



United Nations  
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des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

## UNESCO and Knowledge Sharing (4): The Laboratory of Ideas Function

The third in this four-part series examines the work of two UNESCO Category One Institutes to explore their role as laboratories of ideas.

### Case Study: The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)

IIEP is a Category I Institute. As such, it is institutionally part of UNESCO, and contributes to UNESCO's objectives through an annual programme that a Governing Board approves in coherence with UNESCO's overall objectives. Among IIEP's purposes and functions, is the laboratory of ideas in the areas of educational planning and management. This function plays a key role in IIEP's overall mission: to build and strengthen the capacities of Member States in educational planning and management.

**Audiences.** Our primary target audiences (planners, managers, and decision-makers) need up-to-date and state-of-the-art information to support plan preparation and implementation. Our secondary target audience is among our UN partners and bi- and multi-lateral agencies with whom we seek synergies to advance national development agendas.

**What knowledge?** IIEP identifies new issues, through consultations with stakeholders and through its own experiences and observations; and develops knowledge where there is a need to contextualize what is generically known or where there is a knowledge gap. Concretely, we look into core issues such as planning the financing of education, decentralization, and the design and management of higher education systems.

**How is the knowledge shared?** IIEP shares its findings by disseminating good practices; coaching and training planners and managers in the field; and influencing stakeholders' agendas through IIEP-organized events, participation in

conferences, and electronic and paper publications. IIEP also structures the information and knowledge it gathers, and creates and makes them available in online databases. Key features for knowledge-sharing are the acknowledgement that different audiences need different formats and that dissemination goes beyond the publishing activity, involving technical assistance and advocacy.

**How is the laboratory of ideas function different in an Institute?** The specific mandate in educational planning and management allows IIEP to focus its contribution and therefore to cover the

ground extensively. Also, the Institute has the flexibility to explore emerging themes it considers important as a specialist entity. Some of these themes might not yet have reached the top of political agendas in Member States. Among the areas that benefited from this flexibility are HIV and AIDS; entrepreneurship in higher education; education in emergencies; external quality assurance mechanisms; virtual universities; and corruption. IIEP's management flexibility and functional autonomy allow the Institute to anticipate, analyze, and (re-)act.

**Assets and obstacles.** The following features facilitate IIEP's function as a laboratory of ideas: ownership of what we do; strong links with professional networks which act as relays; credibility with our stakeholders stemming from our expertise; and the trust of our partners. IIEP faces a number of constraints, including the political sensitivity of some of the issues tackled, and the cost of producing different formats for different audiences. IIEP must also pay attention to its opportunity costs, and therefore prioritize its actions.



IIEP library

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## International Bureau of Education, Geneva

### Case Study: Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development

The *Community of Practice (COP) in Curriculum Development* is a global IBE-UNESCO initiative to support regions and countries in their design and implementation of curriculum changes within the framework of Education for All (EFA) goals. As an open, plural, multilingual, proactive setting for knowledge production and exchange, it offers and facilitates the following:

- opportunities to share visions, approaches, experiences, innovative practices, research results and analytical studies
- possibilities for jointly undertaking programmes and projects for institutional capacity building around curricular themes, chiefly on the basis of requirements and needs identified in the field by educators and curriculum specialists.



IBE Documentation Centre

**Actors:** The knowledge is produced and shared within and outside UNESCO with nearly 800 policy-makers, educators, curriculum specialists and developers, teachers trainers, supervisors, principals, teachers, researchers and scholars from 90 countries covering the five UNESCO regions.

**Needs:** Their main requirements are the understanding and clarification of key educational and curriculum concepts, the access to current trends, comparative research and updated documentation on curriculum change, and the identification of valuable practices and useful learning resources at the school and classroom levels (i.e. curriculum approaches and tools).

**Processes:** The processes of knowledge production and sharing on curriculum issues (mainly visions, contents, practices and learning resources) imply different levels (inter, intra and national ones) that interact under various settings (Ministries, universities and civil society) and frameworks (South-South and South-South-North cooperation).

Under a comprehensive framework, the knowledge sharing is done through face to face and on-line activities encompassing international seminars and conferences on core issues, capacity building workshops, inter-regional exchanges, worldwide and regional e-forums, a weekly animation activity of documentation and information sharing, weekly on-line alert, downloads of IBE publications and documents and access to learning resources.

The data and knowledge is gathered through face to

face and on-line interaction between the COP global coordination, 11 Regional Focal Points covering the five UNESCO regions and the COP members. It is systematized and shared in various languages through the COP Section of the IBE website.

The main barriers to knowledge sharing are principally the common understanding of core concepts such as inclusive education and competency-based approaches, and the overcoming of language barriers to effectively generate a fluid horizontal communication among COP members. One COP asset is the inter-regional sharing of concepts out of which new concepts and terminology are being appropriated by educators and curriculum specialists from regions.

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