Hello!

The newest edition of Step by Step electronic bulletin has arrived! This is the right place to get informed on the new resources that we have published – picture books for the children, manual for the parents and teachers, trainings and workshops, opportunities to learn through play and many other activities.

Enjoy reading and get informed on the following pages.

Greetings from the Step by Step team.
In the period between October and December 2015, as part of the USAID Readers and Leaders Project, around 550 representatives from 233 primary schools will go through a two-day training for reading and numeracy assessment of early grade students. The goal of the training is to prepare the representatives from primary schools (pedagogues, psychologists or lower-grade teachers) to make individual reading and numeracy assessment with the help of the standardized instruments EGRA and EGMA. In the spirit of modern technology, the tools EGRA and EGMA are used with tablet computers that USAID has donated to the schools through the Readers and Leaders Project. By using tablets, the assessment process is more precise and more efficient, and the administrative work of the assessors is reduced.

“During the training we managed to get knowledge for use of the EGRA and EGMA instruments. I think that the training was exceptionally organized. The participants also got a chance to prove their own qualities, especially I liked that all were constructive. The means, instruments and methods that we used during the training were very practical.”

During 2013 and 2014, the same training was conducted for representatives from the other 103 primary schools in the country where the instruments were piloted and a baseline literacy and numeracy study with second and third grade students has already been conducted.

“It is of great importance that the research is conducted successfully in order to see where our students stand in literacy and numeracy, and through the results to see what kind of changes need to be made in order to improve student achievements.”
The last literacy and numeracy study on a national level in Macedonian and Albanian language was conducted in 2001. In the last several years, there has been some research made on the basic literacy and numeracy, but those are mainly research as part of a project, for example the research that UNICEF conducted before and after the first cycle of the Project for Literacy, Numeracy and Inclusion in Early Grades (2010 and 2013) on a sample of thirty primary schools. There were many reforms in our education, including the nine-year primary education enacted in 2007 and the new early-grade math curriculum introduced last year. However, more in-depth research is needed on a larger sample in order to see how successful these reforms are and whether they influence student achievements.

In May 2016, within the Readers and Leaders Project, a literacy and numeracy study will be conducted with a sample of 5,000 second and third graders from all primary schools in the country, in Macedonian and Albanian language of instruction. Based on the data received, standards for reading in Macedonian and Albanian language for second and third grade will be developed which will enable the educators to regularly monitor students’ achievements.

Viktorija Dimitrovska, Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Coordinator at USAID Readers and Leaders Project outlined the importance of the standardized tools for literacy and numeracy assessment: “As part of their work, school pedagogues have always done some kind of assessment of the literacy and numeracy, especially of student reading skills. However, until now the assessment has been done with the help of instruments developed in the time of Yugoslavia or with instruments that the school pedagogues have developed themselves. Now, by introducing EGRA, school pedagogues finally received an instrument in Macedonian and Albanian language with the help of which they can assess student literacy skills in a systematic manner while having reliable, valid and comparable results.”
The Learning Communities are conceptualized as places where teachers can share experiences, practices, but also dilemmas and challenges of their everyday work, without distractions and in a constructive manner. The first and second phase schools are already actively engaged in this activity, they meet on a regular basis and talk about their action plans for the development activities which they have identified as important for their practice. Starting this November, the 20 schools from phase 3 are going to establish their own learning communities. We talked to Dobri Jovevski from Ilinden primary school from Kriva Palanka, about his experience, both as a member of a learning community in his school, and as a mentor who supports learning communities in other project schools.

“To be a mentor of a learning community for me is a challenge and an opportunity together with the teachers to create plans about how to overcome certain challenges which they face. The creating of networks of learning communities and the opportunity to join forces with other schools is an incentive to share examples of everyday work of the teachers, conducting joint projects focused on improving the quality of students’ literacy and numeracy skills.” – Dobri Jovevski, lower-grade teacher at Ilinden primary school in Kriva Palanka and mentor in Hristijan Todorovski Karpos primary school in Dragomance, Staro Nagoricane.
"HOW TO READ, LEARN AND HAVE FUN?" 
literacy training for schools

Based on the needs assessment survey for professional development in project schools and the results acquired through the baseline literacy study, in September, 2015 literacy trainings were conducted for 40 project schools. The trainings were provided for the members of the learning communities and the objectives were to introduce teachers with:

- creative activities and techniques to support literacy in young students;
- techniques for creating innovative literacy teaching resources;
- techniques for utilizing play as a learning method; and
- possibilities for inclusion of family members in the learning process with young children.

"The 'How to read, learn and have fun?' training is different from other trainings because it offers ready-to-use teaching techniques and strategies for the early reading and writing process. Personally, from the experience in my daily work with students at the teacher training faculty, I can say that this training is very important because it incorporates ways of learning that make early literacy a smoother process."

Lulzim Aliu, professor at the Faculty of Pedagogy
"St. Kliment Ohridski" - Skopje
Vesna Stanojevikj, a lower-grade teacher in Istikbal primary school in Tetovo and a literacy trainer shared with us: "As an experienced lower-grade teacher, I go through a constant learning and professional development process. This training has ignited my curiosity because it offered me new literacy teaching techniques which I can immediately and easily incorporate in my daily work. The dynamics of the activities, the realization style, the well-prepared training resources and the well-thought-out teaching strategies made this training different from others. After the training I immediately got feedback from the teachers about how they already implemented some of the new techniques in class. I can assure you that once you reveal these techniques to the students, they will be asking for them, over and over again. The title of the training actually confirms what I just said – READ, LEARN AND HAVE FUN!"

These workshops provide participants with opportunities to engage themselves in the activities in an interactive manner, as if they were students, and to come up with new ideas based on personal experience. Furthermore, these experiences and knowledge acquired through the trainings, will be shared by participants with other colleagues in the schools they work at.

"Sharing knowledge and experiences from these trainings in one’s own context is of crucial importance for me. It is a good idea to disseminate these activities in the schools and to create support teams. Teacher-leaders should be responsible for this in their local environment. These teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills, they know how to transfer knowledge and selflessly collaborate with peers during working hours and beyond."

- added Vesna Stanojevikj.
While assessing early grade literacy and numeracy in primary schools in Macedonia, USAID Readers are Leaders Project also considered the availability of learning resources, learning environment, as well as other socio-economic factors that could influence literacy. Research has shown that teachers and students do not lack textbooks, rather they lack additional reading resources both in the classroom and at home. To contribute in overcoming this situation, Foundation Step by Step published a collection of 20 picture books in Macedonian and Albanian language and distributed them to all lower-grade classrooms and school libraries in all primary schools in the country.

The 20 titles of picture books, a manual for parents and teachers and a poster displaying the topics covered in the picture books are part of the collection titles “Our First Library”. Why this title? Because we hope that this will be an incentive for EVERY early-grade classroom to continue enriching their private collection of reading resources available for the children every day.
How to make the most out of reading with young children? What kind of questions do we need to ask children related to the books we are reading with them in order to stimulate their critical thinking skills? How to use these picture books to learn with children about science, art, or talk to them about feelings? In order to offer ideas and activities to the parents and children, we prepared a manual that is aimed to support reading and learning together with children.

All 20 titles of picture books, the manual and the poster are also available in our digital library: [http://stepbystep.org.mk/en/biblioteka](http://stepbystep.org.mk/en/biblioteka)
In her remarks at the event, Mrs. Capie Polk Baily, wife of the US Ambassador to Macedonia, Jess Baily, emphasized, “Children’s books are more than just cute pictures: the words and stories give children an invitation to new experiences, ideas, places, and people. Children’s books improve language and communications skills.”
At the beginning of September, our Magic Literacy Van continued visiting schools across the country. We visited several schools in the surroundings of Skopje, Tetovo and Ohrid. In the Ohrid area we came across a school building with a beautiful view over the Ohrid Lake – satellite school of Sv. Naum Ohridski – Peshtani, in the village Trpejca.

Stefan, Melani, Mihail, Sara and Nadica are the names of the five students that currently study in this satellite school in one combined group from grade 1 to grade 5. Their teacher, Lila Karanfilovska, travels every day from Bitola to Trpejca one hour and a half each direction. Lila shared with us the challenges she faces when working with a combined group of students in a rural satellite school. What are the challenges and what are the benefits of working in such environment? “In Trpejca I work for nine years. This year I have a group of five students, but there has been years when I have worked with only two children. I cannot always use a lot of manipulatives when working with a specific child because it distracts others, so I have to adjust the activities and techniques I use. But these are wonderful children who always help each other when learning. We lack resources and manipulatives, but we have a great cooperation with parents and they contribute whenever possible. This is what keeps me going and encourages me to continue my journey.”
During our visit we were constantly accompanied by two mothers who were helping students during the activities. Spasa Risteska, mother of Sara who is a second-grader, shared: “My father also studied in this same school. It was built in the 1950’ and since then very little has been invested in its infrastructure. During the school year very few outside visitors come, there isn’t much going on. Still, we try to involve our children in everything, so that they do not miss opportunities to learn and experiences. That is why we are thrilled about your visit.”

Sara, on the other hand, told us that she really wants to have this colorful library in the classroom...

Teacher Lila deserves all the credit that the Magic Literacy Van came to visit Sv. Naum Ohridski primary school. She took the initiative to set up this event for the students in the school she works at, so since the announcement they counted each day until the colorful library was to come to their school yard. Lila also understands the enormous importance of continuous professional development of educators and her constant drive to become part of various trainings, seminars and workshops even if it means covering all the expenses as it is a practice in more developed countries.

Besides the school in Trpejca, the Magic Literacy Van visited the remaining three buildings of Sv. Naum Ohridski primary school – the central school in Peshtani and the satellite schools in Konjsko and Elshani.

In the upcoming period the Magic Literacy Van will continue its journey within the country and our priority is reaching the most remote, rural areas and schools which don’t have libraries in their community.
IN THE PERIOD JULY – OCTOBER THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES WERE UNDERTAKEN:

- Focus group with class teachers and subject teachers from primary schools and gymnasias and Trade Union for Education representative. During the focus groups, the workload of teachers and possible solutions were discussed.

- Round table discussion for the draft competencies and standards for school librarians. School librarians from rural and urban, primary and secondary schools participated and contributed for finalizing the document. The competencies and standards will be used for professional development and career advancement for the school librarians.

- Meeting with the student support services that pilot the instruments and procedures for career advancement. The piloting process began in October and will end in December. The insights gained during the piloting will be used for finalizing the procedures and instruments.

- The Guideline for piloting the procedures and instruments for advancement in title teacher mentor was adapted according to the insights gained via the focus groups with the teachers that piloted the process and the filled in questionnaires.

- Piloting of the instruments for assessment of the teacher portfolios for advancement in titles. The Committee gathered several times to review the criteria for assessment of the portfolios and to redo the instruments for assessment.

* The main implementer of the USAID Teacher Professional and Career Development Project is the Macedonian Civic Education Center. The Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives “Step by Step” is a partner-organization in the implementation of activities under the Teacher Competences Component.

For more information regarding the USAID Teacher Professional and Career Development Project, please contact Project Chief of Party, Vera Kondikj - Mitkovska, Macedonian Civic Education Center, through e-mail: VKondik@mcgo.org.mk
The children involved in the project have successfully enrolled in the first grade

The Project for (Self) Empowerment of Roma Parents and Children, has successfully concluded with its project activities after two years of implementation. The activities in the last several months were dedicated to getting the children and their families ready for enrollment in the first grade. With the projects help, through the acquisition of the needed skills and knowledge in math and science, through the acquisition of the Macedonian language, good hygiene habits, communication and socialization, 71 children started their journey toward their formal education. We believe that the support which these children received in their early years is a solid basis to continue their education further in high school and also acquire university level education. Roma parents are more aware of their role as parents, responsibility and support they ought to provide their children with in the education process for the purposes of better communication and cooperation with their children’s teachers and the school. For the trained educators the project provided opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills in the area of early childhood development and education for marginalized groups, which we believe will prove very useful in their career paths.

The initial feedback from the teachers of the 71 first-graders testify for the difference between the level of school readiness of the children supported by the project and those children that were not included in a preschool programme. The initial success, the motivation and self-confidence of the children in these first two months, as well as the solid knowledge and skill base which they have brought with themselves, we hope, will guarantee that this group of children will successfully trace their path through the education system and contribute to the general well-being of the Roma population in Macedonia.

For more information regarding the Project for (Self) Empowerment of Roma Parents and Children, contact Elena Mishik, Project Coordinator, through e-mail: elena@stepbystep.org.mk

www.stepbystep.org.mk
In order to provide financial and organizational sustainability and to increase the efficiency in implementing our vision and mission and the services we offer to our users, the Step by Step Foundation this year started a long term process of organizational capacity building. The Step by Step team works with help of local and international consultants in developing a strategy and additional resources that will bring to more efficient and higher quality activity ideas and their implementation.

In the period between August 18-21, the team of the Step by Step – Macedonia participated at a regional conference for educators in Bosnia. The topic of the conference was “Language in function of the development of critical thinking”. The Step by Step team presented several presentations and workshops: presentation of the Readers and Leaders Project, workshop for development of instruments for literacy assessment and workshop for developing academic and life skills in children through drama play.
In the period between October 8-11, we were hosts to a peer-learning event for our colleagues and collaborators from organizations members of the International Step by Step Association from six countries in the region: Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia and Kosovo. This three-day activity was an excellent opportunity to share experiences and challenges in our work on early childhood development, as well as to discuss possibilities for future regional cooperation in particular areas.

In the period between September 8 - 11, representatives of the Step by Step Foundation participated in the conference “Education and transition- contributions from education research” organized by the European Educational Research Association in Budapest. At the conference over 2,700 papers on education research were presented by professors and doctoral students from top universities, representatives from ministries for education and experts for education policies and representatives from the nongovernmental sector whose goal is improvement of education. At the conference, the Step by Step representatives presented the activities within the Readers and Leaders Project related with the learning communities.

The guests from the region participated in an event with the Magic Literacy Van in the school Sv. Naum Ohridski, Peshtani