

EDUCATION SECTION  
PROGRAMME DIVISION



# CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

## **CASE STUDY:** BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

UNICEF 2010

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**CHILD-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS IN BOSNIA AND  
HERZEGOVINA:  
A CASE STUDY**



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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CEE/CIS</b>	Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
<b>CFS</b>	Child-Friendly Schools
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>OHR</b>	Office of the High Representative
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund

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Commentaries represent the personal views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions of the United Nations Children's Fund.

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## CONTEXT

### Overview

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country in South-Eastern Europe, on the western Balkan Peninsula with an area of 51,209 sq. km and close to 3.8 million people. Bordered by Croatia to the north, west and south, Serbia to the east and Montenegro to the south, Bosnia and Herzegovina is almost landlocked, except for a small stretch of Adriatic Sea coastline it claims in the south. Formerly one of the six federal units constituting the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence on 4 March 1992. Shortly thereafter the country went through a complex, three-year-long armed conflict that finally ended with the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 14 December 1995.

The Agreement, known as the Dayton Peace Accords retained Bosnia and Herzegovina's international boundaries and created a joint multi-ethnic and democratic government charged with conducting foreign, diplomatic and fiscal policy. Also recognized was a second tier of government comprised of two entities roughly equal in size: the Bosniak/Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian Serb-led Republic of Srpska. The Federation and the Srpska Governments were charged with overseeing most governmental functions. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) was established to oversee the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Agreement. In 1995–1996, an international peacekeeping force of 60,000 troops of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) served in Bosnia to implement and monitor the military aspects of the Agreement. Since then, it has been replaced by European Union peacekeeping troops whose mission changed from peacekeeping to civil policing in October 2007, reducing its presence to 2,500 troops.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is home to three main ethnic groups: 48 Bosniak, 37.1 per cent Serb, 14.3 per cent Croat, and 0.6 per cent representing other groups. Along religious lines, 40 per cent of the population declare themselves Muslim, 31 per cent Orthodox Christian, 15 per cent Roman Catholic, with 14 per cent undeclared or following other beliefs. These ethnic and religious differences have been exploited in the past by political interests with the aim of fostering ethnic-based separatist movements and erasing the shared cultural heritage that instilled sentiments of a strong national identity of the past. The country is in transition to a market-oriented economy, and although it still has a trade deficit, the economy has nearly recovered to pre-war levels. Along with the likelihood of achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Bosnia and Herzegovina is ranked fifth in the world among developing countries on the Human Poverty Index<sup>1</sup>, while also being included in the list of countries worldwide with a high human development index. In working towards membership of the European Union, Bosnia and Herzegovina has

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2008 Statistical Updates*, UNDP, New York, 2008. Also noteworthy is that, according to the *Human Development Report 2006*, Bosnia and Herzegovina has a very low disparity between the richest and the poorest citizens, UNDP, New York, 2006.

joined a group of candidate nations within the Stabilization and Association Process, a system created as an intermediary regulatory step to European Union accession. Since the end of the war, the country has made considerable progress in meeting conditional measures required to join the European Union and has already joined the Union for the Mediterranean as a founding member in July 2008.

## Issues and Education Challenges

The educational context in Bosnia and Herzegovina reflects, on one hand, the constitutional setting and administrative division of the country and, on the other hand, its economic circumstances. The legislative power and creation of education policy includes 14 administrative levels. The overall authority in education sector has been delegated to ten cantons, the Entity of Republic of Srpska and the Brcko District. The Federation Ministry of Education and Culture has a coordinating function over 10 cantons. The state Ministry of Civil Affairs is an administrative body responsible for setting basic principles for the coordination of activities, harmonization of entity policies and definition of education policy at the international level.

As a result of this structure, the country's education system has suffered from a lack of common educational space at the state level. This includes a lack of transparent information and missing data. Because politics dominate the education scene, the coherence, quality and standards of education have suffered: curricula and textbooks differ from region to region and are ethnically biased, teachers have not been trained in up-to-date teaching methods and new graduates are not equipped with the necessary skills to tackle real-world challenges. The education system is fragmented (14 Ministers of Education), highly politicized and, as a consequence, extremely difficult to reform.

It is characterized by inefficiencies, disproportionate cost by student and strong regional disparities in access and quality. Preschool enrolment (6.4 per cent) is one of the lowest in the region, and actual primary/secondary school enrolment rates are lower than official figures (MICS 2006).

**Table 1. Education statistical data**

	Indicator	Figure	Units	Year	Source
Education	Primary school attendance rate	98.4	%	2006	UNICEF BiH (MICS 2006)
	Secondary school attendance rate	79.3	%	2006	UNICEF BiH (MICS 2006)
	Women with no school education	17	%	2007	National Human Development Report (2007)
	Men with no school education	6	%	2007	National Human Development Report (2007)

Note: BiH is used for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Sources:** Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2006; National Human Development Report, 2007.

Although the national primary school attendance rate is 98 per cent and 99.7 per cent for boys and girls respectively, there is no government tracking system in place to monitor enrolment based on birth, residence and school registration (Kabil, page 6). As nearly half of the population is near the poverty line, school drop-out rates – although not accurately monitored – are likely to increase with the rising cost of education each year. The actual drop-out rate in the country is not known, because of population shifts and diversity of collection methods.

Roma children are the most likely to face barriers to their right to an education. Faced with discrimination, poverty and homelessness, only one third of Roma children are enrolled in schools (UNICEF 2007), and they are nearly absent from secondary schools. While the main ethnic groups have access to their first language in schools, there has been no government- mandated attempt to incorporate the Romani language or include cultural icons from minority groups in school curricula (Kabil, page 5). Related to this, children with special needs are often neglected in government planning, although they are guaranteed the right to a formal education along with all children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and by the national Framework Law on Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education.

There are still “divided schools” in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with marginalized groups and national minorities being deprived of their right to quality education. Furthermore, the “Two Schools under One Roof” model, which separates students into their ethnic groups, still exists, exemplifying the ethnic segregation that affects all school in the country. Despite a recommendation from the Conference of Ministers of Education that all forms of discrimination should be addressed, there is a general lack of sensitivity among students and teachers to discrimination in schools, especially in areas where the majority population belongs to a single ethnic group.

As a result, instead of being used to build a peaceful, democratic, fair and just society, the education system is used to fuel divisions, intolerance and potential future conflicts.<sup>2</sup> Segregation of children in schools – together with other challenges mentioned above – constitutes a very serious child rights issue that UNICEF cannot ignore, and that should be the central issue driving UNICEF’s interventions in education in the country.

Other challenges include the psychosocial impact on families caused by war and the ensuing trauma caused by displacement. UNICEF data from the country office (Kabil, page 4) indicates that children growing up in internally displaced persons camps face

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<sup>2</sup> As the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education put it recently: “The ‘Two Schools under One Roof’ represents an unacceptable practice as it allows the existence of discriminatory education models, which segregate and divide students of different cultural groups; other models, although not divisive as such, still neglect fully cultural specificities of minority social groups. Excessive educational fragmentation opposes intercultural dialogues, as well as an urgent need for social reconciliation and searching for amicable solutions for social, cultural and religious conflicts.”

much higher levels of depression and struggle with social competencies required for success in school and the labour market.

## **Current Education Policy**

In 2002 Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted a much-needed Education Reform Agenda (ERA), outlining the key educational goals and strategies needed to modernize and reform the education sector. This Agenda has served as the legal framework for improving the situation of education for all children in the country as well as the framework for UNICEF and other development partners' strategic interventions with the government.

The Education Reform Agenda identifies as its overriding objective the need to “depoliticize education while creating the conditions that will ensure equal access to high quality, modern education throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.” In three of its five pledges, the Ministers of Education pledge to:

- Ensure that all children have access to quality education, in integrated multicultural schools, that is free from political, religious, cultural and other bias and discrimination, and which respects the rights of all children;
- Provide basic education of good quality at the preschool, primary and general secondary levels, with a modern curriculum and a modern system of assessment and certification for students and teachers. Ensure that students are taught by well-trained teachers, in properly equipped and efficiently managed schools;
- Ensure the transparent, equitable, cost-effective and financially sustainable investment of public resources, and implement education legislation at all levels that is based on European standards and norms, and grounded in international human rights conventions.

Since 2002, the Education Reform Agenda has informed the development of a number of other strategic documents such as the 2004–2007 Medium-Term Development Strategy (revised in 2006), the Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education (2003), the Framework Law on Preschool Education (2007), Law establishing the Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education (2007).

### **Brief overview of key education indicators**

The MDG for education calls for universal primary education for all. While near universal primary education (ages 6–15)<sup>3</sup> has been achieved, the share of non-enrolled children has increased to an estimated of 4 per cent of the total.<sup>4</sup> Children with special needs have particular problems receiving appropriate schooling. Disparities exist between children

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<sup>3</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, primary education takes nine years, which is mandatory education, and secondary education takes four years, which can be either general or vocational education.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *MDG Update Report for Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Europe and Beyond, UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2004.



from poor and more affluent households. About 43 per cent of children from poor households (compared to 23 per cent of children from more affluent households) fail to proceed to secondary level.<sup>5</sup> Children of impoverished and uneducated parents stand less chance of developing the language, social skills and learning habits crucial to academic success.

The data below indicate a gap between boys and girls in terms of enrolment and attendance in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Table 2. School enrolment and literacy, by gender**

Total population (thousands), 2007	Primary school net enrolment/attendance (%), 2000–2007*	Enrolment and attendance ratios: females as a % of males, net primary school 2000–2007*, attending	Adult literacy rate: females as a % of males, 2000–2007*	Secondary school attendance ratio 2000–2007*, net, male and female
3935	91	95	95	89

Source: MICS data at [www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bosniaherzegovina\\_statistics.html#56](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bosniaherzegovina_statistics.html#56).

## PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

*“The purpose of a CFS model is to move schools and education systems progressively towards quality standards, addressing all elements that influence the wellbeing and rights of the child as a learner and the main beneficiary of teaching, while improving other school functions in the process.” – Child-Friendly Schools Manual (UNICEF 2009, page 18)*

### History of child-friendly schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The overall objective of the UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina Education Programme is to encourage and assist the national authorities to comply with the obligations and commitments they undertook when they pledged to reform their system of education – a complex task given that there are 14 Ministries of Education in a country of approximately 3.8 million people. Moreover, the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been faced for the last 14 years with critical issues of structural fragmentation, politicization and deterioration in quality.

The child-friendly schools (CFS) Project initiated in 2002 was created to address the quality of teaching by changing the teaching practices to focus on children rather than teachers and encourage child participation. The CFS Project was designed to encompass

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *MDG Update Report for Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Europe and Beyond, UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2004.

activities developed to answer some of the questions that educational reform poses for schools and teachers, as well as the entire educational system. Taking into account findings from a large number of studies showing that the role of a well-trained and qualified teacher in achieving educational outcomes for each child is of a paramount importance (and that insufficiently trained teachers are the main reason behind failure of educational reforms), the project focused on teachers as the pillars of successful reforms, while at the same time working with bureaucratic policy levels in order to establish conditions for sustainable systemic change.

The organizational structure of the project has been developed to ensure maximum participation and ownership by all stakeholders. Technical advisers from the Centre for Educational Initiatives Step by Step (CEI), a local non-governmental organization, guided the project implementation process, working closely with project coordinators and implementation teams from each of the participating cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, regions in the Republic of Srpska and Brcko District. The Ministries of Education nominated project coordinators.

Training centres and practice classrooms were established in each canton, region and district throughout the country to ensure improved school management and ongoing professional development. The training centres have been used for training the coordinators, school directors, educators, trainers, teachers, special education advisers and parents (if and when appropriate), as well as serving as resource centres and libraries. Consistent with the aim of promoting child-centred teaching and learning approaches, the project also included a supply component to equip schools with round tables, chairs, bookshelves, display boards, books and teaching aids.

In 2004 a midterm external evaluation of the CFS Project was conducted (Proactive Information Services, *Evaluation of the Child-Friendly Schools Project Final Report*, March 2005). The three key questions for the evaluation were:

1. What are the effects on children (outcomes) of quality child-centred education and a child-friendly school environment?
2. What are the other effects (outputs and outcomes) of the major initiatives in the Child-Friendly Schools Project?
3. What are the factors or approaches that will assist in making the initiatives sustainable?

Data from all respondent groups in the evaluation consistently pointed to the fact that the children demonstrated the desired outcomes, with the conclusion being that, in most cases, students outperformed those in 'traditional' classrooms. Evidence to support the demonstration of these outcomes came from the perspectives of educators, parents, the children themselves, and from independent observation in selected classrooms.

Furthermore, schools have become more welcoming to both students and parents, while becoming more collaborative places for teachers and other professionals.

The evaluation reported that the project had made *“the most quality contribution to the reform implementation in the area of elementary education, as it did not stay at the theoretical or local level.”* However, the respondents also argued for a comprehensive system of professional development, starting with pre-service and continuing into lifelong learning for teachers, including a network of training centres.

After the first external evaluation, the project was continued, placing a special focus on the creation of a quality school model. That is how an initiative called School Improvement was introduced as part of the CFS Project in 2005. This initiative started in 16 primary schools and was soon expanded to 48 primary schools. School Improvement is an ongoing process consisting of several key elements such as: development of the joint vision and the joint mission, analysis of the current situation and creation of the school development plans, and the process of self-assessment. The goal of this training programme was to support schools in the use of existing resources (knowledge and skills of teachers, school principals and students) for the development of the school and with full participation of all stakeholders.

The process of sustaining systemic change in school management and teacher training was enhanced through the development of documents to assist the project implementers, school managers, teachers and trainers. Using a participatory approach involving stakeholders, documents were developed that included teaching manuals based on the existing curricula for kindergarten through fourth grade, teacher training modules, guidelines for establishing systemic change, and school/teacher certification and accreditation guidelines.

In 2008, the second external evaluation of the CFS Project was conducted (Proman, External Evaluation of the CFS Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The objective of this formative evaluation was to assess the potential modalities and strategies of the project to be replicated and scaled up with a particular focus on three elements of the CFS concept (inclusiveness, effectiveness and stakeholders' participation with the view to documenting and disseminating best practices in order to contribute to the Education Sector Reform). The main finding from the evaluation was that by the end of 2007, 97 per cent of lower primary-school teachers and 58 per cent of upper primary-school teachers had received basic or advanced child-centred methodology training. This includes 82 trainers for School Improvement, advanced child-centred methodology, and for the advanced Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking programme. Principals and management teams received training in school improvement planning. Since all primary schools in the country have implemented at least one of the CFS principles and approaches, it can be said that the project has made CFS available and accessible to children nationwide.

The school environment needs to be put in context with the larger societal environment, however. By supporting processes of reconciliation and cross-cultural understanding at school and implementation level, the CFS Project can make an invaluable contribution to reinforcing prospects for peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. The aim is to promote interculturalism among the peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina and lay a sound base for

the future, which is a prerequisite for economic revitalization. Future work should therefore be more focused on providing concrete support to the finalization of legal regulations regarding curricular issues and inspectorate services, and also utilize experiences from the CFS approach to contribute to the development of common outcome-based framework curricula and quality standards.

## **Funding**

Over the five-year period, UNICEF invested around US\$3.6 million for the project or \$530,000 per year (direct costs), with \$647,000 spent in total on training activities for a total of 2,822 training beneficiaries. This results in an average unit cost per trainee of approximately \$230 (probably around \$150 for basic training only). This is well in line with international benchmarks and experience values for similar interventions. It needs to be borne in mind that the cost for “development, adjustment and printing of teaching materials” covered substantial material development costs (including translation into three languages), which will not need to be repeated on this scale for subsequent project phases.

## **Programme Beneficiaries**

When the project started in 2002, it initially included 74 primary schools from six cantons and one entity. From November 2001 until December 2004 a total of 1,100 teachers were trained in child-centred methodology, 480 of whom received advanced training, while 110 were trained to become trainers or mentors. A total of 14 training centres for teachers has been established. After the local trainings were initiated, run by the certified teacher trainers and organized by the Ministries of Education, the total number of participating schools was increased by 20 per cent (from 60 per cent in 2004 to 80 per cent in 2007).

In 2005, the School Improvement initiative was piloted in 16 primary schools, aiming at supporting schools in the use of their existing resources for the development of the schools and with full participation of all stakeholders. In 2007, the initiative was extended to 32 new schools. At the end of 2007, nine different teacher training programmes for 1,050 primary-school teachers were delivered.

As a result, 96.5 per cent of lower primary-school teachers and 58 per-cent of upper primary- school teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina passed basic or advanced child-centred methodology training, including Training of Trainers for 82 trainers.

## **Working Structure and Stakeholders**

The CFS Project, when viewed holistically and with the aim of sustainability, requires involvement from all stakeholders. To this end, the project addresses a wide range of stakeholders and decision-makers in the educational and societal system, including: government authorities at all levels, civil society and the media, school managers, school teachers, educators, children – particularly girls and children with special needs, and parents.

At the school level, the CFS Project has addressed primary stakeholders' needs by (Pfaffe, page 16):

- contributing to children's well-being and holistic development;
- bringing teachers' and principals' knowledge at par with the latest thinking about learning and education;
- upgrading teaching and education management skills at school level; and
- creating space for participation of parents and communities in education.

UNICEF has been an important stakeholder in terms of the development of models for the promotion of social inclusion. Experience has shown that lessons learned from the field and community level need to be fed back to the policymaking level in order to ensure future sustainability. UNICEF achieved significant results at the policy as well as at the school level, and has been seen as a credible partner in the education sector at both levels.

Field presence and stakeholder empowerment, combined with involvement in policy discussions and advocacy for quality basic education, have been UNICEF's strategies for the working structure. As one of the main objectives of the CFS Project is sustainability, it has been especially important to support schools at the community level while also feeding input into education policy writing at the national level. According to the final evaluation (page 16), the CFS Project provides ample opportunities to advocate and support stakeholders' strategic needs by providing evidence on how to ensure equal access to an education based on a modern curriculum and assessment system and provided by well-trained teachers.

## **PROCESS**

***According to respondents in the midterm evaluation, the CFS Project is "the most quality contribution to the reform implementation in the area of elementary education, as it did not stay at the theoretical or local level." – Midterm evaluation (page 11)***

## **Building on Existing Structures for Sustainability**

Establishing implementation teams and appointing coordinators and training coordinators at the very beginning of the project, in cooperation with the Ministries of Education and teaching institutes, resulted in the creation of a strong network of decision-makers who reached a common understanding about the main priorities and activities within the educational reform, as well as developing ownership of all project activities. During the course of the project, meetings with coordinators were held at least four times a year (every second month since the first year of project implementation). A team of 14 coordinators and training coordinators (mainly trainers for different training programmes in all areas of the country) was involved in strategy development and decision-making processes, as well as in the first external evaluation of the project, conducted in 2004. Moreover, in their respective areas, project coordinators initiated professional dialogue with colleagues, practitioners and parents, and in that way, became advocates for change in educational policy and practice. Also, one of the key outcomes in this process was the creation of a network of local trainers in child-centred methodology, which has been recognized and extensively utilized by Ministries of Education as their internal resource for professional development of teachers. All local training sessions for primary-school teachers in child-centred methodology were organized, coordinated and certified by training institutes and Ministries of Education. Implementation team members played an important role in harmonization of the general project strategy with the local needs and context so that the project implementation was more individualized.

Following decisions from a meeting held in January 2005, in which the implementation team members reached an agreement to restructure the group to make it more professionalized, each canton/region/district formed a group of professionals consisting of one project coordinator, to serve as the liaison between the project and the Ministry of Education/ training institute and School improvement teams, and trainers in charge of specific methodology trainings. The new structure of the implementation team proved to be more efficient, strengthening both ownership of each Ministry/training institute and independence of local trainers. In particular, coordinators became genuinely empowered during the final project implementation phase when a small network of partner schools was established through the School Improvement initiative. Coordinators were involved in monitoring the overall process and providing opportunities for wider information sharing, local-level meetings and supporting the school plans and actions.

## **Collaboration at Government Levels**

Because of the autonomous nature within the complex strata of administrative levels of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it has been important to involve as many layers of government as possible. The Ministries of Education nominated project coordinators from each of the participating cantons in the Federation, regions in the Republic of Srpska

and Brcko District. Having participation from members across the nation makes government collaboration easier to sustain and advocate for across all the layers of government administration.

Decentralization in education and increasing the professional autonomy of schools cannot be achieved without strengthening the internal school capacities to be able to continuously analyse and monitor results for all children. This is the main principle of the School Improvement approach, an initiative piloted within this project in 2006. An evaluation of the School Improvement pilot project provided a number of quantitative and qualitative data showing different direct and indirect results of the process. Teamwork development, including involvement of students, parents and communities in every phase of the project, created a different climate in the schools, and improved cooperation, mutual understanding and joint actions. Children reported that they enjoyed school much more, their motivation for learning has increased, and teachers expressed their commitment to continuous professional development.

Developing and strengthening professional capacities and the network of trainers and mentors throughout the country is one of the key results of the project. Every canton in the Federation, as well as in the Republic of Srpska, has a team of competent and highly trained teachers and trainers who serve as mentors for all newly trained practitioners. Eighty-two trainers were trained in new, advanced training modules in every programme. All training sessions (more than 260 training days) conducted in 2007 were fully organized and conducted by local trainers, and in many cases, local trainers travelled to different areas to support less experienced colleagues and contribute to the professional exchange. Coordinators' reports and classroom monitoring reports noted a high quality of training sessions and almost 100 per cent of implementation of acquired skills and knowledge in classroom practice. Furthermore, project evaluation reports indicate that school-based, professional development influences all other aspects of schoolwork by including teachers in ongoing dialogues, reflection and exchange. Ministries of Education continue to finance local level-training sessions, finding them to be "as the one really effective response to the educational reform requirement."

When the CFS Project started, six canton and one entity-level of government were involved. With the newly formed Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education, it should be easier to coordinate the implementation of policies and develop standards that mandate child-friendliness in schools across all levels of government.

## **Identifying and Enrolling Targeted Disadvantaged Groups**

Bosnia and Herzegovina faces challenges in basic education that are similar for most countries in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in terms of ensuring equity in access to quality education for Roma children (who suffer discrimination, homelessness and non-native language instruction in schools), children with special needs (who lack specially trained teachers and community members, appropriate resources and infrastructure) and

poor children (who need to work to help with family income and lack the resources to purchase required school materials).

These groups often overlap, and the efforts of the CFS Project have made disadvantaged children more integrated as schools have become increasingly inclusive and child-seeking (see Vignette). This is supported by statements from school principals affirming that parental and community involvement in school has led to increased enrolment of children from minority or marginalized groups (Pfaffe, page 14).

The situation of ethnic tension is complex and goes beyond the school level. The Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina is beginning to address the issue at the policy level through the Education Reform Agenda while the new Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education will make policy implementation more sustainable by developing quality education standards. Until all disadvantaged groups are equitably represented in schools across the nation, the CFS Project serves as a critical step forward.

## **Partner Roles**

Below is the list of major education players that have had an impact, direct or indirect, on the viability of the CFS Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**European Union:** The Functional Review of the Public Administration Education Sector and the Institutional Capacity-Building in Education projects combined with the government's reform agenda together constitute a legitimate policy framework on which UNICEF can build for the development of standards for inclusive and quality education.

**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE):** A political organization concerned with security in Europe, OSCE is involved in education in Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the importance of this sector as a determinant of (and threat to) the security of the country. OSCE has an extensive network of 23 education officers in the field, who constantly monitor the situation in education, conduct research, organize local seminars and produce status reports.

**Other partners** in the education sector – some of which are funding UNICEF's activities in education or social inclusion – include the Austrian Development Agency, Council of Europe, Denmark, Department for International Development (United Kingdom), Finland, Norway and Spain.

**Non-governmental organizations** in education include the Center for Educational Initiatives/Step by Step (CEI), which made a strong contribution to the CFS project; CIVITAS BiH, which implemented the Life Skills-Based Education Project, and SCF Norway.



## OUTCOMES

*A clear indication of the effect of CFS activities is the decrease of the use of abusive language and behaviour of pupils, an increase in the interest and motivation of students, greater parental involvement in school, and a greater awareness of the importance of involvement of parents in school by teachers. —Final external evaluation (page 18)*

### CFS Project Outputs

The CFS Project outputs can be seen at both an immediate level with children and the school communities around them, and also at the national level through education reform policies that integrate child-friendly laws. With this in mind, the original objectives set in 2002 for the CFS project have been accomplished:

- Introduce and implement quality, child-centred education and child-friendly environments in all primary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina from kindergarten to fourth grade (children age 6–10).
- Create conditions for sustainable systemic change and ongoing professional development in primary education.

As the final external evaluation indicates (External Evaluation of the CFS Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Proman, page 13), all primary schools in the country have implemented at least one of the CFS principles and approaches. Also, as there is a demand among local school communities for ongoing training and scaling up, the impetus for sustained systemic change has already started.

In addition, new policies and agencies for education reform will ensure the loop input between local beneficiaries and leadership at the national level. The 2002 Education Reform Agenda was a solid foundation for including aspects of CFS principles in the national education policy. However, as systemic change must happen with actual implementation at the local level, national policies – in addition to being catalysts for widespread change – can be viewed as indicators of change stemming from demand at the local community level.

The following table indicates specific salient outputs:

**Table 3. Key outputs, 2002–2008**

2002–2008 Key Outputs
500 primary schools (86 per cent) throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina benefited from child-centred teaching and learning approaches.
105,000 children (28 per cent) are learning in child-centred classrooms and improving the level of their life skills.

530 classrooms and parent meeting rooms are equipped with furniture.

5,436 primary school teachers (24 per cent) are actively applying the child-centred methodologies in grades 1 through 9.

The communication of teachers, parents and students in 500 elementary schools has improved through direct involvement of parents in the education process.

Four teachers' manuals, four training modules and one guideline for systemic change are used by trainers and teachers to improve the teaching practices in elementary schools.

14 training centres were established and equipped, and serve as resources for the ongoing training and capacity development of teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

50 schools have formed School Improvement teams focusing on improving the schools management, improvement of the schools' outreach and cooperation with local communities, and on increasing the participation of children within school management via school action plans.

## Impact on Children

***"I have two daughters in this classroom and they are not afraid of, but adore, school. They do not experience stress with school like I did – or all of us present here – because we worked according to traditional methodology, an old methodology based on strict discipline. Play at home is concerned with school. They take turns who is going to play the teacher."***—Parent respondent from the midterm external evaluation (page 47)

As the table above shows, over 100,000 children are now in child-friendly classrooms in 500 elementary schools across the country. The numbers will continue to grow as new students are enrolled each year and more teachers pursue training opportunities. This national scope also means that systemic changes ranging from attitudes to learning achievements are likely to remain sustainable. Both the midterm and final evaluations indicate that children have positive regard not only for school, but also for their teachers, their peers and themselves.

According to the midterm evaluation (page 4), data from all respondent groups – children, parents, teachers, principals, educators and observers – point to the conclusion that in most cases, students in the CFS Project outperform children in more traditional classrooms. The particular areas assessed were:

***Decision-making:*** The teacher gave examples of how children are involved in defining classroom rules, posing questions and coming to consensus themselves. Observers noted how students were cooperative and respectful when discussing decisions.

*Critical thinking and problem-solving:* All educators agreed that CFS students were more skilled at solving problems than their counterparts in traditional schools. Observers noted that students handled problems autonomously without assistance from teachers.

*Self-confidence and self-respect:* Observations in the classroom confirmed that children freely ask questions of the teacher and other students. Principals noted that students had the confidence to organize activities themselves. Some parents shared examples of how their children had overcome previous fears of going to school prior to being in child-friendly classrooms.

*Independence:* Observations confirmed that students chose to use resources beyond books to find solutions to problems. Teachers noted that students would initiate classroom activities even in the absence of the teacher. Parents gave examples of their children studying on their own and consulting multiple resources to find research information.

*Respect for differences:* Observations confirmed that children's language was free from bias, and teachers described classrooms free from insults, and full of respect regardless of differences in ethnicity or religion. Students with disabilities and special needs were included in CFS Project classrooms. Parents also commented that their children respected one another and made friends across the spectrum of race, religion and skin colour.

*Teamwork skills:* Students expressed their interest in group work, and parents mentioned how their children worked together in harmony instead of competition and envy. Children were observed working cooperatively in mixed groups, and principals gave credit to the CFS Project for improving cooperative skills.

*Communication skills:* All educators reported that CFS Project students have higher communication skills than children in traditional classrooms. Observations confirmed that children could explain connections between what they had read and their own lives. Principals and schoolteachers stressed communication skills as a strong outcome of child-centred classrooms.

*Academic knowledge and skills:* Principals reported that CFS Project students were more successful academically than children in traditional schools. Educators believed that students were at least as academically competent as their counterparts. Students cited reading, mathematics and science as subjects they would like to study more often.

*Enthusiasm for learning:* Principals and teachers gave many examples of children coming to school early and not wanting to leave at the end of the day. They also reported an increase in student attendance rates. Many parents cited their child's joy in school and learning as the most important effect of child-centred classrooms.

The final external evaluation, submitted in December 2008, echoes much of what the midterm evaluation captured and offers these final results as the most striking (page 29):

- an increased (gender) equality in enrolment, in particular the enrolment of children from minority groups and inclusion of children with special needs in regular classes;
- children reporting on positive learning experiences, more freedom of expression in communication with their teacher and classmates, and an increased sense of self-esteem;
- established local partnerships in education;
- girls and boys having been socialized in a non-violent environment; and
- increased participation of children in school and community life.

Ultimately, the success of the CFS Project can be seen in the impact it has had on children in terms of their overall well-being.

## **Impact on Teachers**

***“...it is not just about how to present the required subject matter but also how to enable each child to learn and develop to his/her potential, in other words, what do I want each of them to know, do and understand....We start with the question ‘what do we know and what do we want to learn’ and finish with ‘we have learned’.” —***  
**Teacher respondent in midterm evaluation (page 28)**

Teachers are an integral part of the CFS Project because they foster the conditions and attitudes within the classroom that lead to success.

To create the necessary conditions to implement the CFS Project, lower and upper primary- school teachers were trained in child-centred methodology. In addition, upper primary teachers were trained in Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT), an initiative aimed at integrating practical skills within the normal school curriculum. Teachers who were trained in RWCT offered a vital link for continued child-friendly methods that children in the CFS Project were accustomed to, and the external evaluations indicate that these classrooms outperformed classrooms applying traditional approaches.

According to the final evaluation (External Evaluation of the CFS Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Proman, page 21), all teachers who were interviewed recognized the central role of the student in the teaching and learning process, and all stressed the importance of a more open relationship between teacher and students, as well as giving children the self-confidence to express their ideas and opinions. Training has also contributed to building understanding of the importance of child-centred, teaching/learning approaches. The development of reflective teaching was also cited as a key outcome within teacher training. At the time of the midterm evaluation (page 9), at least 550 teachers were using portfolios to document their work and reflect on their growth.

Principals and educators gave examples of teachers sharing their knowledge and experience with others and using new ways to connect with one another. At the same time, independent observers in the classroom noted that teachers used cooperative learning strategies and examples relevant to children's own lives. In turn, this improved teaching practice led teachers to be more willing to engage in collegial dialogue and to want to learn more.

## **Long-term Effects on the Community**

The impact of the CFS Project goes beyond the original objectives and the intended beneficiaries. As both the midterm and final external evaluations show, the project has also impacted parents, principals, educators and officials at education offices throughout the country. With a saturation of impact at the local stakeholder level, coupled with education policy changes at the national level, the effects of the CFS Project are likely to be systemic and long-lasting. As education reform and system-wide improvement take a long time to take root, it should be emphasized that the interlinked relationship between local-level behavioural change and policies at the nation level will grow stronger as time goes on.

## **Parents**

***"I am happy when our parents visit the school. When I see them walking through the classroom proudly, that makes me happy and we feel safer."*** — Child respondent in midterm evaluation (page 45).

The CFS Project has affected approximately 58,500 parents, as measured in group meetings, class visits and meetings with teachers. Parental involvement alone accounts for a dramatic increase both in quality within the school community and in increased school attendance survival rates for their children. In the final evaluation (page 22), parents indicated that they are more likely to approach their children's teachers in an open way, even when the teachers are regarded as authority figures.

As one teacher put it (midterm evaluation, page 29):

*"Parents' role has changed radically...parents are more active than before. They help us as professionals...I would like to point out their active participation in the process of topic planning too. They participate in our workshops...regularly."*

Parents are also vital human resources for demonstrating diverse job skills to all students and as child-friendly trained adults available to monitor and help in the classroom. The following excerpt recounts one teacher's memory of a parent who was due to be at a parent-teacher association meeting (UNICEF 2009, page 42):

*“Suddenly, we heard a knocking on the other side of the wall. We looked at each other in surprise and I went outside to see what was going on. I saw Majda’s father dressed in his overalls with some nails between his teeth and a hammer in his hand. He was very funny when he started to speak as he was mumbling due to the nails held between his teeth. ‘Here you are, teacher! I noticed that some of the hooks on the kids’ coat racks were broken so I bought these in the market. If it’s not a problem, can I fix them now?’ I felt like hugging him for such thoughtfulness and this little deed that meant so much.”*

Parents bring the diversity of the greater community into the classroom and help make the schools serve as seamless extensions of normal, everyday life. Homes and the greater local community are also more likely to be more child-friendly as a result of these close linkages between parents at home, school and work.

## **School Community**

***When it is a question of problem solving, principal and pedagogue will lose their jobs. Namely, in the past, pupils were sent to the principal or pedagogue even for the smallest problem. For the last three years, there was not one case of problem solving where we needed to be included. — Principal respondent in midterm evaluation (page 36)***

As the above quotation indicates, principals and teachers involved in the CFS Project have a positive impression of the outcomes. The midterm evaluation (page 10) indicates that the CFS Project has directly affected 382 principals and teachers. The current number is likely to be much higher, as all primary schools are implementing at least some child-friendly aspects. Principals, some of whom have been doing their job for 30 years, reported that they feel reinvigorated and motivated about the prospects of educational reform and are more positive about the future of children in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Schools with supportive leadership trained in CFS methods are likely to promote more teacher collaboration and integration of parents in the classroom.

In addition to principals and teachers, the CFS Project has directly impacted at least 42 education officials, including representatives of teaching institutions. Respondents within this group (midterm evaluation, page 71) valued the non-intimidating teaching approach, the fact that so many parents have become involved, and the quality of the training for teachers, principals, mentors and consultants. Perhaps most important for the expansion of CFS across the country, the education officials stated (page 76) that the CFS Project has completely incorporated the same goals and principles as the education reform concept.

## **Policy and Legislation Changes**

As already mentioned, the fragmented and ethnically polarized education system has diluted the strength of national education standards and policies. Nonetheless, at the policy level, the CFS Project has succeeded in incorporating the elements of the CFS

approaches based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child into the ongoing education system reform. Through the implementation of the project in various target areas, UNICEF and partners have managed to infuse the CFS philosophy and processes in a consistent manner across different areas of the country.

Furthermore, as a result of intense advocacy by UNICEF and partners, the new national Education Reform Strategy now contains policies in line with the CFS approach.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Operational and Organizational Challenges**

The CFS Project was externally evaluated in 2004 and in 2008. The data from these evaluations revealed many accomplishments at the school level as well as influence at the policy level. The key operational and organizational challenge has been to implement projects within the complex layers of government and regional curricular differences. The CFS Project worked together with the government's Education Reform Agenda as a way to implement national standards despite the curricula challenges.

Another issue raised by teachers and stakeholders in the final evaluation (page 29) was that project achievements could be experienced as problematic. In particular, effective child-friendly schools change working conditions and bring up new challenges to deal with in the classroom. Teachers noted the extra time needed to integrate curricular standards within a CFS framework, the extra time required for focusing on the developmental skills of children with special needs in addition to the normal cognitive learning objectives for all students, and that children are more outspoken and less deferent to teachers.

Implementing effective child-friendly schools requires more integrated planning between teachers and new ideas for lesson plans. Despite the burden of the extra time necessary for being trained in applying CFS methods, nearly all CFS teachers said the commitment was worthwhile and that they advocate for training to be spread to subject-level teachers in secondary schools.

### **Capacity Gap Analysis**

Child-Friendly Schools require child-friendly systems, policies, practices and regulations, in addition to well-trained practitioners. The Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina has all of these elements but there are still capacity gaps that need to be addressed in order to make the CFS approach sustainable.

A validation workshop to discuss the CFS Project achievements and capacity gaps was held as part of the final evaluation. Representatives from evaluation sample schools, the Ministries of Education, teaching institutes, implementing partners and UNICEF

participated. Workshop participants agreed that most of the success of the project is at the implementation level within the local communities. The positive outcomes for children, parents and teachers are clearly documented in both the midterm and final evaluations.

The biggest gaps were found to be in achieving the second CFS Project objective of creating conditions for sustainable, systemic change and ongoing professional development. Participants noted that this is mostly because of the cognitive dissonance between stakeholders at the local level and officials at higher levels of government.

The key recommendations derived from the validation workshop (page 32) are as follows:

- (1) A stronger focus is needed on providing policy advice, thus utilizing positive experiences (“best practices”) from the field so as to influence policymaking dialogue and contribute to the development of a common education policy based on CFS principles, in order to contribute to the realization of systemic impact.
- (2) Experiences from the CFS approach should be used to contribute to the development of a common, outcome-based, curriculum framework.
- (3) Concrete support needs to be provided to the finalization of legal regulations regarding curricular issues and inspectorate services, and to harmonize existing legislation with reform documents.
- (4) At policy and system level, policy development is dependent on sound feedback processes from the field to the policymaking level, and similarly on a functioning communication strategy from the policymaking level to the field. Within such an interpretive approach, the CFS Project also needs to ensure that activities delivering positive cross-cultural messages at the local level will incorporate strategies to address barriers to cross-cultural tolerance.
- (5) The development of approaches to address issues of ethnic discrimination, exploitation and segregation in education at the community level is therefore directly related to putting overarching policies into practice. Likewise, through reporting procedures on the implementation of activities, experiences from the field level will inform policymakers, who in turn receive valuable inputs into the policy debate.
- (6) The issue of culturally based social exclusion will need to be continuously addressed by enhancing the quality and inclusive nature of education at all levels. UNICEF’s ongoing work with technically specialized non-governmental organizations should continue, as will the facilitation of coordination and dialogue between these organizations and cantonal/entity ministries. Good practice models from the community level will be documented and vertical communication channels ensured to maximize upstream benefits.

Although the biggest gaps were found at the policy and system level, participants also noted some capacity gaps at the community implementation level. Most of the recommendations are related to raising awareness and deepening the understanding of CFS Project methods and goals among stakeholders.



The table below indicates some of the achievements, gaps and recommendations collected from the validation workshop (page 30).

**Table 4. CFS Project: Capacity Gap Analysis**

<b>CFS Project Capacity Gap Analysis</b>			
<b>Specific objectives of the CFS Project</b>	<b>Achievements</b>	<b>Gaps</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>Inclusive, gender-sensitive education</b>	<p>Increased (gender) equality in enrolment, in particular for children from minority groups and children with special needs</p> <p>Girls and boys socializing in a non-violent environment</p>	<p>Need to respect diversity and ensure equality of learning (classroom level)</p>	<p>Build deeper understanding of child-friendliness and the concept of a child-friendly school</p>
<b>Protective (healthy and safe schools)</b>	<p>Positive learning experiences</p> <p>A sense of self-esteem</p> <p>Protection from drugs, corporal punishment and harassment</p>	<p>Life skills-based education</p> <p>Promotion of physical and psychosocial emotional health</p> <p>Children protected from outside abuse and harm</p>	<p>Deepen school principals' and management teams' understanding of the underlying principles of CFS concept, particularly outside the classroom situation</p> <p>The school environment needs to be put in context with the larger societal environment</p>
<b>Effective (quality of teaching and learning)</b>	<p>Increase in structured content in child-friendly presentation (classroom-level)</p> <p>Availability of quality materials and resources (classroom level)</p>	<p>Coherently active, cooperative and democratic atmosphere (school level)</p> <p>Commitment of teachers towards children's rights</p> <p>Quality learning outcomes based on children's needs</p>	<p>Further develop school networking for professional development of teachers and for building a school-based coaching and support system</p>
<b>Involved with the community</b>	<p>Children participate in school and community life</p> <p>Increased local partnership in education</p> <p>Working with other actors to ensure children's rights</p>	<p>Established relationships between children, parents, teachers – also outside the school context</p> <p>Segregation in (school) communities effectively addressed</p>	<p>Deepen communities' understanding of the underlying principles and assumptions of the CFS concept</p>

## **FUTURE DIRECTION**

### **Overview**

One of the main goals of the current Bosnia and Herzegovina country programme is to support the government in meeting its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is specifically aimed at ensuring inclusion of all children, young people and women in the provision of basic education, health and child protection services with their increased and genuine participation. Together with government and non-governmental counterparts, UN organizations and donors, the UNICEF country programme seeks to ensure that:

- (1) policymakers and community representatives will provide leadership in developing national policies that contribute to the realization of the rights of children, young people and women;
- (2) service providers and caregivers will adopt behaviours that facilitate access to education, health and child protection services for the most vulnerable; and
- (3) policymakers and community representatives will encourage and facilitate the meaningful participation of children and young people in their communities, including in addressing the risk of landmines.

Also, as there is still much work to be done to end segregation in schools, UNICEF is currently preparing a new initiative based on the development of a communication and advocacy strategy. Using the CFS approach as a framework, work will continue to support education ministries, municipalities and civil society organizations to raise the quality of basic education through institutional capacity-building, child-centred learning and teaching methods, and the development of standards governing quality basic education. In particular, education policies, curricula and community programmes will be implemented to increase the level of inclusiveness and improve intercultural understanding in one fifth of the municipalities across the country.

### **Continuing Capacity-Building**

As the final evaluation indicates, the CFS project has substantially addressed primary stakeholders' needs by contributing to children's well-being and holistic development, bringing teachers' and principals' knowledge at par with the latest thinking about learning and education, upgrading teaching and education management skills at the school level, and by creating space for the participation of parents and communities in education.

To sustain the results achieved so far, addressing stakeholders' practical needs must continue. Teachers may benefit more from school-based coaching and support than from continuation of teacher training workshops. The existing network of mentors (principals and educators) could form such a school-based support system. School principals and management teams may need further improvement of their school-based management skills, skills in school improvement planning and monitoring.

Addressing strategic interests goes beyond the scope of the CFS Project alone, since it requires the cooperation and support of higher levels within the education system. However, the CFS Project provides sufficient opportunities to advocate and support stakeholders' strategic needs. First, evidence on how to ensure equal access to quality education, based on a modern curriculum and assessment system and provided by well-trained teachers, in properly equipped and efficiently managed schools, through a transparent, equitable, cost-effective and financially sustainable investment of public resources (pledges of the Education Reform Agenda), can be made available to decision-makers so that lessons learned may feed into the current policymaking process designed to reform the education sector. Second, CFS experiences are beneficial for curriculum developers when aligning the current curriculum structure and approach with new teaching requirements following the education reform policy.

In a similar way, the CFS Project is useful for the adjustment of pre-service teacher training (in particular the inclusion of microteaching, and the development of reflective teaching skills (through observation and feedback), as well as for the development of new teaching standards.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is closer and closer to realizing child-friendly education for all its students as it strives to uphold the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Education for All, the MDGs and its own national Education Reform Agenda. In the meantime, UNICEF will be present to act as a catalyst for achieving all these goals.

## VIGNETTE

### Amajla Needs Time:

#### And she is going to get it

By Aida Cilic

“Teacher, could you have a look at Amajla’s test now? We will continue with our exercises.”

“I will”, I said.

I was holding that piece of paper and felt anxious myself. I also wished that everything would be all right.

I will never forget that feeling, when my whole being was crying out in support of that girl. I was tense all the time I went through the paper.

As I was driving towards the school the other day I passed by signs such as Speed Limit 20 km/h, Children Crossing, School Zone – Slow Down. As I drew closer to the school, I saw first one sleeping policeman and a little bit further another sleeping policemen, then School Zone – Slow Down.

“Slow down”: That is the message!

I locked my car, thinking “Slow down” can ensure the physical safety of children. It would be so good if we had a similar sign in our classrooms saying “Slow Down”, to ensure the mental, emotional and spiritual development of children.

Amajla was a second-grade pupil, very lively and a favourite among her peers. Her reading capability was well beyond other children and she was very skilled in outdoor games. But maths was her stumbling block.



Most children had gained their knowledge of maths in their previous grade and could build on that knowledge. But not Amajla.

She was struggling with numbers and developing very slowly. Every-day routine for some children, such as calculating the change for buying breakfast in the school canteen or counting backwards from 20, represented a step into unknown and incomprehensible territory for Amajla. In the second week of the new school year, during our morning meeting, we spoke about our expectations for the new school year, and the children subsequently wrote about their own expectations.

Last year my favourite activity in school was \_\_\_\_\_

I was really good at \_\_\_\_\_

The hardest thing for me in school was \_\_\_\_\_

This school year I want to \_\_\_\_\_

I am concerned about \_\_\_\_\_

I had a look at what the children had written and in the section “I was really good at” Amajla had written, “I don’t know.”

And she wrote, "The hardest thing for me in school was maths" and "I am concerned that everyone else is better than me at maths."

By comparing herself with others, Amajla lost perception of her own achievements. As her goals were often unrealistic, she switched between feelings of disappointment and hopelessness. She often switched from "Well, that's easy, I know that" to "I am stupid."

Above all, I knew that I had to build a relationship with Amajla and gain her confidence. It would take time. I was absolutely sure that Amajla could resolve her problem with mathematics, but it was necessary to foster conditions in which she could realize this. Over the following days I monitored her daily work in the classroom, her interaction with other pupils and her choice of activities during breaks.

She was rather communicative. She balanced different opinions in the group well, and I noted how well she verbally summarized different comments in the group. She would take time to summarize the processes they went through and sometimes she would even decide on the steps for the whole group.

"We will first write down similarities and then differences."

She was happy every time she brought a new story or book to read. She loved working with others and when she was reading she was doing it with others, reading to them. In the maths class we rehearsed the skills learned in the first grade. Amajla was silent. She wrote with her head bowed over her maths exercise.

I did not get to her immediately to see how it went. Her friends from the group commented on one problem, yet she didn't participate in the discussion.

At the end of the class I had a look at her work. She had made mistakes in addition and subtraction up to 20. At our next class, while everyone else was working on some serious maths exercises, I gave her some different addition and subtraction exercises up to 20. She solved one of the exercises effortlessly, but over another exercise she took long breaks before writing down a result. I asked her to verbally explain to me the method by which she calculated.

My intention was to find out which strategy she used and see whether that strategy was efficient. I assumed her strategy was to add the numbers by counting backwards.

"I think I know what makes it difficult for you to learn to count quickly and accurately. We will work together on this tomorrow", I said.

The next day, in my morning message, I asked the children to complete one exercise of addition up to 20, finish the calculation and write down their name. After the usual items on the agenda of our morning meeting I returned to that message and told the children: "I would like you to explain to us how you did the addition in these exercises." I also wanted everyone else to listen carefully and to conclude whether any particular method matched their method and whether they understood it.

The children stood next to the chart table and explained how they did their calculations.

“I calculate like this,” Nedim said, after the first method of calculation was presented.

“Who else calculates like this?”

It turned out that there were two more children who chose the “counting backwards strategy”, similar to Amajla’s, but both possessed greater skills: using the line that was drawn above the table. This was very interesting as the children were calculating in different ways.

I allow children to use different methods of calculation. I even encourage them to do so. However, sometimes a child does not develop a specific method and efficient strategy, or the strategy cannot be applied to large numbers, which makes calculation more difficult later on. In these cases, I teach them more efficient strategies.

While Amar was explaining his method of calculation I looked at Amajla and she seemed to be listening to him carefully.

“Has anyone recognized an easier method of calculation other than the one you use?”

“Amar’s method is an easy one,” she said.

When adding two numbers, Amar first added up to 10 and then added the rest.

After the meeting we practised maths by playing board games in groups. We explained verbally the methods by which we calculated and wrote them down in our notebooks.

Amajla and two more children were sitting in front of the chart table with their notebooks and pencils. There were some

numbering cubes in front of them. We did an exercise, and I explained how we wrote the procedure down. They briefly worked with me, and then each child was assigned an assistant.

I asked Amar to help Amajla during the maths class. Amar sat next to her in front of the chart table, and Amajla explained to Amar which exercises she had problems with. Then Amar knelt in front of the chart table and wrote the task:  $8+6$ . Amajla readily started to solve it using the cubes.

Amar turned towards Amajla and said, “You copy the first number. Then see how many you need to reach 10. How many?”

Amajla stopped counting the cubes.

“Two”, she said and moved two cubes.

“How many d’you have left?”

“Four”, she replied.

When I approached them, Amar was giving tasks to Amajla and I suggested that Amar added aloud.

During the remainder of the class I checked the other groups, monitoring their development in solving the maths problems. Once the groups had reported on their work, difficulties and disputes, as well as on their successes, I asked Amar and Amajla about their work.

Amajla said, “I understand much better now, but still...”.

I turned to Amar. He explained with a serious expression on his face:

“She is struggling with how much she has left”.

“It is good that you have noticed that,” I said, adding, “It is always good to recognize what we don’t know in order to be able to work on it and to practise and to learn.” It was obvious that Amajla was struggling with subtraction up to 10, but I was certain that she would soon show some progress on this.

I was more worried by the fact that October was coming up, and the class would have to move forward with their mathematics curriculum. Amajla needed time. Fully aware that I required weeks before I would be in a position to say that she had achieved progress, I began to feel the pressure of time. At the same time I was fighting against my own views.

If I organized additional classes, as I had done in previous years, I would be even more frustrated. Why? I remember that in additional classes on Wednesday I did one type of maths exercise with children and over the following days I asked them to work on new lessons from their class, as well as on assignments from their regular schoolwork. I should not even bother to mention that the effects were poor.

“No, this time I will do it in a different way. Amajla needs time and she is going to get it.”

Amajla stayed after class so that we could make arrangements. I told her what tasks we were going to do the next day because I knew that Amajla liked to be aware of procedural steps. It helped her verbalize the procedure, and so I wrote them down for her on a card:

COPY THE FIRST DIGIT.

HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED TO REACH 10?

HOW MUCH DO YOU HAVE LEFT?

“I think this might help you,” I said.

I also asked her to tell her mother to call me when she was able. This was our agreed form of communication, as both of Amajla’s parents worked all day long in a restaurant outside of town.

Amajla’s mother phoned me in the evening, and I explained to her what Amajla and I had planned. I asked if there would be somebody at home who could help Amajla over the following days.

“Yes”, she said, “my husband is free the whole week.”

I briefly explained to her what I expected them to work on with Amajla during the week: in what manner and for how long each day. I suggested sending them a game of Ludo so they could play with two dice and also a game of Bingo with numbers up to 10, as well as instructions for practising addition and subtraction. I also told her that Amajla should count backwards each time she walked down the stairs. “I will write brief instructions on the manner we do maths in school”, I added.

We also spoke about the sort of homework she would be getting each day. When I first noticed the problem I refrained from calling Amajla’s parents immediately, as I wanted to be clear about what had created the problem. I have learned over the years that it is not enough just to tell parents that their child needs to practise; it is much more efficient to explain to them exactly what

their child needs to work on. Even more important is how, because parents often teach their children in a way that they understand but is generally not appropriate to their children's phase of development.

I wanted to offer Amajla some encouragement in other fields. During our morning assignment of tasks, I found out that she had been attending dance classes for some time and that the Cha Cha Cha was her favourite dance. So I asked her to teach us the dance. Over the following days, as we stood in our morning meeting circle, she explained several steps at once.

She danced so well!

"Amajla, this is difficult" – "So many steps at once" – "We will never be able to learn this!" – "Can we do it our own way?"

I repeated all the questions and comments from her friends, but Amajla just looked at me.

"Could you just show us the first bit again? Until we learn you can count." We slowly practised our steps, laughing and enjoying ourselves. When we were sitting in the meeting area discussing our impressions I thanked Amajla for the lesson.

I said, "It was hard at the beginning. I didn't know when I was expected to speed up and when to slow down."

The children continued to talk about their experiences during the dance class. I was very grateful to them, because they said everything that I wanted to say to Amajla.

Whenever we learn something new it is hard at the beginning. Sometimes we do not even want to do it, but then, when we learn the first steps, as with dancing, it looks like fun so we try it and then continue practising. It is the same when we learn a new dance, maths or some new game.

I think that day was very useful for Amajla. The fact that all of the children in her class, including her teacher, face difficulties when they learn something new helped her realize that she could move forward, too.

Amajla diligently prepared for her second self-appraisal. She had made a lot of mistakes during the first one, but she had been practising different tasks that I had prepared for her on a daily basis.

During her practice of subtraction up to 10 we played a game with grains of beans. I would take 8 or 9 or 10 beans and then, hiding my hands behind my back, split the grains between my hands. Then I would straighten my arms with my fists clenched and she would pick one hand. I would open that fist and show her how many beans I had in it. Her task then was to guess how many I had left in my other hand. She would then hide her hands from me. She often played that game with other children. Once I made a mistake and she said, "Be more careful."

I said, "How many did we take away?"

She replied, "Teacher, perhaps you are tired, we can stop."

The second self-appraisal was much better than the first one, but Amajla did not realize that.



“I was bad again,” she said.

I started my conversation with Amajla by emphasizing her effort and practice.

“I have noticed that you have worked and studied very hard. I saw you practising with the reminder cards that you made yourself. That was a really good idea.”

“Yes, but I didn’t grasp it,” she replied.

I said, “That is true, but you had more correct answers in this self-appraisal than in the one last week. I think this shows significant progress. Do you know which task you completed this week that you didn’t know last week?”

My intention was for her to become aware of her own progress and not just her shortcomings.

There were days when progress was visible, when she did not need any reminders and when she could easily calculate in her head, adding to 10 without using numbering cubes.

There were also days when it did not work, and it seemed as if she had even forgotten things that she already knew.

At the end of the week she completed a self-appraisal. We commented on it together and made plans on what to learn in the future.

At the beginning of the week I offered her another self-appraisal, followed by a test on the Friday. I was sure she was ready for the self-appraisal, as well as for the subsequent test. The self-appraisal was great, and Amajla was shining.

The next day, at our morning meeting, Amajla said to us all:

“Today, I have a maths test. Any questions?”

Irma raised her hand.

“Irma?”

“I don’t have a question, I only wanted to apologize for bothering you. You will be great, you’ll see.”

Everyone smiled their encouragement.

They asked, “May we sing a song of friendship?”

“Of course”, I said. They all huddled in a circle and sang: “Everybody should know what friendship means, we are better together, we are stronger together.”

While Amajla took the test, the rest of the class were completing their maths tasks very quietly, as I walked around.

When Amajla handed back her test, I was asked:

“Teacher, could you have a look at Amajla’s test now? We will continue with our exercises.”

“I will,” I said.

“Everything is correct”, I announced.

The class was euphoric. They applauded and hugged Amajla as she stood there smiling.

Let us “slow down” so that we may be certain that children have enough time to learn, and also for their teachers to learn, too.

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