STEP BY STEP:
A PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

CREATING CHILD-CENTERED CLASSROOMS

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Foreword by: Pam Coughlin

The Soros Foundations/Open Society Institute is a network of foundations, programs, and institutions established and supported by philanthropist George Soros to foster the development of Open Societies around the world, particularly in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. To this end the Soros Foundation cooperates with Children's Resources International to develop and implement the project called Step by Step: A Program for Children and Families.

CRI, a nonprofit organization located in Washington, D.C., promotes the implementation of sound educational practices developed in the United States while maintaining the cultural traditions of the nineteen participating countries.

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FOREWORD

This is the first of a series of publications developed under the Step by Step Program. Step by Step began in 1994 when George Soros dedicated substantial resources of his Open Society Institute for an early childhood education project in Central and Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union. The purpose of this compelling education initiative was to develop a new participatory citizenry beginning with the youngest members of society and to draw families into the education of their children for the first time.

The Step by Step Program introduced developmentally appropriate teaching techniques from the United States to the well-established early care and education system in the countries that chose to adopt the program. An essential part of the implementation of the Step by Step Program was the development of a written curriculum, *Creating Child-Centered Classrooms.* It provides teachers with a guide for the establishment of a classroom environment designed around activity centers, the involvement of families in classrooms and the larger school community, and the individualization of teaching geared to the needs and interests of each child.

The Step by Step Program uses *Creating Child-Centered Classrooms* in combination with on-going training. Each country team, responsible for implementation of the program, is coupled with two or more trainers from the United States who offer on-going assistance. *Creating Child-Centered Classrooms* has been accepted by the Ministries of Education as an alternative curriculum in 19 countries and has been translated into their languages. This current version includes additional sections and revisions.

In the first year, the program was operational in 250 classrooms, burgeoning in the second year to more than 1500 classrooms serving over 37,500 children. Step by Step grew not only in participation, but in scope. It subsequently developed a complementary program for children in primary grades, a higher education initiative for pedagogic faculties, and published *Education and the Culture of Democracy: Early Childhood Practice*, a text that links early childhood teaching and democracy.

This document attests to the tireless work of our partners who implemented the program in Central and Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union. It is they who have made the dream we dreamed come true. We hope its application will lead others to the realization of active participation in open societies.

Pam Coughlin
Children's Resources International

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