



INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF EDUCATION

**THE ADAPTATION  
OF CONTENT  
TO THE CHALLENGES  
OF THE  
TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY**

**Component A.** *Learning to live together in a democratic society: challenges for the adaptation of educational content*

**Component B.** *Adapting educational content to cope with some of the challenges raised by a globalized world*

**IBE, Geneva, June 1998**

## INTRODUCTION

The proposed programme, entitled *The Adaptation of Content to the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century*, attempts to respond to some of the issues raised by the phenomenon of globalization, in particular:

- the uneasiness of young people, who lack faith in society and their future in a context characterized by the loss of traditional references, and who sometimes take refuge in ethnic or religious values, or in violence—the school having failed to provide them with appropriate landmarks;
- the development of inequalities and the marginalization of certain categories of the population—both from an economic and social point of view— which entail unequal access to school in the educational field, and the inadequacy of the teaching;
- the rapid changes in labour markets, linked to the acceleration of economic, financial and trading exchanges under the pressure of ICTs,<sup>1</sup> which often result in what is actually taught in school being irrelevant.

These general trends have to be carefully taken into consideration as far as the educational field is concerned, in order to prepare children for the challenges of the twenty-first century in the most suitable way. Thus :

- Schools should transmit universal values to children (such as tolerance, respect for others and for the environment, etc.), develop their desire to live together (by learning to work in teams, to listen to others, etc.), help them to understand their economic, social and political environment, whether at the local, national, regional or global level.
- The quality of the education delivered should be improved thanks to a higher degree of autonomy and accountability given to schools, the provision of courses better adapted to the specific needs of learners, and the use of child-centred approaches at classroom level—generally speaking, a more participatory management of education systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Information and communication technologies.

- Updated curricula should be prepared, in order to take into account the progress made in knowledge, the new needs of labour markets, and the predominate role played by ICTs today.

Different kinds of initiatives can be taken in order to try to cope with these new demands, such as the reform of curricula, the review of textbooks, the improvement of the education delivered to teachers; to put it in a nutshell, the adaptation of educational content.

This programme has been prepared within the framework of the overall mission of the International Bureau of Education (IBE)—to be an international centre for educational content. Two main objectives are considered:

- Objective 1:** To promote the adaptation of content to include universal concerns in curricula.
- Objective 2:** To strengthen national capacities for the adaptation of educational content, with the involvement of different protagonists at the national, local and classroom levels.

Whilst they are each different, the two objectives are interrelated and complement each other in attempting to address, from different perspectives, the challenges raised by the new educational agenda for the coming decade. In both cases, particular attention will be given to experiences aimed at enhancing the quality and standards of educational provision through the adoption of child-centred approaches, in a context of more autonomous schools.

The programme will be divided into two main components, each linked to one of the objectives listed above:

- (i) learning to live together by integrating the concern of living together in educational content, and
- (ii) adapting educational content in order to cope with some of the challenges raised by a globalized world.

The IBE will lead the programme at sub-regional levels, in co-operation with networks either currently in operation or specifically established for this purpose. Each network should gather together policy-makers, representatives of the academic world, researchers and experts. Institutions specialized in curriculum related matters should also be associated with the implementation

of the programme. This decentralized organization should favour the development of building capacities in Member States.

In this framework, the IBE will have three main functions, namely: a clearinghouse function, a comparative and analytic function, and an operational function.

It goes without saying that the following proposals are meant to serve only as a framework/basis for helping to define projects for implementation by the IBE. Such projects will be developed in a subsequent phase, in consultation, and in partnership with, the different institutions concerned—both governmental organizations (European Commission, Council of Europe, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR), the Southern African Development Community (SDAC), the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), etc.) and establishments specialized in the field of education (Eurydice, the International Association for the Assessment of Educational Achievement (IEA), the future International Academy for Education and Democracy, etc.).

## COMPONENT A.

### *Learning to live together in a democratic society: challenges for the adaptation of educational content*

The first component of the programme will focus on the necessity of taking into account universal concerns when conceiving curricula, educating teachers and writing textbooks. Emphasis will be laid on the teaching of civics and of human rights, of foreign languages and cultures, and of history and geography. Making children aware of environmental issues will eventually be added to the list. Specific attention will be given to the teaching of these subjects at university level. The teaching/learning methods used will also be carefully scrutinized in so far as they play a key role in any evolutions that may subsequently take place.

#### **1. Background**

Following the report made by the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors (1996), particular emphasis is being laid, at the international level, on the formulation of *new educational content that might make it possible to avoid conflicts or resolve them peacefully by developing respect for other people, their cultures and their spiritual values.*<sup>2</sup> An important number of projects illustrates this international concern for the integration of universal values into curricula; one can mention in this connection the UNESCO Teacher Education for Peace Project, the proposed creation of an International Academy for Education and Democracy in Denmark, the Young Leaders' Network (Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Autonomous Territories) in the Middle East, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Delors. *Learning: the treasure within*. Paris, UNESCO, 1996, p. 9.

Specific attention is being given to projects aimed at teaching us to live together (the third pillar of education defined by the Delors report), or more precisely at:

- promoting an ideal of peace—according to the idea that *since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed*—by teaching civic and human rights, and by making the concepts of identity, otherness, universality and democracy understandable, so that everyone can be aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities in a multicultural society;
- reducing and/or preventing the phenomena of violence and intolerance—whose development is linked to the difficulties that young people have in foreseeing their future, in a world where their professional and social integration are called into question. This can be achieved by delivering contents better adapted to the requirements of labour markets, but also by improving communication skills, and influencing attitudes and behaviours through dialogue and debate;
- contributing to the management of conflicts, in particular by reviewing historical and geographical curricula and textbooks, in order to avoid the teaching of prejudiced views, and by favouring the idea of a shared and global world, where local, national, regional and international levels are strongly interwoven and interact.

This programme component will deal with a selected number of significant experiences belonging to one of the three categories mentioned above.

## 2. *Targets*

This project will aim at promoting innovative initiatives focusing on a better discovery of others by means of education. More precisely, it will aim at:

*Target 1:* Accumulating and selecting relevant and innovative educational materials, aimed at teaching about living together (i.e. peaceful co-existence), and used in different contexts,

*Target 2:* Comparing innovative initiatives used in teaching civic and human rights, foreign languages and cultures, history and geography, particular attention being given to the following issues: What values are taught? According to which pedagogical methods? To what extent have children assimilated them?

*Target 3:* At the Member States' request, preparing various kinds of educational materials (textbooks, films, CD-ROMs, etc.) favouring the discovery of others, and with the methodological assistance of the IBE,

*Target 4:* Defining a set of indicators permitting an assessment of the capacity of countries to develop a sense of 'citizenship of the world' among their children.

### 3. *Activities*

The different activities included in this project will be organized at international, regional and national level. The duration foreseen for the first phase of their development is three years (September 1998–September 2001).

*3.1. At the international level,* the IBE will implement the following activities:

3.1.1. In the framework of its clearinghouse function, the IBE will accumulate innovative educational materials (CD-ROMs, films, textbooks, teacher's guides, training boxes, etc.). Descriptions of these materials and how to obtain them will be put at the free disposal of any Member State asking for them. Different disciplines will be considered (teaching of civics and of human rights, of foreign languages and cultures, of history and geography, of environmental issues, etc.).

The implementation of these activities could follow the scheme described below:

- The IBE will contact different associated entities (ministries of education, universities, NGOs, etc.) in order to collect relevant materials.
- After having carefully sorted them out, the IBE will take stock of them thanks to adapted equipment and appropriate software.

- With the help of partner institutions and focal points in Member States, a ‘pool of materials’ will thus progressively be established. Consultative mechanisms will be set up to permit education professionals to dispose of these materials easily.
- Under the aegis of Member States, special events aimed at drawing these materials to the attention of the public could be organized. Mass media could play an important role in this connection.

Furthermore, still in the framework of its clearing-house function, the IBE will create for the particular attention of policy makers a new databank, gathering information on the best practices of teaching about living together. It could be set up according to the following steps:

- A questionnaire will be prepared in order to make an inventory of the most innovative initiatives implemented world-wide. It will be sent, in particular, to the usual regular partners of INNODATA, the IBE databank devoted to innovative educational projects.
- A diagnosis of existing initiatives will be made, with particular emphasis on the teaching/learning methods they use.
- A description of each project will be made, and will be recorded using the micro CDS-ISIS software. Some of the existing entries of INNODATA that fit the scope of the project will also be included in the databank.
- Persons or institutions responsible for other existing databanks, dealing with similar topics, will be contacted, so as to constitute a platform of information relevant to the project, which could be consulted on the web.

Work should begin in 1998 on creating this databank. It will rely on the experience already acquired by the IBE with INNODATA. Nevertheless, additional resources will be needed in order to launch an international survey on the best practices of teaching about living together.

3.1.2. In the framework of its comparative and analytical functions, the IBE will conduct comparative studies on innovative initiatives about teaching civic and human rights, foreign languages and cultures, history and geography, and promoting universal values.

These research studies, involving the analysis of textbooks, will resort to appropriate techniques. They will permit the various values and conceptions of the world explicitly or implicitly promoted by schoolbooks to be highlighted. They will lead to the writing of four case studies in 1999. Each case study should deal with a different region of the world. The four of them could focus on the teaching of one specific discipline, such as geography. They will be compared to each other in a synthesis paper. A similar work on another discipline (civics, for instance) could be conducted in the year 2000.

An evaluation study will be conducted at school level in 2001 in order to assess what values are actually learned at classroom level, and what kind of identity children tend to develop as a consequence. Subsequently, it will be possible to define a set of indicators, which could be used in other contexts.

To sum up, the comparative studies to be carried out will imply the writing of eight case studies (four in 1999, and four in 2000), the preparation of two synthesis papers (one in 2000, and one in 2001), and a field evaluation conducted at school level in 2001.

*3.2. At regional level, the IBE will encourage the creation of networks, which would bring together Member States interested in:*

- (i) Collecting information on relevant experiences focused on the discovery of others by means of education;
- (ii) Exchanging information on those experiences, as well as relevant materials;
- (iii) Collaborating in the preparation of projects and materials at regional level (the writing of common textbooks, for example);
- (iv) Developing an evaluation system permitting an assessment of what vision of the world is actually learned at classroom level.

Networks gathering policy makers, academics, associations of teachers, research institutions, NGOs, etc., may be established specifically for that purpose. But the project will rely mainly on existing networks, already developed in the framework of particular programmes.

Each of these networks should give rise to the creation of school networks, in order to favour the diffusion of innovations at grass-root level.

*3.3. At national level*, in the framework of its operational function, the IBE will propose its services to the Member States that ask for them. The assistance given could be linked to the preparation of schoolbooks, or to evaluation projects.

As the IBE will need to accumulate sufficient knowledge and to develop appropriate skills before implementing such activities, this part of the project is likely to start only in the year 2001.

#### *4. Implementation (First phase)*

The IBE should prepare itself, in partnership with associated institutions, to become a clearinghouse by improving its capacity to keep in stock different kinds of information and using different media.

Regional entities, such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, MERCOSUR, SADC or SEAMEO, will be solicited, in order to prepare the creation of future networks.

Formal consultations will be organized with various institutions and organizations (governmental or non-governmental) present in Geneva, to identify areas of common interest where the IBE's support could be required.

## COMPONENT B:

### *Adapting educational content to cope with some of the challenges raised by a globalized world*

The second component of the programme will deal with the processes of adaptation of educational content through three different steps: the reform of curricula; the production of didactic materials; and the education of teachers. Different disciplines will be integrated within the scope of the project, e.g. science, social sciences and humanities. The focus will be on basic education, where the great majority of school-going children in many countries are found.

#### *1. Background*

A large number of initiatives (national and international) suggest that the topic ‘adaptation of content’ is high on the agenda of the education profession world-wide. To give a few examples, in the South Pacific, in Belize in Central America and in Portugal participatory processes have been implemented in order to evaluate the relevance of the contents taught. As a follow-up, plans to formulate new curricula, improve teacher education, and increase the planning capacity of ministries of education in this field have been set up.

In fact, in a globalized world, it has appeared necessary:

- To update national curricula in order to take into account the important progress made in knowledge in recent years, particularly in the field of science. There has also been progress in the new societal demands and economic requirements, and in the evolution of the world-wide political environment. In this way, every child may acquire the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes necessary for his/her individual personal development in a global society, and become an active member of a market in fast evolution;

- To adapt educational materials, teaching methods and the organization of courses to local demand, by mobilizing communities and the teaching profession, in order to take into account the specific needs of different groups of learners (ethnic and linguistic minorities, migrants, the destitute, etc.), whose access to education is still very low, as the seminar ‘Education for All: four years after Jomtien’ held in Amman, Jordan, in October 1994, has shown.

In the framework of the proposed project, a particular emphasis will be laid on the necessity to adapt educational content to the progress made by science, and to take into account linguistic minorities when preparing curricula.

## *2. Targets*

The proposed project will have the objective of strengthening national capacities, particularly with regard to the adjustment of content. More specifically, it will aim at:

- Target 1:* collecting information in different contexts on the mechanisms of adapting content, from the design of curricula to the actual teaching at classroom level;
- Target 2:* promoting a greater interaction between policy-makers and curriculum specialists, in order to increase their understanding of each others’ objectives, needs and constraints;
- Target 3:* preparing teaching materials on the methodologies and approaches of diffusion that can be used to disseminate content change, for persons responsible for the adaptation of content at one stage or another;
- Target 4:* disseminating the results of the different activities implemented through: (i) the organization of training sessions; (ii) methodological assistance given to the Member States when asked for; and (iii) publications.

### 3. *Activities*

The project will be implemented at sub-regional levels under the auspices of networks either currently in operation or specifically established for this purpose. Four regions could be concerned in a first phase: the Mediterranean region; Southern Africa; Central America; and South-East Asia.

The project will be divided into the three main phases described below, covering a total period of three years (September 1998–September 2001) during the initial phase.

#### 3.1. *Launching of the regional networks*

3.1.1. Four sub-regional courses will be organized by the IBE. They will bring together officials from ministries of education and representatives of the academic world. The courses will introduce them to methodologies of curriculum design and implementation. They will present a state-of-the-art review of the main issues at stake today and inform the participants about world-wide trends in this area. Throughout the courses, emphasis will be given to turning policy goals into curriculum plans.

Each of these courses should gather together about twenty-five persons. The first one will take place in September 1998 in Geneva; it will focus on the Mediterranean region. The three others are due to take place in 1999, the first one for South-East Asia, the second for Central America, and the third one for Southern Africa.

The possibility of establishing regional networks will be discussed during each meeting.

3.1.2. As a follow-up to the above-mentioned courses, four regional networks will be set up. They will gather together members of ministries of education, academics, educationalists, representatives of teachers' associations, and institutions involved in the process of adapting contents.

In those regions where it is possible, electronic networks will be constituted, in order to favour the exchange of information between all these different persons.

3.1.3. With the methodological assistance of the IBE, each regional programme will have to be precisely defined. A few topics of interest will have to be selected by each region; for instance, in the case of Southern Africa and Central America, how to adapt curricula and teaching materials to local needs (and in particular to local languages); and in the case of the Mediterranean region, Southern Africa and South-East Asia, how to adjust the teaching of science to the evolution of knowledge.

Each network will draft a project proposal presenting its main topics of interest, and the different activities it intends to develop within the defined framework.

### *3.2. Implementation of the project at sub-regional level*

3.2.1. The project will be implemented differently according to the region concerned, given the emphasis being laid on particular subjects, the funds available, etc. Nevertheless, it is proposed that each regional team follows the schedule of activities presented below :

- In each region, experts from different backgrounds will collect data on the way content is adapted in their own country.
- Research will be conducted on specific topics, such as the development of ‘school-based curricula’. This will give rise to the writing of a few case studies and monographs, which will help to anticipate future trends in curriculum-related matters.
- Some evaluation studies will be made at school and classroom level, in order to assess the impact that some reforms of content launched at central or local level have had.
- Teaching materials proposing a synthesis of the conclusions drawn from the data collected and the research conducted during the implementation of the project will be developed.
- Scientific workshops will be organized to permit experts to test and validate the materials thus prepared.

Funding agencies will be mobilized to support the implementation of the above activities. The IBE will limit its participation to methodological assistance, in particular during the evaluations carried out at school level, and the preparation of teaching materials.

3.2.2. The IBE will contribute to the diffusion of the work conducted in each region by :

- organizing at sub-regional level four policy forums. They will permit the results of the different activities carried out on the mechanisms of adaptation of content to be presented, and to discuss how to make the best use of them. Each forum will bring together the members of the network under consideration, the experts who took part in the project, as well as policy makers representing both central and regional public authorities. One forum will be organized in the year 2000, and the three others in 2001;
- publishing some of the documents and reports produced by the networks. It is expected that each region will have produced at least four monographs or case studies, one evaluation report, and one set of teaching materials before the end of the year 2001. The IBE will also publish the synthesis report of the four policy forums described above.

### *3.3 Organization of training sessions at country level*

At the request of Member States, the IBE will participate in the organization of training sessions using the materials prepared. These training sessions will aim at developing the skills necessary to translate world evolution into curricula, to adapt curricula to local needs and allowing the curricula to be taught properly. They should benefit people responsible for the adaptation of contents at different levels. These training sessions should be organized from 2001 onward. They should be financed with country resources.

## *4. Implementation (First phase)*

Preliminary contacts have already been made in Central America and South Asia to constitute regional teams.

A pilot intensive sub-regional course will be organized in Geneva from 11 to 18 September 1998 on 'Curriculum Development: Education Policies and Curriculum Design and Implementation at the Upper Primary and General Secondary Education Levels'. As most of the participants in the course will

belong to the Mediterranean region (Albania, Bosnia, Egypt, Greece, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, Slovenia, Spain, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey), the possibility of establishing the first regional network will be discussed here.