other research (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Richardson & Placier, 2001), showing that the effects of training tend to dissipate if teachers are not encouraged to implement the new skills into their everyday practice up to the point that it becomes internalized. This bridge cannot simply be accomplished through training without following up (Ball & Cohen, 1999). The impact of the training is more likely to decrease.

2. **Teacher Study Groups significantly improve teachers' performance and it is an effective professional development method to increase teacher practice.**

Teacher Study Groups (TSGs) performed better compared with the Training group, even though the characteristics mentioned by Garet, et al (1999) were kept in mind during the training sessions. The element that could make the difference in the TSG is the prolonged period in which teachers are periodically encouraged to engage in reflective practices; a period in which the teachers have the opportunity to jointly discuss their actual practice and to then have the opportunity to improve (Hord, 2008). The other element to keep in mind is that there is collective participation outside of the formal learning time—which is comparable in both the training and in the TSG model (Ball and

Cohen, 1999). Teachers in the TSG group were able to contact each other when they had doubts or were stuck, which was not true for the teachers in the Training group. The only focus area which was not different between the Training and the TSGs is the Learning Environment. This again shows that simpler concepts requiring some effort at the beginning of the school year remain noticeable in the teachers' results.

3. **Although the Training + TSG modes significantly improved teachers' performance, demonstrating it to be an effective learning method for teachers, its effects are not significant compared with the TSG mode.**

The Training + TSG mode received double the amount of time and effort than both the Training and TSG separately and it was expected that the combined mode would perform much better than either of the groups would separately. This statement was not confirmed by our data. Its effects were clearly better than both Training and Control groups in all areas, even though the difference was much bigger with the Control group. However, it is interesting to note that the difference in results between the TSG group and the Training + TSG mode were insignificant; except for the Teaching Strategies focus area, in which the Training + TSG mode showed notably better results. It underlines the effect that the concepts learned during training dissipate with time. This supports the assertion made earlier concerning the results of training.

4. **The Control group showed a decline in performance**

Statistical analysis of the data showed a significant deterioration in the Control group compared to their performance prior to the intervention. Even though in many social experiments, it is often the case that in pre- and post-experimental design, there is an opportunity for the Control group to learn or gain awareness during the pre-test this then influences scores on the post-test, as well as on maturation of the control group, due to external forces beyond the control of the researcher; this is referred to as the "testing effect" (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002), and was not the case for our data. It is an important result, as it leads one to reflect on the suggestion that if not supported, teachers risk diminishing their skills professionally, and hence that they offer less competent tuition to their students.
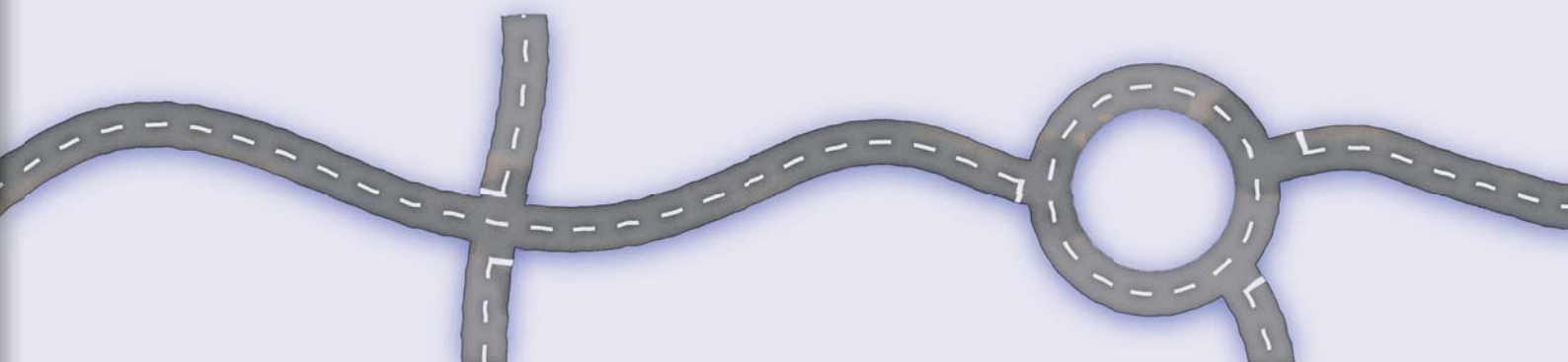
Using Multiple Sources of Influence to Promote Professional Development

The field of industrial–organizational psychology also supports a social constructivist and competent system approach to promoting educators' development, pointing out that change is much more sustainable when frameworks and systemic social and structural support are in place. In a well-known organizational development model, *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything* (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan & Switzler, 2008), the authors point out that when organizations or systems want to introduce change (in this case to promote educators' professional development), they need to find ways to support people's motivation and ability to change and develop. Multiple sources of influence are required that include reinforcement: **personal** motivation and abilities; **social** motivation and abilities; and instruments, processes, and infrastructure elements that **structurally** support motivation and abilities.

Sula's (2013) findings confirm that training alone is seldom enough to change behaviour, even though it has been the traditional way that all organizations/systems (including professional development pre-service and in-service organizations) work to change individual competences. While training is an easy way to relay information to larger groups of people and good training can provide the rationale for change, it cannot sustain it. It can also provide the models, processes, and even the skills for individuals to become more effective in their practices. However, if training occurs only at the individual practitioner level, without other concurrent systemic changes, once a person leaves the training environment, s/he returns to an environment with a whole host of influences that can negate the training.

Influencer says that for change to occur, it must be supported in all of the six cells that are shown in the table below. Their premise is that training and workshops are limited in their ability to influence changes in people because they are activities that only increase their personal abilities (Source 2) and are not accompanied by social and structural support. They may not even increase a person's motivation to change. By including more of the kinds of activities suggested in this table, there is a greater possibility that individuals will sustain professional development efforts and actually make the desired changes that increase the level of quality in their work.

6 Sources of Influence

Level	Motivation	Ability
Personal	**Source 1** **Making a personal choice on why s/he would want to change his/her practice.** **Examples:** Making choices about what is really important in one's life. Discovering new passions or making new commitments.	**Source 2** **Having the knowledge and skills of what to change and how to implement the change.** **Examples:** Being more capable of producing a new behaviour based on training, reading, watching, etc. where the person develops new understandings and/or skills that make change possible.
Social	**Source 3** **Providing encouragement and reinforcement from colleagues to make changes.** **Examples:** Harness peer pressure. Find opinion leaders who can lead change or new people who can demonstrate new skills. Providing opportunities to engage in professional dialogue with others such as a mentor, or in a learning community. Planning and reflecting in groups.	**Source 4** **Helping others develop the knowledge and skills on how to support others to change.** **Examples:** Teach people how to communicate more effectively, give feedback, provide opportunity and help be more reflective.
Structural	**Source 5** **Providing reinforcement by designing rewards and asking for accountability.** **Examples:** Providing new ways to document performance. Valuing processes not just results. Using evaluative feedback and not just summative. Rewarding through acknowledgement those who contribute to change.	**Source 6** **Providing norms, materials, budgets and time/space that promote everyone's ability to do their job.** **Examples:** Providing standards, principles, examples. Providing materials that support people. Ensuring that people have time to meet, discuss professional development strategies and outcomes of activities.

CHANGE BEGINS AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL

Change will not occur without a person first being convinced that there is a reason to change. All change requires that someone make a choice to do something differently than they had done it before—whether changing habits or trying something never done before. It pushes a person out of their comfort zone.

However it is not enough just to want to change. A person needs to know how to do something differently, just as they need basic knowledge on how to do anything. Learning how to do things is what education teaches us. But just because we learn something does not mean that we will or can put it into practice. Additional support is needed at a social and structural level.

EDUCATORS NEED SOCIAL SUPPORT

Research from the business sector on managing change (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996) suggests 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. That is not to say that educators should not receive training. It is one of the ways in which they are able to increase their personal abilities. However, additional actions have to take place post training, in terms of social 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. Reflection is a necessary component for being able to learn from experience. When others in the educator's social network encourage development, model the new capabilities, create opportunities, coach and mentor, and help the educator reflect on practice, then another powerful source of influence is added and the system becomes more competent. If the educator's social (and structural) system conspires against development (neither encouraging nor enabling others, nor helping reflect on practice), then even the best training will go unused.

It is easy to revert to old habits or not try new things when no one is around to pressure someone or to hold them accountable. Even where these do exist, if done in a very authoritative or hierarchical way, it still may not be seen as offering support. Support includes helping a person to gain the skills and knowledge in how to perform an activity in a particular way, as well as understanding its value.

In education, there are several ways that social support systems can support behavioural changes in educators. Educators can learn through structured observations of other practitioners. Mentors/coaches can assist and guide educators in clarifying personal goals, understanding concepts and documenting their progress in implementing quality practice. These same processes can also be undertaken by groups of peers acting as peer mentors/coaches, or by working in professional learning communities working in groups to reflect on practice.

When educators work cooperatively with mentors—or in learning communities with others—there is a sense of security, a spirit of inspiration, additional minds to contribute solutions to problems and additional resources to confront adversity. Educators develop a greater sense of being accepted, connected to and respected by others. According to Patterson, et al., "no resource is more powerful and accessible than the persuasion of the people who make up our social networks" (2008: 138), noting that we must recognise "the enabling power of an essential network of relationships" (2008: 174). Mentoring processes and the establishment of professional learning communities can provide those social networks. However, education systems must provide the space, resources, time, processes and 'know how' concerning how to work in these networks.

EDUCATORS NEED STRUCTURAL SUPPORT

The addition of non-human resources and structures to support individual and social motivation and abilities will enhance the chances that changes in behaviours will occur and be sustained. These include spaces, organization, schedules, furnishings, procedures and policies. For example, if systems want to support the ability of educators to gather together, they have to consider paying for the educators' time and provide places to meet. This is one aspect of a 'competent system', referred to earlier in the text.

The CoRe report states that professionalism must be presented across all layers of the professional system, including practices, management, qualifications and training and research. Professionalization is not just the development of competent practitioners, but also of competent systems in which those practitioners work. "Among the more salient aspects systemic conditions that allow for competent systems to flourish are good working conditions that reduce turnover of staff and continuous pedagogical support, aiming at documenting practice, critically reflecting upon it, and co-constructing pedagogy as an alternation between theory and practice. This requires time, team collaboration and continuous pedagogical support" (Urban at al., 2011: 27).

Structural support also includes meaningful assessment procedures that give educators a greater voice in their professional development. This includes policies and procedures that allow educators to also engage in self-assessment, to choose what areas they would like to work on, and to be able to document their progress, their successes, and their challenges in professional portfolios that are part of the assessment process.

THE *ISSA PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY PEDAGOGY* AND THE QRP AS A SOURCE OF PERSONAL, SOCIAL, AND STRUCTURAL SUPPORT

Educators also need structural frameworks that give them the ability to make improvements in their practice such as principles/standards/norms from which to work that help to create common understanding and vocabulary. Efforts for change often call for changes to widely held norms. However, before norms can change behaviours, they have to be personally learned and embraced, as well as discussed and embraced by a group which can offer social support.

Following the steps of other professional organizations/associations, ISSA developed and implemented educator standards in the document, *ISSA Pedagogical Standards*, that were later revised as Principles in the document, *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy*. ISSA's move to change from pedagogical standards to pedagogical principles was based on the premise that pedagogical principles are more closely tied to values. Values are more open for dialogue, following more democratic processes of discourse and inclusion of the community's input, and are something that a person will or will not personally support.

The ISSA *Principles of Quality Pedagogy* bring together these perspectives promoting a child centred and democratic approach to education celebrating the child's uniqueness and agency. Like Vygotsky, they emphasize the dependency of child development on social interaction. They also place a high value on classrooms that both demonstrate and transmit democratic practices to children, families, and communities.

The *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* are accompanied by multi-faceted resources in the ISSA *Quality Resource Pack* (QRP). The QRP also lobbies for structural support within early childhood systems to create more democratic professional development systems. The resources in the QRP are not just for educators, but can be used by all stakeholders that want to be actively involved in dialogue about defining, searching and creating a shared understanding of quality. It is greatly anticipated that they provide a basis for those who work with and for children and families to walk together the road for quality improvement of early childhood services, including parents, supervisors, school leaders, policy and decision makers, and members of the community.

As the CoRe Report (Urban at al., 2011: 33) points 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. The Step by Step Program and ISSA followed this advice when developing the ISSA Principles.

The *ISSA Principles* are an important document as a structural support that are also embraced at the personal and social levels by its members. They have become the cornerstone of ISSA's professional development process. ISSA Member NGOs have used the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* to improve individual practitioners' teaching skills, influence the larger school community and culture, and broaden community involvement, as well as to influence a large number of policy decisions (Howard et.al, 2010). This is all likely to sustain a movement toward greater quality in educator practice.

EDUCATORS NEED ENLIGHTENED LEADERS

Enlightened leaders understand that to work towards quality in practice, they need to provide educators with support in all of these six sources of influence. Leaders not only have to be clear about what outcomes are desired and what changes have to be made to achieve these outcomes, they also need to get educators, parents, and communities to 'buy into' these changes. 'Buying in' implies that everyone has ownership of both the desired outcomes and processes to get there. These are complex issues and even if something looks like an appropriate and simple solution, it is almost always an incomplete solution. Solutions such as creating a new workshop, supplying new classroom materials, or having grade-level meetings do not, in themselves, have the ability to improve quality in educators' practice. Enlightened leaders understand the complexity of change and the importance of everyone's input into producing new outcomes.

Observation is Key in Professional Development

In order to engage in democratic professional development activities (such as mentoring, participating in professional learning communities and appreciative inquiry processes), educators must know how to self-observe and observe others.

Observing oneself and others is a skill that can be developed, and is a vehicle for collaborative professional development that increases shared understanding of quality practice. Observing peers in a safe and inclusive learning environment makes teaching a public rather a private act, where all can benefit: the educators who are being observed; the educators observing; and the children in the classroom. However, it is important that the focus of the observation be on a collegial exchange of ideas rather than that of a performance evaluation. Educators need to have a level of trust that the focus of process will be on reflecting how children can be more engaged and how they can learn more successfully, rather than making the educator look bad or to place blame.

> Observation is important because it is a way for educators to receive information which will facilitate their learning and development and change their practices. The educator takes the first step in changing his/her practice when s/he internalizes the meaning of observation and understands how and what he/she can gain from observing oneself and others, and from being observed.

Educators develop their observation skills to help them become more reflective in their practice through observing other educators. At the beginning, it is useful to observe others in a small group where at least one of observers is more experienced in observation. For those who are beginners in the skill of observation, it is important to conduct exercises for short periods of time, and to focus on a small number of issues that the group can observe.

There are some protocols to follow that make the observation environment safer for those being observed. It is important that observers make themselves as invisible in the class as possible.

Observers should sit as quietly as possible, observe and record. They should not talk with each other during the observation, nor ask questions to the educator or the children. They should not move around in the classroom, except if this offers them better insight into what is going on between the educator and the children.

All observers, as well the person being observed, should know in advance what they are going to observe, and how they are going to record their observations. Before the observation takes place, the group should define how the data record of the observation will look. Observation as a professional development tool works best when expectations are clear and the observers and person observed understand how to use and benefit from the process.

Observers should be trained in different ways of recording data. The recording methodology also depends on what is being observed.

- The most common ways of recording an observation are through a running record or literacy report (a written record of exactly what people say), or descriptions of behaviours, equipment, toys, children's works in the classroom, etc.

- Checklists can record if a behaviour or action was present during an observation. Codes can be prepared in advance together by the observers. Developing behavioural categories can in itself be a good opportunity for professional growth and learning from each other, as educators decide what is important to include or not include.

- Sampling is another technique for observation. It allows observers to record certain types of behaviours, such as giving information, questioning, answering, encouraging, praising, giving directions, correcting, etc., recording what children are doing, or noticing signs of well-being. The main characteristic of this technique is that, over regular intervals, we can record certain behaviours and can later analyse the time that the educator has allocated for different behaviours.

All records should be a collection of unbiased information that shows the true picture of the educator who was observed and her/his working environment. During the observation, observers should look for evidence and exact descriptions of behaviour. They should focus on what the educator says, his/her behaviour, and the children's reactions and actions. One of the golden rules in recording data is that subjective opinions and interpretations or opinions and words which can be interpreted differently by different people (for example, she was good or he was slow) should not be on the record. It is also important that any subjective judgments of the observer that are connected with observer's own experiences, reactions, questions, values and mental filters, should not be in the records. We cannot objectively observe feelings, intelligence, self-esteem, or reasons for why we think other people do things. What we can do is to collect evidence on what was going on, and later ask the educator to explain the situation.

At the end of observation, observers need time to organize the data they have collected before discussing their records with others. It is important that the observer first review their observations, to ensure:

- there are only facts in their record;
- the facts in the record are stated as they actually happened;
- the notes include only data that one could see and hear, without judgments;
- verbs were used to describe actions;
- there are no interpretations in the notes.

After the observation notes have been reviewed, there needs to be time for reflective dialogue concerning how the information gathered from the observation can be used and applied.

> Observation skills can be improved when educators are provided with regular opportunities to be involved in observation and when they are supported to be successful in this process, such as learning to do it over short periods of time and by concentrating on a more narrow focus. As observers gain skills, they will be able to observe more complex situations. This is especially important when we start to observe with the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy*. We recommend that observers begin by focusing on one indicator and slowly add others from the same Principle.

Experience shows us that it is even better to begin by observing issues in which educators are performing at a higher level or where they are already strong. This gives the opportunity for observers to focus on collecting evidence of what is already there, and not on what is missing. Both *The ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* as well as the *Professional Development Tool* give educators an excellent framework of what is important to observe in the classrooms. Evidence collected around a specific indicator provides a basis for professional discussion, and at the same time gives observers a feeling that they are successful in recording information, which is crucial for the adult learning process. As they master the recording of evidence and sharing those experiences with other observers, they will be able to improve their focus during observations and pay more attention to important evidence they might miss in the classroom.

The process of developing observation skills is something that should be done in professional teams, because it is through dialogue with others that we learn much more. Preparing for the observation, conducting the actual observation, and discussions after the observation are perfect opportunities for sharing professional knowledge, for improving educators' practice, and for forming similar professional values among staff. Positive experiences during the observation process will also contribute to building trust among educators and to making them feel more comfortable with having observers in their classroom. One of the reasons why the majority of educators are not very enthusiastic about having observers in their classrooms is that they are afraid of their reactions and opinions. By having experience themselves of observing others and discovering why observation is useful, they will become more open to it as a way of improving their practice. They will also become more comfortable and less fearful of the benefits of identifying strong and weak aspects of one's own practices, in ways that are as objective and professional as possible.

The Resources in the Quality Resource Pack

ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy is reflected in a complex and multi-purpose **Quality Resource Pack** (QRP), developed by experts in the ISSA network with support from external experts in ECD. The resources address the needs of early childhood education systems to set up a quality framework for early childhood practices, and tools for mentoring, assessing and improving them with the ultimate purpose of creating the best opportunities for children to develop and learn during the most important years of their life, for future self-realization.

The quality of services and learning environments for young children is a burning issue for a growing number of countries. Access is no longer considered sufficient if it is not accompanied by quality, supported by motivated and competent individuals, as well as adequate systems and frameworks.

ISSA has created the systemic and comprehensive **Resource Pack on Quality Pedagogy** in order to:

- better serve the children and their families by increasing the quality of the services;

- support practitioners—preschool, and primary school educators—to improve their everyday performance through the principles of learner-centred, interactive pedagogy, development of life-long learning skills, self-reflection and cooperation with colleagues/peers, families and communities;

- prove and advocate for the complexity of the early childhood profession;

- inform different stakeholders about the need for quality and engage them in dialogue about quality so that better systems are put in place.

The core of the QRP is presented in **Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy**. Each of the resources from the *Quality Resource Pack* can be used individually and in combination with others. They are designed to set a framework that can be used in different ways to engage in dialogue about quality, and to implement various initiatives/pathways around quality.

The resources address a wide range of target audience including: 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/leaders, evaluators, researchers, the mass media, as well as the general public. This chapter gives ideas for specific ways to address these different audiences. Later in the *Guidebook*, there is an outline of how the resources can contribute to individual educator's motivation and abilities, as well as how they can provide social and structural support to positively influence their abilities to

build on those new abilities and motivation. There are also examples of how the resources can be used for lobbying and advocating for quality services.
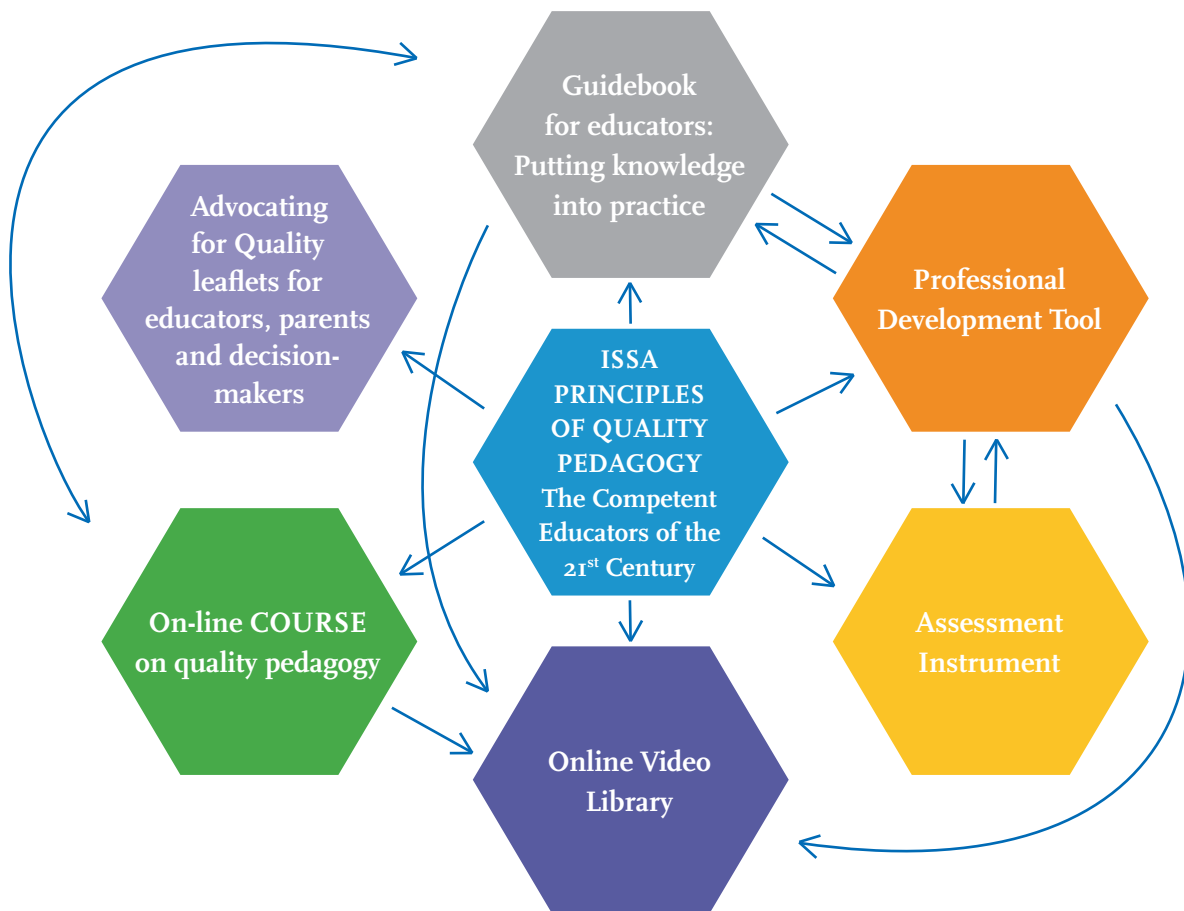
The ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy

The policy document, *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy*, defines quality teaching practices in working with children aged 3–10 and their families to better support the child's development, learning and well-being. The document outlines 20 Principles and 85 Indicators of quality, structured around **seven Focus Areas** of early childhood professional practice:

- Interactions
- Family and Community
- Inclusion, Diversity, and the Values of Democracy
- Assessment and Planning
- Teaching Strategies
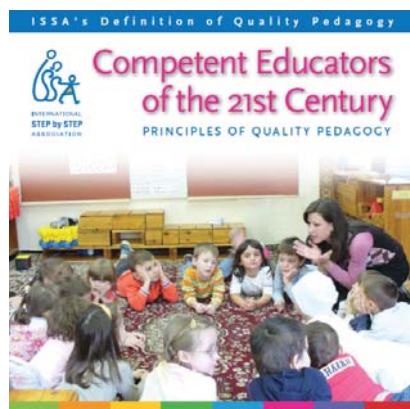
- Learning Environment
- Professional Development.

It also contains a brief history about the development of the Principles, including references to the international documents on which they are built, and explanations of the values they represent for ISSA and its member NGOs. This document provides the conceptual framework for all the other resources in the *Quality Resource Pack*.

Who Can Use it and How to Use It?

- *Policy-makers, education authorities, program directors, pre-school/school administrators, families, and the general public*: as an advocacy tool to introduce, to be informed about the need for quality and how to recognize it, as well as a tool for opening dialogue about how they perceive quality. They can provide a structure for developing policy documents, designing appropriate programs for young children that promote a rights-based approach to education; child agency including autonomy, initiative, and sense of individuality and identity; the young child as a citizen, now with a strong voice, rights and responsibilities; and the development of life-long learning competences.

- *Pre-service and in-service training institutions, education authorities, program directors, pre-school/school administrators*: as a tool for connecting pre-service training with practice and in-service training, for organizing professional development opportunities for educators including designing training/workshops/seminars, providing mentoring/coaching opportunities, and providing the space and structure for encouraging the setting-up and nurturing of professional learning communities.

- *Individual educators, mentors/coaches, professional learning communities*: as a document to begin dialogue about what they perceive as quality, and as way to verbalize how different programs and individuals may be providing quality early childhood experiences for their children. They can also be used as tool to help individual educators and programs write their own philosophies of how children learn and the role that they play in these processes, as part of the documentation they place in their professional portfolios.

Putting Knowledge into Practice: A Guidebook for Educators on the ISSA Principles of Quality Practice

The *Guidebook* is a reference book that describes in depth each of the Principles of Quality Pedagogy and the related Indicators. The *Guidebook* makes the connection between theory and practice, presenting results from research which has been relevant to each focus area, and the important international documents that have contributed to the formulation of ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy, describing why each principle is important. It also provides examples of how to practi-

cally apply the Principles for each of the indicators that describe quality, and how children benefit from this kind of action.

Who Can Use it and How To Use It?

- *Policy-makers, education authorities, program directors, pre-school/school administrators*: as a tool for providing background information (in terms of international documents and research) to support advocacy for quality in early childhood development and education provisions.

- *Pre-service and in-service providers*: as a textbook/reference book and bibliography of studies in early childhood education.

- *Mentors/coaches and professional learning communities*: as reference material to discuss what constitutes quality practice and environments.

- *Individual educators*: as a guide to find evidence-based proof for why certain kinds of actions are more important for children's development, including the kinds of action educators conduct in their classrooms, to highlight their journeys towards quality/transformative practice in their professional portfolios.
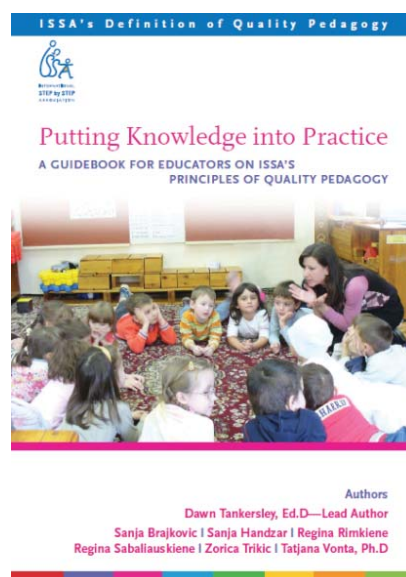
The Professional Development Tools for Improving Quality of Practices

These documents specifically illustrate (for both pre-school and primary school levels of education) each of the 85 indicators of quality in the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy. This tool deconstructs how educators move on a continuum from inadequate practice, to a good start, to quality practice and then into transformational practice whereby they begin to create systemic change in the teaching paradigm and practice. Concrete examples (which are specific to pre-school and the early grades of primary school) of the different kinds of action educators may take at different levels of practice are given for each indicator of quality, in a continuum format.

However, the tools also recognize that *quality* is a concept that is socially constructed. The tool was a designed with dialogue in mind by asking a question at the end of each indicator: *What are other ways that educators can …?* Although the tool may be very useful in describing levels of practice, there are always other examples

of behaviours or action in each of levels for each of the indicators, and such examples could be developed by educators working with others so that different perspectives can be presented and reflected upon. The examples should be changed based on the specific and diverse contexts that educators work in, and not as fixed indicators.

Who Can Use it and How To Use it

■ *Program directors, pre-school/school administrators, pre-service and in-service training institutions, mentors/coaches and members of professional learning communities*: as a tool for focused dialogue and reflection with their educators about what constitutes quality practice, and as a tool for assessing education practice, in order to design tailored additional professional development plans and activities including mentoring/coaching support and action research projects.

■ *Individual educators*: as a self-assessment tool to improve the quality of practice.

Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices in Early Childhood Education Services for Children from 3 to 10 Years Old

The *Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices* is a condensed version of the *Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality of Practice* to rate or assess educator performance with a select group of indicators. Its 36 key indicators were derived from the two *Professional Development Tools*, based on the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy*. The Indicators are the most distinguishable (most observable, most challenging to reach in terms of quality practice), and serve as proxies for other indicators in terms of defining quality practice. The *Instrument* provides a way to quickly gather a snap shot of educators' practice, in order to gauge the implementation of the larger set of Indicators of quality.

The large majority of the indicators in the Assessment Instrument are easily observable, with the exception of five indicators in the Focus Areas on Family and Community and Assessment and Planning, which require documentation and/or an interview to score.

As the Indicators presented in the Instrument only provide a snapshot profile of educator quality, they should not be used as the only source of

material to assess an individual educator's practice. Referencing the full set of Indicators in the *Professional Development Tools for Improving Quality of Practices* in kindergartens/pre-schools and primary schools is needed to provide depth and additional examples of quality practice for professional development intervention.

Inter-rater reliability, or the ability between people who are scoring the instrument to rate indicators at the same level, is an important component of any type of evaluation that compares ratings, or is used as a mechanism to formally assess performance. As the *Instrument* was developed primarily for the purpose of evaluation, it is imperative that a robust system of reliability is utilized. Because there are so few Indicators rated, the importance of reliability is increased, since there is less opportunity for educators to demonstrate the quality of practice being rated.

ISSA has developed a system of reliability that provides a structure for countries to develop reliable observers, providing consistency throughout the ISSA network. Within ISSA, there is a core group of reliability coordinators who have established and maintain inter-rater reliability at a minimum level of 85% on a yearly basis, and have also supported the process of extending reliability in countries where licensed members are using or planning to use the Instrument. Others who use the *Instrument* must be trained and establish this same level of reliability with one of the reliability experts.

The Assessment Instrument is a tool developed for supporting the professional development of educators. A detailed Methodology for using the Instrument, and a Database for recording and processing the data collected through observations, documentation and interviews have been developed to assure the appropriate use of the Instrument.

It can be used for individual or group assessment (with one or more settings) with the purpose of identifying areas of strength and growth in pedagogical practice, thus leading to a more in-depth learning process following the Professional Development Tool and other resources in the Quality Resource Pack.

The Assessment Instrument helps educators and professionals in charge of professional development of staff working in pre-schools and primary schools to develop a tailored, mutually agreed upon, and focused Professional Development Plan.

Who Can Use it and How To Use It?

■ *Program directors, pre-school/school administrators, in-service and pre-service providers who are reliable on the Instrument*: as a tool to quickly monitor a program's progress on a professional development plan, or as a way to assess the results of different professional development interventions, including training, mentoring and work in professional learning communities. Although the Assessment Instrument could be used as a quick tool to self-assess one's own level of quality, it is really meant to be used as a tool for gathering and aggregating data that can guide educators, pre-schools/schools and programs to make decisions about where they need to go and how to get there.

An Online Video Library on Quality Pedagogy

Did you notice that:

* The students freely state their opinion?

* The teacher respectfully listens to the students and encourages them to state their opinion?

* The teacher doesn't only encourage the students to criticise but to also suggest a better solution?

* The teacher encourages the children to use their classmates' suggestions to improve their work?
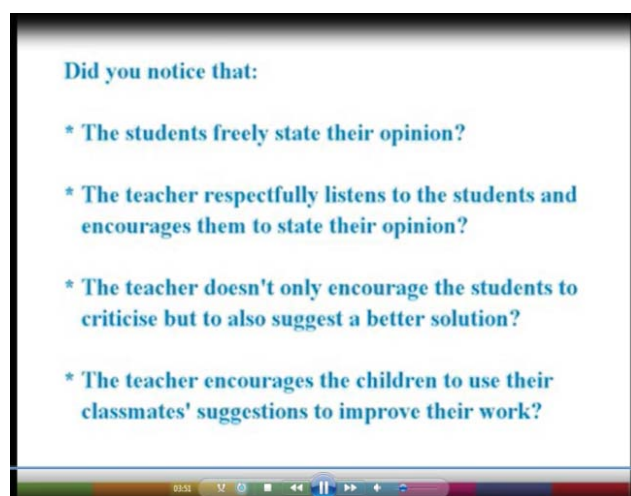
The online video library is a collection of short video clips of educators and children in classrooms (pre-school and primary school), which illustrate how certain indicators of quality practice are being implemented. They present concrete examples of educators' practices and how children respond to them, as well as family involvement and participation in the education process, and educators' reflections on their own work. Each video also contains questions for reflection and dialogue on what can be observed from the video clips, as well as the other things educators can do in their classrooms to demonstrate quality practice.

Who Can Use it and How To Use It?

- Policy-makers, education authorities, program directors, *pre-school/school administrators, in-service and pre-service providers, families, and the general public*: as a tool for advocating quality practice, as they demonstrate how children respond to different initiatives taken by educators. They also demonstrate the competences which children already have, as well as what they can develop in classrooms which will promote democratic practices.

- *Program directors, pre-school/school administrators, in-service and pre-service providers, mentors, and professional learning communities*: as a tool for deconstructing/reflecting/discussing/assessing what comprises quality practice in different contexts. The videos can be used to illustrate specific examples of practice that are shown in the *Professional Development Tools* and in the *Guidebook: Putting Knowledge into Practice.*

- *Individual educators*: as a tool to provoke thinking about quality practice, about children's competences, and about family involvement, and as tool for self-reflection.

Online Courses on Quality Practice

ISSA offers several online courses that can be used to deepen educators' understanding of and ability to engage in quality early childhood education practice. Each individual module in these courses provide: references to background theory and research to support changes in practices; activities to do with children that allow educators to practice new approaches; activities for self-reflection that lead to transformation; video clips illustrating certain points and indicators of quality; short reading texts with ideas and suggestions for better understanding of new concepts; and practices and online forums where participants can share and reflect with other educators.

Who Can Use it and How To Use It?

- *Pre-service and in-service providers, program directors, mentors/coaches:* as a package for distance-learning and professional development and/or as an outline that provides resources for in-person training. Individual modules can also enhance a current particular concept that is presented on a course, a training session, or a mentoring session.

- *Pre-schools/schools, professional learning communities*: as a platform to improve the quality of pedagogical practice in a centre/ school/program, using specific modules to work on different principles chosen by a team.

- *Individual educators*: as an online course or as individual modules for self-improvement and professional development.

COURSE ORIENTATION FOR ISSA'S ONLINE COURSE

TEACHERS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

International Step by Step Association (ISSA) | Quality Care and Education for All 1

Leaflets for Advocacy Initiatives for Quality Practices

ISSA has published leaflets to promote the message that high-quality practices in early childhood education and care services improve children's lives by laying the foundation for lifelong development and learning. There are three leaflets available for three different audiences: policy-makers/ education authorities, early childhood educators, and parents. Their purpose is to bring attention to the roles that each of these audiences play in advocating for and creating the kinds of environments and relationships in which young children can thrive.

Because they are addressed to different audiences, they also convey the message that quality in early childhood services is a shared understanding among different stakeholders. In order to implement quality in early childhood services, all stakeholders need to be in dialogue together as partners about what quality means to them, and to support each other in its provision. In this way, democratic approaches to building quality ECD systems are strengthened, as multiple voices are included and each is empowered to fulfil their own roles in its implementation.

The leaflets provide basic information on why quality in early childhood services is important to each of these stakeholders. They also outline ISSA's definition on early childhood quality pedagogy as a point of starting dialogue about their shared understanding of quality, and provide links for how to get more information on ISSA and its members, as well as their activities as a means to support their processes.

Who Can Use it and How To Use It?

Invest in Quality Teachers

This is intended to introduce initial evidence for the reasons to invest in developing quality teachers and practices, and the reasons for creating more ECD-competent systems. The leaflet explains how ISSA can support their efforts by providing an array of resources that are in the Quality Resource Pack and a wealth of experience in working for systemic change.

NGOs, parent and teacher advocacy groups, and other civil society groups can use this leaflet when presenting to legislators, policy-makers, and education authorities why funding quality early childhood services is important, including adequate provisions for professional development for practitioners, and leading them to resources that will help create more competent systems that will promote and assess quality.
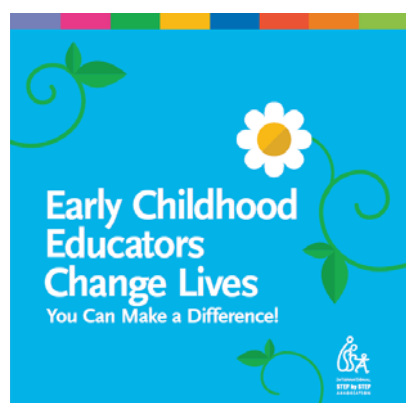
Early Childhood Educators Change Lives: You Can Make a Difference!

This is intended for those who work in early childhood education and care services. It explains how educators may make a difference in a child's life, and how quality in their education systems can be promoted. It introduces the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy, and has them make a quick assessment of where they may be in terms of providing quality educational and developmental experiences for young children, and how to broaden their skills and grow.

It can also be used by educators to show parents, education authorities, policy-makers, and the general public that their jobs are important and that there is a need for appropriate working conditions, professional development opportunities (including peer learning and learning communities), and competent systems to support them in doing their jobs (including the need for cross-sector dialogue and partnerships).

Other stakeholders, such as parents, NGOs, and other civil society groups can also use this leaflet to initiate dialogue with educators about their definitions of quality pedagogy, and how they would support more professional development opportunities for educators.

Give Your Child the Best Start: Laying the Foundation for Quality Learning

This is intended for parents or primary caregivers on how to enhance their role as their child's foremost educator, how to identify quality early childhood programs and services, and the reasons for advocating for quality services for their child and all children. The leaflet promotes empowerment and support for parents to make decisions around the quality of services their children receive, and to create partnerships with educators for advocating for quality.

The leaflet can be also be used by educators and NGOs to show parents how important their role is in their children's lives, to support parents in fulfilling that role, and to nurture dialogue and a shared understanding of how quality environments and relationships should appear in their children's lives.

Chapter 3
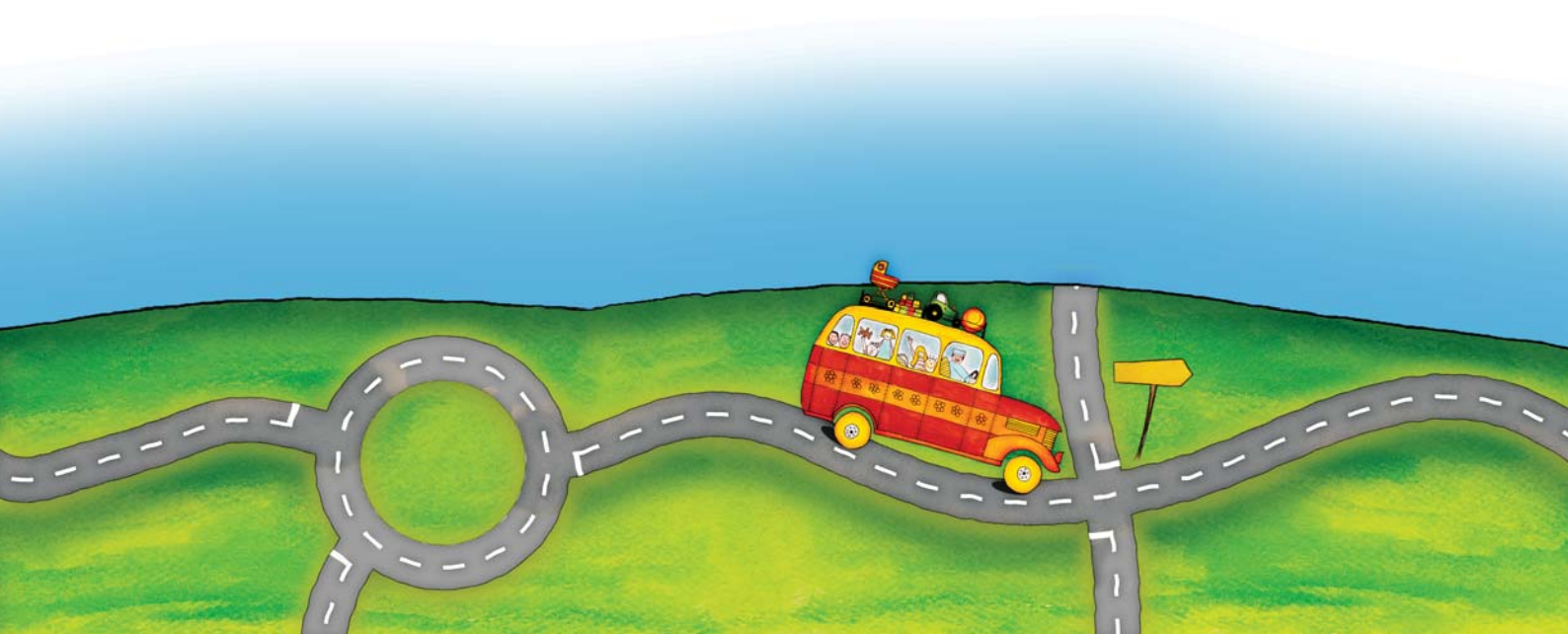
Using the Quality Resources for Mentoring

Introduction: What is Mentoring?

There are several reasons why mentoring is important for educators: children's achievement increases, professional skills and knowledge of the mentee increase, and mentors grow professionally.

> Mentoring is a powerful empowerment tool when done correctly. An effective mentor can help an educator to believe in him/herself, boost his/her confidence, and help build on the things they are already doing and to achieve their goals. An effective mentor helps the educator ask questions and challenge themselves, while providing encouragement. Mentoring helps educators explore new ideas with confidence and support, and to be more open to the possibilities that exist.

Mentoring is generally composed of meetings between the mentor and individual mentees, as well as having mentors observe the mentee's practice. Discussions between mentors and educators are cyclical, not linear. A classic mentoring cycle involves components or phases of thought that are essential in building trust, competence, and self-reflection on the part of the educator (ISSA, 2004). These four phases include the following.

- A **planning phase** where the mentor supports the educator in planning a lesson, strategy or an action experiment. In this session, the mentor and educator may also identify success indicators, or plans for collecting evidence of success.

- A **monitoring phase** where the mentor observes the educator.

- An **analysing phase** where the mentor helps the educator summarize impressions of the effectiveness of what had been tried, recalling other data which supports or refutes those impressions; and comparing, analysing and determining cause-and-effect relationships.

- An **application phase** where the mentor facilitates the educator in constructing new learning and applications based on whatever insights have been gathered.

DIFFERENCES IN COACHING AND MENTORING

The words "coach" and "mentor" are often used interchangeably in the education profession. What some people call coaching may be mentoring, and vice versa. ISSA is choosing to use the word "mentoring" instead of "coaching" because it has a broader meaning. According to Chakravarthy (2011), a coach helps a person acquire the skills needed to perform a well-defined task successfully within the agreed success parameters. Mentoring expands the concept of coaching, and focuses more on the individual and not just on the task. This means that the interaction can be more philosophical, more focused on attitudes and behaviours than on just specific skills. Mentoring is more personal, offering non-judgmental support through questioning, as it is not connected to job advancement, but rather to personal improvement (Weinberger, 2012).

Mentoring works best when educators receive effective, individualized support and is responsive to the context in which the mentee works. Teaching in the early childhood sector, unlike in other professions, requires an especially emotional connection between the teacher and the child (Moyles, 2001; Peeters, 2008). "Emotions are virtually essential to providing good quality early provision to young children" (Osgood, 2006: 5). Mentors need to understand this aspect of the profession, and work with educators on their own holistic development in order to help them provide higher quality practice for children.

Mentors can act as coaches in helping new educators understand how to put into practice the theory they were introduced to during their teacher preparation classes, as well support them with simple classroom management strategies, in order to be able to work with children more effectively. However, a mentor is also a guide who can help practising educators find the right direction, and who can also help them connect to not only the cognitive parts of their work, but also the social, emotional and physical demands that are placed upon them. Mentors rely upon having had similar experiences to gain an empathy with the mentee and an understanding of the issues involved. Mentoring provides the mentee with an opportunity to think about their professional development and to reflect on their practice in a collaborative way.

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF MENTORING

Mentoring has traditionally been associated with having more experienced educators work with those who are new to the profession. Mentoring processes should not be seen just as a professional development activity from which new educators profit, but also for those who are more experienced and interested in becoming better professionals. Having one's practice observed by a trusted colleague, getting feedback on areas in which one feels challenged, and bouncing ideas off others are all activities that can promote one's continuous growth and lifelong learning opportunities. It is one way that an individual can support their own professional development in envi-

ronments that do not provide adequate opportunities for professional growth. It is also an effective way to receive support for the challenges that everyone faces as new realities or social-economic-cultural dynamics are revealed.

PEER MENTORING

As stated earlier, mentoring does not just have to occur between a person whose practice is more advanced in their level of quality and another person who is less experienced. One thing we can do if our systems do not provide mentoring opportunities with more experienced mentors is to ask other people we work with to give us feedback after observing us in the classroom, in the same way that a more experienced mentor would do. This process is called peer mentoring or peer coaching. This can either be between two people who agree to be "critical friends" for each other, or among a group of critically minded friends who have formed a Professional Learning Community. (Professional Learning Communities are discussed in the greater detail in the next section.)

The word 'critical' in this context does not mean to criticize, but to deepen (or to establish a critical) knowledge and understanding that allows for deep change. "Critical friends" are two professionals who mutually support each other to stimulate their learning. It implies the responsibility of both parties involved. To collaborate with a critical friend means that both are learning together and reciprocally, exchanging experiences, asking questions together and reflecting critically on their own practice. Sometimes, working with an individual in this way makes a person feel more secure than working in a larger group; however, a group can work together as "critical friends".

The same processes would be used between peer mentors as between more experienced mentors or less experienced mentees. We give our critical friends specific things that we want them to pay attention to during an observation of our teaching, such as "Which children are talking the most?" or "What open-ended questions did I ask during the last 30 minutes?". The point of these kinds of observations is not to have the critical friend give us general advice on our practices, but to help us reflect on the consequences of our actions so that we get the results that we say we really want. The more we can define our concerns and our ultimate goals, the easier it will be for a colleague to support us in a peer-mentoring process.

If we are doing the same for another colleague who has asked us to observe, once again, our role is not to give advice, to demonstrate how to do something, or to offer constructive criticism; our role is to help them define their experiences, feelings, needs, ambitions and goals through building on their strengths, aspirations and possibilities.

BUILDING ON THE PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING

Mentoring is a process between two or more professionals; it is not a hierarchical relationship as between a supervisor and/or evaluator. As with training, it should be built upon strong adult-learning principles that include the following.

- Adult learning builds on a wide variety of previous knowledge, experiences, mental models, self-direction, interests, resources, and competences.
- Adults are autonomous and self-directed.
- Adults are relevancy oriented. They must see a reason for learning something.
- Adults are solution-focused. Instead of being interested in knowledge for its own sake, adult learning seeks immediate application and problem solving.
- Adult learning needs to be facilitated rather than directed. Adults want to be respected and treated as equals, both for what they know and how they prefer to learn.
- Adults need feedback that is free of evaluative or judgmental opinions. (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 9)

Mentoring also builds on humanistic and social constructivist principles (Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 213), that include the following.

- People are inherently creative and capable, exploring and finding solutions to issues not tackled before.
- Learning takes place when people actively take responsibility for constructing meaning from their experience.
- The meanings people construct determine the actions they take.
- Empathy, mutuality, and connection make people more cooperative and open people up to change.
- "People don't resist change; they resist being changed."
- The more people know about their values, strengths, resources, and abilities, the stronger their motivation and the more effective their changes will be.

Evocative Mentoring

ISSA endorses Bob and Megan Tschannen-Moran's Evocative Coaching Model (2010), as it best describes a process that helps educators meet the Indicators of Quality in the Focus Area of Professional Development in the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy*. Although the authors call their model Evocative Coaching, it falls much more into the concept of mentoring as it is non-judg-

mental and focuses on building what educators already do well. It looks at the development of the entire individual, including building their self-confidence and ability to take risks, not just learning a specific teaching skill or strategy.

Evocative mentoring asks mentors and mentees to engage in four different processes that involve story listening, expressing empathy, appreciative inquiry, and design thinking. The four processes are described by the authors as a being in a dance together, where there are two major turns.

The first two steps, Story Listening and Expressing Empathy, constitute what we call the "No Fault Turn." They are designed to help educators relax, to establish trust, to introduce new perspectives on experience and to appreciate the intrinsic value of whatever is going on. They set the stage for the next two steps, Appreciative Inquiry and Designing Thinking, which represent "The Strengths Building Turn" of evocative coaching (mentoring). Instead of trying to identify and fix weaknesses, evocative coaches invite teachers to identify and build on their strengths. Once designs are field tested, the process then loops back for additional iterations. Simply put, evocative coaching (mentoring) uses empathy and inquiry to appreciate story and create design. [...] Rather than focusing on how coaches (mentors) can improve teacher performance, often through constructive criticism and advice giving, we focus on how coaches can improve our relationships with teachers, so that teachers get motivated and empowered to improve their own performance (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 18).

STORY LISTENING

The first process in Evocative Mentoring is ensuring that there is space for the mentee to tell their story(ies). Stories are a powerful tool for reflection as they are "our most memorable and meaningful mental constructions" (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 60). They help us navigate our way through life because they provide structure and direction (Loehr, 2007: 4). They help people make sense of their experience and, if listened to appropriately, can help someone to begin to take action. Listening to educators' stories shows that we care about more about them as people than the skills we want them to acquire.

The role of the mentor is to "initiate" the story-telling step or support the mentee in telling their story(ies). This is done by establishing rapport and creating a safe place for the mentee to speak freely and without fear of being judged, analysed or violated. The mentor also asks appreciative questions that can help frame the story. The best kinds of questions are "How did you grow?" questions that open the mentoring session in a way that gives it energy. These kinds of questions help these sessions empower, focus, and inspire the educator, moving them beyond gripe or gossip sessions.

Types of "how did you grow?" questions include the following.

- Tell me the story of how you became a teacher.
- Tell me a story about what is working well for you.
- Tell me a story about what you love most about your work, or what gives you the most energy in your work.
- Tell me a story about when you felt most connected to a child in your class, or the family of a child.
- Tell me a story about when you tried something new.
- Tell me a story about how your values come through in your teaching.

"How did you grow?" kinds of questions help educators connect to times where things went well for them or where they felt like they grew as human beings and/or educators. They help educators connect to "times when they felt engaged in, excited about, or challenged by the work of teaching". By inviting teachers to remember and to reveal growth-fostering dimensions of their experience, they communicate respect for the teacher's experience, as well as confidence in a teacher's abilities to handle new experiences. "Such respect and confidence are crucial to the learning dynamic."
—Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 67

Stories that work well as mentoring material also evoke the mentee's emotions. These emotions are acknowledged and accepted through listening mindfully, quietly, and reflectively. Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2010: 76) point out that:

> In typical conversations, we often fail to listen mindfully or quietly. Once we hear something that we have an option about, we stop listening and start talking at a natural break or whenever we can work our way into the conversation. Most talking involves sharing our ideas, opinions, stories, evaluations, comparisons, recommendations, and assertions as to what we think should be happening.

The authors go on to point out that seldom do people have the undivided attention of anyone, let alone without judgment. Once educators have told their stories, mentors respond by helping educators elaborate on those stories. The authors call this "imaginative listening". Imaginative listening consists of guiding the educator to also think about:

- what the experience may have been like for one or more of the other actors in the story;
- how it would have turned out if they had handled it differently or if they had viewed it from a different perspectives (and viewing the story through other lessons that this story can teach us).

EXPRESSING EMPATHY

Expressing empathy is a process that validates another person's ideas, thoughts, and concerns. "It communicates that the other person's life is important and meaningful. This may be the most important service that a mentor can provide" (Knight, 2007: 43). "To express empathy we must learn how to recognize and reflect the life-giving elements of teacher stories and experiences" (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 94).

Rosenburg (2005), in his definition of non-violent communication, pointed out that when listening to another person with empathy, we need to distinguish:

"By connecting with teachers at the level of observations, feelings and needs, we not only maintain trust and rapport, we also create a zone of possibilities as teachers encounter new ways of understanding and processing their own experience"
—Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010:120

- observations from evaluations (we need to communicate our observations and to avoid introducing our own judgments or evaluations into the conversation);
- feelings from judgmental thoughts (we need to focus on what the person is/was feeling and not necessarily on what they are/were thinking. Our reaction when we hear a story we find negative is often "what are/were they thinking?". Talking about feelings leads us to the next step, which is understanding what the person needs.);
- underlying needs from particular strategies (we need to help the person to identify underlying needs rather than the strategy they were using to get the need met, or jump in to give them strategies).

One tool we can use to engage in empathic listing is an activity called "Naming Qualities" (Korthagen & Lagerwerf, 2008). In this activity, we ask a person to talk about one of the following.

- **Best experiences:** This can include their best teaching experience, where they felt the most alive and engaged.

- **Core values:** What things they value most deeply about themselves as teachers, their relationships in teaching, and/or their work.

- **Supporting conditions:** The key ingredients (both internal and external) that enable educators to be at their best, feel satisfied, and have fun in their work.

- **Three wishes:** What they wish to happen in relation to their teaching practice.

These are all things that have given them energy in their job. At the end of the story, the person who listened to the story tells the other what positive qualities s/he noticed about the storyteller through the telling of their story. In the case of an educator who talks about a lesson plan that went well, the mentor may list the qualities of being well-organized, of understanding the phases of learning, or the enthusiasm for the topic. In the case of an educator who talks about the connection they may feel with a child, the mentor may list the qualities of having social-emotional intelligence, of understanding child development, etc. The mentor then actually writes those qualities down and gives them to the person. It is a very powerful tool for feeling competent and validated as a person.

Story listening and expressing empathy are processes that mentors use at the beginning of a mentoring relationship, and the activity "Naming Qualities" is a tool we can use to support those processes. However, it can also be repeated at different points in the mentoring sessions. As in all of our mentoring sessions, we need to be engaged in listening to stories and empathetic listening. Actually, any time is a good time to name the qualities we see in other people. When people are able to understand their strengths and what enthuses them, they are better able to rise above any problems they may be experiencing (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 127).

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

In the Evocative Mentoring Model, Appreciative Inquiry describes the processes where mentors engage in classroom observation, and the subsequent mutual reflection and dialogue to discover the mentee's strengths and observe what enthuses them. In addition, it is the point where mentors help mentees frame their aspirations and explore possibilities. Appreciative Inquiry is the first step in building on strengths that translates motivation into action.

Mentors move forward in their actions with educators when they feel that they have established rapport and trust through story listening and expressing empathy with them. It is only at that point that they ask for an opportunity to **observe** the educator. It is important that the educator has input and some control into what is going to be observed. ISSA offers the *Professional Development Tool* to give educators direction in specifying what focus areas, principles or indicators that they would like a mentor/observer to focus upon in an observation. It is best at the beginning to encourage an educator to focus on areas where they think they do well or that work well for them. We want to focus on strengths rather than weaknesses, and avoid defensiveness and resistance.

There are other instruments that can be used in observations such as Laevers's (2005) Child Well-Being Scale or Involvement Scale. These do not assess educators, but look at how children react to their environment or choose to be involved in activities (Tankersley et al, 2010: 103, 166). Another instrument that can be used is the Teacher's Verbal Behaviours Observation Tool (Centre for School Transformation, 2010) which captures a range of the educator's verbal actions during a lesson including giving information, questioning, answering, encouraging, giving directions, correcting and redirecting during three-minute intervals.

Teacher's Verbal Behaviours Observation Tool

Teacher: **Date:**
Observer: **Time:**

Time	Informa-tion Giving	Questioning	Answering	Encouraging/ Praising	Giving Directions	Correcting	Redirec-tion	Action

Educators also have the option of asking the mentor to observe something else that may be important to them, such as: how particular children play together; what non-verbal behaviour cues they or children give; how a centre is used, etc. These may emerge during the stories they tell or in things you notice about what gives them energy.

After the observation, a **follow-up mentoring session** is held to further explore educator strengths and to review data from the observation. It also further explores the educator's aspirations. Kinds of questions that invite this include the following.

- What things could you imagine yourself doing differently?
- What would you like to see more of in your classroom?
- What kinds of changes would make the biggest difference for the children?
- How could your needs, and the needs of your children be more fully met?
- What do you believe is possible?
- What kind of environment would you like to create in your classroom?
- What kinds of changes would enthuse you the most?

They also include questions that get educators to think about what else they can do.

- What, in your approach, is working well for you? And what else?
- What talents and abilities are serving you well? And what else?
- What is the positive of your actions? And what else?
- What enables you to do as well as you are doing? And what else?

Remember the intention for reflecting on the mentor's observation is never for the mentor to fix what the educator is doing wrong. **Evocative mentors** have a solid belief that good things can always be uncovered. When mentors appear "as partners in search of whatsoever things are true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious, beautiful, and praiseworthy [...] such perspective and confidence are infectious. Educators quickly calm down, believe more in themselves, and generate new possibilities for moving forward" (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 165).

Even if the educator's actions in an observation have really been problematic, the mentor can still try to salvage the session by facilitating positive reframing of the problems. For example, the mentor can ask questions such as:

- How did you get through this and what is possible now?
- What did you try that worked?
- How did this experience make a positive contribution to your development?
- How else can you describe this situation?
- How did you manage to keep things from getting worse?

DESIGN THINKING

The fourth process in the Evocative Mentoring Model helps educators innovate, deliberate, put into actions their ideas for improving practice, and confirm their commitment. Mentors and educators will often jump to the design part of the process (What can I do to fix this?) before adequately exploring feelings, needs, the positive attributes that educators can bring to the process, who may be affected by different decisions made, and what educators' aspirations truly are.

In the Design Thinking part of the process, mentors facilitate educators to come up with new ideas and to implement those ideas in the classroom (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 189). This is the part of the process where ideas are brainstormed, inertia is explored, and experiments to try something new or different are undertaken. The role of the mentor is to support educators to be less afraid of failure and being judged, and to become more self-directed in being able to learn and grow (ibid: 24). Mentors help educators play with different possibilities, to pick ones that are intrinsically more interesting, valuable, enjoyable, and possible to conduct.

Brainstorming is an essential part of design thinking that moves educators more towards action. "Brainstorming helps teachers to get out of their own way, to think outside of the box" (ibid: 190). Good questions to frame brainstorming around include:

- What could I pay attention to that most directly impacts on how things are working in this situation?
- Where could I go and who could I watch to learn techniques I may not have yet tried or mastered myself?
- How could I handle this situation in a way that I have ever tried before?

After brainstorming, mentors help educators identify the top two or three actions they could take that hold the most appeal. Questions the mentor could ask here include:

- Which of these actions stand out as the best ideas? What attracts you to them?
- What would it take to succeed with them?
- What makes them worth pursuing?

- How easy would they be to implement?
- What kind of impact might they have?
- Have you or when have you tried something like this before?

Educators will then choose one of these actions and develop it as a *S.M.A.R.T.* experiment. The term *S.M.A.R.T.* has been used often in the literature to describe goals that are: Specific, Measure-able, Attainable, Realistic and/or Relevant (naming expected results), and Time-bound.

In this case, we are referring to it as an experiment which is also called 'action research' by many in the field. Action research is where educators identify a problem, develop questions or a hypothesis (*if I were to ... would ... happen?*), gather and analyse data to see if it happened, and take new action.

A *S.M.A.R.T.* goal (or in this case, experiment) has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal because it has a framework for answering questions such as:

- Who: (is involved)
- What: (do I want to accomplish)
- Where: (identify a location)
- When: (establish a time frame)
- Which: (identify requirements and constraints)
- Why: (specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal)

Example:

> A general goal would be, "Ask more open-ended questions". A specific goal would say, "Write down five open questions I use as prompts in the discussions after story-time during the next week, so that the children will talk more about characters and their actions". This goal is more specific because it states where (during story-time), how (by writing down questions in advance), and why (so children will talk more about the characters and their actions).
>
> A measurable goal establishes concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal set, including how and when the goal is accomplished. To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which the person is both *will-ing* and *able* to work. A goal can be both high and realistic. A goal should be grounded within a time frame. With no time frame tied to it, there's no sense of urgency. (Top Achievement, 2013)

Example:

S.M.A.R.T. Goal

Problem Identified: What teaching strategies could I use that help children build a stronger sense of personal and family identity and that celebrate their differences and similarities?

Indicator	Goal	Strategies (What, Where, and How)	Data Collection and Reporting	Analysis	Implementation Time frame
5.2.1. The educator offers activities that foster children's sense of individuality and identity. 5.2.4. The educator uses strategies that help children build positive relationships and cooperation with others.	Create a Family activity centre that will help children reinforce their sense of identity and help children connect with each other's home lives.	Collect family photographs and artefacts that include toys, games, and things people use together in their homes to play and work together. Encourage the children to describe who are in photos and what they are doing. Discussions about whether everyone does the same things or whether they do different things. Try new toys, games and tools together, teaching each other new things to do.	**Photo documentation** **Video** Collect notes: what children say about themselves, about their parents, about family members Make a class book about what we learned from each other.	Did the children acknowledge similarities and differences among them and families? Did connecting with what they do in their families help them feel pride in their families? Did the children play more together and show more interest in each other?	End of February

Using the Resources in the Quality Resource Pack in Evocative Mentoring Processes

Mentoring, like teaching, has to be tailored to individual needs, experiences, and contexts. How mentors use the different resources in the Quality Resource Pack to facilitate educators' professional development can differ, depending on whether they are working with an educator who has just graduated from a teacher preparation program, an experienced educator who wants to become child-centred in their practice, or a more experienced educator in child-centred approaches. The mentor's role is to understand not only where an educator is in their career path, or professional development process, but to also understand the possibilities for stories, empathy, inquiry, and design that exist in the different resources. Just using the resources is not enough. Some of the resources may overwhelm educators new to child-centred methods, while other resources may need to be enhanced for more experienced educators.

THE EVOCATIVE MENTORING PROCESS

There will be a basic process that a mentor (be it a more experienced educator working with a less experienced one or a peer mentor) will follow. These include: the initial visit/preconference observation, the observation where data is collected, and the follow-up interview which includes the following.
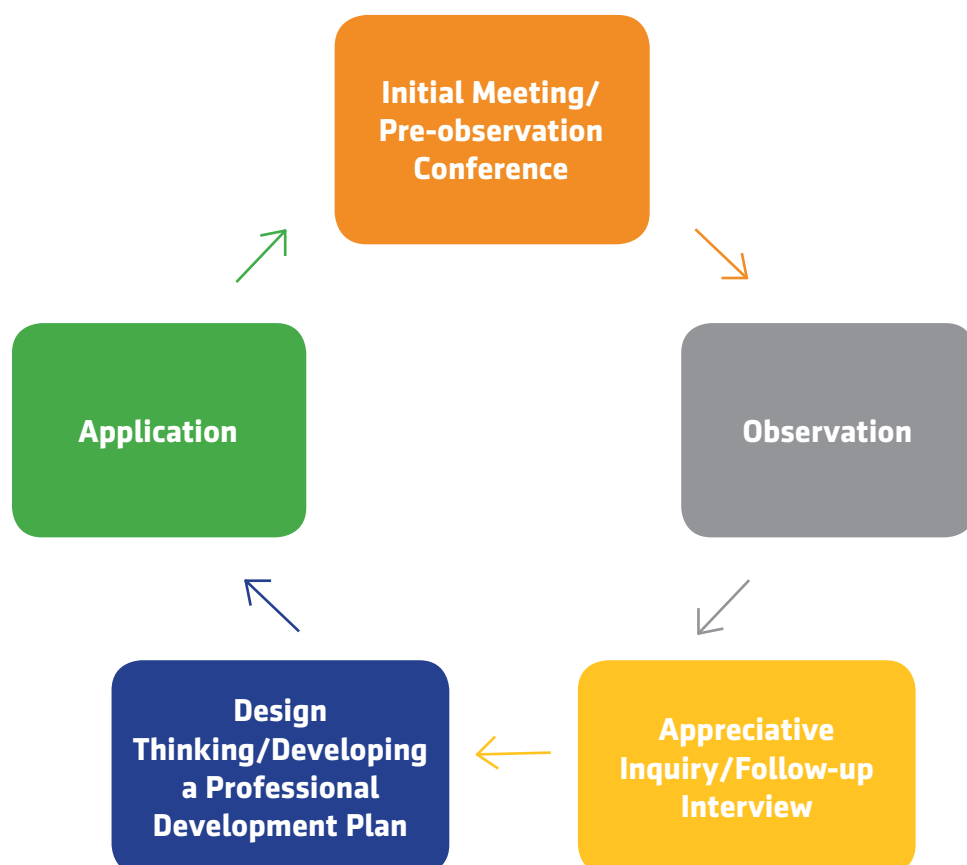
Initial meeting

The initial meeting is the time to establish trust and rapport through story listening and expressing empathy. This is also the time to talk about the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* which will have been sent to the educator in advance of the first meeting. Talk about the educator's personal philosophy of education. What are their reactions to the document? Where do think they are going well? Have them share a story (or stories) of how they think they may be meeting these principles. Also, discuss how they see their role as early childhood educators. Which of the Principles may speak the most profoundly for them and why?

Give the educator a list of qualities you have noticed about him/her as a result of listening to their stories.

Also during the initial meeting, the mentor gives the educator a copy of the *Professional Development Tool* and encourages him/her to use it as a self-assessment instrument. The educator can choose either to self-assess him/herself using the entire instrument, or pick a Principle in a Focus Area where s/he feels strong and assesses him/herself in that area. Another option would be to use the *Assessment Instrument* which has fewer indicators to help them identify a Focus Area or Principle to work on, and then go to the Professional Development Tool to look at the larger set of indicators in that particular area. Explain that during the next visit, you will observe him/her focusing on this Principle and will continue to talk about his/her strengths, personal qualities, and professional knowledge that supports his/her practice with young children that supports the Principle or Indicators they have chosen to focus on.

If the system supports educators in developing their professional portfolios, it will also encourage them to document in their portfolio their philosophy of teaching, their understanding of their roles as early childhood educators, how they see children learning, how families support children in their early education processes, etc. Professional portfolios are developed by educators to provide feedback about his/her teaching practice and professionalism in order to plan improvements in practice independently or with the support of mentors and/or colleagues in professional learning communities. A formative portfolio demonstrates the processes educators have gone though over a period of time. It is a collection of evidence of the work of the educator, a compilation of things s/he has done in the classroom or elsewhere, and evidence of talents and strengths, skills and knowledge, points of view and beliefs. It is a way to document professional growth over time in thinking, understanding and solving pedagogical situations.

Tanya is a pre-school teacher in a classroom of four year olds that is studying different professions. She has invited a group of senior citizens in for the day to talk to the children about their own jobs when they had been working. She has planned different activities in her learning centres such as blocks, cooking and crafts where the guests interact with the children. For later in the day, she has planned an activity where the guests will actually talk about their professions in the circle and she will review cards she has made for other professions.

She talks about how excited she is to have visitors and how she feels the children and guests can develop a mutually beneficial relationship where she can use them also as volunteers at other times in the classroom.

The mentor talks about the teacher's strengths connected to Principle 2.3. "around using community resources to enrich children's development and learning experiences". She is also helping children to understand, accept and appreciate diversity (Principle 3.2) and to build positive relationships with others (Principle 5.2). She is skilful in looking for opportunities to connect her children with others that live in community and in presenting her required curriculum in a more interesting and innovative format for the children.

Observation:

During the next meeting, the mentor will observe the educators' actions in the Principles/Indicators selected by the educator. During the observation, look for signs of the full engagement of the children and the educator and where the educator is doing things in a way that captures the children's enjoyment, interest, and learning.

The children interacted with guests in the centres. The guests were able to help them expand their thinking in building different kinds of structures and they finally decided upon building a garage for their cars. The children were also able to expand their skills in measuring ingredients for the cooking activity and in making a collage in the craft activity.

There was also a mother visiting with her baby. Even though the mother was not in a centre, the children gathered around and asked a lot of questions about the baby and how the mother was taking care of him/her.

During the circle, one of girls (Eva) had a difficult time sitting still, so Tanya used her as her helper to more fully engage her attention.

Appreciative Inquiry/Follow-up Interview:

The mentor begins the follow-up mentoring conversation following the observation with appreciative interview questions such as:

1. What was your best experience during the lesson or time period when you felt engaged and happy with what was going on? Describe that moment in detail.
2. When you were having this experience, what helped you? What enables you to be your best?
3. What did you value the most about this lesson or time period? How did that come through in your actions?

The mentor then offers their own strengths-based observations in a way that confirms the educator's answers (Tschannnen-Moran and Tschannnen-Moran, 2010:301).

The next part of the interview is to ask the educator to share a personal challenge with the mentor. Together, the mentor and educator explore what personal attributes, qualities, and knowledge the educator already has to address that challenge.

> Tanya talks about how well the children behaved. This was important to her because she wanted to show off her children to the guests. She also thinks the guests enjoyed themselves with the children.
>
> She was actually a little worried when Eva began to squirm. She knows Eva really well and knows that she can become disruptive to the other children if she gets bored or is not interested in a topic. Calling on her to answer questions seemed to have avoided what could have become a discipline problem. She would like not to have to worry about Eva so much, as she would also like to pay more attention to other children as well. There are some who are very quiet that she is also worried about.
>
> She was a little disappointed, however, that the children did not ask the guests more questions about their professions. She had really wanted the children to be able to know more about different professions and how they are all important in our community. She wanted to look not only well-behaved, but smart in front of their guests. The mentor agrees with Tanya that children talked a lot with the mother about her baby and that the children are most engaged when they have knowledge about the topic. For example, they were engaged in building a garage for their cars and asking questions about the crafts one of the guests showed them. When are else does she notice that the children seem more engaged or ask more questions? How can she find ways to provide more of these experiences and still cover her curriculum?

Design Thinking/Developing a Professional Development Plan

The educator and mentor brainstorm ideas and co-create together what may be solutions to their personal challenges. The mentor assists the teacher in choosing one of the ideas that inspires her/him the most and is the most realistically achievable and to design a S.M.A.R.T. action learning experiment or action research project (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010: 304) or create a professional development learning plan.

The mentor may suggest areas of the book, *Putting Knowledge into Practice: A Guidebook for Educators on ISSA's Principles of Quality Practice* or parts of *Creating a child-Centred Classroom* that the educator may want to read or explore, additional activities outlined under Quality Practice in the *Professional Development Tool*, or specific videos that may be of interest to the educator in the *ISSA Video Library* as part of a professional development plan.

> The mentor suggests that Tanya read about the section on Teaching Strategies in the Guidebook. Tanya decides that her children talk more with guests they already know and talk more about topics that they are familiar with. In order to learn more about professions, she will do a KWL (What I know, What I want to know, and What I learned) about the professions of the guests.
>
> She invited each of the guests back on separate days so that the children can interview them using the questions they have now prepared in advance.
>
> The children later make a book about the professions they have learned about and share it with the new classroom helpers in a party for them.

Application:

The educator follows through either with the action-learning experience or the parts s/he agreed to work upon in a professional development plan. Following this work, the mentor may meet with the educator again to see how the experiment worked, to listen empathetically to the stories that come out of the experience, and to start the process again with a new personal challenge.

In subsequent observations, the educator may decide to ask the mentor to use other observation tools that were suggested above, such as Laevers (2005), or the Child Well-Being Scale or Child Involvement Scale (on page 103 in the *Guidebook*). There are also other instruments that measure children's emotional well-being or developmental levels in different domains. Or the educator could ask the mentor to watch how they are interacting with different children.

The mentor should encourage the educator to be documenting his/her work and reflecting upon it in their professional portfolios, if they are keeping one.

> Tanya and the mentor later decide that Tanya will use Laevers's Child Involvement Scale to watch different children throughout the week. She will score the children on the scale while they are working in an activity centre, and during the large group circle time.
>
> Tanya learns that her children are also more engaged when working in small groups. She enhances the work in her activity centres to teach different concepts, instead of relying on circle time to teach. She finds that Eva's problems are less pronounced in small groups, and that all of her children are more active in the ways that she wants them to be.

HOW TO USE THE ISSA PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY IN MENTORING

The document, *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy*, is the basis for all of the work we do in professional development with educators, including mentoring.

The document may be used in different ways with the teachers you are mentoring. It is a great tool for opening a dialogue about how teachers see their roles as early childhood educators, what is their basic philosophy of education, and where they think their strengths and weaknesses may lie. The role of the mentor is to actively listen and ask them questions that help them get more clarity on their own thinking and understanding.

The *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* also can be referred to in other discussions where hidden assumptions may be hindering teachers' ability to be more democratic or to make learning meaningful. For example, teachers may be so focused on getting children to write perfectly shaped letters, that they miss stressing the connection between writing and reading. Or they may be so focused on insisting that parents attend meetings that they forget that parents should also have some input into what the meetings are about.

By helping the mentee think through what their ultimate goals are with the things they do with the children and their families, the mentor can help them move into quality practice. The mentor's role is to ask questions that help the educator understand where they can get the results they want and where they cannot. The mentor also helps them understand what gives them energy, passion, satisfaction in their job, and helps them explore possibilities where they can find more things they can do that give them these kinds of opportunities. This helps them to experiment and try out new behaviours.

In the earlier example with Tanya, her initial goal was to connect the children more with their community, as well as to learn about professions. By working on Principle 2.3, where she felt capable, she was able to see that she also wanted her children to be more active in their learning processes, which moved her into the Principles from the *Teaching Strategies* Focus Area.

With new educators	With experienced teachers who are new to child-centred methodology	With experienced educators in child-centred practice
• As this group may have less experience working directly with young children, have new teachers talk about their own early childhood experiences and memories, including attending day care, a pre-school, or even learning from caregivers or other children in their homes. What were positive and negative memories for them? How did they remember learning? What was one of their best learning experiences and why? Why did they become an educator? When did they feel respected by their teachers/adults? • What theories did they learn in their teacher preparation programs that may have resonated for them? Which of the ISSA Principles/Indicators do they feel are most important for them? Which ones were part of their early learning experiences and which ones were not? How would it have been if these principles had been part of their experience if they were not? • Which principles/indicators would they like to earn more about and why? Which principles do they think they may be really good at and which ones will be more challenging? Why is this? What are they committed to doing that will make them successful?	• As this group will have a lot more experience working with children and their families, their stories will focus more on those experiences rather than their childhood memories. This is also an important time to get them to record their own thinking about their roles as an educator, the role of the children, and the role of the family. Have them give examples where they, the children and family members have fulfilled their roles. When did they not do so? What is their philosophy of teaching and learning? • Ask these teachers to talk about what they think is working really well for their children and families. How do their core values come through in their teaching? Are any of these core values similar to the principles described in this book? When have they felt respected as an educator? When did they learn a valuable lesson in their teaching? How have they felt about their professional learning opportunities since becoming an educator? Where did they feel they learned the most?	• These educators will be more familiar with many of the principles. In this case, mentors will want to understand specifically where these teachers may see things differently than how the Principles are stated, what their biggest obstacles may be, and how important they feel the development of democratic competences are in their classroom. What may be missing in the package or Principles for them? The role of the mentor in this case is to help educators deconstruct each of the Principles/Indicators so that quality is something that we continually redefine depending on particular, ever changing contexts. • Although more experienced teachers are more comfortable with classroom management, they have sometimes not reflected on unintended consequences of what they do. They may be so focused on controlling / managing children's behaviours. They have forgotten that self-regulation / control is more important than just minding managing the teacher. For example, if the teacher assumes that children are not learning if they are talking when the teacher is talking, then they may not give children enough opportunities to also talk. Another example is that teachers often do not question why they are asking children to stand in line or wait their turn after all of the other children have had a turn. An unintended consequence of doing this is that they are not actively learning during this down-time. Singing songs, playing word games, or having the children help each other with activities such as washing hands or getting ready to go outside and play, not only manage children's behaviours, but also enable them to participate in an enjoyable, helpful learning activity.

HOW TO USE THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TOOLS IN MENTORING

The *Professional Development Tools* (PDTs) are instruments that can be used by the mentee for self-assessment; or the mentor can use it to assess the practice of the mentee. Like the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy*, they can also be used as a reference for conversations between the mentor and teachers' understanding of what is and is not quality. The PDTs specifically illustrate (for each level of education, pre-school and primary school) each of the 85 indicators of quality in the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy*. This tool deconstructs how educators move on a continuum from inadequate practice, to a good start, to quality practice and then into transformational practice whereby they begin to create systemic change in the teaching paradigm and practice.

If we are using an evocative approach, however, it is probably best to use this tool as way to engage in dialogue rather than as an assessment that a mentor would perform on the teachers. The role of the mentor is never to be that of an inspector or supervisor who is evaluating a subordinate. The tool was actually designed with dialogue in mind by asking a question at the end of each indicator: what are other ways that educators can ...? Although the tool may be very useful in describing levels of practice, there are always other examples of behaviours or actions in each of levels for each of the indicators and such examples could be developed by the mentee together with the mentor.

> Teachers feel more ownership of an instrument or process if they have helped create it. Having them write examples under each of the indicators is a meaningful process to deconstruct what the indicator is saying. It is also a way to work in a teacher's zone of proximal development. However, in order to do that, the mentor must know where a particular teacher's zone of proximal development lies. Having teachers write their own examples can help the mentor understand what the teacher knows and how they feel about particular strategies. This is another area where unintended consequences can be explored.

Just as with the document, *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy, the Professional Development Tools* are meant to be used to open dialogue about educators' practice that meets ISSA's definition of quality pedagogy. Others may have other definitions of quality. Quality is actually a concept that is constructed. Just as the ISSA members used their experience in developing child-centred programs, the experiences of other programs that had good reputations and evidence-based research and the most current knowledge of how young children develop and learn to construct a definition of quality, so we have to give opportunities for other educators to do the same. We learn through dialogue, where different perspectives are presented and reflected upon. The examples can and should change, based on the specific and diverse contexts that educators work in, and not as fixed indicators.

With new educators	With experienced educators who are new to child-centred methodology	With experienced educators in child-centred practice
• Although new teachers have not had a lot of experience in their own teaching, it does not mean that do not have ideas of what is and is not of quality. Even if they are not ready yet to self-evaluate their own practice, they can use the parts of the document to talk about their own understandings of actions that are either inadequate to be called child-centred practice, or actions that are indicative of quality practice. • Mentors can ask new teachers about what they seen others do in classrooms and whether they feel that these are inadequate, in process, or quality. Where might they have dilemmas in these examples? For example, children have to learn certain facts and knowledge. For example, they must know their colours, they must learn how to sound out and write letters, they must have one-to-one correspondence when counting. Educators may feel that "teaching" these certain skills are the most important part of their job. • In teacher-preparation courses, student teachers spend a lot of time learning the content that children need to know to be "ready" for school or that they must learn in early primary school. In a four-hour teaching day, these expectations may compete with giving children more opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. This is a good opportunity for them to talk about conflicting expectations. Mentoring new teachers requires looking at their conflicting expectations and aligning them with the teachers' own capabilities, aspirations, and goals.	• For those educators who have more experience but would score inadequate on a lot of the indicators, using this assessment instrument may be demotivating. In such a case, it is really important to focus on a single area where the mentor has identified that they are doing better, rather than overwhelming them with the entire instrument. Mentors build on what strengths these teachers have and appreciate what they already do well instead of focusing on what are their deficits. This is an important part of establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust. People need to feel that they are not being judged. • With educators who have more experience, it may be more challenging to get them to try something new especially if they are comfortable with what they are doing. The mentor's goal with these teachers is to help them align their hidden assumptions that influence their actions with their intended goals. What are they committed to doing that would make them more successful? It is helping them think about steps the teachers can take to change things that they have decided they want to change. • We highly recommend that when working with the Professional Development Tool, as with other tools in the Quality Resource Pack, to focus on one Principle or a small number of Indicators at a time. Multiple or all of the Principles/Indicators at the same time not only can be overwhelming, but can also be confusing or working at too shallow of a level. Being successful in one area will increase the probability of being successful in other areas. • This is also an opportunity to talk about the examples in the indicators that teachers may not be in agreement with in terms of their labels as inadequate, good start and quality. The ISSA Principles and Indicators are well connected and, most of the time if a teacher is working on one Principle, they are improving in multiple areas. By deconstructing areas where they are in agreement, teachers may find that they change their minds about other issues. For example, Tanya at the beginning was more concerned with the children's behaviours than with their involvement. Telling her at the beginning that she was inadequate in teaching strategies would have made her less excited about becoming more child-centred in her practice.	Experienced educators are the only ones who should be using the entire assessment instrument. This way, they can choose where they want to work as well as monitor their own progress. They can contribute to the improvement of the tool itself by providing relevant examples to various indicators they worked on and share them with the mentor or colleagues. They may also choose to focus on the levels of moving forward in the instrument. The role of the mentor at this level is to help them really think through how deeply they are going in the different Focus Areas and Principles, where they can be more flexible, where they can be more open and value different ways of being, and how they help those whose voices may not be heard, in order to get their messages out into the world.

HOW TO USE THE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT IN MENTORING

This document is a condensed version of the *Professional Development Tool*. It is a subset of the Indicators from the *ISSA Principles of Quality of Pedagogy* that are the most distinguishable (most observable, most challenging to reach in terms of quality practice) and serve as proxies for other indicators in terms of defining quality practice. In some cases, the mentor may choose to use this instrument as a way in which teachers can quickly self-assess themselves or to see their progress. A mentor should use it with caution, however. As it assesses those indicators that are more challenging to reach, it can be de-motivating for new teachers or teachers new to child-centred processes.

Remember that mentors need to work in teachers' zone of proximal development. They must be able to understand why this indicator is important and how they can achieve quality in the Focus Area to which the Indicator belongs before they can start to work on it themselves.

The Assessment Instrument is a very useful tool for starting working within a mentoring program on those aspects of the teaching practice that need improvement, and supports educators to step into the zone of their proximal development. The Instrument has been developed with this purpose, and it can be used at an individual level as well as the group level, but also for larger communities of professionals working in early childhood education and care services, indicating the areas of high-quality practices and areas that need strong support for improvement through mentoring programs.

By running an initial assessment, a mentor can identify the indicators that are placed in the *high quality, good start* or *inadequate* score range and together with the educator/s, can agree on meaningful steps to be made towards increasing their scores by using the professional Development Tool, the videos in the Video Library or the *Putting Knowledge into Practice Guidebook*.

With new educators	With experienced educators who are new to child-centred methodology	With educators experienced in child-centred practice
It is not productive or constructive to use the Assessment Instrument with new educators or educators new to child-centred methodology as they will score very low. It is best to use it with educators after they have been exposed to training, mentoring, and work in professional learning communities on this pedagogical approach.		• The Assessment Instrument is strongly linked with the Professional Development Tool, presented above. Experienced educators may use the PDT to self-assess their practice and work on improving those areas that need reinforcement. To be provided with a feedback on the level of quality of their practice, educators may ask a mentor to use the Assessment Instrument and assess the level of the quality of their practice. By collecting the data and populating the database accompanying the Instrument, the mentor can identify which are the Focus Areas and the Indicators that had high or low scores, meaning which are the strengths and the areas for improvement. Thus, the mentors may provide feedback to the educators and agree together with the mentee on their joint work towards professional development. • The Focus Areas of practice that were indicated in the Instrument as needing improvement serve as proxies for all the indicators in that Focus Area. This therefore, leads the mentee and the mentor to focus their attention on how to reinforce those aspects. Now they may start developing together an Individual professional Development Plan. • During the improvement process, the mentor can use the Assessment Instrument to monitor changes that occurred in the teaching practice of the mentees as a consequence of the mentoring activities. The interim assessments should indicate improvements in the score on those indicators in focus and will serve a basis for discussions and reflections as well as learning activities during the mentoring sessions. • Such progress in quality improvement can be tracked by using the Assessment Instrument's Methodology and Database.
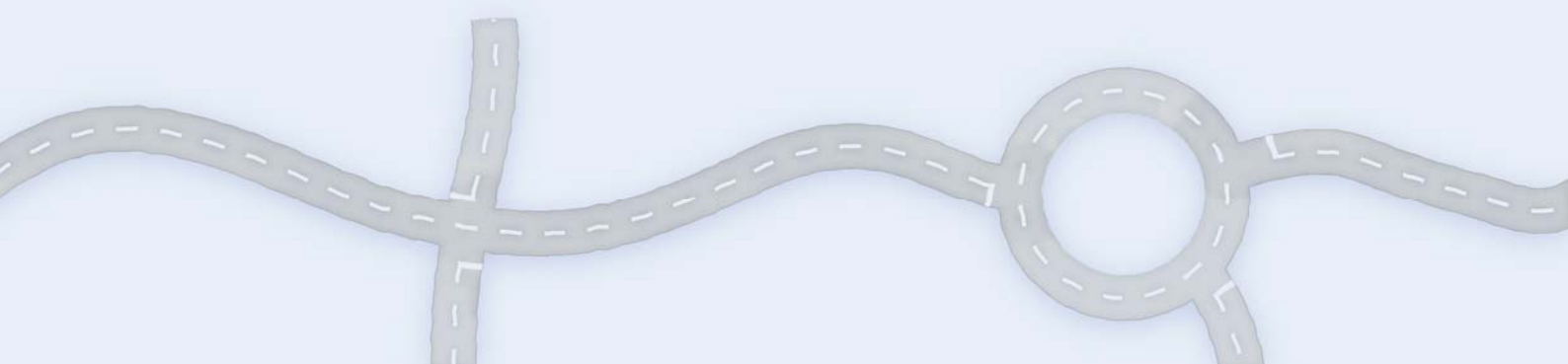
Practice

With new educators	With experienced educators who are new to child-centred methodology	With educators experienced in child-centred practice
• The mentor may be much more active in helping a new teacher arrange his/her classroom, develop lesson plans based on observations of children, and helping them to design strategies for involving family members. As stated before, new teachers will also need a lot of support in how to manage children's behaviours in ways that promote their self-regulation and build a community among them. • As specific issues come up around issues of equity and diversity, the mentor may also suggest parts the *Guidebook* that give specific ideas of how to be more aware of and inclusive of the diversity that exists in their classrooms.	• Because these documents contain a lot of information (they can even be used as textbooks in pre-service education programs), it is probably best to work with the resources by focus area, principle, or topic. This is where a mentor's familiarity with the entire document is important because they suggest which parts of the *Guidebook* may be of the most interest to a teacher. • The *Guidebook* provides information about theory that these teachers can be reminded of that they learned in their teacher preparation programs, but did not have a chance to actually implement in practice, since they did not yet have classrooms. It also supports them by giving them the language they can use with other teachers, administrators and parents to describe why they may want to change their practice to be more child-centred.	• The *Guidebook* gives these teachers the background information of how and why to reflect on their practice and to deconstruct actions they may unconsciously make that have unintended consequences. It also gives them the information they can use to move forward in their practice, becoming agents of social change and leaders in their field. • Teachers who are peer-mentoring each other will also find the *Guidebook* useful as a tool to structure their sessions with each other. A good method for working with any reading material is to use what is called the **insert method**. This is a special technique that can be used in critical reading that gives the reader more opportunity to interact with the text. The process consists of: putting checkmarks next to statements that reader(s) are in agreement with; question marks next to statements that are not clear; plus marks next to statements or ideas that are new to them; minus marks next to statements which they already know from the past; and exclamation marks next to statements that they do not agree with. • At the end of reading, they can prepare a table of main ideas and messages and place them under five columns (checkmark, plus, minus, question mark and exclamation mark). Under each category, they write the statements (or main idea from the statement) from the marked text. In the process of preparing this kind of table, the readers are forced to think analytically and critically about what they are reading. They can discuss results with each other and usually start to explore possible answers and meanings.

How to use the ISSA Video Library in mentoring

The video library is a collection of short video clips of educators and children in classrooms (pre-school and primary school), which illustrate how certain indicators of quality practice are being implemented.

> In the ISSA Online Community, licensed ISSA members have access to a document entitled: The Table of Contents in the ISSA Video Library which states which videos work best to illustrate different indicators from the seven Focus Areas for teachers who work at the pre-school and primary school levels. Each video also asks questions that help a mentor and a teacher dialogue about what is important in the video and how to improve practice. In some cases, these videos may inspire ideas on what teachers can do in their own classrooms when working on the design phase of the Evocative Mentoring Model.

They are also a good example of how the mentor can use video recordings of the teacher to structure dialogue around the teacher's own practice.

ISSA Online Courses and mentoring

In addition, ISSA offers online courses on Quality Pedagogy using the resources from the Quality Resource Pack. The courses address specific topics around how to set up a child-centred kindergarten program, how to work with the diversity in families, communities and children, and how to work in multilingual kindergartens. Mentors may suggest having teachers look at different Modules on the course where they may indicate that they have an interest in finding out more about a particular topic or strategy. Once again, in the Evocative Mentoring Model, these can be offered in the Design Thinking phase as a way for a teacher to see new ideas of ways to implement a particular strategy and to learn about other resources they can use to enhance their professional development process.

Using the Quality Resources for Developing Professional Learning Communities

What is a Professional Learning Community?

A professional learning community is more than a group of professionals that regularly meet, for example for staff meetings or for training. Learning communities, unlike groups of experts seeking information about a certain field of work or exchanging experiences, have some additional characteristics. Puntman and Burke (in Doolittle, 2008) identified seven characteristics of a professional learning community:

- a sense of common purpose;
- viewing peers in the group as colleagues;
- seeking self/group actualization;
- perceiving outside groups as similar to ones own group;
- individual and communal reflection;
- giving and seeking help;
- and celebrating accomplishments.

Eaker (2002) states that for a community of educators to become a learning community, the group of educators needs to have: cooperation; a joint vision/mission; common values and goals; orientation towards learning; leadership; a focus on a plan for enhancing performance; determination; and a celebration of achievements.

Newmann et al. (1996, in Vescio et. al, 2008) add other basic pre-conditions for the development of learning communities and included:

- shared values and norms (on issues as the group's collective 'views' about children and children's ability to learn, the school's priorities and the role of the educators and educational professionals);
- a constant focus on children' learning, reflective dialogue between community members, de-privatizing practice to make teaching public;
- and a focus on collaboration.

Elements of a Learning Community

In this chapter, we will focus on three elements that we find necessary for the development of professional learning communities, and which we incorporate in the structure of the work of the communities. These are: *cooperation, shared vision and reflection.*

Development of a supportive, collegial environment for teaching will positively impact children's learning because today's requirements and working conditions in the teaching profession make it impossible for educators to be successful if they work alone. Success requires cooperation. In addition, we should not forget that learning, due to the way our brains operate, both in children and adults, is a social process. Thus, cooperation between team members creates a basis for community development.

COOPERATION

Traditionally, in educational systems, connections between educators are weak. This is partly due to the structure of pre-school and schools where educators almost always work in their own classrooms, never or rarely cooperating with their colleagues on issues of teaching. The majority of educators never observe their colleagues teaching after finishing their internship. Eaker (2002) describe such schools as "parking lots for teachers". Schools often seem to be aggregates of individuals meeting at one place during working hours.

The term community is often applied to almost any collection of individuals, regardless of how poorly those individuals communicate with each other. If we are going to use the word 'community' meaningfully, we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks, and who have developed a commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, delight in each other, and make other's conditions their own (Peck, 1987, in Wald & Castleberry, 2000).

Working in an environment with other educators can enable professional development, but if the relationships or communication between colleagues is negative, being in contact with other educators may cause professional stagnation, and even regression.

Cooperation does not solely refer to educators working in a pleasant atmosphere, but also to mutual appreciation and sharing experiences, knowledge, skills, doubts, etc. According to McMillan (1976, in McMillan & Chavis 1986: 9) the "sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together".

Knowing ourselves and each other

The process of developing cooperation in a community starts with **knowing ourselves and each other**, as what we do in our classrooms is impacted by our beliefs about education and learning. For example, learning can be seen as the transmission of knowledge or a social process whereby knowledge is constructed together with others. Imagine, for example, how hard it would be to cooperate with colleagues who have a completely different set of beliefs than yours on the ways how children learn best. Therefore, it helps to share one's personal teaching philosophy with one's colleagues.

The personal teaching philosophy

Recent literature covering education and development emphasizes that: educators are the key, and what they do in the classroom is crucial. Hattie (2012) finds it has become a cliché, that what educators do in classrooms is less important than having an appropriate frame of mind relating to the impact of what they do, and that they see it as their role to evaluate their effect on learning. He thinks that educators' beliefs about children, teaching and their own role as educators has the greatest impact on the children's development and learning, and that these beliefs can be influenced. As in the mentoring process, the first step to being able to change one's behaviour is becoming aware of one's own beliefs and attitudes through the process of writing a personal teaching philosophy statement.

A personal teaching philosophy statement is an expression of personal beliefs one has on teaching, learning and development. A personal philosophy of teaching statement usually answers the following questions.

- What is the ultimate purpose of education for the child?
- What is the role of the educator?
- How do children learn?
- What is the role of the parents in education?
- How do you design the curriculum to fit different needs of children?
- How do you know that you have achieved your goals during teaching?
- What is the role of education in society?

For example, one person can believe that the purpose of teaching is for the children to acquire basic knowledge, while others place more emphasis on the development of critical thinking and the learning process in children. It is important for educators to set aside some time and write down their teaching philosophy, because during the process of writing, they will become more aware of their beliefs on education, learning, development and teaching, as well as other beliefs influencing their decisions at work. All educators change their teaching philosophy in the process of their professional development and the experience they gain in practice. For this reason, it is recommended to not only write down one's philosophy, but also to review and revise it periodically, since our beliefs can and do change. Comparison of our own philosophies and beliefs over a period of time provides us with an opportunity to become aware of the changes our professional development creates in our practice.

The teaching philosophy conveys our personal beliefs, yet at the same time, it is the part of the scientifically based social consensus addressing what teaching should be. By reflecting on one's personal teaching philosophy, educators describe their views about the purpose of teaching and become more aware of their own roles and work responsibility. At the same time, the educator is becoming aware of wider perspectives of their actions in the classroom, and how they link with the societal view. Education is not confined merely to classroom activities, but is also influenced by and influences research and professional development activities such as mentoring, discussions with colleagues, etc.

To know someone means knowing their beliefs, motives, thoughts, behaviour, etc. Questions that members of the community might ask each other in order to understand their beliefs and to get to know each other better (Roberts, 1994, in Wald & Castleberry, 2000) include:

- What is your opinion on this topic?
- Where does this opinion come from? Do you have proof of this?
- Are you willing to change your opinion?
- What is your vision of a satisfactory solution of this problem?

People get to know themselves while cooperating with others, because by talking to others, they identify their own unused capacities and personal potential.

Developing trust

Developing cooperation in a community means creating an atmosphere of trust, or in other words, a belief that their colleagues do not wish to threaten them professionally (i.e. to ridicule or humiliate). Mutual trust is the basis for success of a community. Les Hart (2002, in Caine & Caine, 2010) describes, what happens when people feel threatened or helpless. In such situations, the brain switches to automatic, often a fast and reflexive reaction which serves the purpose of "survival" and which he calls downshift. In such moments, higher-order thinking is blocked. To be explicit, when educators feel frightened about the reactions of their colleagues, their brain is in downshift, and they are not capable of thinking and solving professional challenges they encounter in their daily work.

> Le Doux describes a similar process. He states that the brain works in two basic modes "high road" and "low road" mode. The "low road" is the survival mode. It occurs as a reaction to stimuli which cause fear (for example, public speaking). In that state, a person literally loses contact with the parts of the brain handling higher cognitive processes and reacts within the *fight* or *flight* principle. This means that the body, when feeling threatened, instinctively and automatically prepares for self-defence or flight from a dangerous situation (according to Caine & Caine, 2010). To be specific, if educators feel threatened in communities, they will either verbally attack their colleagues or will simply stop coming to the community meetings.

Bryk & Schneider (2002) have determined that in schools where trust exists between educators, changes are more often introduced which benefits the achievement of their children. In an environment governed by mutual trust, people speak openly what is on their mind; they are open to advice from others and experiment with new ideas. According to Wald & Castleberry (2000), trust among community members can be recognized by the existence of:

- openness (all group members are invited to express ideas, thoughts, emotions and reactions);
- sharing (members offer materials and resources to each other in order to help each other achieve goals);
- acceptance (positive communication with members of the team on their contribution);
- support (recognising strengths and capacities of the team members);
- cooperative intentions (it is expected that all team members cooperate for the purpose of achieving common goals).

Brain function and its relation to developing cooperation between educators

In the course of developing learning communities, the most important task is to create a stress-free, and cooperative learning environment.

If we are anxious, then the information we acquire during learning will not reach the long-term memory in the area of the pre-frontal cortex, and will not be processed consciously. This means that when anxious, we are incapable of learning.

Stress blocks the flow of information through the amygdala and the limbic system (its function is to regulate emotions) to the pre-frontal cortex (its function is to handle higher cognitive processes) and redirects sensory information into more primitive parts of the brain which regulate reflexive reactions in situations of danger. When we face danger, the brain will react in one of three ways: flight, fight or freeze. In stressful situations, emotions prevail over capacities of thought, and the pre-frontal part of the cortex, which regulates rational thinking, has a limited impact on memory, thinking and human behaviour.

By recording brain activity with magnetic resonance (MR), it has been determined that the part of the pre-frontal brain called the frontal cingulum regulates the process of problem-solving. When subjects attempted to solve a problem, this part of the brain showed increased brain activity. It is interesting that, when the subjects were exposed to pleasant emotions, this part of the brain showed increased activity, which contributed to the successful problem-solving.

Dopamine (the neurotransmitter released in the brain when we feel pleasant emotions, and is blocked when we are under stress or anxious) also has an important role in learning. Release of dopamine is also connected to easier memory, and problem-solving.

Taking all that into account, we can conclude that stress makes everybody less efficient, be they teachers or pupils. Therefore, our goal is to decrease stress in teachers and enable the mobilization of all existing teachers' capacities. This will consequently result in the mobilization and realization of all capacities of the pupils.

Sense of interdependence

In time, **the sense of interdependence** should develop between community members, the feeling that they can succeed together, combine talents and capacities and create something new (Covey, 1989, in Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Creating a sense of interdependence in the group is a complex process which is alleviated if each member of the group understands one's self (Who am I? What do I believe in? How do I wish to contribute?). This self-awareness is then combined with knowing others and their strengths, by valuing differences in the group, different experiences and opinions.

Numerous studies emphasise the link between success in learning and the state of relaxed attention. Therefore, the experience of participating in a community should be connected to pleasant emotions (Bandura, 2000; Davies, 2002; Gillham, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman, 1991; in Caine & Caine, 2010).

How will we recognise a community in which cooperation between team members exists?

- Members of the community actively contribute to the work of other members, offering support, assistance, evaluating their work and pointing out new challenges.

- Heterogeneity of the community allows its members to realise different levels of expertise in different areas of work, to learn from each other, to guide each other towards better quality of practice.

- Members of the community are aware that the success of one of the team members is success for all of them and the failure of one member is their common failure.

- Each community member contributes to the group individually, assuming responsibility for their work, the work of the group and the school.

- All community members have an opportunity to contribute, regardless of the area of expertise or experience.

> Pleasant emotions enhance higher order thinking such as: episodic and work memory, creative problem-solving,a the decision-making process, flexibility in reflecting, etc. (Ashby, Isen & Turken, 1999; in Caine & Caine, 2010). When surrounded with pleasant emotions, people are more intrinsically motivated for changes because the one who learns has an opportunity to pose relevant questions without fear that they will be threatened in any way (Caine & Caine, 2010).

In order to encourage educators to develop cooperation at the very beginning, one of the goals of the first community meeting is adopting the rules of behaviour. In addition, during all succeeding meetings, leaders create activities which allow educators to get to know each other better, to understand each other's values and attitudes. One of the more important components contributing to the development of cooperation between educators is the efficient communication between the leader and all educators, but also, between educators themselves.

From our experience in developing learning communities, cooperation between educators (in other words knowing each other, tolerance, trust, sense of interdependence and pleasant emotions connected to community meetings) are key for the success of the entire work of the community. We can say that in teams where cooperation between educators was at a high level, educators introduced more changes in their work and discussed more, as well as reflected more on the consequences of these changes. In schools in which cooperation between educators was not developed in the past, leaders had to make an additional effort to develop the cooperation.

SHARED VISION

The goal of professional learning communities is to realize the shared vision of the (pre)school/centre that they want for their children. The shared vision is an image of our classroom and the school of the future. It looks for answers to the following questions: What do we want to create? What kind of a (pre)school do we wish to become? What kind of a (pre)school do we want for our children? Why do we exist? How are we going to know when we have achieved our vision? What will the children do? What will the educators do? What will the parents do?

To have a shared vision does not mean that everyone will agree on a single activity to implement in their work (for example, setting up a parent's board in front of each classroom). A shared vision is much more; it is a mental schema of the quality of work in all areas of the (pre)school's/centre's work that contributes to the learning and development of each and every individual child, as well as of the educators and the education system itself.

A shared vision is also different than just using common teaching activities. Even when educators have agreed on what quality practices look like, educational professionals often cannot reach a consensus on which activities to do with certain age-levels of children. It is clear that there is no

magic formula for effective activities which would work for all educators in all (pre)schools in all classrooms and situations. Whether the activity was the appropriate one and could have been improved or adapted, depends on a series of factors such as the timing, the children we work with, the strengths of the educator, amongst many others. It would be absurd to make our vision of teaching look like a recipe book on how to do something step by step in each classroom, because one strategy for one educator and child could be excellent, while for another it would be inadequate.

Hanushek (2010) explains that past educational reforms often gave recipes to educators on how to change their practice in the classroom, instead of having them first focus on what their shared vision is. The reason for this was because the studies on the impact of the educators' work on the children's achievement were linear; in other words, they always measured how one aspect of the educators' work influenced the children (for example, how humour influences children). He finds that it is an over-simplified perspective of the work of educators, because it is not linear and simple; different educators will by applying different "strategies" to achieve the same goals with children. Someone could be good at using humour in the classroom, and for the other, this would mean the complete loss of control over the process of teaching.

Creating a vision in schools often turns into writing wish lists: "We would like to equip our classrooms with computers; we would like a new gym hall erected …". The function of professional learning communities, however, is not to talk about physical structural changes (although we do not diminish their value). Their function is to address teaching and learning. Therefore, we wish to create a common vision of teaching and learning that we want for our children. If what is most important to educators is the development of children's critical and reflective thinking, research capacities, self-reflection, self-control and respect for others, a shared vision should also contribute to the development of all these capacities and not just academic outcomes or high academic scores.

A shared vision of quality teaching would allow all educators to implement their work differently. Part of having a shared vision is having a common understanding of the theory of teaching. Studies show that the better educators know the theory of teaching/learning, the better they can cope with problems in the classroom (discipline for example), but also they can teach various content easier and with better quality (Caine & Caine, 2010). Therefore, educators are required to combine knowledge of theory and practice with an understanding of professional terminology, and reflect on their own experiences.

The ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy are not a recipe, a formula or a checklist. Instead they connect theory with practice, or in other words, enable educators to use findings from the fields of learning, development of children, neurobiological sciences and other sciences in their daily practice. Educators are encouraged not only to accept this document as a shared vision of the school, but also as a starting point for discussing and reflecting about the current quality of education in their (pre)school/centre and of the goals they wish to achieve.

ISSA Definition of Quality Pedagogy: a common vision of teaching and learning

The *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* are an example of a shared vision of quality teaching and learning. A thorough discussion on the shared vision of teaching in line with the results of research and theoretical concepts, as well as with national documents and the context the educators who are members of the community work in takes a long time. Therefore, the *Competent Educators of the 21st Century – ISSA Definition of Quality Pedagogy* has been used as a framework for discussing common visions in professional learning communities in different countries. The purpose of using such a document has been to accelerate the process of creating a shared vision and thus assist educators to introduce changes and enhance the quality of their work more quickly. This document describes quality child-centred teaching practice based on the findings of research of children's development, the theory of learning and neuroscience.

Each professional community may select the area of the educators' practice they wish to enhance. In addition, each community independently determines which segment of work they wish to tackle within this area and the time they will dedicate to it. The goal is to guide the learning community towards the development of quality child-centred practice, and at the same time allow the freedom for each professional learning community to plan their own vision. During all meetings, the community members discuss some of the aspects of quality (Indicator belonging to Principles in ISSA definition), discuss how to meet the Indicators of quality in their work, and how ultimately to develop a "professional development plan" describing what they plan to achieve or change in their practice by the next meeting, what actions they will take, what resources they will need, and who can help them.

Instead of the transmission perspective over the practice in which the educators are usually told what to do, the constructivist view of the teaching profession is nurtured within and through the learning communities. This means that we are aware that educators base their practice on previous knowledge and experiences, and bring them into new situations where the new understanding emerges. Educators are no longer perceived only as do-ers, but also as people who know and who reflect.

REFLECTION

Reflective teaching is a term introduced in education practice by Dewey (1933, in Pollard & Tann, 1993). He defined the distinction between routine teaching (practice) and reflective teaching. Routine practice or routine teaching is led primarily by impulsive reactions, tradition and authorities. This means that educators try to solve problems or teach based on the "collective code" ("This is how WE do it"). In contrast, in reflective teaching the educator actively, persistently and attentively reflects upon each belief or practice, their advantages and possible consequences.

Routine teaching is very visible in today's educational practice. Many feel that a "good educator" should have prepared answers for all questions and challenges which can occur in their work. Therefore, educators waste a lot of energy collecting ready-to-use, pre-packaged lessons plans, handbooks and "practical examples" in order to prepare in advance being armed by answers and reactions to possible questions or problems (Jackson, 2009).

On the other hand, successful educators are considered to be the ones who teach reflectively, or by using reflection (Čudina-Obradović, 2008). Reflective teaching includes "thinking processes with a purpose of resolving new learning or new action which includes a conscious and purposeful effort to understand personal activities or experiences in a certain situation, especially if incorrect or inappropriate operation or outcomes are identified within it" (Moon, 2006, in Vizek-Vidović 2011: 87).

Senge (1990, in Wald & Castleberry, 2000) describes two types of learning: adaptive and generative learning. Adaptive learning answers the question of what to do to solve a problem. Generative learning starts with identifying/discovering problems, but instead of finding a solution by asking "What to do?", first asks "Why is this a problem?" or "What beliefs do we have that make it a problem?". This question invites us to question our beliefs. It is becoming more obvious that the professional development of (pre) schools in the 21st century needs to be based on questioning or on the generative model of learning (ibid).

The goal of reflection is to seek new understanding and new ways for improving the quality of practice, instead of the usual revision of daily practice. Therefore, while working in professional learning communities, it is necessary that educators avoid dealing only with "nice ideas" they can apply in their work on a one-time basis. Instead, it is necessary to ensure reflective thinking about the education practice.

Zeichner and Liston (1996, in Čudina-Obradović, 2008) mention that educators by thinking reflectively do the following:

- examine, frame, and attempt to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice;
- question the assumptions and values s/he brings to teaching;
- take into account the institutional and cultural context in which the teaching occurs;

- take part in curriculum development and be involved in school change efforts;
- take care of their own professional development.

Reflection is a process of revising professional experiences in order to describe them, analyse them and evaluate them (Reid, 1993). It responds to the questions "Where are we now?" and "How good we are, compared to what we want to be?", "What activity had an impact on the children, and what had none?", "Based on what can I say this?", "What out of the attempted had most impact?", "What kind of children's behaviours indicated that we are going the wright way?" (Caine & Caine, 2010). When educators respond to these questions (or in other words, reflect upon their practice) they are engaging in metacognition (thinking about personal cognitive processes and beliefs) and examining their emotions (thinking about personal emotional status) and behaviours (analyzing personal behaviour and its consequences) (Vizek-Vidović, 2011).

Reflection can be done individually or as a group activity of educators. Through discussing a problem together, theories, or current issues and documenting their own experiences, educators can become the driving force of change. Reflective practice which starts at the individual level (the educator as an individual who reflects causes and consequences of his/her work) may influence the practice of colleagues and groups which s/he belongs to (the professional learning community); and group reflexive practice expands and is accepted on the school level (Čudina-Obradović, 2008).

Dewey (1933, in Pollard & Tann, 1993) speaks of three preconditions for reflection: openness of the mind, responsibility and commitment. Openness of the mind refers to the active listening to different points of view, giving full attention to alternatives, and recognizing possible mistakes in beliefs, even the ones we are especially fond of. To be open means to search actively for indicators which prove to be the opposite of the ones we find "correct" or "true". Responsibility presumes thinking about multiple consequences of teaching: the impact on the self-image of children, intellectual development, and social consequences on children's lives.

> According to Korthangen & Wubbels (2001, in Čudina-Obradović, 2008), a reflexive educator:
>
> - is capable of independently designing learning situations and topics that s/he finds very important;
> - asks key questions during the learning situation;
> - has goals and outcomes of teaching that are clear to him/her;
> - is capable of describing and analysing his/her own work and its effects.

Reflection is important because it allows professionals to learn from personal or practice and/or experience of others. It usually occurs after the activity is carried out (reflection on activity). Work in the communities is an example in which educators reflect upon already carried out activities in the classroom. Educators who often, independently or in a group, reflect upon realized activities, develop skills of reflecting during the activity or during teaching (reflection during activities) (Schon, 1990 and 1995, in Caine & Caine, 2010). This allows reflecting on the quality and effectiveness of what they are doing while teaching, followed by the immediate introduction of any changes, finally making the teaching even more effective.

How to ensure reflective practice in learning communities?

Reflection is incorporated in the structure of the learning communities meetings on **three levels**, as described by Cowan (1998, in Vizek-Vidović, 2011).

- During meetings, the educators (based on previous experiences and understanding of certain elements of quality teaching) plan activities to be carried out their practice. This is called reflection *before* action. During the execution of planned activities, educators observe the reactions of children. This is called reflection inaction, reflection during action, or reflection of the first level. An educator's journal may help them while reflecting *in* action as they record their observations.

- Immediately after teaching, educators reflect if they carried out activities as they planned, were there any discrepancies and finally, why and what would they do differently next time. This is reflection *on* action, reflection about the implemented activities or second-level reflection. Once again, the educator's journal is a tool for recording and analysing reflections *on* action.

- While meeting with colleagues, at the learning community meeting, educators present their thoughts after the plan has been carried out (***reflection on reflection*** or third-level reflection).

During each meeting, all educators briefly present how they carried out activities in their classrooms, how children reacted, what would they have done differently, etc. After that, one educator presents in detail his/her reflections of the implemented activities and her/his reflection by answering the aforementioned questions:

- What activities had an effect and what had none? On what basis can I say this?
- Out of the things I tried, what made the strongest impact?
- Which behaviours of children indicated that I was on the right track?

During this process, it is important to take a step away from technical aspects of teaching; in other words, instead of answering "how?" questions, we rather explore **"why?"** questions. By asking "why?" we avoid routine teaching, and introduce true reflective practice into our teaching.

Educators who have an opportunity to reflect on activities regularly as well as on their own reflection (which is part of the structure of community meetings) tend to do so more easily. This allows them to reflect upon the quality and effectiveness of what they are doing while teaching, and make instant changes that will make the teaching even more effective (Schon, 1990 and 1995, in Caine & Caine, 2010).

During the community meetings, all educators should (regardless of whether they are presenting examples from their practice or not) analyse, assess and ask questions on the content and process which took place in their classroom, connect theory with practice, link goals and tasks, beliefs and behaviours and assess different aspects of their practice.

According to Wald and Castleberry (2000), we need a lot of courage and a strong will in order to solve the problems we encounter in education, both as individuals and as a professional learning community, in order to be able to get more complex insights from them, and to question both the assumptions and beliefs we base our practice upon. Russo and Ford (2006, in Čudina-Obradović) list some **barriers** to reflection which may occur during community meetings.

- The need to protect ourselves from discomfort, criticism, doubts of our own capabilities, impairment of our self-image and self-esteem, which can occur as a consequence of a critical analysis of actions with a purpose to improve implemented methods.
- The need to avoid the risk of putting our beliefs, attitudes, values and emotions to the test.
- The need to protect an established personal professional identity and acquired methods of teaching.
- The fear of doubting our own work and a loss of security and self-confidence.
- Resistance towards the increased investment of effort and time needed for reflective teaching.
- The fear of a decreased efficiency in the entire process of teaching.

Experiences from leaders of professional learning communities have shown that in different communities, certain elements were emphasized more than others: cooperation, vision or reflection. For example, in schools with no established habit of educator conversations or dialogue, leaders needed to invest a lot of effort in establishing trust between community members, making them feel accepted enough to be able to speak both of their successes and challenges. In schools where educators did not feel intimidated by their colleagues, communities focused more on the vision, using more articles, video materials and other resources in order to clarify certain terms and to reach common definitions of the quality of teaching. In schools where educators have already worked together on their professional development, have attended seminars on child-centred approaches, and have already developed a shared vision of the quality of educator's work, the reflection component was emphasized. They used fewer pre-prepared resources (video, lessons plans, etc.). Instead they created new activities used for reaching the goals described in the ISSA Definition of Quality Pedagogy. At their meetings, educators spent most of their time discussing the effectiveness of the activities they created.

It is important to add that all three elements—cooperation, vision and reflection—are necessary for the quality work of all communities, and that the final purpose of the community is the professional development of educators into competent, reflective practitioners. At the same time, it is important that the leaders of learning communities respect the climate in which the educators work, their previous experiences of professional development, and emphasize individual elements in the work of the community.

How to Establish a Professional Learning Community and Work with Resources in the QRP

In the following section, we will describe how introductory meetings establish the basis for the work of the professional learning community. This will include how to prepare for the community's work, including the different agreements that must be made by its members, the procedures for choosing the Focus Area in which the members will work, and developing initial individual professional development plans for the members to follow. This part of the manual is intended for leaders of the communities.

In order for the professional learning community to realize its vision and goals, several key preconditions should be in place:

- understanding the motivation of educators for membership in the community;
- that the educators' expectations of their personal benefits from community membership are realistic;
- that communication between community members promotes and fosters professional development;
- that the school management supports the work of the community.

To achieve all this, it is important to build solid foundations for the work of the community. Preparation for the functioning of the community usually takes two or three meetings lasting 20–60 minutes.

The expected outcomes of the introductory meetings are that:
1. all educators and members of the Teachers' Council are informed about the professional learning community;
2. the time and the place for meetings are agreed upon;
3. rules of behaviour are agreed upon;
4. the ISSA Definition of Quality Pedagogy is presented;
5. the priority area for improving the quality of educators' work is selected (according to the document, *Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy*;
6. all educators have developed individual, initial professional-development plans.

During the first two or three meetings, educators will still not have had an opportunity to "feel" the real functioning of the professional learning community, and it is possible that they may become inpatient and a bit disappointed. Therefore, **we recommend that the first three meetings take place more frequently than will be the case with the remaining meetings.** For example, you could hold the first three meetings once a week (instead on monthly basis).

1. INFORMING EDUCATORS AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE TEACHERS' COUNCIL: WHAT IS A LEARNING COMMUNITY?

Although suggestions exist (Murphy, 1998, according to Jolly, 2008) that all educators should become members of learning communities, a far larger number of experts think that members of the community should be those who truly want to be members. For example, in Croatia where learning communities are still developing, it has been very important to establish that membership and participation was on a voluntary basis. In order to do this, members must acquire enough information as to what a learning community is. Therefore, the task of a future leader of the community is to inform as thoroughly as possible all educators and other members of the Educators' Council about what learning communities are.

Who are the leaders of professional learning communities?

The leaders of the professional learning communities are very often the leaders of professional development units/expert task units/work groups/task force/action groups, at the level of the (pre)school/centre. In some cases, these can be educators who are enthusiastic about their own personal development, but also care about the professional development of their colleagues and the enhancement of the quality of performance on the (pre)school/centre level. If possible, it would be beneficial if a community has two leaders, because it makes the preparation of the meeting easier, and it contributes to the sense of security of the leaders, as well as to the dynamics of the meeting.

Information given to community members include: what learning communities are, how the functioning of these communities differs from other types of professional development, what the obligations of its members are, what the experiences of other communities are, etc.

> "I just returned from a school in which I held the first community meeting. The meeting lasted from 17.30 to 18.30 and I designed an invitation announcing the duration of 90 min.
>
> I feel excellent and I am really satisfied with what I have done.
>
> On Friday I invited all teachers in the school (in written form) to the meeting. EVERYBODY came!

I prepared well and thoroughly for this meeting. I arranged the room, copied materials and had the "whole story" set in my mind. I prepared a presentation as well (this presentation really was a blast!)

Content of work:

1. Rules of behaviour in the community
2. Seven areas of educational practice
3. Self-assessment
4. Agreeing on further work

(Švenda, K. (2011). Learning community in primary school SE 'Belvedere', in *Child, School, Family*, 28–29, Zagreb: Open Academy Step by Step)

After the second meeting I noted the following.

I just returned from a community meeting I held in the school and... I am veeeery satisfied!

I prepared for a long time, but now I have no regrets – on the contrary, I have a feeling I could present it to the Parliament, with TV broadcast! :). Jokes aside...

The meeting lasted for 90 minutes. Out of the selected area "Inclusion, diversity and values of democracy" I selected the indicator: "The educator uses language and activities that avoid gender and other stereotypes".

By using various magazines and internet I prepared a presentation on "Gender stereotypes". After the presentation I presented a survey to my colleagues which I created for the purpose of this topic, aiming at measuring the presence of stereotypes in my classroom.

We fine-tuned the survey together, and we will translate it into Italian language (for Italian classrooms). We agreed that the survey will be carried out in all classrooms and then make conclusions on the next meeting.

Through brainstorming we came up with additional ideas on how to work on gender stereotypes.

– In the lower grades read the picture book "Mara and her Dad" and interpret this story;
– Develop a dramatization with a boy and a girl in shifted roles;
– Watch a cartoon and analyse roles of boys and girls;
– Call a mother shoemaker by profession to visit the school.

At the end I distributed the "personal professional development plans" to my colleagues to bring to the second meeting, along with some detailed ideas and materials.

> We agreed that we will continue working on the same indicator in the next meeting. Everybody was creative and active.
>
> (Švenda, K. (2011). Learning community in primary school SE 'Belvedere', in *Child, School, Family*, issue 28–29, Zagreb: Open Academy Step by Step)

In addition, we recommend that the leaders present one of the video examples with professional learning communities at work. Such recordings of practice usually make educators ask questions and get answers to all the questions they might be interested in if they wish to become members of learning communities. One such example can be found on a DVD which accompanies the *Guidebook for Educators: Putting Knowledge into Practice* (Tankersley, et al. 2010). In addition, leaders can find some examples at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7YX-40bWrCs and www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JDhPXQY318).

When designing presentations with basic information on professional learning communities, the leaders should keep in mind that the goal of the presentation is to motivate educators to participate in the work of the communities; thus, it is important to think about what would support educators in a (pre)school/centre to become a member. This is especially important today, when educators are overwhelmed by new requirements and new information.

Some of the **most frequent reasons why educators join learning communities** are (adapted from Jolly, 2008) as follows.

- *A sense of urgency*. Recently, more and more can be heard not only about educational reform, but of the necessity for a revolution in education (Robinson, K. and Aronica L., 2011). These changes would support children in learning how to make conclusions, think creatively, etc., instead of merely memorising content.

- *Relevance and value*. Educators who are members of one community work in the same (pre) school, face similar challenges and learn best from mutual experiences. The knowledge acquired through the work of the learning community can be applied immediately in the classroom, and the impact can be observed.

- *Support from colleagues*. Working in a team allows educators to acquire new skills and get support in implementing those newly acquired skills. Nowadays, it is too often the case that educators are isolated from their colleagues. Cooperation with colleagues is sporadic and takes place mainly in informal situations (during recess, coffee breaks, etc.). Educators realise that through the work of a learning community, they can get the collegial support they need. Learning communities are beneficial for all. Less experienced educators have an

opportunity to get ideas and information they can implement in practice at once. The more experienced people, who often get no opportunity for supervision or mentorship in our educational system, have an opportunity during community conversations to discuss and reflect on their own work.

■ *A way of implementing school-wide initiatives to work on a vision.* The value can be seen of a disciplined, systematic method to implement a new school-wide learning approach initiative. 2010/11

For a successful initial presentation about professional learning communities, focus mostly on how you can motivate educators to get involved. It is important that during the presentation, educators get answers to all their questions and dilemmas. Therefore, at the end of the presentation, leave enough time, at least 15 minutes, to ask questions and share impressions.

2. AGREEING ON A TIME AND PLACE FOR THE MEETINGS

After you have presented the learning community approach and framework to educators, invite to the next meeting only those who are interested in becoming members. The international literature (for example Caine & Caine, 2010; Jolly, 2008), but also the experiences and recommendations of leaders in professional learning communities, suggest that the ideal number of members is 5–10. Caine and Caine (2010) have determined in their study that the process of working in the community is less effective if the community has more than 10 members. A larger number of members discourages the active participation of all who want to take part, and also limits the time for speaking to what is available, instead of what is needed. In addition, if the group is too large, cliques can develop and it is harder to nurture the sense of belonging to the group and unity. If there are fewer than five members, the group energy falls, which can result in an insufficient number of ideas. On the other hand, the advantage of a smaller group lies in the possibility for rotating the position of leader.

Some authors think that the groups function best when members are not only educators who informally cooperate closely, anyway.

It is good to start the work of the community with the questions "What do you want to gain from this experience?", "Why did you join the community?". In order for the community to function in the way the educators expect, an agreement has to be made as regards when and where the meetings of the community will take place and how long they will last.

Professional development is a long-term process after all. Therefore, it is suggested that community meetings, in order to be effective and achieve results, should be held for at least one

year. When the members of the community meet continuously for a longer period of time, there is an increased probability for development of new ideas, mutual trust and conversations on sensitive issues and topics regarding teaching and learning. It is ideal to hold two two-hour meetings per month. If this is not possible, it is necessary to hold at least one meeting each month.

> It is recommended to have the meetings scheduled during working hours to avoid educators leaving and then returning to school just for the meeting. In some schools where this condition was not met, two communities were established, one per each shift. Occasionally, these two communities met and exchanged ideas.

Caine and Caine (2010) suggest that, in order for the educators to detach mentally and physically from the working routine, the communities should not meet at usual venues for educator meetings (educator rooms) or classrooms. It is possible to find a place which is rarely used in the (pre) school, to arrange it and meet there (for example, some schools fixed up attics which are now used for community meetings, workshops; or educators met in libraries, cabinets, etc.).

It is already established that at many meetings, we sit in a circle. This is because the circle sends a message that there is no hierarchy in the group. The second benefit from sitting in a circle is that everybody can see everybody else. Sitting in a circle contributes to a feeling of unity. However you will need tables for meetings because notes will be taken and plans for professional development will be made. In addition, take care that educators are comfortable (avoid sitting on child-sized chairs).

3. ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

As discussed in the previous section, cooperation and establishing trust amongst members is highly important. One of the ways to accomplish this is through seeing ourselves and co-participants in the community as competent, and as people who have something to contribute to the community. Bureau Mutant's instrument, Naming Qualities, from their book *Permanent Learning*, is an excellent way to create a sense that every member is valued and essential to the community's success. It is also a way to get to know our colleagues better and build on individual members' and group's strengths.

Activity: *Naming Qualities*

1. Everyone picks a partner.

2. The first partner speaks for five minutes without interruption about what inspires her/him in her/his work. As the first partner speaks, the second partner is engaging only in active listening, using body language that shows he/she is listening.

3. The second partner says what qualities s/he observed in the first partner as they spoke. These could include, but are not limited to: enthusiasm, determination, caring, carefulness, clarity of expression, organization, curiosity, critical thinking, spontaneity, quickness, creativity, etc. The person who is being described writes these qualities down in their learning journal. These are qualities that they can always use and build upon in their work, and that are valued by others in the group.

4. The partners switch roles and the second partner speaks while the first partner actively listens and then names the qualities they heard that pertain to the speaker.

5. The leader then asks each person to name their qualities and writes these down as qualities that are part of the professional learning community.

A second activity that is an instrument for creating professional learning communities from Bureau Mutant's book, *Permanent Learning* is having members name a professional challenge. As with the previous activity, this also builds a common sense of purpose among community members to help each other find solutions to their individual challenges as the work in the learning community unfolds.

Activity: *Naming a Professional Challenge*

1. Each participant chooses a professional challenge: "My niggle, question, concern, irritation in my daily practice is …", or "What matters to you as you pursue your work (your ideals, dreams, wishes)? What would you like to see realized in your job? I am someone who strives to…".

2. These are shared with the partner that they worked with in the Naming Qualities Activity. Together, they try to formulate a question that answers "How Can I/We *ensure … encourage … stimulate … explore … manage … deal with … change … structure … find balance in my team … build on trust … understand differences of …overcome … fight discrimination against … .*

3. These challenges should be gathered and used by the leader to help guide the members' thinking about their practice when they arise in later meetings. It shows that the practicality of belonging to a professional learning community, since it addresses real problems that practitioners encounter in their work, and helps make connections between learning and its application.

4. AGREEING ON THE RULES OF BEHAVIOUR

Members of the community should feel accepted when expressing opinions, both when they agree and disagree. They should be capable to overcome problems which will surely arise from time to time during the working process of the community. They must respect and listen to each other even if their opinions are very different. All this means that it is necessary to adopt certain rules of communication and behaviour which will allow professional development of each member of the community.

Rules of behaviour are usually discussed at the second meeting, when we are certain who will be the members of the community. It is important to agree on the rules of behaviour at the beginning because teachers probably have different opinions on the ways in which a meeting should be held, or what type of communication should be present between team members.

Rules of behaviour cannot be imposed on the group, but should be designed by the group based on their expectations, values and experiences.

> **Activity:** *Setting the rules of behaviour (30 min)*
>
> 1. Everyone gets six post-it notes and a pencil.
> 2. Ask everyone to think how the members of the learning community should behave in order for their work to be productive; each of the behaviours/ideas should be written on one post-it.
> 3. Let them all stick their post-its on a big sheet of paper or a board.
> 4. Try to group similar behaviours/ideas together.
> 5. After grouping ideas/behaviours, ask participants to create one behavioural rule for each group.
> 6. Write down the rules on a large sheet of paper. For each of the rules, check if everybody agrees. Try to reach a consensus (give teachers enough time to say why it is important for them to adopt a certain rule of behaviour).
> 7. The leader of the community keeps in mind that the rules should contain all areas that will ensure the productive work of the community:
>   - rules which regulate attendance at meetings (i.e. "All members of the team will come on time and stay for the whole meeting", "We will start on time and finish on time");
>   - rules of behaviour which regulate discussions between team members (i.e. "We all participate in discussions", "Everybody will listen carefully while others speak", "When we disagree, we do so with the ideas, not other people");

- rules of behaviour which relate to expectations of the team members (i.e. "All team members will try to contribute to the productivity of the meeting", "All team members will refrain from other tasks during the meeting");

- rules of behaviour which relate to decision-making (i.e. "We will reach decisions by consensus");

- and rules which relate to evaluating the success of teamwork (i.e. "After every two meetings, we will briefly review the rules of behaviour in order to see which ones should be improved and which should be changed".)

Communication rules must be clear for all group members. Once the rules are adopted, all group members should abide by them. At the beginning, it is not always easy, and occasionally it is good to remind educators of the rules of behaviour, and ask members of the community to assess the extent to which the rules are kept, and if some need to be changed.

Another way to do this is to use a pre-written set of rules and to ask the members of the community if they agree with them and how they would seem in actual practice. Rules for Working in Teams could include the following.

- *We respect each other.*
- *We provide recognition and appreciation.*
- *We ensure confidentiality.*
- *We encourage each other.*
- *Everyone has a chance to speak.*
- *We all take our own responsibility.*
- *We try new things.*

(Marschall, 1994; in Keulen, A. van and Barrio Saiz, A. (2010). Permanent leren. Van zelfreflectie naar team reflectie. Amsterdam: SWP)

5. PRESENTING "ISSA'S PRINCIPLES OF QUALITY PEDAGOGY"

One of the tasks of the community leader during the first few meetings is to allow the team members to verbalize their vision of what kind of school they want. This conversation should initiate the exchange of ideas, hearing each other, and creating a common vision or definition of quality pedagogy. During the first meeting, educators should already have realized how much their beliefs differ, as well as the approach to teaching and pupils in general, their hopes for a better system, and readiness for change.

During this meeting, the leaders of the communities can use data which confirm the importance of the quality process. Also, bear in mind that one of the outcomes of presenting *ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy* is to learn the content and structure of the Principles, which will be the starting point for discussing quality during the course of the learning community's entire work. During the presentation of the *ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy*, you may use one out of two proposed activities below.

Activity: *Defining the quality of educators' practice and introducing ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy (60–90 min)*

Step 1

1. Split educators into four groups. Distribute task cards with the following text:

   - 1st card: You are a child at primary school. Write down what represents quality teaching to you, or how a quality educator teaches.

   - 2nd card: You are a representative of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports. Write down what you think quality teaching is, (i.e. what makes a quality educator).

   - 3rd card: You are a parent of a primary school child. Write down what is quality teaching for you. What do think quality educators do?

   - 4th card: You are a group of educators. Write down, from your perspective, what makes quality teaching, and what makes quality educators?

2. Each group reports back. Everything is noted on a flipchart or board. Jointly, features of quality are grouped and titles are given to these groups.

3. The mini-lesson presents the importance of a joint vision (i.e. definition of quality to educators). Present the "ISSA Definition of Quality Pedagogy", explaining only the areas it covers (see the section on Shared Vision).

Step 2

4. Participants are divided according to the seven focus areas of work *ISSA's Principles of Quality Peda*gogy:

   1. Interaction;
   2. Family and community;
   3. Inclusion, diversity and values of democracy;
   4. Assessment and planning;
   5. Teaching strategies;
   6. Teaching environments;
   7. Professional development.

5. Each group writes down (on flipchart paper) what an educator should do in order to be excellent in this area.

6. Explain the structure of the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* and distribute the document to the educators (Annex 1).

7. If you have time, show a short video of classroom activities from the *ISSA Video Library*. Discuss which of the areas of work are most visible on the video and try to determine the indicators visible in the video. In this way, educators will realize that the document, *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy*, is truly applicable in practice. In order to improve personal performance directed towards the realization of the vision, the educators first have to carry out a self-assessment of their work, using the ISSA *Professional Development Tool* that is applicable to the age level they teach, in order to recognize strengths and weaknesses. Based on the self-assessment, personal professional-development goals will be set, which are to be achieved during the realization of the vision.

8. Distribute the individual self-assessment form (Annex 1). All educators (at home or at the meeting, depending on the time available) assess their strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges they face at work.

Activity: My vision of me (30 min)

1. The leader asks the participants to imagine that they are at an award-winning ceremony for educators and that it is happening in the future, ten years from now. Awards are given to educators for their achievements. Each of them is a winner of an award, and their colleagues are talking about them.

2. What do they hope their colleagues would say? The leader asks educators to write a two-minute speech expressing what they hope will be said about them at the ceremony.

3. The leader writes down what the educators might say.

4. "ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy" is presented and participants compare it to what they said they wished to hear about themselves. Differences are commented upon, including a discussion of which criteria are more demanding, theirs or the ones in the document.

6. CHOOSING FOCUS AREAS OF QUALITY PRACTICE FOR ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATORS' PERFORMANCE

Based on experiences introduced in the work of communities, we recommend that:

■ all members of the community work on improving their performance quality in the same Focus Area, according to ISSA educational standards (Interactions, Family and Community, etc.);

■ the learning community works for an entire year on improving performance in one Focus Area, according to *ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy*.

It is important that all educators work on improving the same Focus Areas and Quality Indicators at the same time, as this creates the common energy needed for the realization of the same goal, and the benefits for the children increase. It is important to emphasise, and this will be visible in the following chapters, that educators, although improving quality in the same area, do not plan identical steps for the realisation of their goals. In such a way, the individuality in the work of all the educators is acknowledged, and the educators get an opportunity to realise the diversity in achieving a quality of work in a certain area. If the members of the community do not tackle the same Focus Area and/or Indicators, then some of the materials the leader prepares may not be relevant for achieving their goal, and the leader will be able to satisfy only a few with their choice.

Members of the community sometimes wish to work on improving quality in several Focus Areas. Our experience has shown that this leads to a superficial exploration of areas of quality, and very often leads to tackling those areas or indicators in which educators are already productive, leaving out those which present a challenge or in which educators are less successful. Although the decision to focus on one area only for the entire year (for example "Family and Community") will cause dissatisfaction for some, the interconnectedness of the different areas must be stressed to educators. Regardless of the area that educators choose, they will surely touch all other areas of work, and the enhancement of quality in one area will surely lead to improvements in other areas as well.

> The selection of the Focus Area (*Interactions; Family and Community; Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy; Planning and Assessment; Teaching Strategies;* or *Learning Environment* (the Focus Area *Professional Development* is not an option)) starts in a way that each member of the community shares self-assessment results with other members. Then, similarities and differences are discussed, as well as common interests in professional development. In order to facilitate the process, the following activity can be used.

Activity: *Selecting Focus Areas for improving the quality of educators' performance (20–30 min)*

1. The leader reminds educators of the self-assessment that each of them should have carried out (Annex 1).

2. Each person gets an opportunity to say a few sentences about their self-assessment.

3. Educators get an opportunity to talk about the similarities and differences between them.

4. The leader explains to educators that they should determine a common Focus Area for their community to deal with (*Interactions*; *Family and Community*; *Inclusion, Diversity and Values of Democracy*; *Planning and Assessment*; *Teaching Strategies*; or *Learning Environment*). This should be the area they wish to work on as a community for the entire year. Sometimes it may seem that there is no consensus among members on the focus area. If that happens, a decision can be reached with the help of a plan for professional development from the school, whereby you can identify which areas are defined as a priority. In addition, bear in mind that the areas of work are overlapping (for example, the Focus Areas *Teaching Strategies* and *Planning and Assessment*) and that during the work you will tackle the other area as well. Think also of the materials that you have available for each Focus Area.

5. After the community members have chosen the area, they select the Principles or even Indicators they wish to start working on to improve the quality of their daily practice.

7. DEVELOPING THE INITIAL INDIVIDUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

After agreeing on the modes and place of meeting, and defining the rules of behaviour, an introduction to the *ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy*, identifying the focus area for improving the quality of work of educators, and the development of the first individual professional development plan follows, in which all educators individually identify their competences and needs, strengths and weaknesses, as well as the path of development, in order to contribute to the realization of the common vision of quality teaching.

Writing down the professional development plan at the beginning of the work may be difficult because educators still do not function as a team, do not sufficiently know the area they wish to improve, or because priorities have not been defined. Therefore, it is not necessary to spend a lot of time and energy on the details of the initial plan, because this process should be improved throughout the year. More about this will be mentioned later. While developing the initial individual professional development plan, the following activity can be used.

1. Members of the community receive a hand-out in A3 format, focusing on priorities and actions (see Annex 2).

2. Educators brainstorm responses to the questions.

3. Individually, they write on a sheet of paper what they will do before the next community meeting.

4. Educators fill in the Individual Professional Development Plan form (see Annex 3).

5. Everybody presents their plan. For the initial plan, it is of the utmost importance that the educators plan activities to be carried out in the classroom before the next meeting.

The Structure of Professional Learning Community Meetings

After getting basic information on the community work during the first two or three meetings, members of the community agree where and when they will meet and how frequently. Rules of behaviour are defined, *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* are grasped, and the area of teaching practice they will work on during one school year is defined. **They continue to meet at least once a month.**

Our experience was that initially, the community meetings lasted for one hour, but educators soon extended the duration to an hour and a half because they found the meeting would be more efficient. To conclude, experience in communities has shown that **90–120 minutes should be reserved for each meeting**. It is important that the community meetings are structured so as to avoid the discussion going astray, and to fulfil the purpose of the community, which is the professional development of educators.

The basic goal of the community is the professional development of educators. At the same time, in order to develop professionally, educators should be able to:

- analyse and research issues and materials of interest;

- have an opportunity to link the new with the familiar;

- introduce new activities in their work in order to understand and integrate them better;

- receive mentorship through guidance and explanation;

- observe how their colleagues held a class competently;

- use different resources as a basis for actions they will carry out in their work (Caine & Caine, 2010).

All the activities Caine and Caine mention are incorporated in the structure of the community meetings we propose: warming up; reflecting on performed activities or discussion about a specific challenge; developing a common understanding of the quality; planning next steps; and concluding the meeting. Such a structure allows educators to develop and acquire new knowledge and skills according to the principles of adult learning, while respecting the individual differences which exist between educators. You will notice that the proposed structure of the meeting consists of three previously mentioned elements of community work: cooperation among members; a common vision; and reflection.

It is expected that the outcomes of all meetings will be:

◼ work on creating a sense of unity and strengthening cooperation between educators;

◼ presenting performed activities and reflecting on at least one community member;

◼ creating a common understanding of the quality.

◼ thinking of activities that could be used to improve the quality of work in the selected area of the work of an educator;

◼ revising the educators' individual professional development plans.

Table 1: Structure of the community meeting

Elements of the structure of the community meeting	Activity	Duration
1. Warming-up	Warming-up exercise, creating a sense of unity and strengthening cooperation.	(5–10 min.)
2. Reflecting on performed activities	1. The educator who reports speaks briefly of the activities, impressions, dilemmas and ideas for improvement, etc. (10 min.) 2. Other educators ask questions and seek clarification, offer their ideas for improvement, solutions, etc. (15 min.) 3. The speaker gets an opportunity to say which proposals she/he found useful. (5 min.) 4. Everybody gets a chance to give their opinion (5 min.)	(30–45 min.)
3. Developing a common understanding of quality	Discussion on one quality indicator initiated by an article, text, video, or similar.	(20–25 min.)
4. Planning next steps	Each educator writes his/her own individual professional development plan.	(5–10 min.)
5. Closing the meeting	Closing remarks, conclusions, evaluation.	(5 min.)

1. WARMING UP

The first part of the meeting, warming up, **lasts 5–10 minutes.** These few minutes of the meeting are the key to setting a positive atmosphere and a sense of unity. **The most emphasized element** during warming up is **cooperation**. The purpose of this part of the meeting is to be introduced to the community members, and to develop trust and belonging and emotional connectedness with the members of the community.

These goals in the first 5–10 minutes of the meeting are usually achieved through informal conversation or some prepared activities. If the school has the possibility, it is good to have coffee and tea available. Many educators started to bring their own cakes spontaneously, although this should never become the responsibility or obligation of a single person.

Some examples of warming-up activities are:

Activity: *What's in It for Me?*

Educators walk around the room, shake hands, introduce themselves and tell each other what they expect will be useful for them at this meeting.
In this activity, educators have an opportunity to welcome each other, but also to focus on the expectations of the meeting.

Activity: *Joint sculpture*

Educators in smaller groups create a joint sculpture of different materials that will present the identity of their small group.

1. Everybody shares one of their characteristics.
2. Similarities and differences are identified.
3. Similarities and differences between members of the group become the basis for a sculpture created out of recycled material (newspapers, boxes, etc.).
4. Educators name the sculpture, representing all members of their community.

Activity: *Confessions in Four Corners*

1. The leader prepares signs with different professions (for example, ship captain, doctor, tourist guide, etc.) and puts them in four corners of the room.

2. Then educators are asked to go to the corner with the sign which best describes them as an educator.

3. All the people standing in the same corner explain why they stood there.

4. The leader asks: "Do you have the same and/or different reasons for standing in the same corner?", "Were you surprised by some answers from your colleagues?"

This activity helps educators become aware of their behaviour and how various people interpret the same roles.

Activity: *The Game of Jobs*

1. The leader puts a set of cards with different professions on different tables.

2. Participants go around the tables and collect cards they wish to keep (as many as they want).

3. Then in small groups, educators explain why they chose the cards. The leader asks: "What attracts you to professions you chose?", "Do these professions require some things you are good at?", "Is this profession completely different from yours or are there some similarities?"

An alternative to this activity is that participants are given several cards, and then they exchange cards until everybody finds what they want to keep.

Activity: *The Treasure Box*

Members of the group fill a box or a bag with personal items from their pockets, pencil cases, or bags. They choose the ones which represent them well. Everybody explains why they selected a specific item.

Table 2: Magic Moments

	1. Educator	2. Educator	3. Educator
Magic motivator: "I strongly believe ..." or "I love this topic."			
Magic people: "People who influenced me professionally."			
Magic events: "Experiences which shaped me as a professional."			

2. REFLECTING ON PERFORMED ACTIVITIES

Since each meeting ends with planning the activities, each educator will carry out in their work in order to enhance the quality of teaching, in this part of the meeting one, and sometimes several educators, present how they implemented their plan and which activities they carried out in their classroom. In this part, the educator can present a problem or a dilemma s/he had in the area of work the community is tackling and ask from community members for assistance. This part of the meeting usually lasts approximately 30–35 minutes.

Reflecting on performed activities or working on a problem involves several **steps**:

1. The educator who reports speaks briefly of the activities, impressions, dilemmas and ideas for improvement (10 min).
2. Other educators ask questions, seek clarification and offer their ideas for improvement, problem solutions, etc. (15 min).
3. The educator gets an opportunity to say which proposals she/he found useful (5 min).
4. Everybody has an opportunity to share opinions (5 min).

Step 1:

The educator who reports speaks briefly of the activities, impressions, dilemmas and ideas for improvement, etc.

In ten minutes, one educator presents their professional development plan from last month and what s/he has realized. It is beneficial that during the presentation, the educator also documents what happened in the classroom with photographs, video, anecdote notes, children's works or similar. All these documents are already incorporated in the professional development plan as indicators of progress, and could become part of a professional development portfolio.

The most frequent mistake observed in communities was educators presenting only what they did in the classroom with no reflection or critical overview on the quality. Experience alone is not enough for professional development. Experience needs to be processed. This means that educators, by sharing examples from practice, should speak about what happened during the introduction of new elements in their practice (i.e. how the pupils reacted, how they could adjust to achieve maximum efficiency). It is important that educators reflect and explore new approaches to teaching during the entire meeting. Some simple questions educators could answer during presentations are: *Have I accomplished what I intended? What did I learn? What will I change in my work as a result of this experience?*

It is beneficial to refer to the quality indicators (ISSA's Definition of Quality Pedagogy) after the presentation and find the ones visible in the work presented. Encourage educators to try to recognize the indicators which were not part of the plan, or even the ones visible in another area. Let them argue. In such a way, educators form a comprehensive understanding of quality practice, and not only an understanding of the indicators they are currently working on (for example although the plan related to Teaching Strategies, in this video example, we observed indicators from the area of Interaction).

Step 2:

Other educators ask questions, seek clarifications and offer their ideas for improvement, problem solutions, etc.

When educators present their attempts and activities in the classroom, other educators serve as a corrective, and with their feedback, help the educator/presenter to reflect on high quality practice that could be integrated in their daily work in the classroom. This step emphasizes the constructivist learning of adults. By listening to questions, thoughts and comments on their work, educators construct new thoughts about their profession (re-assessing the teaching process, questioning their beliefs, relationships towards pupils, etc.). After that, they are more likely to choose new paths in realizing different teaching goals.

After the educator presents the work, educators first ask questions for clarification. **Clarification questions** (Caine & Caine, 2010) are simple questions with answers being certain facts known to the respondent. These questions help the presenter towards a better understanding. They should not make the presenter "think".

Examples of some clarification questions are:

- How long did the project last?
- How did you group students?
- Which materials were available for the pupils?
- Did children have a choice?

After the clarification questions, probing questions are asked. **Probing questions** enable the speaker to think deeply about a problem. If the person who was asked a question responds immediately, then it is either a clarification question or an advice. Sometimes the listeners ask a question which seems to be a probing question, but it is in fact a judgment about the work of the educator with a dilemma (for example, when we say "Dear Colleague, don't you think that...")

Probing questions:

- are general;
- are non-judgmental;
- are open (with many possible answers);
- help people solve a problem (instead of imposing solutions from more experienced people);
- do not require a swift answer;
- motivate the person to reflect instead of react;
- provide a perspective from a different angle.

What must we keep in mind when asking questions?

- The person you are asking the question to has the intention of being the best possible in teaching children.
- Your question should assist the person you are addressing.
- Before asking the question, think carefully and then formulate it.
- Check if the question is relevant for the topic you are dealing with, and the problem the person wants to solve.

Examples of some probing questions are:

- What other ways could you use …? What do you think would have happened if …?
- How would it look like when …?
- Did you have similar experiences before?
- Why do you think it happened this way?
- Who can help you in this situation?
- What did you expect?
- Why did you choose to do it that way?

Here are some suggestions on how to formulate a good probing question.

- Check if you are suggesting a particular answer with your question. If yes, reformulate the question or do not ask it.
- Check if your question is relevant for the issue presented.
- Ask yourself if the question is in fact a problem which is bothering you. If it is not, do not ask it.
- Use questions such as: *What are you afraid of? What do you want? What do you suppose? What do you expect?*

After asking the questions, feedback is provided to the presenter on what was heard, as well as suggestions for possible improvements. The presenter should not interrupt the person who gives feedback. It is unnecessary for her to justify her/his presentation or behaviour.

Positive feedback is easy to give or take, but when one wants to emphasize that something should be improved, it becomes much harder to say, and even more difficult to hear. Be considerate when giving feedback: the one who gives it should try to help and not hurt the person. **Feedback is most beneficial when it is clear, relevant and oriented towards action.** Good feedback speaks specifically of certain behaviours and situations. **Feedback should refer to behaviours that can be changed.** Feedback on behaviours which are difficult or impossible to change causes withdrawal and is not beneficial. Vague and unclear speech is also not beneficial. When giving feedback, speak only of the things you have observed. Do not speak of persons who are not present or you do not know personally. **Avoid evaluation.**

Sometimes during giving feedback, educators evaluate the quality of the work of others. As leader, remind educators that the objective of the work of the community is not to say whether something is good or bad, but to search for new and/or better solutions. Therefore, effective feedback avoids evaluations such as: "That was unprofessional/bad/good". If the person explicitly asks for evaluation, emphasize that this is only your opinion.

Step 3:
The educator has the opportunity to say which suggestions s/he finds helpful.

During the previous step, the educator who presented the work had an opportunity to hear the opinions of her/his colleagues, and ask questions which encouraged reflection, but also add new suggestions. After that, s/he has an opportunity to summarize in approximately five minutes her/his understanding of the feedback and share which ideas out of the ones heard are applicable in her/his work.

Some good advice is to give a few moments to the educator-presenter to think of everything that has been heard. This will allow the educators to take a deep breath before giving her/his opinion. This may seem banal, but our body is programmed to react to stressful situations (listening to the suggestions and opinions of our colleagues can be stressful) in the same way as a physical attack (muscles contract, breathing becomes shallow and short). Deep inhaling and exhaling helps the body relax and the brain to focus on substantial issues.

Step 4:
Everybody has an opportunity to share opinions and impressions.

In the end, although seemingly dealing with the practice of one of their colleagues, all of the educators gain information in the process of discussing one case. They, as well as their colleague, have thought about their own practice. Therefore, at the end, the leader should provide several minutes for all the educators to say what they will apply in their practice out of all the things they heard, what they liked, and what made them think.

3. DEVELOPING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF QUALITY

During this part of the meeting, the educators develop a common understanding of quality and thus **the educators' vision of quality is emphasized most.** The aim of this part of the meeting is to help educators develop a vision of high-quality practice of child-centred teaching. This will allow educators to assess where they are in relation to this practice, and also to design a plan for achieving such a level of quality in their classroom.

During each meeting, educators work on developing a better common understanding of one quality indicator, which is part of the focus area they are dealing with that school year. Usually, a new indicator is selected at each meeting. Sometimes, if it is a more complex indicator, the community decides to work on one of them throughout several meetings.

Regardless of what materials you use, the process of developing a common understanding of quality indicators should consist of several steps (Wald & Castleberry, 2000).

Definition: educators exchange opinions on how they understand individual quality indicators, because there is the possibility of an uneven or ambiguous definition of the same term.

Studying: in this phase, educators seek new understanding of terms and identify to what extent and how the specific quality indicator can become (or is) visible in their practice.

Experimenting: in this phase, educators should understand that adult learning is an active process, which applies new ideas and theories. Individual reflection is focused upon (What have I learned? What will I apply?), which becomes the basis for group reflection (What have we as a group learned? What would be good to investigate more?).

It should be said that this part of the meeting, along with creating the professional development plan, is key for the development of the community. On the other hand, this part of the meeting is often the most challenging for educators. Discussing the individual words/terminology used, and the quality indicators, creates tension if the educator realizes that his/her knowledge of certain concepts is not sufficient or that his/her understanding is different than others. Therefore, it is important to tolerate misunderstanding and confusion during these meetings, because it will sometimes occur among members of the community. However, it is also important to avoid a feeling of discomfort during discussions, because it will cause the group to avoid the discussion due to an understanding of a certain term, level of quality, etc. Nobody wishes to attend unproductive meetings. It is important that if the educators are not ready for discussions, the leader understands this, and when planning meetings, takes into consideration the experiences of educators, their levels of professional development and mutual trust.

Several options exist for overcoming possible 'crises' during developing common understanding of quality. First, in order to be able to speak openly about their thoughts, and even to have 'clashing opinions' with their colleagues, educators must feel accepted, emotionally supported, and safe. This means that in the community, cooperation and trust among members must be at a high level. In communities in which cooperation and trust are not established, members will fear expressing their opinions freely. In such communities, more effort should be invested in establishing trust among educators, by designing activities which will teach them successful communication, recognizing the strengths of each educator, knowing each other better, etc.

Second, the educators often expect leaders to 'give' them knowledge, or to explain the indicator/quality and offer a multitude of ideas for working in the classroom, out of which they will apply a maximum of one or two they like. Often this is the case with beginners or educators at the first levels of professional development, or if they feel insecure in their work.

If this is the case, the leader should make compromises at the beginning and prepare materials (texts, video and similar) and activities which clarify parts of theory and/or provide new practical ideas for teaching. It is important that these are the kinds of materials which initiate discussions about the principle/indicator which the community is dealing with. Later on, as the community develops, educators will need fewer stimuli for discussion, or they will be ready to explore a certain topic before the meeting and then discuss it freely.

Leaders can prepare different materials and activities, and use them to plan stimulating discussions on quality indicators.

◼ *Joint reading of articles, chapters from professional literature or research on learning and teaching*

Members of the community read about views on certain concepts and the number of ideas multiplies as these concepts become applicable in the classroom. Based on the reading, educators create new ideas. In ISSA communities, educators have mostly used the handbook for educators as additional literature: *Putting Knowledge into Practice* (Tankersley et. al., 2010). This follows the *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy*. The book explains links between each quality Indicator of the ISSA Quality Principles, along with relevant research and international documents. In addition, examples are provided which illustrate the application of each indicator in practice.

◼ *Short workshops on different strategies which can be implemented in the classroom*

Educators discuss the application of different professional ideas and concepts in the classroom within different structured activities. During the workshop, they practise the presented strategies. Short workshops encourage members of the communities to introduce changes in the classroom. We should bear in mind that learning communities are not seminars, and that workshops should not be held at each meeting, and that the entire meeting should not be transformed into a workshop.

◼ *Very short expert lectures*

Members of the community sometimes decide to invite experts to community meetings who can help them clarify dilemmas they have. For that purpose, video lectures from different experts or scientists can be used. Many video lectures can be found at www.ted.com.

◼ *Collegial observation of the work in the classroom (via video recording or 'live')*

Educators organize collegial observation during teaching or record their teaching practice and show the video to others at the meeting (more on recording and viewing videos will be said later). It is important that during observation and viewing of the video, attention at the meeting is focused on the visibility of the quality indicators. During collegial observation in the classroom, concrete examples of efficient practice are acquired, the observer's repertoire of skills is broadened and analytic thinking is stimulated. It is important to select a person to work with, or exchange observations. The educator who is being observed and needs feedback on her/his

work, should determine the area of work in which feedback is required, for example: *Monitor the kind of questions I pose to pupils. Are these questions about memorizing or do I ask questions which stimulate higher cognitive processes?* The observer can initially be in the classroom for shorter periods of time (15–20 minutes), for instance, only during one activity. Gradually, this time expands as educators begin to feel better about being observed. Getting real feedback from our colleagues can be an unpleasant experience. So the basic principle that should be respected in the process is that the **person who is being recorded or observed keeps control over the situation at all times.** It is also beneficial if colleagues agree in advance on some basic rules for giving feedback, for example. "Everything we say to each other and observe in our classrooms will remain among us".

- *Self-evaluation of the quality of work*

  Educators discuss traditional, educator-oriented practice, and child-centred practice in order to recognize which type of practice they apply in the classroom. During these discussions, educators self-assess the quality of their work and realize that the quality is introduced gradually, but through concrete changes. In the chapter "Phases of professional development", we described in detail some theories on professional development of educators which will be of use to the leaders in designing such activities. Our communities used the handbook, *The Professional Development Tool* (Tankersley et al., 2012) for self-assessment. It contains a series of examples of how each ISSA indicator of quality practice can be visible in practice. These examples are grouped in four categories of educator professional development: "inadequate practice", "good start", "quality practice", and "step forward".

- *Joint exploration of problems, including analyzing data, action research*

  Educators are allowed to plan their professional improvement rationally and systematically at the entire school level, to follow results and make conclusions. The quality of insight and solutions will enhance the level of professionalism.

- *Providing moral support and encouraging educators who face difficulties*

  Educators are allowed to present the problems they encounter in their work and are encouraged not to give up on new practice when they are in a difficult period. Stress levels drop, while the readiness of educators for experimenting with new methods and exchanging ideas rises.

- *Joint reflection on necessary didactic materials and their joint design*

  When reflecting together, members of the community feel safe to ask for assistance and advice without feeling either dominant or less valuable.

The task of the community leader is to plan activities for each meeting which will stimulate discussion on understanding the selected quality indicator they are dealing with. We propose some activities that can be used for this part of the meeting, either individually or combined.

Activity: *Five times – Why?*

This activity helps the community members to contribute their knowledge and beliefs to certain aspects of the teaching practice.

During the activity, educators repeat the question *why* five times. It starts with a quality indicator and then we start asking *why*.

Example:

Indicator 2.2.1 (Focus Area 2, Principle 2.2): *The educator regularly communicates with families about the children, their learning and development, curriculum requirements and events in the classroom.*

Question:

Why should the educator communicate regularly with the families about the children, their learning and development, curriculum requirements and events in the classroom?

Educators may answer:

Because families have the right to be informed of the education and the upbringing of their children.

Question:

Why do families have a right to be informed of the education and upbringing of their children?

Educators may answer: Because they are the primary educators of their children.

Question:

Why is it important for us that they are the primary educators of their children?

Educators may answer:

Because they can share valuable information about what the child has already mastered, which learning experiences the child has already had, etc.

Question:

Why is this information important to us?

Activity: *My Opinion Is ...*

This activity helps members of the community to reflect on a concept, material or an experience.

1. Anyone in the group may start. Everybody says something about a selected topic, idea or experience. The duration is pre-set (usually 1–2 minutes). After the first person finishes talking, the person on the left continues. The time is limited, allowing everybody to participate (the shy ones as well). The ones who are more outspoken are reminded that everybody is equally important in the group.

2. While one person speaks, others listen without interrupting, joking, commenting. When speaking, participants should express only their opinion and/or experience and not comment on what others said.

3. The leader is the time keeper. Participants do not have to use all the time assigned for them to speak (when they finish, they simply say "Go on").

4. If someone says that they have nothing to say on the topic, at the end the leader once again turns to those persons asking if they have something to add.

Activity: *The Process (from Caine & Caine, 2010)*

1. *Introduction to the material:* The leader prepares an article in advance, a chapter from a book or another text. If it is a longer text, members can read it before the meeting. If the text is shorter, they can do it at the meeting. Instead of the text, the leader can choose a video.

2. *Analysis and discussion about the material:* These questions are asked: What is the basic idea of this text? What other ideas/terms come to mind after reading the text?

3. *Supporting personal interest:* The leader asks questions related to members of the community and the text/video; what part of the article was the most interesting for you? In which way was this article connected to problems you encounter in practice?

4. *Sharing personal stories on the material*: The leader asks which experiences of the community members are connected with the topic of the article. The important thing is that the members of the community create the new understanding together.

5. *Presentation and grouping of ideas:* Everybody presents their ideas and posts them on the wall; similar ideas are grouped together.

Activity: *Think – Question– Explore*

This activity works particularly well with indicators containing terms less familiar to the educators.

1. Educators read the indicator they are dealing with.
2. Individually, they reflect and write down the ones which are not clear to them, what confuses them, and about which they would like to know more.
3. Questions and dilemmas are shared in the group.
4. Discussion is started and for the unanswered questions, the discussion may focus on resources that can be used for deepening understanding and finding solutions.

Activity: *Where is our (pre-)school?*

1. A quality indicator is selected.
2. The group discusses how practice which is oriented to the educator instead of to the child looks like in relation to this quality indicator.
3. Discuss with the group: Which one does the practice in our school resemble more? What can we change?
4. Write individual professional development plans.

Activity: *Where am I?*

1. A table with three columns is drawn.
2. On the top of the paper is written the Indicator in focus (within the Focus Area the community is working on).
3. Individually, each member thinks of their personal strengths in that particular Focus Area (1–2 minutes). What is he/she already doing to make this indicator visible in their classroom? Is the indicator visible to others who visit the classroom? How is it visible?
4. Participants express opinions in groups and note their strengths in the second column.

5. Together, they think of the things they do not do in school, but which could be done, and write it down in the third column.

6. In the large group, they think how the practice which is oriented to the educator instead of to the child looks like in relation to this quality indicator. This is recorded in the first column. Individually, all members think about whether there are elements of this traditional practice in their practice.

7. Educators are asked to look at the table once again. The first column describes the educator-oriented practice; and in the second, child-oriented practice implemented in relation to the indicator; and in the third, what could be done.

8. Discussion is led in the group on the changes and activities that could be introduced in their practice in order to enhance it.

Using video in learning communities

To take a peek at other people's classrooms is of great value for every educator, regardless of whether they are experienced or beginners. Video allows us to observe the practice of others through "different eyes". The technical possibilities of repeated viewing and slow motion allow educators to observe their practice in detail. Observing the practice of others allows us to observe our practice with "different eyes" as well, to recall some of our behaviour and think about different approaches to any problems in the future. In such a way, the video also encourages self-reflection, which is a necessary precondition for enhancing quality.

Some of the long-term benefits of looking at videos (Stadler, 2003; Cunningham, 2002; Jensen, 1994; in Wright, 2008) are:

- increased knowledge of educators of the entire educational practice;
- encouraging professional discussions among colleagues;
- better understanding of how pupils learn;
- increased achievement of pupils as a result of encouraging the enhancement of personal practice.

There are both positive and negative repercussions of using video recordings for the purpose of enhancing educator practice. Certain challenges exist as well.

- In teaching practice in general, there is no tradition of reflection. Therefore, watching videos often results in criticizing the practice of others. In addition, we may feel uncomfortable watching ourselves "in action" or presenting our successes without any real intention of making a step forward in enhancing the quality of our work.

- Videos are sometimes too long and tiring to watch. Too many things are presented, which makes it difficult for educators to focus on the one area of work they wish to enhance.

- Watching videos in itself is not enough for reflection and enhancement of practice if educators do not watch with the purpose of reflecting on personal practice (Jay & Johnson, 2002; Jadallah, 1996; Pailiotet, 1995; Brophy, 2004; in Wright, 2008).

In order to focus on the enhancement of personal practice and avoid false interpretations while watching the recordings, we propose the following principles for watching videos.

- *Focus only on a narrow area, instead on the entire teaching practice*

   In this way, we can get a deeper insight into one area of practice and see small segments of our practice in a new light, identify good sides of what we do in these segments of practice, and what we wish to do in order to improve it (McKenna, 1999; De Mulder & Rigsby, 2003; Zeichner & Liston, 1996; in Wright, 2008). If the videos are recorded by one of the educators in the classroom, this means that only one segment of the practice should be selected and presented at the community meeting (for editing videos, free software is available on the internet). For example, **while watching the recording of an educator in action, we focus on the strategies used to develop self-regulation in children.**

- *Focus on the objective, and what is visible and audible on the recording*

   Most practitioners react to the videos by evaluating the work of the observed person (for example, "She uses vocabulary children do not understand"). Remember that (usually) this comprises only a few minutes of recording. As such, the recording does not represent reality, but an interpretation of reality, and each of us will interpret it differently. We should always focus on the objective perception of what is observed, what is visible and audible, or on giving arguments for evaluation. For example, how did the children react? If you think the educator is using words that children do not understand, can you support that with what you saw on the recording?

- *Analyse the recording*

   The analysis includes the confrontation of assumptions, connecting the observed with some theoretical knowledge and assumptions. During the analysis phase or critical thinking, practitioners should think about what they have observed, compare it with their practice, their teaching, their beliefs about teaching, and so on. Questions that can be asked are: What do you think the educator did to develop this level of communication between children? What would you do in this situation? What are some other possible reactions to this situation? What would be justified? How could you achieve the same goal in your practice?

- *After watching the video recordings, concrete actions for enhancement of quality of personal practice should be proposed*

   Each viewing of the video recording, be it our own or of others, should end with the question: Which ideas from the recording or discussion can we apply in our classroom to improve our practice? This is, at the same time, the most important part of working with recordings. We

should bear in mind that the purpose of working with video is not to evaluate educators' work, but to encourage fruitful discussion among educators that will result in ideas for improving the quality of the practice.

Due to discomfort or lack of technique, the majority of our educators still do not have the habit of recording their practice and viewing it with colleagues for joint reflection. Therefore, as a transitional solution, educators can be offered some ready-made recordings of classrooms which they can discuss during meetings. Videos of teaching can be found on webpages like: www.youtube.com, www.teachertube.com, www.tes.co.uk or on the DVD which is part of the guidebook *Putting Knowledge into Practice* (Tankersley et al, 2010).

Using ISSA's Library of Videos on teaching practice is an excellent way to introduce how to use videos in a professional learning community without putting the educators in a fishbowl at the beginning of the process. The guided observation of specific aspects in the video and the supporting questions in the videos enhance educators' discussions and reflections in the group.

Also, it is anticipated that watching videotapes of other educators' work in the classroom stimulates a lot of educators to record themselves in order to self-evaluate and enhance their practice. Such initiatives should be strongly supported because all experts agree that recording our practice brings many advantages:

- facilitating self-evaluation of our work;
- increasing the awareness of educators about their strengths and areas of work they wish to enhance;
- allowing educators to reconsider their decisions made during teaching;
- encouraging educators to think about their beliefs on teaching;
- encouraging the professional development of educators.

In the same way as when viewing videos of others, we need a certain structure and organization while viewing recordings of our own work. If the educator who was recorded views her/his recording, s/he may ask the following questions.

- How do the things I see on the recording differ from my perception of my work in the classroom? What strikes me most in the video?
- What are the consequences of certain elements of my work? What would I change? Why? What would have happened if I had reacted differently?
- How should I act next time? What will I change in my future work based on this reflection?

Experiences of using video in team professional development show that before commenting on recordings, it is important to work on the trust in the group and find ways to reflect together. Therefore, it is beneficial to set some rules for giving feedback (for example "All that was said will stay among us"). After viewing the video of one of the community members, it is good to ask and stick to questions for clarification.

Experiences of educators and studies confirm that viewing one's own videos or others', in general, stimulates reflection and the improvement of educational practice. It allows us to identify what is useful and what is less effective in teaching, our strengths and weaknesses, and areas we wish to change in our work with children. Videos can motivate educators to change established beliefs, to develop new ideas, to focus on key elements of teaching, provide examples of teaching and ideas for working. They help them think as experts. In brief, the aim of using video for improving quality of educators' performance is to explore, to study and discover new options for teaching, and not to evaluate it.

Children, their parents, and any other adults who are in the video recording must be informed of the purpose of filming and **parents and other adults must grant their approval** before any filming takes place. We should bear in mind that the most of the children will need some time to "forget" the camera and start behaving as usual. No one (the educator, children, or parents) should be put in a situation, while watching the videos, where they could be ashamed of their actions, and the educator who was recorded holds the right to comment first. Responsibility for using video is taken by the ones who are recording it and the ones commenting on someone's educational practice.

4. PLANNING NEXT STEPS

Teaching, as with any other skill, requires continuous practice and improvement. Therefore, educators, in order to develop professionally, should try out in the classroom what they have discussed at the meeting. Only through personal experience is it possible to find the ways of improving quality of personal practice. One can read a lot about Microsoft Office or about another software package, but without the courage to use it, you will never be able to say that you are a competent user.

This part of the meeting is intended for planning which ideas out of all of those discussed will be applied in practice. The task of each member is to fill in the Professional Development Plan at the end of each meeting (see Annex 3) and to describe what s/he plans to achieve or change in their practice until the next meeting (related to this area, indicators and materials they worked on), which activities will be carried out, resources needed and who can help them. Since educators are at different stages of professional development, each of them designs activities they think are applicable to their practice.
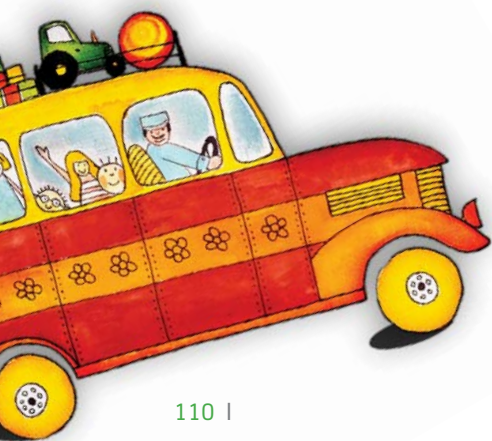
Table 3: Professional development plan

The aim (What do I intend to achieve? What will I change in my practice?)	Activities I will carry out (What will I do? Which steps will I take and when?)	Resources (Which form of support do I need? Who can assist me and how?)	Indicators (How will I know if I was successful? What, concretely, will I expect to change?)

Planning is one of the components of the educational work, but is often seen as a "technicality" and educators do not reflect on their plans once they have created them. In contrast, each community meeting discusses how they applied the planned activities in practice (see the Section "Reflecting on performed activities"). In addition, plans created in the community are not general; instead, educators focus on a very narrow segment of their practice in which they plan to introduce "small" changes (for example, What will I do in the following period to make it possible for children to express their thoughts and participate in decision-making?).

Sometimes, before writing the plan, educators think first about which level of quality a specific indicator becomes visible in the practice of the entire pre-school/school (see the Activity "Where Is Our Pre/school" in the Section *Planning Next Steps*) and this is then used as a motivator factor for writing individual plans. For example, all educators fill in the following table together.

Table 4: (Pre-)school development plan

INDICATOR				
What do we do in our (pre-) school? At which level of quality are we?	What ideas did we get? What else could we do?	Where could we get more ideas? What can help us understand?	What actions will we take?	Who?

The community may decide that the same change/activity will be introduced in all classrooms, or that each member will introduce a different change/activity.

Some educators may disagree with writing Professional Development Plans because they may think that it is just another bureaucratic requirement. Educators often hear good ideas they wish to implement, but not the goals they wish to achieve by implementing them, or how to know when

the goal was reached. Difficulties occur, especially during writing the indicators for the realization of the plan, or how the planned intervention had really made an impact on the children. On the other hand, it is the continuous checking of the impact of teaching which makes educators be the ones to control the impact they have had on children in their classroom.

Writing Individual Professional Development Plans guarantees that educators will systematically and rationally introduce changes in their practice, and that the consequences of these changes will be considered not only at the meeting (practice reflection), but also, while introducing the changes (reflection during practice).

Writing the plan takes little time (5 minutes), and our experience has shown that in the communities where educators consistently wrote plans, it functions very well. The educators felt they gained more from participating in the work of a learning community. As one educator described it: "When we speak informally, this conversation is simply gone with the wind. But when I write a plan, I feel obligated to implement it in practice. I feel obligated in front of my colleagues, and myself."

It is expected that educators, instead of starting with planning classroom activities, start with planning aims they wish to accomplish (for example, *I wish to incorporate my knowledge on families and the local community in the curriculum and the children's experience*. Indicator 2.3.3). In order to facilitate the writing of plans at the beginning, we can use the following activity.

Activity: *If, Then* (first part)

1. First, everybody asks themselves a question: If in my classroom … (Indicator), in which ways should I change my work? For example, if in my classroom I used strategies which support independence and initiative in children (see Indicator 5.2.2), how should I change my work?

2. Each educator writes several ideas on a post-it for their professional development.

3. Then everybody presents their own ideas and posts them on the wall, grouping them by similarity. During that process, several topics/groups will stand out.

4. Everybody will then choose one of the ideas which make most sense for them and which are most important for the quality indicator to become visible in practice.

5. Ideas are recorded under "activities" in the Professional Development Plan (Annex 3).

6. The Professional Development Plan is filled in.

Activity: *If, Then* (second part)

1. Sometimes, it makes more sense to start with indicators of success; then we can ask ourselves: While in the classroom … (Indicator), what can we notice? For example, when we encourage children to be independent and take initiative in the classroom (Indicator 5.2.2), what can be observed in the classroom?

2. The response to the question is recorded under "Indicators" in the Professional Development Plan (Annex 3).

3. We think about what is necessary to do to notice such indicators in the classroom and we put this under "activities".

4. The Professional Development Plan is filled in.

When planning the goals and the activities used to achieve the goals, attention should be focused on what the educator does, and not the children (for example, "I will create a possibility for the children to make the experiment independently by providing detailed instructions on the steps they have to make", instead of "The children will carry out the experiment independently"). In addition, we use the logic of creating SMART goals as described in the section on evocative mentoring.

Table 5: Example of part of a Professional Development Plan

GOAL	ACTIVITIES	INDICATORS
Using procedures which will motivate children to cooperate purposefully and support each other (Indicator 5.4.1)	◩ Organizing cooperative activities (at least four times a week) and delegating roles during the cooperative work. ◩ Introducing strategies for evaluating the contribution of individual members to group work. ◩ With the children, setting the criteria for "cooperative behaviour".	◩ Educators are interested in working (photographs). ◩ Example of pupil's self-evaluation and evaluation from other pupils. ◩ Pupils recognize behaviours that contribute to or weaken joint work.

Another mistake which often occurs in professional development plans is that educators create plans which are not necessarily challenging for them because they already use everything they planned in the classroom. Or they develop plans which, because of their level of professional development, simply cannot be realized in practice. How should we design a plan which is sufficiently challenging and yet is not too demanding?

In order to do that, educators should think about their comfort zone, risk zone and danger zones are located. **The comfort zone** usually consists of those tasks and/or places which do not present a challenge because we feel safe in them, work without tension, and can control the situation even if something does not go as planned. **The risk zone is the best place for learning**. This is the area in which a person does not feel very competent and relaxed, but is prepared to take a risk because of wanting to learn something new or to become better. This is an area in which people openly disclose to others, ask for opinions and ideas and consider them honestly. Some call it relaxed alertness—this is an area in which a mixture of low threat of failure or rejection and high challenge coexist. It is not recommended, in general, to work in the **danger zone**. In that zone, people feel high anxiety and stress and may wish to run away from the situation. They are wasting a lot of energy on something that exceeds their competences. Therefore, when we find ourselves in that zone, we should think about how to move into the risk zone (Caine & Caine, 2010).

The purpose of development is that each member of the community commits to trying something new in their practice, based on the discussion of new material or based on personal reflection or the reflection of their colleagues.

1. **Warming up**
   – Perform greetings in a circle by finishing the sentence "This week I can commend myself because … (2 min.)
   – Mini-lesson "Questions for clarification and questions for questioning" (10 min)

2. **Reflection on activities carried out in accordance with the indicator 5.1.2. "The educator offers the activity which support research, experimenting, independent exploration and creativity."**
   – All educators briefly report (up to 3 min.) on if and how they carried out their Professional Development Plan.
   – Educator M. D.[3] reports (10 min) on activities she carried out in her classroom.
   – Other educators ask for clarifications and M. D. responds (10 min.)
   – Educators ask questions for questioning, and M. D. responds (10 min.)
   – Educators give suggestions and additional ideas for the activities. (10 min.)

   ....
   3.   Fictitious name of an educator.

3. **Developing a common understanding of quality**

    Educators discuss the difference between indicators they worked on in the past month and the Indicator 5.1.3: "The educator uses strategies supporting cognitive processes and problem solving" (5 min.)

    –   Watching the *Science* video (5 min.)

    –   Discussion on activities which stimulate higher cognitive processes in children. Recommendation of literature that can help us (15 min.)

4. **Planning next steps**

    Each educator writes her Professional Development Plan. (5–10 min.)

5. **Closing the meeting**

    Closing remarks, conclusions and evaluation of the meeting (5 min.)

5. CLOSING THE MEETING

At the end of the meeting, the leader asks community members to evaluate the process of the meeting. If there is time, educators can briefly share what they found to be most useful at the meeting, what they learned and what they would wish to explore further. It is important not to rush them, because then the impression will be given that the leader is not interested in their opinion.

The leader should distribute evaluation sheets to be filled in (see Annex 4), providing them with an opportunity to evaluate the productivity of the meeting, orientation to teaching, leading of the meeting and communication amongst educators, and to give suggestions for improving the meetings.

Wellman (1999, in Jolly, 2008) suggests that community members should always be motivated to question things, "What is my role in this team?" and "What role should I have?". This is why it is important that the leader understands, but also clearly conveys to the members of the community, that evaluation is not a score given to the leader, but an opportunity for critical reflection on the quality of the meeting and how it can be improved.

The learning community is not created by the leader according to a set of strategies agreed upon in advance, procedures or instructions (although it is good that the leader is trained for leading learning communities), but by all its members with their activity during the meeting and evaluation at the end. For this reason, it is wise to ask the members what they think successful communities look like, and what they do.

> In some schools, communities have displayed their posters in educator rooms or areas where educators meet more often, reminding them of the activities they dealt with; posting photographs, lists of ideas developed during meetings, lists of literature, etc. These displays draw the attention not only of the community members, but of all educators, making the community useful and influencing the quality of work of all educators.

In addition, the leader at the beginning of each meeting should refer to the evaluation of the previous meeting. S/he should be very brief and specific. The evaluation should not be commented upon and advice should not be given; this should be left to the team members. If the evaluations mention specific people, it is better to reformulate that part and speak of activities and behaviours. Also, the good sides mentioned in the evaluations should be recognised.

If the evaluation is excellent, which often happens because the educators who are members of the community appreciate the effort leaders invest in preparing and leading the community, the leader may comment how s/he evaluated the meeting and what are her/his expectations, in order to prompt the members of the community to be constructively critical the next time they evaluate the work of the community.

Using the WANDA Method within Professional Learning Communities

WANDA is another format for working with practitioners that can be used in structuring professional learning community activities. It builds on appreciative inquiry.

THE VALUE OF THE WANDA METHOD[4] IN PLC[5]

The complexity of our society and its constant transformations need a workforce that is capable of dealing with differences and commonalities between people by valorising them (DECET & ISSA, 2011). Therefore, in order to reach quality in the education system, we need practitioners/educators that are able to negotiate, to deal with uncertainty, to reflect on the meanings of what they think and do (Schön, 1983), to question themselves and constantly find the balance between *agreement* and *disagreement* in the group.

The international debate about quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) field is rich, and it underlines how quality should be seen as an *on-going contextualized process* carried

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4. For more information about Wanda: http://projecten.arteveldehogeschool.be/en/wanda.
5. Some parts of this text are based on an existing article (*WA = WANDA? Hoe waarderende praktijkanalyse een meerwaarde is voor kinderopvang*) published in *Dutch in the Journal of Welfare Studies* (Tijdschrift voor Welzijnswerk, jg. 36, nr. 328, December 2012), and written by Katrien Van Laere (VBJK, Centre for Innovation in the Early Years), Vicky Cauwels (Artevelde University College), Karolien Frederick (Artevelde University College) and Brecht De Schepper (Artevelde University College).

out through negotiation. As pointed out by CoRe research (Urban, et al., 2011), ECEC quality is strongly related to a professional, competent workforce, which takes shape in a competent system that links staff's initial good educational practices to the possibility of reflecting on ideas and practices. Although there is a consensus about the importance of reflection in ECEC, how to concretely realize this reflection on daily practices is often less clear.

In such a context, group reflecting methods, like WANDA, can play an important role when they bring together low- and high-qualified practitioners/educators and assistants in order to build a Professional Learning Community where staff become able to think about its questions before reaching contextualized answers and/or actions (Peeters, 2008; Bove, 2009).

Through critical reflection on practices, staff can develop new learning practices that meet the needs of a specific social context (Children in Europe, 2012; DECET & ISSA, 2011) and support an appreciative analysis with respect towards children, parents, colleagues, the community.

WHAT IS WANDA? ROOTS AND NEW ROADS

In 2010, Artevelde University College[6] and VBJK[7] (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years) started a trans-national ESF (European Social Fund) project to develop a new method for the childcare sector in the Flemish Community of Belgium.[8] The method, called WANDA (which stands in Dutch for Appreciate, Analyse and Deeds), has been created for educators, practitioners and students and developed in the childcare sector (0–3 years old), but it can be used also with groups that work with older children, with kindergartens and schools, and in any working and learning context that works with children and families.

The WANDA method is the result of an intensive study trajectory in which 12 organizations in the ECEC sector and seven training institutes were involved. The roots of this method are based on two approaches: *Analyse de Pratiques* and Appreciative Inquiry[9] which have been adapted to the Flemish context, where by the WANDA method, we mean an appreciative analysis of practices.

6. For more information about the Artevelde University College: www.arteveldehogeschool.be/en

7. For more information about the VBJK Centre: www.vbjk.be

8. Belgium consists of three Regional Governments (French, Flemish and German-speaking communities) who are each responsible for childcare (birth to three years of age), which is under the Ministry of Welfare, and kindergarten (2, 5-6 years of age), which is under the Ministry of Education. As with most European countries, Belgium has a split system, which means that different qualifications are required of the staff working in these two sectors, different salaries are given, and in general the concepts of *care* and *education* seem to be divided. In this article, we address a project located in the Flemish community of Belgium and referred to the childcare sector (Oberhuemer, 2005; Vandenbroeck, et al., 2009).

9. *Analyse de pratiques* (analysis of practices) originated in the 1960s in France from Michael Balint. This English-Hungarian psychoanalyst analysed doctors and their practices, since a disease is not always simply cured by a proposed treatment. They focused on the underlying question of the patient behind the symptom. This way of working later found its way into the broader social sector and came to be utilized from a systemic perspective. In France, many professionals (affiliated groups, students groups, etc.) work in child care and other social fields with *Analyse de pratiques*, which is also used within the training course for *Éducateur de jeunes enfants* (training "educators of young children") to support students in reflection and connection between theory and practice (Favre, 2004). *Analyse de Pratiques* is strongly inspired by the solid knowledge and experience of Ecole Sante Social Sud-Est (SSSE) from Lyon, France. Appreciative Inquiry was developed in the mid-80s in the US by David Cooperrider and Srivasva. They found that the focus on successful experiences yields more and leads more quickly to effective changes than problem-oriented strategies. Literally, 'Appreciative Inquiry' means appreciatory investigating and it's based on the strength that is inherent in people and organizations (Cooperrider, 2003).

In 2013, Artevelde University College, VBJK and ISSA started a two-year project called "When WANDA Meets ISSA",[10] funded by the European Social Fund and realized in collaboration with four ISSA Full Members[11] in four countries within the ISSA network (Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Czech Republic). The aim of the project is to adapt and use WANDA in order to support ISSA members in their work for quality improvement of the ECEC services in their countries through meaningful professional development opportunities for professionals and para-professionals working in ECEC services for children from birth to 10 years of age.

WANDA IN PRACTICE: BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD
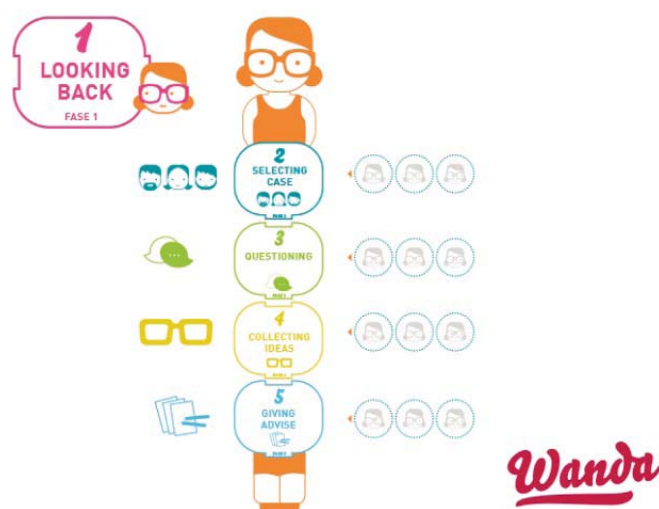
"A child doesn't want to eat at school."

"A father thanks a teacher all of a sudden."

"A child has been 'excluded' by his peers in the classroom."

"An educator sees that a mother reacts in an 'angry' manner when her child gets low points for his homework."

There are numerous such moments when we do not know how to respond to what is happening. When such situations arise, we often tend to instantly come up with a solution or a conclusion. In this way, we develop all kinds of standard procedures. What do we do in situation A? How do we react in situation B? Nonetheless, we do not always have the right 'answers' to hand. For example, in the case where a child doesn't want to eat at school, we can consult our colleagues, we can find an article about food and children, or follow a training course about it. Although this research certainly makes sense, this kind of input is not always sufficient. That is because all our experiences

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10. For more information about the project When Wanda meets ISSA: http://projecten.arteveldehogeschool.be/en/wanda/node/39

11. Step by Step Czech Republic, Open Academy Step by Step – Croatia, Partners Hungary Foundation – Hungary, Educational Research Institute – Center for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step – Slovenia

take place in a specific context: a specific place, at a particular time, with certain parties who have their own history together. Consequently, we do not simply have a 'recipe book' that will support us in 'tackling' a situation. We can choose to let a situation like this simply pass and hope that it improves. Or, we can see the opportunity that lies within it: how can we turn such a situation into a learning moment, in order to improve quality for children and families, and to acquire new insights for growth as professionals and as an organization?

Group reflection is a good answer to this kind of question. It can be realized in many ways and the WANDA method is one of them.

WANDA can be organized within a team of practitioners/educators that work together, or by creating a group of people that work in different institutions, have the same role or function, and want to reflect on their practices. It's important to have quite a regular and stable group, in order to focus on the process, more than on fragmented meetings.

Each group gets together around once every four or six weeks to participate in a WANDA session, which takes one and a half to two hours and is guided by what is called a "facilitator" (which can be a pedagogical coordinator, a supervisor, a mentor, etc.).

> During a supervision moment within the "When WANDA Meets ISSA" project, one facilitator says that two teams would like to do WANDA together to share the experience, but the "united" group will be 20 people. The group will also not be stable, since for each session people will be asked to choose to participate or not. The facilitator has doubts about this situation. Through the supervision, the idea comes up that 20 people might be too many to have a good exchange amongst participants and to also reach the ones that talk less, etc. Also the feeling of being "safe" in a group is better reached in a smaller group. The fact that the group is not stable can also interfere with the meta-goal of WANDA. WANDA is not just about discussing different cases each time. It is about creating a path in which the group grows and feels safer and safer. The suggestion comes up that maybe it's better to keep the two groups separate, and then the facilitators of each group can meet once in a while to share their experiences (the "sharing part" has to be then in the agreements of both groups).

Each WANDA session goes through five different phases:

Phase 1: Looking Back

Once the WANDA path is started, each session will begin by looking back to the last meeting. The facilitator will ask the contributor of the previous case what happened, referring to the discussed case and to the advice given by the group. In this way, the link between the sessions is always kept, and the meetings are not fragmented but always related to each other.

Phase 2: Selecting a Case

After looking back, each participant can bring a case, a situation that touched or surprised him/her in a positive or negative way, something that left questions in his/her mind. The situation is described in a concrete way by the participant without interpretations. The person who brings the case is the "owner of the case"; he/she has to be involved in it. He/she cannot bring a case heard from someone else. After listening to all the cases, the group decides which one will be the subject of the WANDA session. In this way, we emphasize that the group is responsible for the session and of its own learning path. The person who selects the case is the "contributor".

> A mother comes with her son into the class and sees Jason standing there. Suddenly she turns around and walks out. After 15 minutes, the mother comes in again to bring her child to the group. Jason wants to initiate a conversation with the mother, but the situation overwhelms him so that he can't. Jason feels uncomfortable and does not dare to speak with colleagues about this. In the coming weeks, this moment keeps going through his mind. At the next WANDA meeting, Jason presents his case and the group chose it for the session.

Phase 3: Asking Questions

With support from the facilitator, once the case has been decided, the group asks openly non-interpretative questions in order to clarify the context. It can be compared to a theatrical performance. More is done than simply examining the interaction between a few key players under the spotlight. An effort is made to map out the whole theatre scene to obtain more insight into what exactly is happening. This is a phase that proportionally requires more time. The more contextualized a situation becomes, the more the group can search for possible meanings and, ultimately, develop possible actions. At the end of this phase, the facilitator asks the contributor what he/she would consider to be a desired situation (the learning question). Sometimes, by asking questions and contextualizing the situation, the contributor's point of view of the case changes.

> Jason's colleagues ask him a great many questions about what exactly happened, who was there and what he thought and felt at the time. Jason talks about his experience and often speaks in terms such as, "because I'm a male employee, the mother was startled and left immediately". At the end of this phase, the facilitator sounds Jason out about what he hopes to achieve. He indicates that he wants to feel more comfortable when communicating with parents in similar situations.

Phase 4: Collecting Ideas (or Perspectives)

At this point, the situation is analyzed from different perspectives giving voice to all the people involved and to what they could think, want, and feel. The case is explored through different lenses (that of the child, the parents, society, ISSA quality Principles, etc.).

Theoretical knowledge can also be called upon, and the link between theory and practice becomes clearer. In order to formulate hypotheses, several theories and knowledge sources are revealed. By knowledge sources, we mean the knowledge you get primarily from the children in the group, the parents, yourself as a practitioner/teacher, the mission of the organization/school, local society and legislation. In the second instance, an appeal can be made to social, educational and pedagogical theories (e.g. children's rights, the theory of well-being and involvement by Laevers, the theory of social vulnerability, Malaguzzi's image of the rich child, ISSA's Principles of Quality Pedagogy and the Quality Resource Pack etc.). Based on this, various hypotheses are gathered for all those involved. What significance could this situation have for all of them? What could the various parties possibly be thinking, feeling, and wanting? The basis of an appreciative approach is the belief that a positive intent is hiding behind behaviours and that everyone is taken into account with respect. By bringing in the perspectives of the other involved parties, the tenor of the case becomes very different.

Jason has the impression that parents are not comfortable with him as a male worker. During the discussion, the group focuses on what parents do appreciate greatly in Jason. If examined from the perspective of the mother, one wonders whether or not she was equally surprised. Jason takes on a butterfly function in the groups. Could it be that the mother was not comfortable with leaving her child with someone she didn't know? The mother is of Moroccan origin. Perhaps the norms and values of her home culture play a role here as well? Moreover, she only speaks and understands French. Jason was not aware of this. From the perspective of the organization, the question is whether enough attention is given when new practitioners/teachers come to work in the group. Furthermore, the question is asked whether the organization and the local government are clear enough in their mission, which is that the team should be a reflection of society and therefore, that male employees are also important for the children and the team.

In order to discuss the case on its merits, the team uses the ISSA and the DECET principles on diversity in childcare. These principles offer an ethical framework for developing the practice with respect for everyone's identity. Some colleagues discover for the first time that these principles also appear in the mission of the organization.

Phase 5: Giving Advice

Starting from what has arisen from the session up to this point, the group thinks of possible advice for the contributor, but also for the team and for the organization. Some reflections can also involve advice for society as a whole. It is important to underline that it is not about finding "the" solution, but about suggesting "possible roads". The contributor is never obliged to use this advice. He/she will decide for him/herself what to do with them.

Jason's colleagues formulate various advices for him. For example, one colleague suggests always presenting himself clearly to the parents. "Good morning, I am Jason, your child's teacher". With that simple sentence, you can avoid a lot of uncomfortable contacts and ambiguity. Since male teachers are in the minority in this sector, most parents would expect that Jason was a father, and not a teacher. One colleague suggests that Jason could organize an activity with the mother and her child so that the parents could see him in action and their confidence in him could grow. The colleagues emphasize their own appreciation for Jason. From their views on diversity in education, Jason plays an important role for young children. At the level of the organization, the reception policy for new employees will be reconsidered. How can trusted colleagues build a bridge between parents and new colleagues? They will make sure that the diversity of the team (gender, ethnic-cultural, age …) will be more clearly reflected in the documentation material of the organization. The team feels that this is also a focus for the local board of directors and the local government. One should better communicate the added value of diversity in the staff to all citizens. At the social level, the participants emphasize that the ECEC sector and the government should work to improve the perception of what ECEC actually is. It is indeed more than simple care, since care is often solely associated with female workers; it is about bringing up and socializing children in a diverse society.

An important role in the whole WANDA session is played by the "learning question", which represents what the contributor wants to learn from the group during the session, what is it that moves him/her in the case, and towards which direction should the support be oriented. At the end of the questioning phase, the facilitator supports the contributor in making clear his/her learning question, by underlying that the learning question cannot be about "changing the others" (e.g. "I want the mother to behave differently"), it has to be about changing our perspective on the situation (e.g. "I want to have better communication with this mother").

THE ROLE OF THE WANDA FACILITATOR

Although each meeting will deal with one specific situation, it's important to know that this method is "process oriented", which means that the meaning of it cannot be revealed in one or two sessions, nor in sessions that are too far one from each other. Each session is related to the others, and individuals and groups will grow during the process. That is why it is important to create a "path", during which several WANDA sessions can take place with the same group of people.

> During the supervision moment within the "When WANDA Meets ISSA" project, one facilitator said: "during the 'looking-back phase' I was surprised that one of the participants reported that she solved her case (which was not picked up in the previous session) after our WANDA meeting. So, a short presentation of her case and then a discussion about another case supported her in what she might want to do".

The real meaning of WANDA is to go beyond the WANDA session itself and to support people in developing a reflective attitude within their daily practices.

It then becomes evident that the role of the facilitator is crucial. He/she creates a climate of dialogue and participation. By this, we do not simply mean a place where we exchange some ideas and experiences, but a democratic place where we question assumptions, where relationships are placed in the foreground and knowledge of situations can be disputed. In order to do this, you must have, as they say in France, an atmosphere of *libre parole*, of freedom of expression: to speak, be silent, think. etc. (Favre, 2004). In services, in France in particular, external psychologists (psychoanalytically or system theoretically-oriented) take on the role of facilitators. The coordinator of the team or the director of the ECEC centre is often not present at these sessions. In the Flemish project, we have worked, on the one hand, with external facilitators, and here the coordinators are indeed present and participate along with the facilitators. On the other hand, coordinators/directors themselves have assumed the role of facilitators.

In the *When WANDA Meets ISSA* Project, different solutions have been adopted according to the different contexts. The 'free space' differs depending on the choices that are made. In all situations, it is good to reflect on the conditions that allow the participants to express themselves freely and openly. The rules can be written down by the facilitator and recalled at the beginning of each session, keeping in mind that working on trust and security is an ongoing process, and not a final stage. It is not simply just because a group determines some rules at the beginning that someone is in a 'safe' group after some sessions. It is a shared concern, and this will occasionally create a situation where the facilitator is faced with dilemmas: how can I create a stimulating and informal learning space while I am in some cases (outside the WANDA sessions) also supposed to evaluate the practitioners/educators?

> During the supervision moment within the "When WANDA Meets ISSA" project, one facilitator said: "At a certain moment I had a delicate moment with the contributor. At that point the principal came in the room to sign something. I asked her/him to postpone the moment saying that it was not the right moment. After the session I said to the group that I had the feeling that it was a delicate moment that couldn't be interrupted. And then I went to principal to explain the same. The principal said that she/he understood very well. The group felt "protected" and respected. I think that in this way mutual trust can be slowly created".

Since this field of tension between support and evaluation is not fixable as such, the facilitators search together for a contextualised approach instead of employing unequivocal principles. By bringing the facilitators together into a critical learning group, they also learn from each other how to facilitate the analysis on practices and they experience what this can mean for their own participants. As such, they take part in a meta-analysis of practices.

For instance, in the *When WANDA Meets ISSA* project, online supervision moments are organized on a regular basis. During these moments, the WANDA team from Belgium meets the facilitators that are experimenting WANDA in the four countries involved. Facilitators can share experiences and ideas, critical points and good practices. They can learn from each other and feel supported by a network.

WHAT WANDA IS NOT

During these sessions, a second important field of tension was also dealt with. To what extent can analysis of practices create therapeutic effects for the participants? By using various glasses, participants are confronted with their own visions, ways of cooperating, etc. Sometimes, the participants' own personal stories arise. In WANDA, we try to use utmost care in dealing with this, especially if you are both a facilitator and a coordinator/director. Appreciative analysis on practices is not group therapy, it is not about healing, it is about learning together; it builds a professional learning community, as mentioned in previous sections. The emphasis lies in the fact that people feel supported and grow in their role as professionals. In this way, the organization can change along with them. In contrast, group therapy sessions would focus more on personal change. This does not mean that these personal changes could not take place due to the WANDA sessions, but they are more of an indirect result. The situations and their context are the central focus of attention (Favre, 2004).

HOW TO USE WANDA FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

The ultimate goal of organizing WANDA sessions is that the quality of the services/schools is increased for each child, his/her family and the neighbourhood. We emphasise that the one cannot be required to follow the advice given. The advice can be at the individual, group and organization level. Suggestions for the organization (but sometimes also for the government and for the wider society) are recorded by the coordinators/directors. Appreciative analysis of practices thus becomes a driving force in the quality policy. Through these thinking exercises, it is not only the participants who learn, but also the coordinator.

This method can be strongly connected to the implementation of the ISSA Quality
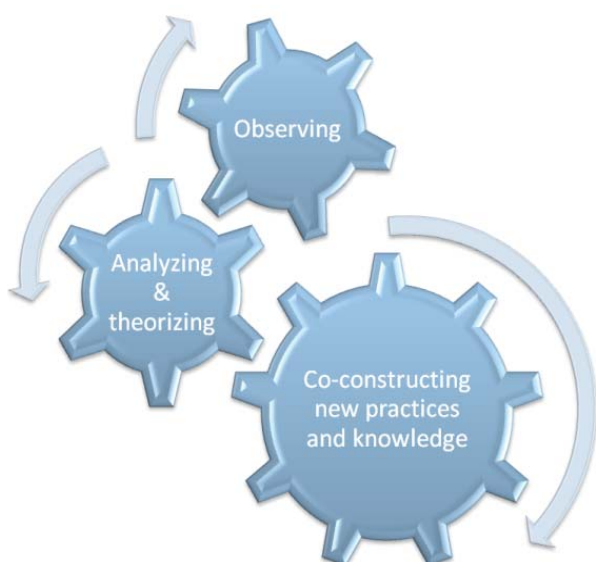
Resources in several ways, especially because the ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy, with the seven Focus Areas specifically refer to some of the key principles of WANDA.

Through the *When WANDA Meets ISSA* project, the ISSA Full Members from Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia and the professionals in the ECEC services are developing new roads to link WANDA to the QRP, with the aim of linking the quality principles to the daily life of practitioners and teachers, within a bottom-up approach in which quality is discussed and improved based on real-life situations.

More specifically, some of the options for using the WANDA method in using the QRP are as follows.

1. *Situational*: during the "collecting ideas phase" the ISSA Quality Principles can be used as one of the glasses. Or, during the "advice phase", they can be used as one of the Focus Areas in which advice can be given.

2. *'Evaluating'* WANDA sessions with the ISSA Quality Principles: after a number of sessions, the group looks at the cases discussed through the ISSA Quality Principles lens.

3. *Thematic*: the facilitator asks to the group to find cases related to one of the Focus Areas of the ISSA Quality Principles for the next WANDA session. In this case, the facilitator has to be aware of the fact that suggesting a Focus Area can be already an orientation for the group, while WANDA promotes experiences that the group itself finds important. But the ISSA Quality Principles are very broad, so they can easily suggest a theme without hinting towards particular answers. On the contrary, if the facilitator is aware of it, this can become an occasion to reflect on the principles and co-construct new knowledge.

The WANDA path leads to the appreciation of the work (of one's own work and of colleagues), but it also increases the empathy of the teachers (for children, parents, colleagues, and community).

> During a supervision moment within the "When WANDA Meets ISSA" project, one facilitator said: "I was surprised that the contributor of the previous case did so much and came on our next session with such a pride and self-esteem".

Situations that take place "here and now" are connected with a long-term quality policy. How do we look at our work? What do we stand for? What drives us?

The adjustment of the practice and the mission on the basis of appreciative analysis of practices is a process that never ends. Policy and facilities are committed to ensuring that staff is invited to continually question, enrich and innovate its educational or socio-pedagogical practices. WANDA can support this process of creating a negotiated idea of high quality in each setting.

Connecting Professional Learning Communities on School and Network Levels

One of the challenges of professional development processes and quality improvement at the level of the whole school is that there are usually differences among the staff regarding their levels of knowledge, practice, professional values and their needs and motivation for change. These problems are familiar to school directors or school leaders, who are in charge of quality improvement and the professional development for the staff. They have to find strategies that can motivate many diverse educators to be involved in their professional growth.

The ISSA *Principles of Quality Pedagogy* and the Quality Resource Pack are very useful tools for achieving differentiation among educators in their professional development process. Educators can choose a Focus Area according to their professional needs and connect themselves with others who have the same interest in Professional Leaning Communities (PLC). At the school level, there can be different PLCs, some working on the same Focus Area, others on different areas. It is the responsibility of school leaders to arrange opportunities for the different PLCs to share their successes and learnings. If they are working on the same Focus Area, PLCs can engage in professional meetings/exchanges to share their understandings, examples of good practices, processes and strategies they used, etc. Sharing among PLCs should also demonstrate how professional development is part of the framework of the school's vision and mission.

> It is important that all PLCs received effective feedback about their achievements. Sometimes, more minimal progress in one PLC will be much a bigger achievement than that in another. School leaders need to find the appropriate balance and give each PLC the attention and praise it deserves. School leaders should also be able to assess if there is a need in a particular PLC to redefine the focus or to change the participants/members of a particular group. The one constant need in managing a system of connecting PLCs is that they are in the continuous process of learning and sharing, on their way to achieve quality improvement.

One of the possible risks in connecting PLCs at the school level is that they are sometimes not capable of finding answers for particular professional challenges, or they just do not see what they are not doing well. In these cases, it is possible that the same mistake is present at the level of the entire school. To avoid this kind of situation, we can use network activities in which we connect PLCs or entire schools.

> Perspectives from outside and from different environments can open our eyes. We can find answers for many questions through sharing experiences, in observing practice in other environments, and in working together to find answers for challenges.

Networks of teachers, PLCs or schools can use ISSA's Principles and the QRP for common training, workshops, or conferences in order to work on quality improvement through continuous professional growth, professional sharing and care for building professionalism in the field of ECEC. To achieve this mission, the network should have strong organizational and professional support not only from practitioners, but also from other professional institutions.
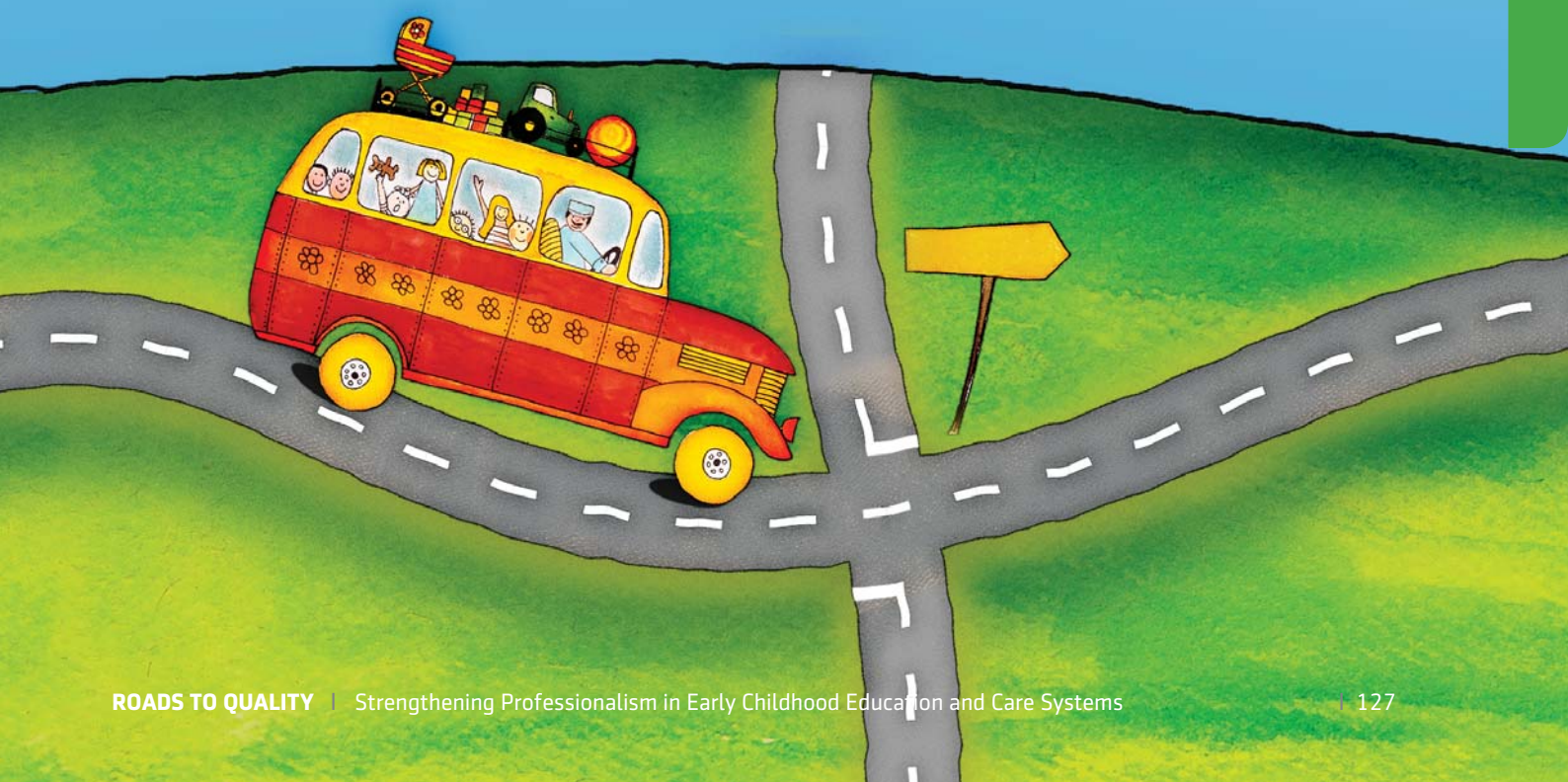
Chapter 5

Using the Quality Resources for Advocacy/Education Diplomacy Initiatives

What is Advocacy?

Many feel that advocacy is something that trained lobbyists do to influence legislators' and policy-makers' opinions and activities. ISSA sees advocacy in a different way; it is something that anyone who is interested in improving the lives of children and families can participate in including families, educators, and civil society.

ISSA feels that educators should be interested in advocating for quality services for all children and their families and that they should engage in advocacy activities as part of their professional role and professional development. Because of educators' direct involvement in the classroom, they bring a perspective to understanding the complexities of teaching that cannot be matched by others (Cochran-Smith & Lythe, 1990). Their voices in advocacy initiatives are imperative and having knowledge on how to go about engaging in advocacy is necessary. They also have direct access to numbers of parents/families who can also add their voices, strengthening positions on why certain changes need to be made.

Advocacy is building support for an issue among such diverse audiences as the general public, elected officials, the media, and key opinion leaders. Activities such as educating audiences, including parents, other educators, news media, etc., about a topic; sharing illustrative stories of what does and can go on in classrooms, or working on a solution to a problem are all considered advocacy (The Ounce, 2009).

Advocacy is getting messages out to others in information sharing formats that promote democratic participation, dialogue and inclusion of multiple voices in creating the message. Advocacy is a critical part of the change processes in education. It aims to influence policies and create conditions for quality improvement within the local, regional and/or international contexts.

Advocacy is generally seen as:

- a long-term process, not a one-time event;
- built into what we do as part of our vision, mission, and work;
- based on data, evidence and experience;
- inclusive of multiple voices (in education, this includes children, families and other stake-holders).

Educators are most likely to be heard when they see their roles as advocates for children and families as part of their continuing work, when they provide different kinds of evidence to show that change is needed and when they work in partnerships with others to create that change. Advocacy is a form of democratic participation which, according to Moss (2007), is a means through which participating with others, they shape decisions affecting themselves and others, and the wider society.

Ways to Engage in Advocacy

Advocacy includes communicating with public officials through phone calls, letters, emails, meetings, providing them with information or educational materials on a topic, or inviting them to visit a program and see the work being done. It also means following legislators' positions and voting records, and then supporting the election of those who have similar positions.

General Tips for Communicating with Public Officials

As you are building these strong, personal relationships, it is important to remember the following.

- Policy-makers care about issues that affect their constituents, and they respond to concise, persuasive arguments that are easily understood and communicated.
- Letters, emails, and phone calls are all effective ways to communicate. Five or six letters or phone calls on a specific issue will encourage the elected official to pay much closer attention to that issue. Personalized letters are always most effective.
- You know much more about children's issues than your elected official. Leverage your knowledge to educate and build up a relationship with your elected official so that you are seen as a resource for information on children's issues and possible legislation.
- Sharing stories about children and their families and how they are affected by an issue is very effective at building support for your position.
- Legislators' staff members are wonderful resource. Developing a good relationship with legislative staff can lead to direct contact with a legislator over time.

Phone Calls, Letters, and Emails

Correspondence from votes reminds elected officials that the public is tracking specific issues, legislation, and their voting records. Whenever communicating with legislators through a phone call, letter, or email, remember these tips.

■ Identify yourself.

■ Make sure you touch on every point you wish to convey.

■ If possible, keep written correspondence to one page, and phone calls to five minutes.

■ When addressing a specific piece of legislation, refer to the bill number.

■ Include factual and, if possible, local information and examples that support your viewpoint.

■ Stay on topic—discuss one issue per written communication or conversation.

■ Include a call to action, specifying what you want the lawmaker to do.

If making a phone call, practice your remarks. The more you rehearse, the more comfortable you will be delivering your message when it counts. Practise with another person to identify any areas where your message isn't clear or effective.

In-Person Meetings with Elected Officials

■ Look for common ground and compliment the official for past support if applicable.

■ Allow the elected official time to ask questions and share observations or opinions.

■ Anticipate opposing arguments. Be prepared to defend your perspective and stay focused on suggestions for constructive solutions.

■ Ask elected officials what it would take for them to change their minds. Several communications maybe necessary to effectively persuade a policymaker.

■ Be friendly, firm, and positive in your messaging even if your legislator does not share your perspective. A rational, balanced conversation will keep the official's door open to future contact.

■ Bring informational materials such as fact sheets, articles, or research studies to leave with the legislator and staff. When possible, use local data. For example, cite how many children under five live in their district and how many early childhood slots are available.

■ Remember that you are an authority with content knowledge and expertise to share.

■ Do not forget a call to action. Let the legislators know what you want them to do: vote for a bill, talk with colleagues, sponsor legislation, etc.

■ Offer to provide relevant follow-up contact or materials after the meeting.

■ Take notes, particularly if further contact is expected.

■ Thank your legislators or their staff members for the time they've spent and any supportive actions they will take.

- Follow up with an email thanking the legislators or staff persons for their time and reminding them of any action commitments they made.

- Let them know what follow-up action they can expect from you if you offered to provide their office with further information.

- Talk with other advocates about the meeting and strategize next steps.

Invite Elected Officials to Visit Your Program

- Confirm the date and time of the visit one week in advance. Ask if others will be accompanying the legislator, and let them know if the local media will be present.

- Inform parents and staff that the legislator will be visiting and assure them that they and the children do not need to do any-thing different or special. Invite them to participate if they wish.

- Invite the local media to attend, making sure to get parental permission for children's photographs or names to be used in stories.

- Use the opportunity to inform your official about important issues affecting young children and their families in the district.

- Showcase an activity that demonstrates a strong age-appropriate learning environment as a way of informing the official about the importance of your work with young children.

- Encourage your official to participate in an activity.

- Take photos to use for your program's newsletter and to send to the legislator with follow-up correspondence.

- Maintain the relationship with a follow-up thank-you note and further communication when you have specific information about early childhood issues to share.

- Add the official's name and address to your mailing list to maintain contact and provide updates.

(Resource: The Ounce, 2009)

Advocacy also includes using media to increase public awareness and influence broader public debate about early childhood issues. Keeping an issue in the news creates public recognition and support, thereby increasing its practical and political importance. This can include:

- expressing a point of view through letters to the editor and call-in opportunities;

- contacting local reporters, radio and television when your organization has news to share;

- identifying families or others impacted and asking them to write letters or make calls as well;

- sharing pertinent local media coverage with elected officials from your community.

Advocacy can even be where an individual educator intervenes to address an individual child's or family's problem. By being aware of and documenting service-delivery problems, educators can share important information and collect examples that help identify policy issues.

They can:

- research the rules or eligibility requirements of a particular program or policy;
- document a problem, its history, and whether others have had similar difficulties;
- meet with local agency staff and/or an affected family to discuss a problem;
- file appeals when a problem is not resolved.

Framing the Message

According to The Ounce (2009: 9), "many of our key audiences (legislators, legislative aides, agency staff, reporters, business, and civic leaders) often have very little time to discuss complex issues. Given these time constraints, it is imperative to develop a succinct message about early childhood issues that will capture the audience's interest. Advocates must also be capable of communicating a clear and concise message in a number of different formats: letters, emails, speeches, and meetings with public officials."

The EPIC format, trademarked by the grassroots advocacy organization RESULTS (www.results.org), is a useful way to create a concise but powerful statement. The messages we make in advocacy need to do the following.

- **Engage** the audience. Identify the audience you are trying to influence and what motivates them. Choose information and language that will resonate with the audience and help it understand the issues. For example, legislators, policy-makers, and decision-makers are concerned with social issues, but they also have to follow budgetary constraints. Parents are concerned with whether their children will be successful and happy. Educators are concerned with getting better outcomes and finding ways to reach all children.

- State the **problem**. Clearly and concisely define the problem, including why it is a problem. Choose the most compelling component of the issue for each audience. Problems can be more easily identified with data, including research, assessments instruments and evaluation tools, and stories.

- **Inform** others about potential solutions. Be prepared to suggest and discuss practical solutions of how to resolve the problem. Consider your specific recommendations, the evidence you have to support them, and how these solutions might be funded. Solutions can also become resources that show people how to do things in a different way.

- **Call** for action. The call to action required will vary according to the audience and the problem at hand, but make sure to clearly define the "ask." The action requested should be specific and give your audience an immediate way to get involved.

The advocacy cycle

Using the *Quality Resource Pack* as an Advocacy Tool

The resources in the *Quality Resource Pack* can serve as a powerful tool for creating and organizing advocacy activities for different stakeholders at local, regional and international level, and for variety of purposes.

- As a base for situation analyses, identifying key issues and establishing goals for advocacy.
  - Instrument for assessing quality at all levels
  - Framework for policy analyses
  - Reference for analyses of pre-service and in-service teacher training
  - Base for collecting evidence

- Building allies and supporters
  - Providing framework for common understanding of quality
  - Educating parents and other stakeholders about quality

- Developing messages for advocacy:
  - Providing clear arguments and evidence why quality matters
  - Providing vision for quality education

- Developing advocacy strategy and tools:
  - Use Quality Principles for lobbying
  - Provide professional development for educators and policy-makers
  - Presenting resources at conferences, round tables, promotions

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. It provides credibility to organizations andto the entire network.

RESOURCES	ADVOCACY ACTIONS	HOW TO USE THE RESOURCES
1. **ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy**	Engaging different audiences Stating the problem and identifying solutions	Information sharing and dialogue Educating policy makers, educators, parents, NGOs, pre-service and in-service training institutions, etc. Building allies and supporters–reaching common understanding Message development Promotions and events
2. **Putting Knowledge into Practice: A Guidebook for Educators**	Stating the problem and identifying solutions	Building allies in professional communities Professional conferences Providing professional arguments for quality Professional articles Analyses of pre-service and in-service teacher training – curriculum and learning outcomes

RESOURCES	ADVOCACY ACTIONS	HOW TO USE THE RESOURCES
3. **Professional Development Tool for Improving Quality of Practices in Kindergarten/ Primary School**	Stating the problem and identifying solutions	Analysing quality in order to establish goals and objectives for advocacy Analyses and improvement of the professional development system Educating professionals but also parents and public about current and envisioned quality, as a goal for advocacy
4. **An Online Video Library on Quality Pedagogy**	Identifying solutions	Promotion of quality by providing clear examples and goals for advocacy
5. **Online Courses**	Identifying solutions	Information and education of key stakeholders
6. **Instrument for Assessing Quality Practices in Early Childhood Education Services for Children from 3 to 10 Years Old**	Stating the problem and identifying solutions	Analyzing quality in order to establish goals and objectives for advocacy
7. **Leaflets advocating for quality in early childhood services (targeting educators, parents and policy makers)**	Engaging different audiences Stating the problem and identifying solutions	Sharing at conferences, round tables and all other events Developing materials on the country level Building allies and supporters–reaching common understanding Self-evaluations Dialoguing about quality among different stakeholders

Using the *Quality Resource Pack* for Educational Diplomacy

What Is Education Diplomacy?

Educational diplomacy is a cross-disciplinary, intercultural sharing of theories, ideas, and concepts that advance human development. It moves beyond advocacy which is a more one-way communication of relating a message to others, to negotiation and serving as diplomats for education. Educational diplomacy sees education as a bridge for promoting peace, global security, and sustainable solutions for complex human problems. It requires being able to work with multiple stakeholders such as those from health and social services, human rights groups, different kinds of early childhood service providers, policy-makers, government authorities at the local and global level, to come up with comprehensive approaches and solutions to the issues that young children and their families face.

We develop the competences to be educational diplomats through having multiple experiences of dialoguing, collaborating, and connecting theory and practice. In education diplomacy, we move back and forth between the international and local arenas, resolving global education challenges that are ultimately experienced at the community level. The application of educational diplomacy is relevant in global and local contexts, whether working internationally or resolving education challenges in our own nation or community.

Diplomacy requires additional knowledge, skills and dispositions to be able to move back and forth between local and global issues and to be able to work on issues at a systems level. According to the Center for Educational Diplomacy, education is central to development and to ensure the conditions in which human potential may flourish.

These core competences are needed to provide innovative and sustainable solutions to complex and often contextually sensitive problems in the development of meaningful collaboration and systems-based approaches. Diplomacy requires understanding multiple perspectives which come from engaging in real dialogue, being empathetic to others, and building relationships with them. It is used to cultivate intercultural and interdisciplinary understanding and cooperation.

Educational diplomacy is a way to leverage the educational agenda through engaging in dialogue, collaborating, sharing knowledge, and making connections to theory and practice. The resources in the ISSA QRP are tools to help ground this dialogue in internationally promoted principles and theories of early childhood development as well as evidence-based research. They serve as a platform for connecting and aligning global and national policies around early years' care and education, and as a tool for dialoguing, defining and advocating for quality experiences for them.

The *ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy* propose universal values that guide early childhood education to best support human rights and the CRC. Each principle is described in *Putting Knowledge into Practice: A Guidebook for Educators on the ISSA Principles of Quality Practice* with the theory and research that support the case of why that principle is important to put into practice.

The other resources such as the Professional Development Tools, Video Library and Online Courses then go on to describe in more detail how to put these principles into practice. The resources align with other important international frameworks and position papers such as the *European Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care* (2014), OECD's Review of Policies and Practices for Monitoring and Evaluating Quality in Early Learning and Development in *Starting Strong III* (2012), and documents from UNESCO and UNICEF.

The resources encourage and support social processes that are based on dialogue, collaboration, appreciative inquiry and the social construction of knowledge among early childhood educators and among interdisciplinary groups that interface with their work with young children and families. They are meant to provoke individual and group reflection and intellectual flexibility. They invite international and national stakeholders to reflect upon the crucial importance of providing quality learning and care experiences for young children under three and their families and to acknowledge the urgent need for inter-sectorial work.

Goals for improving services are developed through dialogue. Settings goals for quality is important because they can: help focus attention; consolidate political will; strategically align resources with prioritized areas; anchor discussions for better government leadership; promote more consistent, coordinated and child-centred services with shared social and pedagogical objectives; and provide guidance for providers, direction for practitioners and clarity for parents (OECD, 2012: 10).

Competences for Education Diplomacy
Knowledge:
- Human rights
- International educational policy (to know what international policies drive educational policy at the national level)
- International development or the cross-sectorial, multidisciplinary context that contributes to societal and human progress
- International relations

Skills:
- Negotiation
- Mediation
- Appreciative inquiry
- Listening

Dispositions:
- reflective insight at the individual, group and organizational levels to look back at a series of events, practices, behaviours, and/or actions to determine lessons learned and to assemble resources for future undertakings.
- intellectual flexibility to assess and adapt to changing circumstances rapidly, draw inferences and conclusions, and utilize multiple creative solutions.
- global ethics, whereby a common basis of universal values govern the actions of an individual, members of a community, or profession.
- cross-cultural communication and the sharing of thoughts and ideas through verbal and non-verbal channels, results in the ability to create and cultivate relationships with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Center for Education Diplomacy (An initiative of the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI).

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Annex 1
Deciding on the Area That I Want to Improve in My Practice

Please self-rate your work with the help of the *ISSA Professional Development Tool for Kindergarten/ Primary School* document. Do as follows.

➢ For each Focus Area, separately:

  ◼ read why this Focus Area is important.

  ◼ read all principles and indicators. For each of them, mark the indicators that you feel that are visible in your work and which that are not, or they are but only partially.

➢ Write down for each Focus Area what are your strengths and your challenges and what you would like to improve in this area.

➢ Finally, consider and write down which Focus Area you would like to work on most in your professional learning community in order to improve the quality of your practice.

Work slowly! Give yourself plenty of time for reflection.

INTERACTIONS

Strengths	Challenges

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Strengths	Challenges

INCLUSION, DIVERSITY AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Strengths	Challenges

ASSESSMENT AND PLANING

Strengths	Challenges

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Strengths	Challenges

LEARNING ENVIROMENT

Strengths	Challenges

PROFESIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Strengths	Challenges

The Focus Area that I would like to improve most during the next year is:

Annex 2
Priorities and Action

Note: Discuss the issues raised together. Take time to discuss the ideas of all colleagues and try to reach a mutual decision.

1. On which principle(s)/indicator(s) do we want to work first? Why?	
2. Do we have something to learn or explore in order to better understand this/these principle(s)/indicator(s)? What resources can we use?	
3. Which goal do we want to achieve?	
4. What specific activities in the classroom are we going to perform in order to improve the quality of our work on this principle/indicator?	
5. What other specific activities in the classroom we can perform to improve the quality of our work for this quality principle/indicator?	

Annex 3
Professional Development Plan

Name and surname: *Date:*

How did this meeting affect your plans for the <u>next month</u>?
What changes are you willing to introduce in your practice?

Goal What do I plan to accomplish? What will I change in my practice?	The activities that I will perform What will I do? What steps should I take and when?	The resources Which type of support do I need? Who can help and how?	Indicators of success How do I know if Iwas successful? What do I specifically expect will change?

Annex 4
Professional Learning Community
Meeting Evaluation Form

Date: _____

Please evaluate today's meeting on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent):

Productivity	1	2	3	4	5
Dedication to teaching/teacher work	1	2	3	4	5
Guidance	1	2	3	4	5
Communication among teachers	1	2	3	4	5

Your suggestions for the next meeting:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Did you perform according to your professional plan created in the last meeting?

☐ YES   ☐ PARTIALLY   ☐ NO

Annex 5
The ISSA Principles of Quality Pedagogy

Focus Areas

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

1. Interactions

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

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

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

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

2. Family and Community

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

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

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

PRINCIPLES	INDICATORS OF QUALITY
2.1 **The educator promotes partnerships with families and provides a variety of opportunities for families and community members to be involved in children's learning and development.**	1. The educator invites and welcomes family members into the classroom and finds ways for all families to participate in the educational process and life of the learning community. 2. The educator involves family members in shared decision-making about their children's learning, development, and social life in the classroom. 3. The educator involves family members in decision-making concerning children's learning environments.
2.2 **The educator uses formal and informal opportunities for communication and information sharing with families.**	1. The educator regularly communicates with families about their children, their learning and development, curriculum requirements, and events in the classroom. 2. The educator regularly communicates with families to learn about a child's background in order to gain insights into the child's strengths, interests, and needs. 3. The educator promotes opportunities for families to learn from one another and to support each other. 4. The educator keeps information about families and children confidential.

2.3

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

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator takes children into the community or brings community members into the school in order to enhance children's learning and socialization.

2. The educator assists families in obtaining information, resources, and services needed to enhance children's learning and development.

3. The educator uses knowledge of children's communities and families as an integral part of the curriculum and their learning experiences.

4. The educator offers information and ideas for parents and family members on how to create a stimulating home learning environment and helps to strengthen parent competences.

3.   Inclusion, Diversity, and Values of Democracy

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

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

PRINCIPLES

3.1
The educator provides equal opportunities for every child and family to learn and participate regardless of gender, race, ethnic origin, culture, native language, religion, family structure, social status, economic status, age, or special need.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator is aware of her/his own beliefs, attitudes, and experiences and how they affect communication with children, families, and teaching.

2. The educator treats each child with respect, dignity, and consideration and provides equal opportunities to engage in the life of the school.

3. The educator treats every family with respect, dignity, and consideration and finds ways to involve them in their child's education.

4. The educator uses language and activities that avoid gender and other stereotypes.

5. The educator makes adaptations to the environment and to learning activities so that children with different capabilities, educational needs, and social backgrounds can participate in most activities.

3.2
**The educator helps children understand, accept, and appreciate diversity.**

3.3
The educator develops children's understanding of the values of civil society and the skills required for participation.

1. The educator appreciates and incorporates into his/her teaching the diversity that exists among the children, families, and within the community.

2. The educator uses opportunities to draw children's attention to the diversity that exists outside the school in a respectful manner and affirms its presence.

3. The educator promotes democratic values by encouraging every child to express his/her opinion in an appropriate way and participate in decision-making.

4. The educator promotes and supports the development of children's language and communication in multiple ways throughout the day.

1. The educator strengthens children's appreciation and respect for different preferences and points of view, and helps children develop skills to express their views appropriately.

2. The educator assists children in understanding how stereotypes and prejudices can influence their attitudes and behaviours.

3. The educator encourages children to treat others with equity, fairness, respect, and dignity and to expect the same from others.

4. The educator introduces the concept of personal responsibility in caring for the environment and provides opportunities for children to practise the concept.
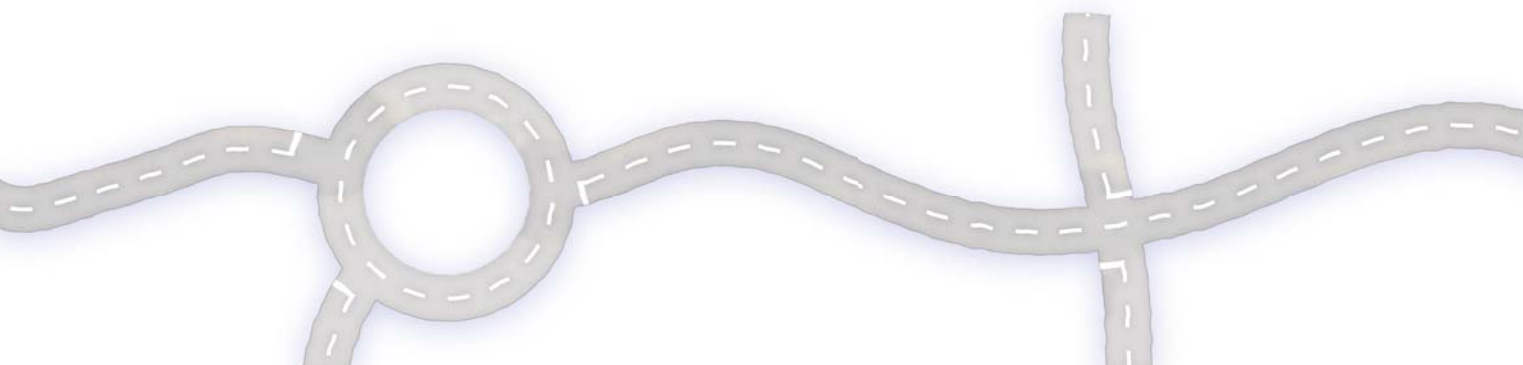
4. Assessment and Planning

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

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

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

PRINCIPLES

4.1
The educator regularly and systematically monitors each child's progress, learning processes, and achievements.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator uses systematic observation and other diverse and developmentally appropriate formative assessment tools that reflect on the process and outcomes of learning and development.

2. The educator assesses the level of children's involvement necessary for meaningful learning and participation and makes adjustments to activities accordingly.

3. The educator ensures that the assessment process takes into account and builds upon children's strengths, individual needs, and interests.

**4.2
The educator plans for teaching and learning based on information about children and national requirements.**

1. The educator plans activities that are based on the developmental levels and interests of the children to enable them to acquire relevant competences.

2. The educator balances planned activities with child-initiated activities and choices, including finding ways to support children's individual leaning styles and paces.

3. The educator uses a comprehensive planning approach that provides for a balance of individual, small group, and whole-group learning experiences.

4. The educator plans for a sufficient variation of activities to keep children engaged and to provide new challenges for them.

5. The educator's plans and actions are flexible enough to acknowledge and incorporate changing conditions and children's needs and interests.

**4.3
The educator includes children, families, and relevant professionals in the assessment and planning process.**

1. The educator assists children in becoming skillful at self-assessment and making decisions about their own learning and behaviour based on clear and consistent criteria.

2. The educator guides children on how to evaluate others' behaviours and work.

3. The educator and family members share information regarding children's progress and interests, and together create short-term and long-term individual goals.

4. The educator includes relevant professionals in the assessment and planning process, where appropriate.
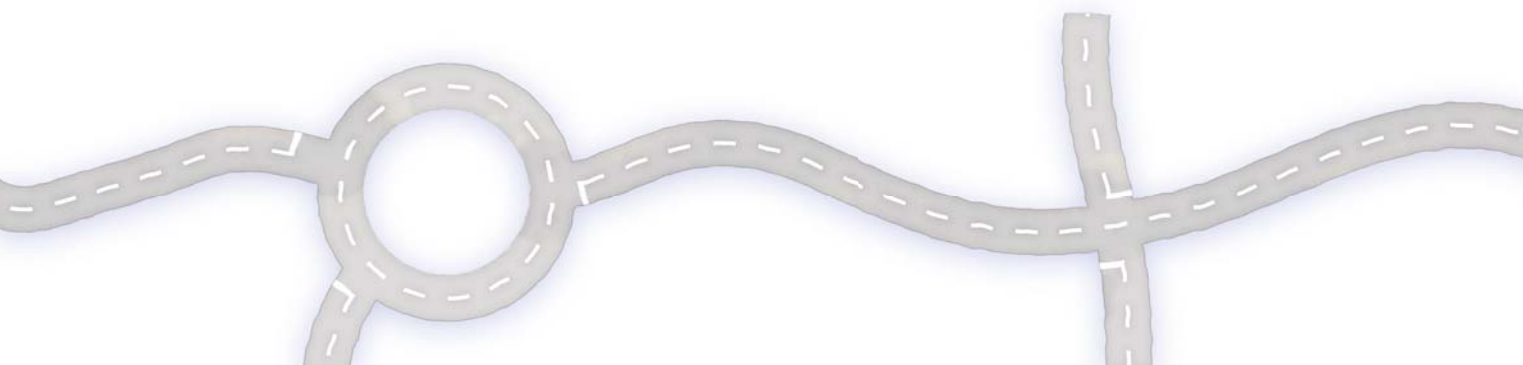
5.   Teaching Strategies

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

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

PRINCIPLES

5.1
The educator implements a variety of teaching strategies that actively engage children to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions as defined by national requirements, and which build the foundation for lifelong learning.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1.   The educator uses a range of active-learning strategies that address all develop-mental areas of a child in a holistic manner.

2.   The educator offers activities that encourage exploration, experimentation, independent inquiry, and creativity.

3.   The educator uses strategies to promote higher-order thinking and problem solving.

4.   The educator recognizes, values, and creates diverse opportunities for informal learning outside of direct instructional time.

5.   The educator shares learning goals with children and encourages children to reflect on their learning processes and outcomes.

6.   The educator encourages children to use available, developmentally appropriate technologies to support their learning and to develop skills required for active participation in an information society.

5.2

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

1. The educator offers activities that foster children's sense of individuality and identity.

2. The educator uses strategies that build children's autonomy and initiative.

3. The educator uses strategies that promote children's self-regulation.

4. The educator uses strategies that help children build positive relationships and cooperation with others.

5. The educator supports the development of children's abilities to resolve conflict.

5.3

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

1. The educator connects learning new concepts and skills with children's previous knowledge and experiences.

2. The educator provides an adequate amount of effective scaffolding to children according to their needs and progress.

3. The educator encourages children to set goals and expectations for their own work and to reflect on the results of learning.

4. The educator integrates learning experiences so that children can see the interrelations among learning concepts and everyday experiences and can apply them in real situations.

5.4

The educator uses strategies that promote democratic processes and procedures.

1. The educator models and applies processes and procedures that encourage meaningful cooperation and support among children.

2. The educator uses strategies that promote children's participation and under-standing of responsibility and its consequences.

3. The educator uses strategies that help children learn about boundaries, rules, and limits, and learn to respect the rights of others in a democratic society.

4. The educator offers opportunities for children to make choices both in the learning process and other situations and helps to develop an understanding of the consequences of choices made.

6.   Learning Environment

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

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

PRINCIPLES

6.1
The educator provides a learning environment that promotes each child's well-being.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator creates an environment that ensures each child's sense of belonging and comfort.

2. The educator shows respect for children by being interested in their feelings, ideas, and experiences.

3. The educator creates an atmosphere where children are encouraged to express themselves.

4. The educator creates an environment that stimulates children to take appropriate risks for development and learning.

5. The educator encourages each child to develop attachment and an individual relationship with her/him.

6.2
The educator provides an inviting, safe, healthy, stimulating, and inclusive physical environment that promotes children's exploration, learning, and independence.

1. The educator ensures that the learning environment is physically safe and easily supervised.

2. The educator ensures that the space is inviting to the children and comfortable for them to engage in a variety of activities.

3. The educator organizes the space into logically defined interest areas that support learning and development.

4. The educator incorporates varied, plentiful, accessible, and developmentally appropriate materials that stimulate children to explore, play, and learn.

5. The educator encourages children to participate in planning, arranging, and maintaining their environment.

6. The educator modifies the physical environment to meet the needs of individual children and groups of children.

6.3
The educator provides an environment that promotes children's sense of community and participation in creating the classroom's culture.

1. The educator communicates clear expectations for behavior and involves children in creating rules when appropriate.

2. The educator creates an environment that is built upon democratic values and promotes participation.

3. The educator uses consistent routines to promote children's self-regulation and independence.

4. The educator guides children's behaviours based upon knowledge of each child's personality and developmental level.
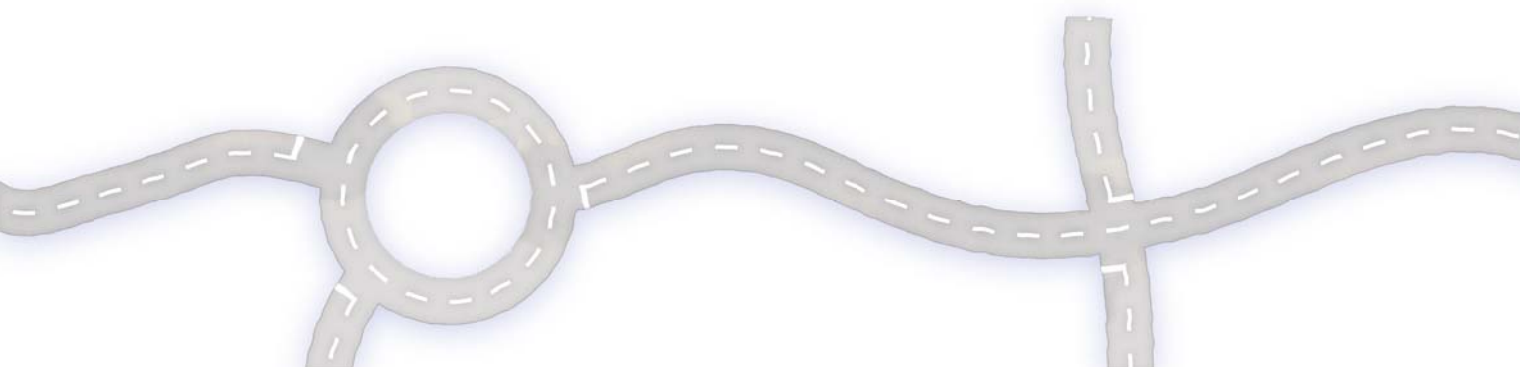
7.   Professional Development

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

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

PRINCIPLES

7.1
The educator continually improves his/her competences to reach and maintain high quality in the teaching profession according to the changing demands of today's world.

INDICATORS OF QUALITY

1. The educator recognizes the importance of lifelong learning by participating in a variety of personal and professional development opportunities.

2. The educator reflects, assesses, seeks feedback, and evaluates the quality of his/her pedagogical practice and level of professional teaching knowledge and makes appropriate changes when necessary.

3. The educator works cooperatively to enhance the overall quality of her/his own practice and that of the profession.

4. The educator acts as decision maker in the profession using knowledge, skills, and independent and critical thinking.

5. The educator engages in public community activities to promote the importance of quality teaching and access to quality education for every child and respect for the teaching profession.

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