



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION



ISSA Peer Learning Activities



ISSA Peer Learning Activities Overview 2020



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INTERNATIONAL STEP BY STEP ASSOCIATION

The **International Step by Step Association (ISSA)**, is a growing network and professional learning community encompassing over 90 organizations from 43 countries. Together we are dedicated to exploring and improving quality, equity, and access in early childhood services through pioneering initiatives and partnership projects.

ISSA's vision is of a society where families, communities and professionals work together to empower each child to reach her or his unique potential and embrace values of social justice and equity.

- **Do you share ISSA's this vision?**
- **Do you work in the field of Early Childhood Development?**
- **Can your organization benefit from being part of our community?**

To be part of our learning community – *Join ISSA!*

**ISSA International
Step by Step Association**

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Peer Learning Activities took on a new format in 2020

Every year ISSA Members benefit from Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), which aim to build Members' capacity, deepen their knowledge and act as enabling spaces for Members to co-create new knowledge. Though 2020 was not a typical year, and the COVID-19 pandemic deterred many plans globally, ISSA remained committed to this service that brings richness to the ISSA Network. In fact, in such a year, opportunities such as PLAs are vital. They enhance the ability that networks have to catalyze impact in the early childhood development field and provide space for professionals from different contexts and backgrounds to come together.

In 2020, due to travel restrictions made necessary by the COVID-19 pandemic the PLAs had a different format and took place exclusively online: a series of online workshops, webinars, or seminars hosted by Members for their

peers! The most wanted proposals were the ones offered.

This new format sparked innovation and creativity. It enabled participants to attend these meaningful webinars, workshops, and seminars from wherever they were, and allowed for Members to have access to the session recordings on-demand.

Five Member Organizations hosted PLAs, sharing their expertise and experience – ranging from inspiring best practices on how to help children confront negative emotions, to fruitful discussions about the accessibility of childcare centers.

Over the past 11 years,
56 PLAs
 have taken place within
 the ISSA network,
 benefiting more than
13,000
professionals.
 Every year, these events
 involve an increasing
 number of participants,
 from professionals
 working in ISSA
 Member Organizations,
 to practitioners.

The Peer Learning Activities are financially supported by ISSA with financial or in-kind contributions from its Members.

*If you would like to participate,
 consider joining as a Member of ISSA.*

*If you would like to learn more about our PLAs,
 contact us at membership@issa.nl*



Peer Learning Activities 2020 in figures

5
PLAs

25
ISSA Members involved
from
20
countries

232
Participants

17,259 Eur
Investment



In 2020, PLAs were attended by organizations from 20 countries:

Azerbaijan	France	Italy	Netherlands
Belgium	Georgia	Kyrgyzstan	Romania
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Greece	Latvia	Russia
Bulgaria	Hungary	Lithuania	Tajikistan
Estonia	Ireland	North Macedonia	Ukraine



Using the *Persona Doll* method during and after COVID

JANUARY–FEBRUARY 2021

A method to help children feel “not alone”

The *Persona Doll* method is a practical approach to help children talk about emotions and feelings in early childhood settings. The method provides a powerful, non-threatening, and enjoyable way to raise equality issues and counter stereotypical and discriminatory thinking with young children. The dolls help children express their feelings and worries, think critically, develop empathy, and challenge unfair treatment.

The approach uses a lifelike doll, which is given personality traits and story. This doll “visits” the classroom (offline and/or online) from time to time and allows teachers to talk about sensitive issues they might be reluctant to raise. With this method, children can turn fear and exclusion into respect and worries and bad feelings into the initiative to problemsolve.

There are very few educational tools available to help children cope with the many difficult experiences created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Using the *Persona Doll* approach, practitioners can help children name their feelings and emotions. The method has also helped children develop coping mechanisms during the pandemic through a combination of role-playing and storytelling.



Partners
Hungary
Alapítvány

Partners Hungary Foundation designed this PLA to provide hands-on experience in using *Persona Dolls*, and to offer opportunities for reflection and discussion. They also developed a step-by-step guide for delivering *Persona Doll* training online.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PARTNERS HUNGARY

Participants: 19

Host: Partner's Hungary Foundation

Country: Hungary

Structure: 3 online sessions of 6 hours each

MAIN LEARNING OUTCOMES

- The *Persona Doll* method, which can be used to effectively address the topic of prejudice and discrimination without fear and through play and which is an effective tool for dealing with emerging conflicts
- Prejudices and tools to work to reduce them
- Strategies to use *Persona Doll* to help break down fears and worries caused by COVID-19
- Step-by-step instructions how to deliver *Persona Doll* sessions and/or trainings

RESOURCES

- Practitioners Training Manual

“It was great pleasure to be part of the training and find new colleagues who pursue the same values and mission.”

— PLA Participant



A whole-family approach in early year settings: Why we need it, how it works and what it means for children, parents, staff, settings?

DECEMBER–JANUARY 2021

Sharing concrete tools to enhance the accessibility of childcare settings

Early years settings have a huge role to play in society. They contribute to children's learning and development, support them to develop social relations, and function as a 'gateway' into society. They also allow parents to work, engage in educational programs and even meet and bond with other parents. In most countries, early childhood education and care services (ECEC) are designed to maximize children's well-being and offer them the best possible learning and development opportunities – the focus is on stability and continuity.

There is a paradoxical and – most probably – unwanted side-effect to the way ECEC is organized, especially for the youngest children. The focus on stability creates additional thresholds for families, specifically families who have lower access to childcare anyway, such as parents on low-incomes, in vulnerable situations, living on benefits or unemployment, or parents with refugee status. People who do not have steady

Participants: 15
Host: Artevelde University of Applied Science
Country: Belgium
Structure: 4 sessions, 2.5 hours

MAIN LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Importance of cross-sectoral collaboration
- How to make the whole-family approach concrete in the early childhood services

RESOURCES

- Business Models for Holistic Childcare Toolbox
- Feasibility study for upscaling: Providing Access to Childcare and Employment (PACE)
- Providing Access to Childcare and Employment (PACE): Impact report (2016–2020)

employment have more difficulties finding a childcare solution. For them, the lack of flexibility is an additional barrier.

In this PLA, Artevelde University of Applied Science aimed to raise awareness about how the way that early years settings are typically organized can create additional barriers for parents, often for parents in vulnerable situations. They also shared good practices of holistic, integrated, and flexible childcare and raised questions about national and regional policies for discussion.

"I learned about the main aspects of childrens education activities."

— PLA Participant



Speaking a common language: Child development

FEBRUARY 2021

Why is it critical that the educational community speaks the same comprehensive language?

Addressing the very early years requires individuals to speak the same language across different organizations, family backgrounds, and roles (practitioner/caregiver/educator). Why is the same, comprehensive language so vital for the whole educational community?

Early childhood is a cross-cutting issue for which the education, social service, and health sectors are jointly responsible at different levels, from practitioners to policy-makers at national, regional, and municipality levels. Furthermore, pushing forward early childhood policies and practices while advocating for the importance of high-quality services requires that our diverse values, beliefs, and attitudes become embedded in a common framework.

During this PLA, Ensemble for Early Childhood Education used recent research from the field of neuroscience to enrich participants' knowledge of child development. The PLA focused on enhancing practices to support enriching environments for children and helping participants adopt a reflexive approach.



Participants: 10
Host: Ensemble for Early Childhood Education
Country: France
Structure: 2 sessions, 1.5 hours

MAIN LEARNING OUTCOMES

- An understanding of essential foundations in child development (e.g., observation, zone of proximal development, epigenetics, professional posture, quality feedback, social and emotional development, attachment)
- Appreciation of interactions between key knowledge foundations
- Rethinking about how child development knowledge is needed for on day-to-day practices
- Bringing self-reflections to day-to-day practices

RESOURCES

- “Tell me” – A compilation of videos addressed to families and ECD professionals, that explain the developmental stages of the child and how we can support children’s holistic development and autonomy

“I’m so excited about future opportunities! It’s great when PLAs are organized in this kind of interactive way, with materials, videos, and discussions, provoking a lot of thinking on your own background.”

— PLA Participant



“Turn it on! You can’t force it.” Creating inclusive schools and pre-schools

FEBRUARY 2021

Insights into creating inclusive schools and preschools

In Russia, and around the world, issues of inclusion are being raised. For professionals working to create inclusive environments in schools and preschools, many questions arise. How do you ensure your school fits any requirements? How do you provide adequate infrastructure? How are you sure to provide a rich experience if there are no specialists for children with special needs?

Based on the experience of practitioners who developed inclusive schools and preschools in St. Petersburg schools and in four other regions in Russia, this PLA included four thematic seminars with room for questions and answers, practical recommendations, and “hacks” for participants.



Participants: 119
Host: Pavlov Institute of Physiology,
Russian Academy of Sciences
Country: Russian Federation
Structure: 4 webinar sessions, 3 hours each
Language: Russian, with English interpretation

MAIN LEARNING OUTCOMES

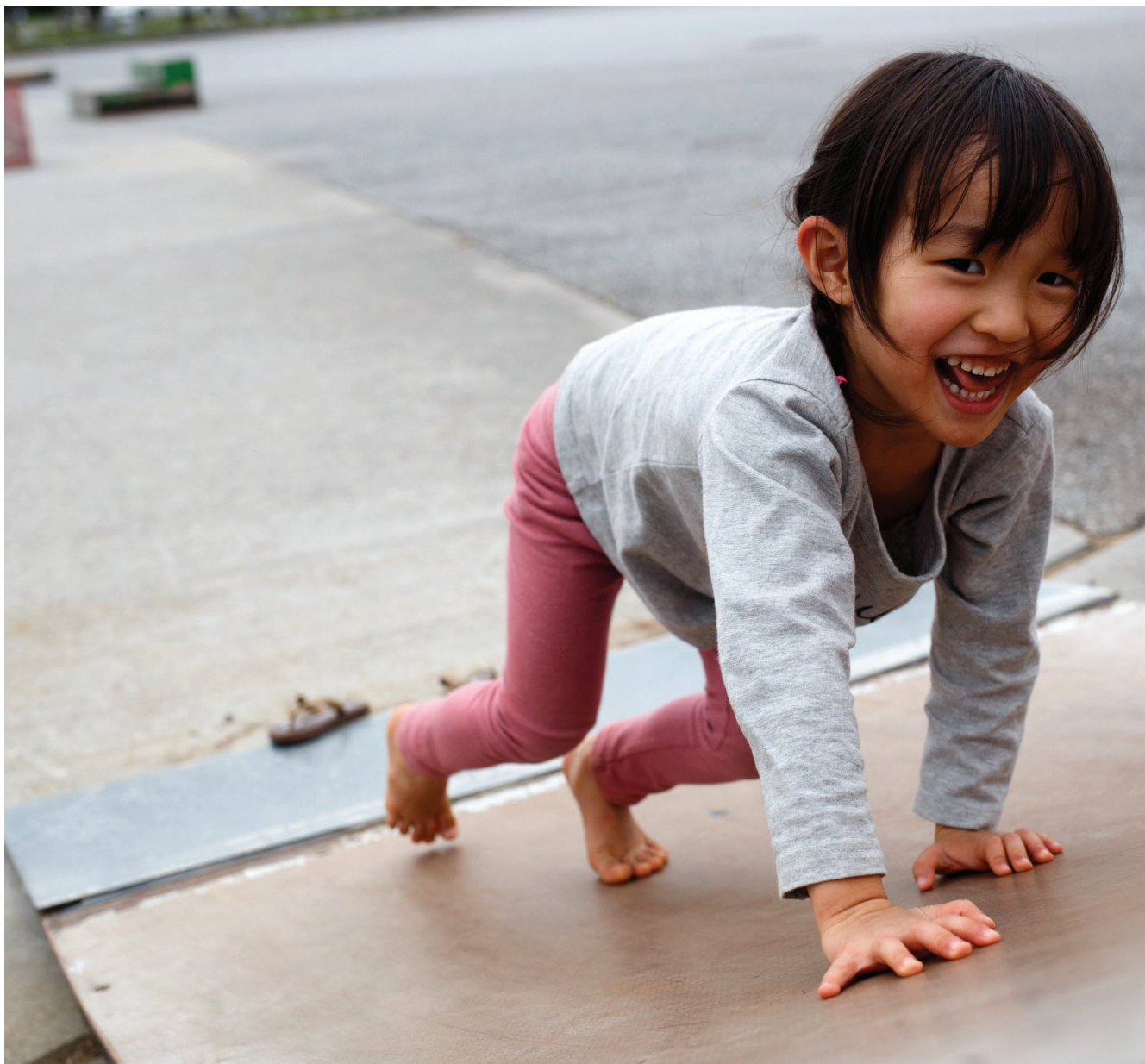
- Participants received a general idea of the state and problems of inclusion in preschool and school institutions in the Russian Federation and received specific examples from educational practice.

The participants gained insights into:

- The philosophy of inclusion and legal frameworks
- How to re-structure the learning environment to reinforce inclusion
- Diverse examples of good practices in inclusive education
- How to support the professional development of educators in inclusion

*“I plan to introduce the experience
gained in this webinar to students of the
Department of Special and Inclusive
Education where I work.”*

— PLA Participant



Gentle violence and ordinary educational violence: Tackling the issue and fostering children's development of self-esteem and identity

JANUARY 2021

“Gentle violence or Ordinary educational violence”: do these terms seem like oxymorons to you? Do they bother you?

Many recent neurological studies have shown that violent and malicious educational practices impact the child's emotional development and self-esteem. Questioning, defining, and understanding them in order to modify our reactions becomes essential.

In a society where “doing” takes a prominent role, the question of “violence” encourages professional educators to question their “knowing of how to be”. How can we welcome children and parents with mindfulness? How do we open up to others without judgment? How do we respect the individual? What can we do to support the parent-child

Participants: 9
Host: Le Furet
Country: France
Structure: 4 sessions 2.5 hours

MAIN LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Deep understanding of what constitutes gentle violence in ECEC centers
- Reflection on how we can better evaluate practices and work on professional posture
- Reflection about how we, as professionals, act in the best interest of the child and respond to his/her fundamental emotional and social needs

bond? How can we listen to each other and support the diverse paths of parenthood?

This PLA offered by Le Furet focused on these questions, aiming to help professionals question their practices and build quality within their teams. Participants learned to identify “ordinary educational violence”, develop active listening and respectful collaboration, and create evaluation methods to track their progression.

“Thank you for the opportunity, and more so in the ‘COVID-time.’ In addition to being interesting, it helped to feel connected.”

— PLA Participant



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We would like to thank our supporters for making this work possible.

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