



# Inclusive Preschool Education

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## Case Studies

PROJECT: “MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM IN PROVISION  
OF INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION”



GEORGIAN PORTAGE  
ASSOCIATION



OPEN SOCIETY GEORGIA FOUNDATION  
ფონდი ღია საზოგადოება საქართველო

Georgian Portage Association acknowledges:

Ilia State University

Center for Educational Initiatives

The Agency of Tbilisi Kindergartens

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## INTRODUCTION

During two year period Georgian Portage Association (GPA) was implementing the project “Multidisciplinary Team in Provision of Inclusive Preschool Education” with the support of the Open Society Institute (OSI). The aim of the project was to promote and develop inclusive approach in preschool education in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia. The project was implemented in partnership with Tbilisi Kindergarten Agency, Center of Educational Initiatives and Ilia State University.

At the end of two years, there are 10 kindergartens in Tbilisi whose staff is aware of the kindergarten’s policy on inclusive education and the procedures needed for the management of each child’s case.

There is a multi-disciplinary team of highly experienced professionals that any kindergarten can draw on for assistance in difficult cases. Referrals to the team have increased slowly but gradually.

There are two forums which enable the personnel of all kindergartens to communicate with each other, sharing experiences and acquiring new knowledge: regular meetings of persons responsible for inclusive education; and the webpage of the Georgian Portage Association ([www.portage.ge](http://www.portage.ge)) which provides relevant literature in Georgian and the opportunity for on-line communication with other site users.

As a result of intensive cooperation between the Georgian Portage Association and Ilia State University, a certification course covering all aspects of preschool education has been established at the University for the professional development of staff working in the kindergartens.

15 students have been involved in practical activities in Tbilisi kindergartens to date and have also participated in a study of inclusive education practice in the kindergartens.

We are most pleased that during these years the number of



children with special needs has significantly increased and the placements have been successful.

We present here seven case studies based on our experience of the Project.

The cases were managed and written by kindergarten caregivers, specialists and Portage multidisciplinary team members.

It is a first attempt in Georgia to present case studies developed by kindergartens staff. Caregivers were not provided by any structure or rules for preparation of presented studies. It was intended to provide them a free space to describe their experiences and reflections of their work with children having special needs. Therefore, all cases differ from each other in terms of structure and volume. Due to the terms of confidentiality names of children are changed and the names of teachers and specialists are not assigned under each case.

## NICK, 6 YEARS OLD

Two years ago, a boy with autistic spectrum disorder was enrolled in our group. All the time he used to walk around the classroom, making strange sounds, never sitting at his place and showing no interest to the toys or playing with other children. While in the kindergarten, he never ate meals and couldn't hold a pencil (he usually took it with the fist and threw it away).

Initially, I was very nervous because of his behavior and constant vocalizations, as I was worried that other children would copy him, making it impossible to manage the group. So I decided to ask the specialist for assistance. The Georgian Portage Association multidisciplinary team member advised me to be less emotional and try to observe child's behavior in a more focused way and then develop a plan of action.

During my observation I didn't pay any attention to Niko's chaotic walking and vocalization and made no comments about them. Maybe because of this, the children also didn't pay attention to his behavior, so there was no problem in the classroom.

As a result of my observation, I identified that the boy liked the moving toys, big cubes, and going through the labyrinth, so in planning the group activities I tried to use these to engage Niko's attention so as to facilitate his participation. The boy also showed interest in the trials we made in the group, observing other children. So once, we had an activity to glue the flag of Georgia. I invited Niko to come and sit at the table, but he refused. I decided not to pay any attention, but still put some working materials on a table close to him and started helping other children. A few minutes later, Niko came to the table and started gluing independently. His work was praised by me and other children; starting from this day, Niko always tried to show his work and waited for my comments.

After this, together with Niko's mother, the kindergarten psychologist and the Georgian Portage Association multidisciplinary team member, we discussed and agreed on Niko's in-



dividual goals and made a step by step intervention plan to achieve these goals.

Very soon Niko started to eat, at first with my assistance and later independently. Gradually, he got used to holding the pencil and making some indistinct drawings. I was very glad, when after our step by step efforts Niko learned to draw some human faces. Drawing by himself, he was quite satisfied with what he was doing. As Niko was not trying to communicate with other children, I tried to help him by offering games requiring communication with other children, knowing their names and so on. Together with the other children, we put the cubes in line and went through the rings, so soon Niko started to call the names of children. I always tried to focus on his strengths and, as he was very good at using scissors for cutting the contours, I always presented his work together with good work of one of the other children to the whole group.

When Niko came to the kindergarten, he knew only his grandma's name, now he knows many words and can spell them. He independently washes his hands, recognizes the numbers and counts up to five. My satisfaction was enhanced by his mother's satisfaction and acknowledgement of what we've managed to achieve in the kindergarten.

During these years I've learnt a lot. Any simplified activity that was important for Niko was interesting and joyful for other children too. Gradually, I started to better understand which activities benefited the boy mostly and how to set the goals for him. Of course all this also affected my professional development and I was very glad of this.

*Theacher*

## GIGO, 4 YEARS

I met Gigo in the kindergarten. His eyes were sparkling with childish naivety. A little bit confused and curious why he was not like other children, he asked many questions. Sometimes he had a feeling that everyone was pointing a figure at him. Because of the visually noticeable retinal disease he had problems with vision. And what I thought was: “he needs my assistance and not my empathy and compassion”.

Together with the kindergarten psychologist we planned several activities directed at the development of different skills, but first of all we agreed on how to share information about Gigo’s needs with other children, as they also showed interest in the process. As a teacher, I was responsible for doing this.

We gave the children different pictures presenting children with different special needs and disabilities. We talked about the variety and differences, saying that all we are different in this or that way, maybe because of our appearance or abilities. Talking about this, I was focusing on physical characteristics like the color of hair, skin, shape of eyes, etc.

Our efforts resulted in a positive response. When Gigo was coming to the class, no one was paying special attention to him, he was treated like all other children, and, even more, children tried to help him to move around the classroom.

*Theacher*



## LEVAN, 4 YEARS

Levan has attended the kindergarten since October, 2013. He is also involved in a home-based early development program, provided by the organization “Children of Georgia”

Usually, Levan didn’t want to stay in the kindergarten without his mother, but as soon as he was offered different favorite activities, he got calm. He had stereotyped and stimulating actions: all the time he was holding the toys, swinging them up and down and vocalizing.

While in the classroom, he liked physical activities and music (clapping hands, tapping feet). It was difficult for him to concentrate on activities like reading, table games (domino, bingo), and modeling. Often screaming and crying, he wouldn’t sit on his chair. As reported by his early development specialist, he liked looking over the picture books and drawing with fingers, but when offered these activities in the classroom, he would just glance at the book and put it aside; he also resisted drawing with fingers and cried and screamed when the adult was trying to hold his hand.

To develop the intervention plan, a meeting was organized with participation of the multidisciplinary team members, kindergarten specialists (special educator, methodologist, and teacher), the parent, the representative of the Georgian Portage Association and the early development specialist from the organization “Children of Georgia”, working individually with him at home.

The intervention plan we developed for Levan was based on group activities, enabling a gradual increase of his presence in the kindergarten and the development of a daily routine. Initially, the plan was for him to spend one hour in the kindergarten, subsequently extended to two hours. The long-term goal was full-time placement in the kindergarten.

Initially, in agreement with Levan's parent, we defined activities for two hours and developed special visual aids in tabular form, clearly showing the activities - music, physical exercises, playing the cubes - that the boy liked to participate in. So when Levan was coming to the kindergarten, we had physical exercises with children performing different movements, accompanied by music, and then playing with the cubes. Working with him, we used the strategy of physical assistance, and visual cues (cards with pictures).

As advised by the specialists, at the end of each activity we helped Levan to mark the completed activity on his chart and name the next activity.

Currently, Levan spends 4 hours a day in the kindergarten, during this period he is not refusing to stay in the group without his mother and goes to different activity areas. He also shows less intensity of stereotyped and stimulating actions.

Levan looks through the picture books, points at familiar objects and animates them with physical movements, e.g. hair washing movements when he sees the shampoo or hair brushing movements when he sees the brush. He also points at the animals he knows (horse, dog), likes to take pictures by phone and browse them.

If asked to do so, Levan gets involved in his favorite activities; he observes other children and tries to imitate them. After getting involved, he stops the stereotyped and stimulating movements. He is not against changing the environment and going out of the classroom, plays with dolls ("feeds them", "takes them to bed"). With adult's support Levan is able to take turns during the playtime (playing the train, washing hands).

*Theacher*