

## **Rome Education Research Project General Research Plan**

The Open Society Initiative (OSI) Education Sub-Board has made a commitment to devote greater attention to improving educational programming for Roma children in Europe. As a foundation for this effort, it is sponsoring a focused research project to examine and learn from existing educational programs that serve Roma children and are considered successful. Based on criteria developed and recommendations provided by the Roma Education Working Group (REWG), seven educational programs have been identified to serve as the focus for the research project. These include:

- Roma Teaching Assistant project (CEGA and Interethnic Initiative) operating in Bulgaria
- “Nadez” community center approach operating in Macedonia
- “Nova Skola” Foundation teacher training component operating in the Czech Republic
- Educational Centers approach operating in Slovakia
- Whole School approach of the “Equal Chances” program operating in Romania
- Mentoring and Non-Mentoring Scholarships Program for secondary students operated by the Hungarian Foundation in Hungary
- Step by Step Program operating in Yugoslavia

These programs were intentionally selected to demonstrate a range of program approaches and to examine a variety of operational contexts. Their diversity offer important lessons to guide strategic thinking in developing future educational programming for Roma children.

### **Research Questions and Indicators**

**Question # 1 – How effective is each project in (A) getting and keeping Roma children in school through completion and (B) improving their educational achievement?** To determine program effectiveness, the research project will seek to examine several indicators across all sites, including:

- School attendance and absentee rates for students
- Enrollment in preschool programs
- Course grades and class rankings
- School dropout rates
- Rates of school re-entry after dropping out
- Movement from segregated to non-segregated schools
- School completion rates
- Disciplinary and behavioral incidents in school
- Secondary school and university enrollment, attendance, and completion rates
- Post-graduation employment

**Question # 2 – Has each project promoted institutional or policy changes in the public schools which advance goals of equity and educational quality?** In responding to this question, the research project will identify and examine changes in:

- National or local government educational policies
- Government and school support and involvement for sustaining the project
- School learning environments provided to all students
- School instructional programs
- School interest in Roma cultural activities
- School governance structures
- School interactions with families and the Roma communities

**Question # 3 – Has the project resulted in (A) a change in attitude toward Roma children among teachers and other school staff, (B) a change in attitude toward Roma children among non-Roma children and their parents, and (C) a change in self-characterization by Roma children?** In assessing attitudinal changes of others toward Roma children, the research project will examine:

- Characterizations and expectations of Roma children by school staff
- Interactions between Roma children and school staff both in the classroom and in non-academic (i.e. cafeteria, playground, etc.) school settings
- Characterizations of Roma children by non-Roma children and parents
- Frequency and nature of interactions between Roma and non-Roma children in both academic and non-academic school settings
- Institutional treatment (i.e. placement, disciplinary action, etc.) of Roma children compared to non-Roma children by schools

**Question # 4 – What is the feasibility of replicating each project within each country or in other countries based on issues of cost, resources, institutions, and culture?** In assessing feasibility of program replication, the research project will develop standard program descriptions using several defined categories including:

- Project goals, purposes, and target population
- Nature of Project intervention
- Instructional philosophy
- Participant assessment approach
- Project management
- Facilities requirements
- Staffing requirements and staff qualifications
- Equipment, material, and other resource requirements
- Funding sources
- Relationship and interaction with families and the community
- Relationship and interaction with governmental and non-governmental institutions

### **Research Philosophy**

This project will employ a participatory research model. Such a model emphasizes the active engagement of a program's designers, staff, participants, and other stakeholders in the research activities. Specifically, they would provide substantive input to:

- Identification and elaboration of the research questions
- Development of the overall research plan
- Design of data collection processes and tools
- Analysis of the resulting research information
- Preparation of written and electronic reports summarizing the findings and results of the research project

The role of the researcher in a participatory research approach is not to serve as an external and detached “judge” or “auditor” of the program. Rather, the lead researcher will carry out several well-defined roles designed to involve the other members of the research “partnership” while ensuring a high-quality, utilitarian research project. The most important role is to ensure that all participants in the research “partnership” have effective, not simply formal, involvement. In this regard, it is important that expectations and responsibilities of project staff and other stakeholders are appropriate and realistic – especially in light of other demands on their time and attention. In particular, the research activities must be seen as complementing and strengthening the project rather than intruding on its ongoing development and operation. Additional roles for the researcher include:

- Organizing and facilitating the development of all elements of the research plan
- Overseeing and managing the implementation of the research plan
- Ensuring that all participants in the research “partnership” have an understanding of the basics of research design, data collection and analysis, and presentation
- Providing technical expertise on state-of-the-art research techniques, instruments, and procedures
- Providing an external, critical perspective on data collection and analysis
- Preparing reports/presentations on the findings and research of the research project

This participatory model has three distinct benefits. First, it enables the research to directly draw upon the observations and insights of both “program insiders” (program designers, staff, participants, and other stakeholders) and “program outsiders” (researchers). Second, it actively involves a program’s staff, participants, and other stakeholders in developing the research design, collecting the data, and deriving conclusions/recommendations. This gives them both greater understanding and greater commitment to the results – making it more likely that those results will be applied in the field. Finally, this model strengthens the capacity of each local program to understand, conduct, and eventually design their own research.

### **Research Team**

The research team will involve a lead researcher and teams of local researchers (one for each of the seven projects). The lead researcher will design the project-wide research plan, develop data collection and analysis instruments and tools, oversee the work of the local research teams, coordinate the analysis of the data, and coordinate preparation of any resulting research reports. Each local research team will focus on data collection and preliminary data compilation related to the educational program operating in their country. Of course, this research team will work closely the research sponsor, the program staff and designers, participants, and other stakeholders in developing and carrying out the research project. In addition, they will work with

the lead researcher to conduct analysis of the data and to prepare research reports. Each local research team will prepare a local research plan to define and guide their research activities.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

**Phase 1: Background Information.** In order to provide a foundation and context for understanding the goals, objectives, and accomplishments of each of the projects, each local research team will develop a brief written background statement. This statement will describe:

- Structure and operation of the public school system in their country
- Geographic distribution and socioeconomic characteristics of the Roma in their country
- Challenges and educational problems facing Roma children in their country

In preparing this written background statement, the local research team will rely on existing reports and needs analyses prepared by governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, research institutions, funding agencies (including the Soros Foundation), and the news media. The statement should be a brief and concise summary and synthesis of these reports and analyses.

**Phase 2: Initial Interviews and Documentary Review.** This phase of the research project will produce two working documents for each of the seven educational programs – a Program Profile and a Data Inventory. A form for each document has been prepared by the lead researcher. This document will be jointly prepared by the lead researcher and each local research team. It will:

- Summarize available descriptive information on each program using a standard set of categories
- List publicly available information sources regarding each program's development, structure, operation, funding, and impact
- Identify gaps regarding both program description and needed information sources

Each local research team will conduct an initial interview with the director of the program. Based on the results of this initial interview and the nature of the program's management responsibilities, the team may also conduct initial interviews with senior management staff responsible for budget and finance, staff supervision, curriculum and instructional design, and family and community outreach. Guidelines for this interview have been prepared by the lead researcher.

The local research team will conduct an initial interview with knowledgeable representative(s) of the local Soros foundation, other appropriate funding agencies, national or local governmental agencies, and local non-governmental organizations. Emphasis should be placed on selecting and interviewing individuals who significantly knowledgeable and involved with the project – not simply aware and peripherally involved in it. These individuals can be identified by the project director, the local Soros foundation, and OSI.

At the same time, the local research team will conduct a Web search for written or electronic descriptions of the program. As part of the initial interviews with the program director and foundation representative, they will also request descriptive or informational documents or

videos related to the program. All documents and videos will be reviewed by the local research team.

Where appropriate, the local research team will create video or audio recordings of interviews conducted as part of the research project. These recordings will only be created with the full knowledge and informed approval of the interview subject. The recordings will be used primarily to assist in preparing summaries of the interviews. Selected recordings may be used for presentation or reporting purposes or may be archived for future reference. This also will occur only with the informed approval of the interview subject.

Summaries of the initial interviews and reviewed documents will be prepared in electronic form (using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel) by the local research teams and submitted to the lead researcher. The lead researcher will maintain a comprehensive, confidential database of all interview and document summaries. In addition, the lead researcher will work with OSI staff to develop and maintain a comprehensive archive with copies of all print, videotape, or audio recording materials obtained by local research teams.

The interview and document/video summaries will be used each local research team in consultation with the lead researcher to prepare the Data Inventory and a first draft of the Program Profile for each program. Tentative, contradictory, or unconfirmed information will be included in the draft of the Program Profile with appropriate and explicit caveats.

**Phase 3: Collection of Statistical Data.** For each program, the lead researcher and local research team will use the Program Profile and Data Inventory to identify and prioritize available statistical data related to the program's service level, funding, operation, or impact. This will include records maintained by the schools and the program itself, as well as those maintained by program funders, local Soros foundation, and other governmental institutions. Data will be sought for at least the last three years. The local research team will make formal request for all publicly available data, identifying all privacy or access issues. Any procedures or requirements which arise that may impede access to the data will be referred to the lead researcher and/or OSI staff for resolution.

All data obtained by the local research team will be compiled into a computer-readable (Microsoft Excel) spreadsheet format unless otherwise directed by the lead researcher. The resulting files will be submitted for review and analysis by the lead researcher. Technical assistance in the compilation or conversion of files from one application format to another will be provided through the lead researcher or OSI.

The local researcher will use standard statistical techniques to summarize and analyze the resulting data. It is anticipated that statistical data will be collected relating to the service level of each program, its budget, and its impact on participants. The nature of the analysis used by the lead researcher will depend upon the nature of the data and the purpose of the analysis:

- **Data on a program's services** will be summarized using the characteristics of the target population (including age, gender, and previous educational achievement). Service data on programs targeting educational professionals will also look at the race/ethnicity and professional experience of the target populations. Program service data will also be

analyzed based on the type of services provided, the sites where the service were provided (if multiple sites exist), and the time frame for providing services to identify trends by service type, location, or over time.

- **Budgetary data** will be summarized based on type, purpose, and source. This information will also be analyzed over time.
- **Student impact data** will be summarized based on the age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, parents' educational experiences, and students' previous educational experiences.

As a frame of reference for understanding the student impact data obtained for each program, the project will select from among four different types of comparisons.

- **Peer Comparisons** will compare statistics for Roma children who are program participants with those who are not participating in the program. The characteristics of both groups will be examined to ensure comparability. The expectation is that valid, significant differences developed over time between the two groups.
- **Non-Peer Comparisons** will compare statistics for Roma children who are program participants with non-Roma children. Again the characteristics of both groups will be examined to ensure comparability. The expectation is that valid, significant differences declined over time between the two groups.
- **Longitudinal Comparisons** will compare statistics for the same Roma children at various points in time to assess their growth and change. The expectation is that valid, significant trends will be apparent over time.
- **Developmental Comparisons** will compare statistics for Roma children using standards derived from developmental or educational research (i.e. achieve reading literacy by age 8) or based on policy decisions (i.e. have no more than 5% dropouts). The expectation is that Roma children will meet the established standards.

It is likely that most comparisons will rely upon either peer or non-peer comparisons. However, the selection of the type of comparison used for particular data in particular projects will depend upon the nature and purpose of the specific project, the available data, and logistical considerations associated with the collection of the data. The specific types of comparisons used for each project will be collaboratively determined by the research teams and lead researcher local research plan. However, practical considerations and opportunities that emerge during the research project may result in subsequent modifications in those initial decisions.

**Phase 4: Interviews/Surveys of Project and School Staff.** Each local research team will either conduct interviews or administer a short written survey to all staff in the project they are examining. For projects that are school-based, a variation of the interview/survey will be conducted with relevant school staff. For programs that are directly serving educational professionals, another variation of the interview/survey will be conducted with participants.

Decisions about whether to conduct interviews or to administer a survey will depend upon the number of individuals in each category (project staff, relevant school staff, adult participants). Where the numbers are too large for even a written survey to be administered to all members of any group, the survey will be administered to a sample. These decisions will be made the local research team in consultation with the lead researcher and the research advisory committee. Decisions will be included in the local research plans.

Interviews will be scheduled by the local research teams in consultation with the project director or school administrator. Interviews can be conducted either in person or by phone. The use of audio recordings would be appropriate with the same conditions discussed previously on page 5.

Surveys of program staff will generally be administered and completed during a staff meeting organized for this purpose. This meeting will be arranged by the local research team in consultation with the program director.

Surveys of school staff or other educational professionals can also be administered and completed in such a setting. As an alternative, the survey can be distributed at the beginning of the school day, completed during the day, and collected by the end of the day. In this situation, the local research team members should be available at the school throughout the day to answer questions and collect the surveys. The administration of the survey will be arranged by the local research team in consultation with the school principal, headmaster, or other appropriate administrator. The local team may seek the assistance of the program, the foundation, or OSI to facilitate these arrangements if impediments arise.

These interviews/surveys will solicit information from program staff, school staff, and adult program participants regarding the structure and operation of the program, staff responsibilities and qualifications, and the program's impact on participants, families, schools, and the community. The survey will employ both multiple choice questions and open-ended questions soliciting narrative responses.

The lead researcher has prepared guidelines for interviews/surveys of the program staff and school staff. The local research teams and lead researcher will modify these guidelines if necessary to reflect specific issues or problems related to each project. In particular, modifications will be used to respond to the particular goals and characteristics of each program and to address gaps or ambiguities in information as reflected in the first draft of the Program Profile.

Interview and survey results will be translated and compiled by the local research team using Microsoft Word. The results will be submitted to the lead researcher for analysis. In addition, this information will be used by the local research team and the lead researcher to prepare a revision of the Program Profile of each program.

**Phase 5: Site Visits.** Each local research team will conduct visits to sites relevant to the operation of the project (including direct service centers or sites operated by the project and schools involved in or benefiting from project services). During these site visits, the local research team will:

- Tour the site
- Observe a sample of classroom or project activities
- Observe project staff or school staff meetings
- Conduct follow-up interview(s) with the project director and other project managers
- Conduct a series of individual or group interviews with project and/or school staff
- Conduct a series of group interviews with project participants

Most projects work in or benefit multiple schools. The local research team in consultation with the lead researcher and research advisory committee will develop criteria for selecting specific schools for visits. The criteria will include geographic distribution and the socioeconomic diversity of the student population, as well as additional project-specific criteria. The criteria will be defined in the local research plan.

The tour, observations, and interviews will be guided by protocols jointly developed by the lead researcher and the local research team. These protocols will be project-specific and will be developed based upon the results of the first four phases of research data collection and analysis. As noted earlier, video and audio recordings may be made as part of these site visits, but only with the informed consent of the interview subject. Again, any use of the recordings for presentation purposes must be approved by the interview subject.

Summaries of the observations, interviews, and focus groups will be prepared by the local research team using Microsoft Word and submitted to the lead researcher. This information will be categorized and studied by the lead researcher, the local research teams, and research advisory committee using matrix analysis, pattern-matching, trend analysis, and holistic interpretation. Where appropriate this information may be transformed into numerical categories for standard statistical analysis. In addition, this information will be used to prepare a revised draft of the Program Profile.

**Phase 6: Participant Interviews and Field Interviews.** Each local research team will conduct field interviews with students, their families, and other relevant community members (including educational professionals). Interviews will be conducted either with individuals or with small groups in their homes, in community sites, or in other appropriate locations.

The number and types of interview participants will be determined jointly by the lead researcher and the local research team, based on the scope and nature of each project. Criteria for selection of interview participants will be developed and included in the local research plan.

The local researchers face a number of challenges in conducting interviews with Roma children and their parents. Identifying appropriate members of the community to interview, getting their trust for interviewing purposes, and overcoming language differences also pose major problems. The local researchers may try to engage members of the Roma community to assist them in addressing any or all of these problems. These individuals can serve to introduce and “vouch for” the researchers with the Roma adults and children. Alternatively, they can serve as translators and even as interviewers. Plans for inclusion of members of the Roma community in these roles should be described in the local research plan.

The specific interview participants will be selected by the local research team in consultation with project and foundation staff. Guidelines for the interviews jointly developed by the lead researcher and the local research team. These will be project-specific and will be developed based upon the results of the earlier phases of the research project. Any audio or video recordings made as part of these interviews will be treated as discussed previously.

Summaries of these interviews will also be prepared by the local research team using Microsoft Word and submitted to the lead researcher. As with the data gathered during phase 5, this information will be categorized and studied by the lead researcher, local research teams, and research advisory committee using matrix analysis, pattern-matching, trend analysis, and holistic interpretation. Where appropriate this information also may be transformed into numerical categories for standard statistical analysis. This information will also be used to prepare a final version of the Program Profile that will serve as a primary source for the final research report.

### **Reporting the Results**

The lead researcher and the local research teams will prepare both a preliminary report (in January 2001) and a final report (in March 2001) to present the findings of this research project. The preliminary report will summarize information collected during the first three data collection and analysis phases of the project. The final report will summarize information collect during the entire project. Both reports will be organized around the four research questions (as further refined during the course of the research project). Each will employ both a case study methodology to present our findings for each of the seven programs and a cross-site analysis to present consistent trends and patterns.

This research reports is designed to inform multiple audiences. Of course, this includes the OSI Education Sub-Board and the Soros Foundation network. However, it also includes:

- Administrators, staff, boards, and funders of each project
- School administrators, staff, and governing bodies affected by the projects as well as others across the region
- Roma families and communities
- Roma governing agencies and non-governmental organizations
- National and local governmental agencies across the region and particularly in the seven countries where these projects operate
- International funders and advisory organizations

Among these audiences, our research will be used as a basis for the development of strategic approaches to strengthen or expand educational services for Roma children. In addition, it will provide significant information to the administrators and staff of the participating project (and of other projects) by helping to identify their own strengths, weaknesses, and emerging issues or needs. It will also enable project administrators and staff to develop a better understanding of when and how to reflect on one's project and recognize avenues for improvement.

In order to address the needs of these various audiences, the final report will encompass multiple elements. This will include:

- Detailed report presenting our findings and conclusions across all projects
- Brief summary of our findings and conclusions across all projects
- Detailed reports presenting findings, conclusions, and recommendations for each project
- Brief summaries of our findings, conclusions, and recommendations for each project

As researchers, we are also interested in learning about our own research processes – understanding both its successes and shortcomings – and sharing what we learned with our colleagues. As such, we will seek to consistently document and archive our research plans, tools, and developmental processes throughout this project.