



**The Community of Practice in Curriculum Development, an initiative on a global scale to support the regions and countries in their consideration and implementation of curriculum changes within the framework of the goals of Education for All (EFA).**

### **The International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO)**

Through curriculum development the IBE, as the UNESCO bureau specialized in the area of the structures, contents and methods of education and teaching-learning strategies, is promoting a comprehensive approach to curricula based on processes (how) and results (what). This entails policy dialogue concerning the relevance of curriculum change, its objectives and underlying basis, its disciplinary contents, teaching and learning processes, the inputs and educational materials required for its implementation, institutional and pedagogic practices in education centres and classrooms, its results and the accompanying evaluations.

In July 2005, the IBE, in conjunction with curriculum specialists from different regions of the world, set up the Community of Practice in Curriculum Development, which is understood as an intra- and inter-regional space where the issues of curriculum change can be jointly discussed and implemented within the framework of a holistic approach to determining and implementing the goals of Education for All (EFA)<sup>1</sup>.

Its gradual development since then as a space for production and exchange on a worldwide scale implies a double dimension, offering on the one hand an opportunity to share approaches, experiences, innovating practices, research results and analytical studies, and on the other hand practical possibilities for jointly undertaking, at national, intra- and inter-regional levels, programmes for institutional capacity building around curricular themes, chiefly on the basis of requirements and needs identified in the field by the educators themselves. Through this approach, horizontal cooperation, chiefly South-South, is promoted by the Community of Practice on a permanent basis.

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<sup>1</sup> These six goals refer to expanding early childhood care and education; the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all; the promotion of appropriate learning and life skills programmes for young people and adults; achieving a 50 per cent improvement in the levels of adult literacy; eliminating gender disparities by 2005 and achieving gender equality by 2015; and improving the quality of education.

At present, the Community of Practice consists of 731 educators from 90 countries and from a variety of organizations and institutions, including ministries of education, universities, NGOs, foundations, intergovernmental councils, international cooperation agencies and others. The diversity of institutions and actors is seen as an opportunity for engaging in dialogue and comparing perspectives, while highlighting points of understanding and shared construction in relation to the role that education should play as a public long-term policy aimed at constructing solid foundations for development and social equity.

The COP's main activities are focused on:

- Organizing and promoting the exchange of documentation on EFA-related curriculum themes on a global scale;
- Supporting comparative research into the processes of curriculum change;
- Publishing and disseminating regional and national curriculum productions;
- Strengthening the capacity for collective discussion and construction among public and private institutions on education and curriculum policy agendas;
- Developing programmes for strengthening national and regional capacities in relation to curriculum approaches, tools and resources, which support the efforts of regions and countries to meet the challenges of designing and implementing curriculum changes (for example, training programmes around the competency-based approaches).

For Latin America and the Caribbean more specifically, the Community of Practice is made up of 234 members from 18 countries. It is a forceful, dynamic community, which is constantly enlarging its capacity for proposing ideas and putting them into practice. The gradual coordination of its activities with UNESCO's regional office (OREALC) and with the other UNESCO offices in the region allows it to refine its institutional structure and thereby strengthen the contents and impacts of its activities.

In 2006, activities in the region, which involved the holding of six seminars (see [www.ibe.unesco.org/Spanish/COPs\\_sp.htm](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/Spanish/COPs_sp.htm)) were focused on:

- Setting up subregional communities of practice (Southern Cone, Andean and Central American) with contributions from distinguished educators and regional specialists based in ministries, universities and civil society institutions;
- Designing an OREALC-IBE plan of work for 2007-2008, which would include, amongst other aspects, a comparative study on the curriculum systems of the 41 countries of the region, and a plan to strengthen the meaning, appreciation and role of secondary education as part of basic education within the framework of EFA goals;

- Discussing topics and agendas relating to basic education, mainly those concerning the equity-quality objective and the conceptualization and development of secondary education as a component;
- Tackling the challenges of educational integration within a regional perspective, considered as a fundamental element for the effective democratization of training and learning conditions, opportunities and processes;
- Implementing programmes to strengthen the capacities of national teams to initiate curriculum reforms based on competency approaches;
- Holding virtual forums at regional and global levels to discuss the various issues facing curricula nowadays, relating both to the production of knowledge and to political action;
- Opening a Community of Practice section (in Spanish, French and English, among other languages), on the IBE/UNESCO web page ([www.ibe.unesco.org/COPs.htm](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/COPs.htm)), which can provide access to up-to-date documentation and information concerning the tendencies and processes of curriculum change.

We consider that the presence of the Community of Practice at regional level may be seen and may develop as a support tool for the processes of curriculum change, with the dual aim on the one hand of gaining access to and becoming familiar with the approaches, experiences and practices of other regions of the world as possible inputs to theory and practice, and on the other hand of extending the processes of dialogue and joint horizontal construction among educators and curriculum specialists at regional level in general and in the subregions and individual countries in particular.

From this point of view, we feel it is worth emphasizing the role which the Community of Practice can fulfil as a space which is:

- friendly and easily accessible for joint production at global, regional and national levels and for developing an on-going exchange on curriculum topics;
- multicultural, in the sense that it facilitates and promotes communication in several languages and cultures regarding curriculum development;
- comprehensive, in that it incorporates different outlooks, policies and strategies, thereby adding to plurality and an understanding of diversity;
- conducive to cooperation and exchange between educators and curriculum specialists from different regions and countries, mainly on a South-South level;
- propitious to thought, contributing to the generation of critical appraisal and the preparation of education and curriculum policy agendas, linking institutions and actors;

- geared to research and action, facilitating the development of comparative studies mainly on basic education and EFA standards, as a means of contributing to the development of policies and programmes;
- productive, in the sense of guiding, proposing and implementing on the basis of the problems and challenges identified by the educators themselves in concrete curriculum practices.

The distinguishing characteristic of the proposal is that it is clearly aimed at producing contributions from the field.

We are open to your comments, suggestions and initiatives in order to ensure that this initial process of building up a Community of Practice should be relevant, rich in content and sustainable over time at national level. Thank you for your contributions.

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