

Building a System of Professional Development through the use of Teacher Standards as a means of Supporting Quality Teaching Practices

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Introduction

This panel presentation will offer a perspective on creating a system for supporting quality teaching through the use of teacher standards. The International Step by Step Association (ISSA) has designed a spectrum of services to support quality teaching through the implementation of standards for teachers. These internationally developed, child-centred standards provide a framework from which teachers can set concrete goals for quality improvement. Mentoring support is offered to teachers to facilitate successful implementation of standards in the classroom. Additionally, ISSA has developed a Teacher Certification process that recognizes teachers based on these standards. With the accession of ten new countries into the European Union in May 2004, it is important to identify standards for teacher quality that can ensure cross-national mobility in the field. Two Step by Step countries will share their experiences of utilizing developmentally appropriate teacher standards as an impetus for supporting and recognizing quality teaching. These presentations will explore outcomes from the individual to policy levels.

Specifically, Slovenia will present the results of a research study about implementing ISSA Teacher Standards as a tool for teachers' external evaluation and professional development. The study compared teacher performance as measured by the ISSA Teacher Standards and by the ECERS, an internationally accepted measure of classroom quality. A comprehensive intervention, including self-evaluation of teachers, development of a quality improvement plan and technical assistance on the standards was used to help teachers successfully improve the quality of their teaching. Results were measured through pre- and post-observations and changes were found to be statistically significant.

Over the past year, the ISSA has been working on completing a series of case studies for each of its member countries. The Czech case study will offer insight into the wider implications of creating a certification system on professional development for early care and education professionals as a whole. By training education professionals to recognize quality practice as measured by a set of standards and accurately report findings in a supportive manner to teachers, a new cadre of experts in the field is developed, having dramatic effects on the profession. This Case Study and the process for becoming a certifier and the professional implication of this process will be discussed. Excerpts of the "Role of A Certifier", Case Study from the Czech Republic follows the Slovenian paper.

Teacher Evaluation Using ISSA Standards: A Tool for Professional Development and Quality Improvement

by Tatjana Vonta, EdD, Director, Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives, Slovenia

The ISSA Teacher Standards, developed by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA, 2002), provide a model for teacher certification in the Step by Step Program. We were interested in the question of whether the certification process, using the ISSA Teacher Standards, could also be an effective strategy for teacher evaluation and professional development. A study was implemented in Slovenia (Vonta, 2003) to address the following research questions:

- 1 How good are ISSA Standards as a measure of quality?
- 2 Does the quality of teaching improve for teachers who participate in the certification process?
- 3 What kinds of factors influence the results on ISSA Standard scores?
- 4 What are teachers' opinions about the certification model and process?
- 5 What are certifiers' opinions about the certification model and process?
- 6 Do these opinions change over the duration of the whole certification process?

Research Design and Instruments

A representative sample of twenty preschool teachers was drawn from all 123 preschool teachers implementing the Step by Step methodology in classrooms for children three- to six-years old during the 2002/2003 school year in Slovenia, based on the following characteristics:

- Years of job experience;
- Level of formal education;
- Average age of children in the classrooms;
- Amount of in-service training;
- Number of Step by Step classrooms in the preschool;
- In-service training of teacher assistants.

Two instruments were used to measure quality: the ISSA Teacher Standards Observation Form (ISSA, 2002) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) with thirty-seven items (Harms and Clifford, 1980). We selected ECERS as a second instrument because ECERS has frequently been used for comparative studies on quality. Details of both instruments are included below.

ISSA Teacher Standards**Standard 1: Individualization**

Teachers use their knowledge of child development and their relationships with children and their families to appreciate the diversity of each class and to respond to each child's unique needs and potentials.

Standard 2: Learning Environment

Teachers promote a caring, stimulating, and inclusive classroom by organizing the environment in ways that best facilitate children taking learning risks, practicing democracy, and working both cooperatively and independently.

Standard 3: Family Participation

Teachers build partnerships with families to ensure optimum support for children's learning and developmental needs.

Standard 4: Teaching Strategies for Meaningful Learning

Teachers design and implement varied strategies to promote conceptual understanding and to encourage innovation, creativity, independent inquiry, social cooperation, and exploration within and across the disciplines.

Standard 5: Planning and Assessment

Teachers create plans based upon national standards, program goals and individual needs of children, and use a systematic approach for observing and assessing each child's progress.

Standard 6: Professional Development

Teachers regularly evaluate and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of their work and collaborate with colleagues to improve programs and practices for young children and their families.

ECERS (1980): 37 Items organized into 7 Subscales**Personal Care Routines**

1. Greeting/departing
2. Meals/snacks
3. Nap/rest
4. Diapering/ toileting
5. Personal grooming

Furnishings/Display

6. *Furnishings (routine)*
 7. *Furnishings (learning)*
 8. *Furnishings (relaxation)*
 9. *Room arrangement*
 10. *Child-related display*
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Language/Reasoning

11. *Understanding language*
 12. *Using language*
 13. *Reasoning*
 14. *Informal language*
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Fine/Gross Motor

15. *Fine motor*
 16. *Supervision (fine motor)*
 17. *Gross motor space*
 18. *Gross motor equipment*
 19. *Gross motor time*
 20. *Supervision (gross motor)*
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Creative Activities

21. *Art*
 22. *Music/movement*
 23. *Blocks*
 24. *Sand/water*
 25. *Dramatic play*
 26. *Schedule (creative)*
 27. *Supervision (creative)*
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Social Development

28. *Space (alone)*
 29. *Free play*
 30. *Group time*
 31. *Cultural awareness*
 32. *Tone*
 33. *Exceptional provisions*
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Adults

34. *Adult personal area*

35. *Adult opportunities*

36. *Adult meeting area*

37. *Parent provisions*

The study proceeded in two phases: preparation and evaluation. In the preparation phase we trained certifiers in the use of the instruments, tested the certifiers on inter-rater reliability, and created instruments for assessing teachers' and certifiers' opinions. In addition, we held meetings with teachers to share information and materials about the certification process. Teachers completed a self-evaluation according to the standards and registered for certification. The activities in the evaluation phase of the research are listed in Table 1 (below).

Quality Improvement Planning

A key strategy for promoting professional development and quality improvement was the development and implementation of a Quality Improvement Plan. Based on findings from classroom observation, the teacher and Master Teacher Trainer (MTT) jointly developed a plan for improving the quality of teaching. Areas identified in the plan might include:

- Structure of the physical environment;
- Individualization;
- Involving children in the planning process;
- Transition between activities;
- Systematic observation and assessment of children's development and learning;
- Meaningful and process-oriented learning;
- Cooperative learning;
- Developing elements of critical thinking (anticipation, inference, asking questions, argumentation, planning, and assessing);
- Active parent participation in the learning process;
- Planning;
- Experience-based learning;
- Teamwork.

Results

1. *ISSA Standards are a valid tool for measuring teacher quality.*

In order to ascertain the validity of the ISSA Standards, we compared the results of the findings from the ISSA Standards with the ECERS findings. We found a high and statistically significant correlation between the results on the ISSA Standards and the ECERS at the beginning of the certification process (first observation) and at the end of the process

(second observation). After the first observation, the Pearson's coefficient of correlation was 0.88; after the second observation it was 0.84. We also measured the regression between ISSA and ECERS results and found them to be statistically significant. These results confirm that ISSA Teachers Standards are a valid tool for measuring teacher quality.

2. Teachers who participate in the certification process show improvement in the quality of their teaching.

The results on the ISSA Standards after the second observation are statistically significantly higher than after the first observation on all standards (see Table 2). Moreover, the data indicate that teachers improved their quality no matter what kind of instrument was used to measure quality. These findings suggest that the activities entailed in the certification process — observation with follow-up discussion, identification of the teacher's strengths and weaknesses for each standard, and active participation of teachers in the creation of a quality improvement plan — provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on and improve their practice.

3. The amount of in-service training has a positive effect on ISSA Standards scores.

We also examined the relationship between the results on ISSA Standards with such variables as the amount of in-service training, amount of formal education and number of years of teaching experience. As indicated in Table 3, we found that one variable—the amount of in-service training — was positively related to ISSA scores (Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation). However, we found no correlation between the level of teacher's formal education and ISSA scores. This result is surprising since we are aware from other research of the importance of a high level of teacher education for achieving quality. It may be that the content and teaching approaches in higher education, based on traditional educational methods, are too dissimilar from the knowledge and skills measured by the ISSA Standards to have a positive effect on ISSA scores. On the other hand, in-service training that was in tune with the content and methods of the new educational paradigm — provided mostly by the Step by Step Program — resulted in high correlations with scores on the ISSA Standards.

4. Overall, teachers' opinions about the certification model and process were positive.

Teachers who were involved in the certification process said, at the end, that they would recommend certification to their colleagues. They affirmed that quality improvement can be achieved because it is based on a plan that is clear, operational and proactive. They valued the certification process because it was goal oriented, promoted higher responsibility, and was better than self-evaluation because help was provided.

5. *The certifiers identified challenges as well as positive aspects about the certification process.*

The certifiers noted that aspects of the certification process were stressful and difficult, especially the process of engaging low ISSA-scoring teachers in reflective conversation and quality improvement planning. However, they had a high opinion of the ISSA observation form and their preparation for the certification process. Moreover, they viewed their experience as one that positively influenced their own professional development as well as that of the teachers.

6. *Opinions change, becoming more positive, over the duration of the certification process.*

At the beginning of the process, teachers thought that the certification process was good because of the opportunity to receive feedback on their teaching. At the end of the certification process, they felt it was good because it contributed to their professional and personal development and increased their satisfaction and motivation.

Conclusions

Our research confirmed that ISSA Standards are a valid instrument for external evaluation of teachers and, at the same time, can be used as an effective tool for professional development when combined with constructive feedback, reflective conversation, and the active participation of teachers in creating a quality improvement plan. The certification process is, however, only one small piece in a larger system of professional development that seeks to change the culture of the school and the culture of teaching to improve children's (and adults') learning. This larger system includes training and workshops, exchange of ideas, and support from colleagues, principals, and Step by Step team members. Step by Step seeks to build capacity for coaching and mentoring teachers in reflective teaching to achieve better quality and to develop a "learning community" on both the school and network level.

Table 1: Activities in Evaluation Phase

What	When	Who
1. First observation with ECERS (37 items) and ISSA Standards	Beginning of November	2 Master Teacher Trainers receive training to become ISSA certifiers
2. Discussion with teachers after observation in the classroom	Beginning of November	2 Master Teacher Trainers
3. Quality report	Middle of November	2 Master Teacher Trainers create and write the report; 1 MTT communicates the findings in the report
4. Development of a Quality Improvement Plan (with teacher's active involvement)	Middle of November	Teacher coaching by 1 Master Teacher Trainer (the same MTT who communicated the findings from the Quality report)
5. Implementation of the Quality Improvement Plan	Middle of November through the end of March	Teachers
6. Second observation with ECERS (37 items) and ISSA Standards	End of March to beginning of April	2 Master Teacher Trainers
7. Discussion with teacher after the observation in the classroom	End of March to beginning of April	2 Master Teacher Trainers
8. Quality Report	End of March to beginning of April	2 Master Teacher Trainers writing the report; 1 MTT communicating the findings from the Quality Report
9. Quality Improvement Plan (with teacher's active involvement)	End of March to beginning of April	Teacher coaching by 1 Master Teacher Trainer (same MTT as communicated the findings from the Quality Report)

Table 2: Differences in Scores Between First and Second Evaluation With ISSA Standards

	Maximum	Average Scores in First Evaluation	Average Scores in Second Evaluation	Difference
STANDARD 1 Individualization	9	7.0	8.3	1.3*
STANDARD 2 Learning environment	9	6.4	7.9	1.6*
STANDARD 3 Partnership with families	18	13.5	16.1	2.6*
STANDARD 4 Strategies for meaningful learning	15	10.8	13.2	2.4*
STANDARD 5 Assessment and planning	21	15.0	18.2	3.2*
STANDARD 6 Professional development	12	10.2	11.4	1.2*
ISSA together**	72**	52.6**	63.5**	10.9*

*Differences are statistically significant (Analysis of variance- Huynh-Feldt test).

** Total scores without scores at Standard 6.

Table 3: Correlation Between ISSA Scores and Some Independent Variables

	First Evaluation N	CORRELATION OF SCORES WITH ISSA	Second Evaluation N**	CORRELATION OF SCORES WITH ISSA
DAYS ON TRAINING-SUM	N=20	0.58*	N=19	0.61*
AVERAGE AGE OF CHILDREN IN THE CLASSROOM	N=20	-0.25	N=19	-0.03
JOB EXPERIENCE OF TEACHER	N=20	0.33	N=19	0.11
NUMBER OF SBS CLASSROOMS IN PRESCHOOL	N=20	0.03	N=19	0.01

*correlation coefficient is statistically significant

** One teacher didn't participate in the second observation due to an extended leave of absence for health reasons.

The Role of a Certifier

Presented by Václav Šneberger, Step by Step, Czech Republic

Main Questions

- In what context is the role developing?
- What is the role of a certifier?
- How do the various people involved construct the role?
- How do the certifiers view the role and deal with it?
- What impact has it had on their lives?

List of Characters

(All names were changed in order to keep confidentiality.)

Marie – a certifier and Step by Step (SbS) lecturer.

Zuzana – a certifier and a coordinator of certifiers.

Tereza – a SbS teacher who went through the certification process.

Jiri – a director of Eva's school.

Mrs. Novakova – a Ministry official.

Ivana – a Ministry official, former SbS coordinator and future certifier.

Dana – a certifier and a Ministry official.

Jane – a certifier and ISSA lecturer from the USA.

Martin – a certifier and ISSA lecturer.

Klara – SbS, NGO director.

All current active certifiers – six people (including Marie, Zuzana, Dana and Martin).

The Step by Step, NGO

The certification practice is realized by the Step by Step Centre, in the Czech Republic (SbS CR), a non-profit organization that was established in 1994 as a centre for continuous development and implementation of the SbS Program, as well as other projects that focus on reform of the system of education and development of civil society. SbS CR provides training opportunities for professional enrichment to in-service and pre-service teachers, as well as faculties in universities and teacher training institutions. SbS CR has gained accreditation from the Ministry of Education for the further education of teachers and for the verification of the quality of educational programs in SbS pre-schools and primary schools.

To provide these services, SbS CR has developed a network of training centres. Most of the training centres are primary schools and kindergartens, which have been implementing the educational program SbS since 1994. They have practical experience with work in the classroom and with the further education of teachers and parents. The SbS CR instructor

base consists of 56 trainers, who conduct seminars, workshops and summer schools, whether at their own training centre in cooperation with Pedagogical Centres, individually or within the program of activities organized by Sbs CR.

Basic Political Conditions of the Czech Education System

The education system in the Czech Republic continues to undergo many reforms started in the 1980s. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is in charge of most state administration activities concerned with education and sets out the conditions for its development. It is the National Education Development Program of the Czech Republic, also called the 'White Book' (published in Autumn 2000), that constitutes a basic document of the Czech education system. The White Book analyses the contemporary situation and formulates a clear vision of Czech education on a mid-term scale. This vision follows the European Union documents and promotes child-centred education and democratic values. On the basis of the White Book, two basic compulsory provisions have been created: General Program for Preschool Education and General Educational Program for Primary Education. These provisions reflect the reform trends of the Czech education system and comply with the quality requirements common in the European Union. Delegates of the Sbs program team were invited to cooperate in preparation of these provisions. The Sbs CR was also one of the NGOs that designed and prepared education modules for public dissemination.

Quality Evaluation

The Sbs certification practice brought a completely new way of combining the evaluation and support of teachers. In the Czech Republic, the only institution that currently pursues evaluation of teachers' work is the Czech School Inspection that uses criteria related to quantity of teaching results, rather than to the quality of the teaching process. It is a state institution devoted primarily to the control, not to the support of teachers.

Position of Teachers

Besides the factors described above, there is another important issue influencing the certifiers' work and the way they are perceived. It is connected with the social atmosphere and common attitudes and stereotypes of our society. In Czech society, even in the area of education, being different or exceptional is still not well accepted nor much appreciated. It is probably associated with our long history of communism when values such as collectivity, uniformity and obedience to given norms were promoted. Even though Czech education has been undergoing a significant transformation, if you enter into the classrooms and staff-rooms of many schools, you can feel a strong trend to uniformity. Zuzana, the Sbs coordinator of the certifiers, recalls a Czech idiom expressing the underlying principle: *"It does not pay to leave the line."* Among teachers, it is not common to aspire to get some kind of certificate or to voluntarily ask for evaluation.

According to Zuzana “...people often do not understand that applying for the certificate is not an issue of boasting or considering oneself superior to others, but means an important step in one’s professional growth.”

Certifiers

The main role of a certifier is to support a teacher in his/her professional growth. The certifier guides the teacher through the certification process, evaluates the current state of his/her work and suggests possible ways of improvement. In the Czech Republic, there are seven certifiers who have been working for one year. Our Case Study focuses on exploring their personal experience with the role and its meaning. The role of a certifier means a completely new phenomenon, not only within the network of schools which work with SbS CR, but also in the whole Czech education system. We explore the important context issues related to the role the certifiers play and might play in the system.

All of the certifiers are education specialists and experienced trainers. Five of them had already had some kind of previous experience with classroom observation. Three of them had been visiting classrooms, observing and providing feedback to teachers when working as the coordinators and mentors. Two others had been observing teachers during inspections they had been working on as members of school management. Five of the certifiers had, at some time in their lives, been SbS teachers at preschool or primary grades. The two others were involved in many SbS program activities as trainers.

According to the Certification Guide (Skardova & Sneberger 2003), a certifier is someone, who:

- *“received an international certificate of ISSA certifier (on the basis of passing an international training for certifiers and fulfilling the given criteria);*
- *cooperates with the applicant and goes with him/her through the certification process up to the acquisition of the certificate or the postponement of certification until the applicant is able to fulfill the criteria that correspond to the international standards;*
- *together with two other independent certifiers, recommends ISSA to give the certificate to the applicant.”*

Writing a report on the state of quality and a plan for improving the quality is another phase of the certification process. Evaluative information in the reports needs to be based on observation and clearly explained. Enough appreciation and encouragement should be included. Great attention has to be devoted to improving quality and furthering professional growth. The reports are delivered to the teacher and then a phone call is

placed to arrange further steps. If the teacher wants further consultations or other systematic support, one of the certifiers becomes his/her personal mentor.

After six months from the first visit, a second observation and interview takes place. The data are analysed and another report is written. At this point, the certifiers decide whether to recommend ISSA give the teacher a certificate or not. If yes, the process is finished. If no, another observation follows after the next six months. So the whole process lasts at least six months and consists of at least two observation visits. Zuzana emphasizes that *"...the certification process does not mean any control or seeking mistakes. On the contrary, it is long-term support of the quality of the teacher's work."*

The most extensive material that resulted from the NGO preparation for certification was the "Certification Guide". It contains all the basic information needed for entering the certification process, such as an introduction of the ISSA and the Sbs CR, an explanation of the purpose of the Sbs standards and the certification process, a detailed description of the process and statement of requirements for giving a certificate, a step by step guide through the process and additional materials. These additional materials include application forms, requirements for the teacher's portfolio and the Sbs Program and Teacher Standards.

The certification process was presented for the first time at an annual meeting of the Sbs staff, and the directors and trainers from Sbs training centres that took place in the Eastern Bohemia town of Pardubice in January 2003. Approximately 30-40 people were present. During February 2003, eight first application forms together with, as Zuzana said, *"...incredibly heavy portfolios"* arrived to the Sbs office. The schools where the teachers are located were spread out all over the Czech Republic.

Current Certification Practice

"Up to now, 12 teachers have been involved in the certification process. The basic conditions of the certification procedure and the certifier's role have already stabilized" Zuzana stated on April 26, 2004. All the certifiers, except one, conducted several field observations. The average number of years spent by teachers who are successful in certification in the Sbs program is eight, and the average number of seminars per year is three. *"If you take a look at the portfolios, you can see that every one of these teachers was attending at least 2 seminars a year (not necessarily Sbs seminars),"* Zuzana points out.

How Can a Certifier Benefit a Teacher?

When exploring what is most important about how the certifiers benefit teachers, Marie comes to two main conclusions: providing immediate feedback within the interview

following the observation and providing the written feedback in the reports. *"We have repeatedly found out that the interview is a crucial moment."* The teacher might develop his/her own reflection of the morning's work. Then, he/she is interviewed about those parts of his/her work that relate to the standards and are difficult to observe (for example cooperation with family or professional growth) or about those parts that the certifiers have mixed opinions on. *"The teachers are often tense and waiting for our reactions. ... Besides the clarification of the aspects we cannot observe in the classroom, it has a certain psychological effect, the effect of calming the teacher."* Then, the teacher may really benefit from the reports, because *"...they include suggestions for improvement, i.e. concrete ideas, what and how to do in the classroom, how to extend the work, offer the children more ... we also recommend literature, sometimes also send some photocopied materials."*

According to Eva, what definitely is the greatest benefit certifiers can offer to a teacher is honest feedback. *"I appreciated that they spent the whole morning here to really see the children and also that they had time to talk with me after the observation and provided me with feedback."* Then she adds that she likes the time schedule, the fact that there were two observations, six months apart. *"I had time and opportunity to work on myself and to hear their opinion after six months. I was fully satisfied with that."*

The director says that from his point of view, the greatest benefit to the teacher lies in *"the certifiers' natural approach, in the lively contact, good observation and well-working reflection to the teacher."* He adds that nobody else can offer such a complex range of elements enabling the teacher to work systematically on his/her teaching. *"Of course when I come to the classroom I try to help, but still it is an inspection, which means control, and that is not a suitable role for such a help."*

Looking into the Future

The future of the role of certifiers is closely connected with the future of the whole certification practice in the Czech Republic. This short history of the practice shows the certifiers are devoted to development of the practice and the number of certifications realized proves they succeed in their efforts. The Ministry plans to develop a similar kind of evaluation to that which is working within the SbS, but currently lacks the methodology and instruments. Because the Ministry *"would appreciate cooperation"* and would like to make use of the SbS certifiers' experience, an opportunity of extending current cooperation now exists.

This corresponds to what Jane, an ISSA lecturer, said at the February Prague training. She emphasized that the SbS standards comply with general political trends in the European education - *"EU wants child-centered education and the SbS standards are very close to*

what experts consider developmentally appropriate ... but there is a lack of quality evaluation." She continued that the quality concept is a new approach to evaluation and it will take time until people understand and accept the change from previous practice. Only a high-quality program can achieve change for children, and only such a program seems to have the potential to survive in the highly competitive environment of Czech education. The certification process can be considered a powerful tool for supporting teachers in achieving and sustaining high quality work, and thus is also a crucial tool for the survival of the Sbs program.

Conclusion

"In the CR, there will be a working network of certifiers consisting of teachers ..., lecturers, master teacher trainers and parents, maybe even other professions ... that are interested in child-centred education ... Thus, the Sbs program methodology will be enriched to constantly edge towards the needs of children, families and communities." A full copy of the Case Study can be obtained after November 2004 by contacting the ISSA office (info@issa.nl.)

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