

IBE-UNESCO

ABEGS -GASERC

INTEGRATION BETWEEN SCHOOL SUBJECTS
Content selection, Evaluation and Organization

Dubai/U.A.E, 28-31 March 2004

SEMINAR REPORT

IBE-UNESCO
May 2004

by
Hugo Labate

Based on inputs from:

**GASERC and ABEGS
Cecilia Braslavsky
Dakmara Georgescu
Kawsar Kouchok
Cecilia Stenborg
Bachira Tomeh
Hugo Labate
Tony Macelli
Philip Stabback**

SUMMARY

	Page
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
<i>Background information to the seminar</i>	
<i>Participants</i>	
<i>Seminar objectives</i>	
<i>Seminar agenda</i>	
<i>Outcomes, recommendations and follow-up</i>	
CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION	7
SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS	9
<i>Presentations followed by discussions of pre-requisites of content integration</i>	
Curriculum Integration: Improving content selection and organization (Dakmara Georgescu)	
Cognitive & Meta-cognitive processes and learning (Bachira Tomeh)	
Guidelines for content analysis, evaluation and adjustment (Philip Stabback)	
Plenary presentation of the Curriculum Decomposer Tool (Anthony Macelli)	
Consequences of curriculum integration on curriculum design (Kawsar Kouchok)	
Leading curriculum processes (Cecilia Braslavsky)	
PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS AND OUTCOMES	19
LESSONS LEARNED AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP	21
Annexes	23
<i>Seminar agenda</i>	
<i>List of participants</i>	
<i>Reports on seminar evaluation outcomes</i>	
<i>Presentations</i>	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background information to the seminar

After the successful conclusion of the GASERC-ABEGS I project, and in response to requirements of the Joint Plan¹ regarding the domain of curricula and course design and in co-operation with GASERC and ABEGS², IBE-UNESCO undertook a project for Curriculum Integration (the so-called GASERC-ABEGS I I project). In the framework of this project, a final seminar on *Integration between school subjects – Improving content selection, evaluation and organization* took place in Dubai/U.A.E in March 2004.

In compliance with the projects' objectives (reviewing content of the existing curriculum, adjustment of content scope and sequence, and promotion of professional competencies of curriculum developers in the field of curriculum integration), several materials have been prepared, including

- Papers dealing with specific aspects of Curriculum Integration and Content Analysis
- Graphical Presentations
- Country reports on national cases of Curriculum Integration and Content Analysis
- An electronic tool to help in Content analysis and evaluation: "*Syllabus decomposer*"

The seminar was aimed at disseminating the project outcomes among curriculum directors, curriculum researchers and developers from the ABEGS countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen). At the same time, the seminar provided a good opportunity for participants to engage in a fruitful exploration of the state-of-the- arts in curriculum development in the region.

Participants

From each of the Gulf countries groups of 3 to 5 curriculum specialists, have attended the seminar (*see Annex 2 – List of participants*). IBE-UNESCO was represented by its Director, Dr. Cecilia Braslavsky, and by a team of seven other education specialists, staff members and consultants. GASERC has been represented by its Director Dr. Marzoug Y. Al-Ghounaim and by Dr. Ali Bubshait, Education Advisor.

¹ The Joint Plan for Developing Curricula in the GCC countries, ABEGS, adopted in 1999.

² ABEGS= The Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States; GASERC= The Gulf Arab States Educational Research Centre

Seminar objectives

In the framework of the GASERC-ABEGS II project, the seminar was envisaged as an opportunity to provide an overview of the projects' outcomes and of possibilities of dissemination at national level. At the same time, it has also facilitated a careful exploration of further needs of the region in terms of capacity building and the sharing of experiences in the process of curriculum analysis and reform in compliance with internationally-recognised good practices in education. Among such international trends and good practices, integrated learning and curricula, and curriculum revision based on students' competencies have been tackled as new directions leading to a more balanced and updated curriculum.

The participants were invited to reflect on international trends in content integration and on findings arising from cognitive research, as inputs for suggesting solutions to improve the curriculum provisions in the region. They were presented with guidelines and criteria for content analysis, and were made aware of the needed leadership skills to conduct processes of curriculum change.

The seminar has also contributed to a productive exchange of existing projects for change and interesting experiences in integrating the curriculum in some of the Gulf countries.

Seminar agenda

In compliance with the seminar objectives, the agenda included plenary (interactive) presentations, panel discussions and group activities. During the first day participants were exposed to a presentation focused on the different types of curriculum integration (Dakmara Georgescu) as possible strategies to promote an integrated and holistic learning. A second presentation was included dealing with the findings of cognitive researchers and their application in content selection and organization (Dr. Bachira Tomeh).

In the second day, two interactive presentations dealt with the application of guidelines and criteria for evaluating curriculum content (Philip Stabback and Dr. Tony Macelli), as well as with the use of the electronic tools for analysing the curriculum (Dr. Tony Macelli). These presentations were followed by hands-on activities to apply the concepts to curriculum samples of the ABEGS countries provided by the participants – The rest of the day was devoted to the presentation of several country reports describing national initiatives of curriculum integration and methodologies used for content analysis and adjustment.

The following day included a presentation about the range of impacts of curriculum integration (Dr. Kawsar Kouchok) followed by a panel discussion. The rest of the day was devoted to the presentation of a second group of country reports.

The final day featured a presentation about strategies for leading curriculum change (Dr. Cecilia Braslavsky) based on international experiences. Participants also

engaged in a lively discussion on needs and possibilities for follow-up and made suggestions for improving further experiences of a similar kind.

Outcomes, recommendations and follow-up

As many participants stressed in their comments, the seminar provided a good opportunity for an updated knowledge of curriculum development in the region and of the needs for capacity building in the ABEGS countries, including a better understanding of the existing situation regarding the curriculum in different countries and of future possible developments.

Good grounds for a wider dissemination of the project outcomes were also set. Each participant has received a folder with the Arabic translation of the project documents and tools produced under ABEGS II, and a CD with documents and tools in electronic format.

Participants all agreed that the subject of content integration in school practices needs more discussion, and that this meeting should be followed by future events organised in the region and by a better networking between the ABEGS countries, and between the ABEGS countries and IBE-UNESCO. It has been also recognised that there are many levels of content integration, and that the efforts to integrate content at the curriculum level must be followed by efforts in developing integrated teaching practices and materials, as well as to change the in- and pre-service teacher training system.

After the seminar, Mr. Tony Macelli will work to improve the Curriculum Decomposer Tool based on participants' inputs.

At present, the IBE-UNESCO team, in co-operation with GASERC and ABEGS (-ABEGS), is finalising preparations for running the GASERC-ABEGS III and IV projects, which will be two of the most important follow-ups of both GASERC-ABEGS I and II, and that will concentrate on the building of capacities to make decisions about time allocation in the light of international good practices (including competencies-based approaches and curriculum integration).

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1999, a *Joint Plan for Developing Curricula in the ABEGS member countries* (Hereinafter “*Joint Plan*”) was initiated under ‘the auspice and wise directives of their Majesties and Royal Highnesses the leaders of the GCC countries’¹ and adopted by the General Conference of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (ABEGS) during its fifteenth session (Abu Dhabi, April 1999).

The Joint Plan includes ‘three major domains of action, each comprising several items’ (p. 3):

- A. The domain of General educational aims and Plans of action;
- B. The domain of School Curricula and Course Design and
- C. Other domains, such as Teacher’s competence, Achievement Assessment and Education Infrastructure.

In 2002, within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 10 February 2002 by Dr. Saeed M. Al-Mullais, Director General of ABEGS, as authorised representative on behalf of ABEGS, and by Prof. Dr. Cecilia Braslavsky, as director of IBE-UNESCO, as authorized representative on behalf of IBE-UNESCO, a first phase of the project on Ratio-Weights (GASERC-ABEGS I project on Time allocation and Ratio-weights) was started. The project was finalised in early 2003 and was addressed to the curriculum developers and decision makers from the ABEGS member countries, with the main objective of increasing the professional capacity of curriculum developers and managers in the ABEGS member countries to address issues of time allocation and ratio-weights (see Project and Project Seminar Report – Bahrain, 10-14 May 2003).

In response to requirements of the Joint Plan, especially Domain B: *The domain of School Curricula and Course Design*, ‘Items 1 C: To approximate and create interdisciplinary relations among different school subjects and curricula; Item 3: Special issues to be included in the new curricula; Item 4: Information Technology and the use of computers in education; Item 5: Improving and raising the standards of educational subjects; Item 7: Pedagogical aspects and methods of teaching renovation; Item 8: Development of skills; Item 9: The role of school’ (Joint Plan, p. 3-4), a new GASERC-ABEGS II project on Curriculum Integration was approved in 2003.

The new project on Curriculum Integration was intended to address several specific GCC Plan requirements, such as:

- To review the content of the existing curriculum, in the light of the educational aims, to be more up-to-date and relevant to the needs and interests of the learners;
- To adjust the scope and sequence of the content, to be coherent, well-balanced and free of repetition;

¹ The Joint Plan for Developing Curricula in the GCC Countries, p. 2

- To elaborate a conceptual and practical framework for curriculum integration, helping curriculum specialists and teachers to develop relevant meaningful experiences.
- To promote professional competencies of curriculum designers and teacher trainers in the field of curriculum integration.

In compliance with the projects' objectives, the following materials were prepared:

- A. Paper on Curriculum Integration and the corresponding graphical presentation
- B. Paper on Cognitive Processes and Learning and the corresponding graphical presentation
- C. Comprehensive Methodology/Guidelines for analysing the existing curriculum and for changing and improving it, and the corresponding graphical presentation
- D. Electronic Tool for Decomposing the Curriculum ("*Syllabus Decomposer*")
- E. References concerning Samples and experiences of integrated curricula from different countries and regions of the world
- F. Paper on Consequences of Curriculum Integration on Curriculum Design and Implementation and the corresponding graphical presentation
- G. A graphical presentation on Leading Curriculum Development Processes.

A project Seminar was aimed at disseminating the project outcomes among curriculum directors, curriculum researchers and developers from the ABEGS countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen). At the same time, the Seminar provided a good opportunity for participants to engage in a fruitful exploration of the state-of-the-arts in curriculum development in the region.

Two pre-workshop meetings were organised, the first in Geneva/Switzerland (November 2003) and the second in Dubai/U.A.E. (February 2004) in order to discuss several issues concerning: the preparation of the capacity-building workshop for the ABEGS country members, including the agenda of the meeting; the competencies-based approach in curriculum development processes; the draft documents of the seminar; the pre-workshop activities; the presentation of the tool prepared within the framework of the project (*Syllabus Decomposer*); the content of two follow-up projects which would mainly focus on capacity building for time allocation. The meeting was attended by IBE staff involved in the project, representatives from ABEGS-GASERC, and country experts

The Seminar took place in Dubai, U.A.E, on 28-31 March 2004. Curriculum researchers and developers from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen attended the meeting. The workshop was both an opportunity to provide an overview on the projects' outcomes and a chance for exploring further needs of the region. Among the needs mentioned above, most important are the ones related to capacity building and experience sharing in the

process of reshaping the curriculum based on international trends and good practices, such as students' competencies and curriculum integration. Activities were organised around plenary (interactive) presentations, panel discussions and group activities.

SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS

INTERACTIVE PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CONTENT SELECTION, EVALUATION AND ORGANIZATION WITH A VIEW TO CURRICULUM INTEGRATION, FOLLOWED BY DISCUSSIONS

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION: IMPROVING CONTENT SELECTION AND ORGANIZATION (Mrs. Dakmara GEORGESCU) In her presentation, Mrs. Georgescu tackled the issue of clarifying the concept of curriculum integration, and the importance it has on improving teaching practices and learning results. She underlined the importance of finding a balance between the specialization connected to school subjects and the need of making connections among the different aspects of knowledge and action.

The presenter analysed important components of the curriculum, and made the participants aware of the international trends of shifting from knowledge-centered curricula to competencies-based curricula, as focal points for organizing learning experiences. This implies a different way to develop syllabi; for instance, the question is not when and how to include a particular topic as Trigonometry, but to ask what kind of contribution can Trigonometry make to the development of a more general competence, e.g. problem-solving. Competencies are seen as a new, more fruitful way to organize the curriculum, as they can guide the selection and organization of learning experiences in a more holistic way, approaching to phenomena as a whole, including all possible perspectives, and seeking connections that allow the student to make better sense of what he/she is taught. Competencies are also a way to define learning outcomes in an integrated, active way, including the dimensions of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

After this introduction, Mrs. Georgescu invited the participants to interact giving their comments and definitions about the idea of curriculum integration.

The participants portrayed integration as a basis of making linkages between the knowledge and skills from different subjects to reach a common goal. Therefore in the participants' opinion, it has to do with helping in some subjects to understand concepts from other fields of knowledge; thus integration is seen as a way to reduce the amount of information presented to the student, avoiding duplication or repetitions.

Mrs. Georgescu made a distinction between "integrated learning" and "integrated curriculum", pointing out that it is possible to promote integrated learning even in a subject-based curriculum, but there are alternatives of content integration that go beyond the current subject structure. In her view, curriculum integration is a set of

practices for addressing learner's needs making connections between different areas of learning and development, given the complex relationships of the natural and man-made world. She proposed two categories of curriculum integration efforts, a "loose" level of integration that doesn't imply major changes in the way curriculum is organized, and a "strong" level that means a deeper impact on curriculum organization and practices.

She portrayed several strategies for integration in each of the two categories. Beginning with "loose" integration practices, she mentioned *Curriculum correlation*, as a set of actions to make teachers, textbook authors and students more aware of connections; *Inter- and Trans-disciplinary approaches* including such practices as team-teaching and thematic approaches to deal with a certain topic from several perspectives; *Cross-curriculum objectives, issues and approaches*, including the setting of objectives to be fostered in all subjects, e.g. communication skills; *Integration through assessment*, by means of developing assessment tasks that can evaluate the learning achievements by assessing the use and application of knowledge coming from different subjects in a practical task; *Project work, flexible schedules, flexible student grouping*, as strategies to reorganize the students activities to include exploration, research and reporting activities around a topic. All this practices can be combined in several ways.

"Strong" integration implies generally the introduction of major changes in the way the curriculum content is organized and delivered. For instance, the combination of subjects into *Broad curriculum / learning areas*, might imply turning two or more subjects in only one learning area, with the corresponding impact on the number of teachers, the rebalancing of time allocation, the grading system, etc.; *Inclusion of emerging knowledge areas* can be understood in two ways: the first one leads to issues of coordinating the content sequences across subjects, as the development of an integrated topic might need the articulation of knowledge and skills coming "just in time" from separate subjects. The other meaning for the "emerging" areas is to understand them as new learning areas that address new challenges of today's world, e.g. environmental education.

This implies the need to delete or recombine topics that belonged to established subjects. A *Thematic approach* is a way to organize learning around interesting themes, and not around subjects; it is a way to improve content organization that is more easily implemented at the primary level, but it is very challenging in the current disciplinary setting of middle- and high school. This approach is still in the side of organizing curriculum by means of inputs; but *Competencies-based approaches* seek to organize learning based in outputs, selecting and organizing learning experiences in a way that it can contribute to the development of one or more competencies. Finally, *Problem-based learning* is organized around the investigation and resolution of "real world" problems. This kind of content organization can contribute also to the development of competencies.

Mrs Georgescu presented also some pros and cons that are claimed by the supporters and the opponents to curriculum integration. Negative arguments are centred on the specialized needs of higher education, and the particular traditions of teaching and organizing knowledge built by disciplines along their history, with the difficulties

posed by the loss of disciplinary identity and the need to retrain teachers and change school organization practices. Some of the positive arguments are that integrated approaches may increase the efficiency of learning as it takes into account the ways our brain works and also the behavioral characteristics of children and teenagers, promoting creativity and interest on the learner's side. There are also interesting research findings that support some of these ideas.

Participants' questions and feedback

Many exchanges were focused on the desire to address at the student as a whole individual, and Integration of curriculum as a way to develop an integrated personality. Integration is needed to build a curriculum that not only "teaches" but also "educates", and that adds meaning to learning, connecting the different learning experiences. The participants perceive that curriculum integration is a step that requires a previous evaluation of the existing curricula, because many ABEGS countries have introduced recent changes in their curricula and they feel that there are not clear foundations to implement integrated curricula.

Participants see the controversy on curriculum integration as a controversy about means, not about ends. They agree with the theoretical grounding of integration but the problem lies in the practical application, as the number of teachers that can introduce integration in their everyday teaching practices is scarce, and the impact of integration in ratio/weights has many consequences. Needs for further training or re-training of teachers have been also brought up. The participants would like to know interesting, successful application examples, and lessons learned from those who are practising integration. They will feel more confident to introduce integration if they can plan each step carefully before adopting it. About integration as a way to avoid content repetition, it was claimed that some times, the "same" topic is taught in different subjects, but the kind of cognitive processes and skills are not the same.

COGNITIVE AND METACOGNITIVE PROCESSES AND LEARNING (Mrs. BACHIRA TOMEH). Dr. Tomeh highlighted the need to know more about the ways in which knowledge and information are processed by the brain to devise effective teaching methods and materials. Particularly important is the use of memory as a central component of the learning process, as each piece of knowledge has to be stored and then linked to the existing knowledge in the brain of the learner.

Recent findings from neurology and cognitive sciences, revised in the light of what we know on the structure of computers have led to a new paradigm for brain research, that allow a better understanding of memory as a system. Dr. Tomeh explained the limitations and powers of short-term memory, through an interactive exercise using a set of pictures and then examined some ways to make memorization last longer, such as association and double encoding (verbal and pictorial).

She also showed that the sequence of knowledge "bits" is important, as some concepts or ideas can interfere the learning of other ideas if they are very close in meaning, and as a result of that there are sequences of subjects and even sequences of topics inside a class that can cause cognitive interferences, reducing the effectiveness of learning. The sequence of learning activities and materials is also important due to the

inferences that students may make when they attempt to make sense of the text or activity, trying to predict the aspect of the coming pieces of information.

Real learning needs the incorporation to long term memory of knowledge items loosely retained in short term memory. Integration of knowledge in the curriculum is important as it may help in the process of building a semantic structure around a theme or phenomenon because the different approaches and relationships built about it reinforces and stabilises learning. An interactive exercise showed the participants the importance of the idea of concept interrelation to build a mental model of a topic or situation. Several different mental models can be built around a concept, and having more than one mental model helps in achieving a deeper understanding and in avoiding or reducing errors.

The construction of mental models is related to the relevance of the learning in the mind of the student. Different factors have to be considered here, as the incentive or motivation given by real-world problem-solving situations, but also aesthetic considerations as emotions are powerful forces that can enable or impair learning.

The participants were very interested in Dr. Tomeh's explanation and they evaluated her presentation as outstanding. Some questions were made, discussing the paradigm of tentative and ever-evolving knowledge that is part of the description of learning by cognitive sciences, because it doesn't include absolute forms of knowledge such as revelation. They were interested in knowing more about forms of teaching and assessing that are in line with cognitive research, and they stressed the need of training teachers and also textbook authors to deliver content in a more effective way, taking into consideration the ideas explained by Dr. Tomeh.

Some comments and considerations to the two presentations were provided by Mr. Hugo Labate, pointing out that integration of content can be a way to make learning more effective (in the quantitative sense) but also to achieve a more integrated human being. Integration should not be seen as a "magic solution", because it requires a lot of effort and adjustment from the teacher's side, and a new set of teaching materials.

Steps in the way to integration could be to find examples of reinforcing relationships among different concepts inside every class, and devising a plan in the medium term to find more overarching levels of integration across subjects. It was also discussed that cognitive sciences deal with a restricted version of the mind's process, centering in information-processing capacities, but there is not yet a clear theory to explain how the brain causes other processes of knowing, as feeling or believing, and how these different kinds of knowledge translate into actions.

GUIDELINES FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS, EVALUATION AND ADJUSTMENT (Mr. Philip Stabback). Mr. Stabback invited participants to reflect on the idea of curriculum change, as the practical procedure to arrive to integration. To change the curriculum it is needed to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the current curriculum. This can be done by researching the value of materials available today including curricula from different countries and experiences of curriculum change. For the process of curriculum change, the gradual approach was recommended by Mr. Stabback, after evaluating which is the current capacity for

implementing changes, the available resources, and the existence of a clear rationale that can be communicated, explained and defended successfully.

To begin the analysis of existing content, the participants were invited to reflect on the meaning of “content”, helped by focus questions. A consensus was reached after brainstorming and discussion that content is the bulk of experiences presented to the students, including ideas, principles, motor and mental skills and values. The challenge of every curriculum was perceived to be finding a way to present content in a consistent way with the learner’s needs, but also the needs of the country and the marketplace, and to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant content.

Mr. Stabback proposed two alternative and complementary ways to conduct curriculum evaluation. Traditional models tend to be carried out after curriculum implementation, and are pressed by the need to meet the standard of “objectivity”, in a way that makes them lose the more “qualitative” and contextual aspects of curriculum implementation. On the other hand, “new-wave” models are more subjective and their results are usually more difficult to quantify. There is a need to find a good combination of these two models, relying on both objective and subjective information, gathering information from a variety of sources and combining measurements with impressions. A process for evaluating the curriculum has also to be limited in scope because it is not possible to manage any amount of information.

Practical advice for content revision was given in a series of steps, including

- the assurance of the adequate preliminary conditions such as political commitment and the set up of effective structures to deal with the evaluation (expert commissions and representatives of other stakeholders)
- Planning the process of assessment (objectives, methodology and resources)
- Collecting the information through a variety of methods (questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, analysis of documents)
- Analysis of information against previously determined criteria (sequencing, learning theories, balance, consistency, relevance)
- Drawing conclusions and selecting the kind of changes to be devised and implemented (fight overload, increase relevance, avoid repetition)

Participants exchanged ideas about the methods they have been using for evaluating curricula, and described a methodology based on surveys and questionnaires, with some input from national exams, universities and field visits. Some of the countries are engaged in processes of curriculum revision and shared their approaches in the plenary, including also the obstacles they find. They stressed the importance on having a broader view including exchanges with sister countries as well as with international boards and experts.

Mr. Stabback provided the participants with a set of draft criteria for assessing curricula, and invited them to discuss and improve them as a model for evaluating their curriculum materials. A short exercise was conducted where the participants

chose a particular criterion from the list and used it to check a sample curriculum material from their own country. The exercise was followed by an interesting plenary exchange on the pertinence of the criteria, and possible ways to reframe them.

As a concluding remark, Mr. Stabback reminded the participants that evaluation of curricula has to be understood as a process, that needs planning, expertise, time and resources, and that it must include stakeholders to access rich sources of information and to support the efforts for change.

PLENARY PRESENTATIONS OF THE CURRICULUM DECOMPOSER TOOL (Dr. Anthony Macelly). The ABEGS/GASERC/IBE partnership has produced a third tool relating to curriculum development planning (the first two were produced under the ABEGS I project – see the Report of the project seminar in Bahrain, May 2003). Dr. Macelli presented the new tool stressing the prerequisites for its application, such as the development of good typologies and categories for the analysis of syllabi.

Since potential users are the experts in charge of defining criteria for the analysis of curriculum materials, and are also in charge of the evaluation and categorisation of the different components of the syllabi texts, it is clear that they cannot achieve an “automatic” decomposition through manipulating the tool.

An advantage of using the tool for the decomposition of curriculum materials lies in its flexibility, as it can be applied to syllabi, teaching materials and even textbooks, and the results of the decomposition process is kept in a database which enables the production of different kinds of analysis selecting automatically those items related to a specific question.

As visual instruments, the tool enhances the users’ capacity to explore connections and produce focused reports, that are useful inputs in the process of decision-making for curriculum change. It could be a helpful instrument in revealing curriculum shortcomings.

The kind of categories used in the decomposition process will be different depending on the objectives and the kind of change to be introduced. If the aim is to reduce overload, then a set of useful categories should classify content elements as essential, important, less relevant, irrelevant; if the focus is to rewrite curriculum in terms of competencies, the categories should help to identify concepts, facts, skills, values, etc. The set of categories should be also exhaustive, and categories should not overlap. Existing documents can be analysed and decomposed, and the elements in the resulting database can be recombined and mixed with other input for the design of new documents. Design is a second step, and also needs the development of a previous set of categories, probably a different one that the one used for decomposing existing materials. Design categories can help not to miss any needed component, and can suggest interrelationships and sequence among different parts. The public discussion of the categories with stakeholders can be also a useful step in achieving consensus and ownership of the new materials since the very beginning.

COUNTRY REPORTS – 1ST SESSION

Each country was asked to prepare a concise report on curriculum integration in its respective education system, describing cases of curriculum integration, plans regarding curriculum integration and methodologies used for content analysis and adjustment. Some written reports were submitted during the seminar in Arabic and only a schematic idea is included in this report.

Saudi Arabia: The participants described a study conducted in their country to analyse two types of integration: inside a subject and between subjects. They have used a matrix to verify the complementarity and reinforcement of content in different subjects, including values, habits and attitudes as well as concepts or skills. They have a plan for curriculum analysis including the study of their current situation and the establishment of standards for integration. A committee for producing new documents has been appointed and cooperation with universities is envisaged. At present they are developing curriculum materials (books and teaching aids). Next steps forward will be the piloting and generalization of the materials.

Qatar: The country team described the process as formed by two steps that were called “diagnoses” and “cure”. The diagnostic is being conducted with the help of field visits and feedback from teachers, as well as studies on international trends in curriculum. They have formed a committee, and the plan includes using interviews and questionnaires to assess objectives, contents and evaluation methods. They are planning to start a major project of curriculum reform, and at present they are revising the scope and sequence of the curriculum.

U.A.E.: The participants explained that the Emirates are in a similar phase, including the work of curriculum teams to produce an integrated framework for Social Studies, including concepts and skills across History, Civics, Geography, Economy and Science and Technology. At present, they are starting to write the new teaching materials, and are trying to deal with some obstacles posed by resistance to changes, and some financial difficulties for providing IT at school level.

COUNTRY REPORTS – 2ND SESSION

Bahrain: Participants informed about several integration practices they have been testing since the 80's in grades 1-9. Teachers decide the organization and sequence of topics. Some obstacles they have found is the difficulty posed by teachers that have not been trained to deal with several subjects, and there has been continuous effort in training of teachers in workshops. They plan to keep the curriculum flexible, and reforms will impact on the number of allocated hours but sequence will be kept open to teachers' decisions. They remarked the importance of planning carefully and allocating resources to avoid trial-and-error and starting the process many times.

Yemen: The country team gave an overview of the process for curriculum change. It is a quite recent process because after unification the new curriculum was started in 1993, and the framework for higher secondary (years 10 to 12) has been finished quite recently in 2002. They are now in the phase of evaluating the curriculum through questionnaires and committees receiving feedback from schools, and are also developing new teacher training materials.

Oman: The country team informed the seminar of the comprehensive reform introduced to the educational system in Oman. Then new ten-year basic education programme was introduced in 1998/1999. Basic education is divided into two cycles (Grades 1 to 4 and Grades 5 to 10), followed by two years of secondary education. Curriculum integration has been highly considered in the process of designing the new curriculum, especially at lower grades.

Kuwait: The country team described the process of curriculum revision in Kuwait. During the last decade, efforts were made to review and update the content of syllabuses in order to respond to the changing needs of the society. Curriculum integration has always been a major factor to be considered in the process of curriculum revision.

CONSEQUENCES OF CURRICULUM INTEGRATION ON CURRICULUM DESIGN (Dr. Kawsar Kouchok)

During her presentation, Dr. Kouchok brought into discussion several aspects related to challenges the option for curriculum integration (as a major education policy decision) poses to curriculum development specialists and institutions. She also talked about the numerous challenges of curriculum integration to the school organisation, school 'rituals' and 'habits', as well as to teacher training systems that are based on a traditional philosophy of teaching and learning, that is seeing the teacher rather (or exclusively) as a major source of information for its' students.

Dr. Kouchok presented several conclusions of innovative experiences in the Arab countries regarding curriculum integration. As in many other parts of the world, owing to several important factors (among which teacher training systems and employment policies), curriculum integration seems to be easier to carry out in primary education, while in secondary school, where the subjects are numerous (each of them being usually taught by one teacher), it is rather difficult to plan and implement it successfully.

Dr. Kouchok also addressed the issue of social acceptance of education innovation and discussed with the participants about different strategies to engage fruitful public discussions and reach consensus over controversial issues.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Dr. Anthony Macelli, Hugo Labate and Philip Stabback engaged with the participants in a panel discussion on linking theoretical and practical aspects of content analysis and evaluation.

Dr. Macelli used this opportunity to reiterate some of the ideas he addressed during his presentation of the Syllabus Decomposer Tool: why is it always important to set clear criteria against which a certain curriculum document (curriculum framework, syllabuses and/or textbooks) will be analysed; which could such criteria be; and how to link the strategy of analysing the curriculum (the content of the curriculum) with plans of revising and improving it.

Philip Stabback distinguished between a broader content analysis procedure (involving education stakeholders and looking at the curriculum from different perspectives) and a ‘narrow’ strategy that would take into consideration rather logical and psychological aspects and relationships between different elements that compose a curriculum document and address the content of learning.

This ‘narrow’ (strictly content/information-related) analysis was seen by participants as more appropriate for the actual project stage, and also as fitting the structure of most curriculum documents in the ABEGS countries.

Owing to heated discussions regarding a suitable model for analysing the curriculum content and obtaining relevant information, the practical exercise prepared for this session had to be shifted to an optional session at the end of the day.

LEADING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES (Dr. Cecilia Braslavsky) The presentation attempted to highlight the kind of leadership needed to impulse changes in educative systems, facing the contemporary challenges of education. Dr. Braslavsky emphasized the need of a long-term vision for educating children who will grow and work in 2050. She identified some obstacles for change, and also some factors that help in moving ahead, as is the case with the dissatisfaction with educational results.

The presenter gave some advices about the ways to engage stakeholders in the process of curriculum change, giving examples of the tensions that can be found among different views. Technical and bureaucratic times can sometimes be too slow from the point of view of political opportunity, but a quick change might receive low levels of consensus. That is why leaders of change need to develop new competencies, for example the capacity to negotiate, to communicate, to inform the public and to find the best moment for promoting change. A leader must build up his/her capacities for negotiation, for teamworking, and may sometimes need the assistance of external observers to give her/him a feedback of the process.

Leadership has a lot to do with attitudes. Leaders, first of all, are able to create an atmosphere and culture for change, concentrating on the future vision and communicating it to their own staff as well as the public, but they also let themselves be influenced by other people. They can take risk because they are able to take safety measures including the publicity of decisions and the clarity of their mission, and balancing the size of change with the visibility of change.

Dr. Braslavsky gave a vivid picture of the challenges posed by a process of change, and the need to build a clear structure for making decisions and to communicate with different audiences in the particular language they can understand.

A very interesting debate followed the presentation, including the usually difficult relationships between curriculum experts and politicians. The presenter advised participants to analyse examples of many top-down processes that have failed, as well as finding ways to influence the public opinion without direct opposition to political

leaders, taking into account the need of politicians to feel that they are in control of the situation. Stakeholders' interests were analysed and Dr. Braslavsky insisted on the importance of presenting arguments that embrace the point of view of the other person but highlighting the common goals of improving education more than concentrating on differences.

Some participants felt that strong arguments against educative changes in ABEGS countries are in some cases a resistance to perceived external pressures. Dr. Braslavsky argued that to discuss the question of change in these terms is misleading, and she felt it was better to emphasize the discourse about improving the quality of education, because that is a goal nobody can criticise.

PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION OF SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS AND OUTCOMES (see also Annex)

- The content of the seminar was perceived as stimulating and relevant, and the seminar participants seemed to enjoy the opportunity to share experiences in a number of areas, including integration of curriculum and content evaluation. The general atmosphere was friendly and all participants felt encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas. Participants were appreciative of the opportunity to meet experts and technicians from the ABEGS countries and from abroad, as they all supplied valuable and interesting experiences.
- The schedule has been flexible, changing to accommodate the needs of participants.
- As participants stated in their evaluation, they felt that the seminar was intense and comprehensive but very short, and as a result there were many questions raised that could not be dealt with, for example the relationship between integration of content and its translation into skills and values, as well as the kind of evaluation methodologies needed for teaching practices in an integrated curriculum.
- The inputs from international experts ranged across a palette of issues and questions such as curriculum integration, learning theory and learning styles, curriculum (content) evaluation, leadership of curriculum processes and consequences of integration. While all of these were well-presented and well-received, the relationships between the different topics were not made sufficiently explicit. As a result there could have been some confusion on whether the two main topics of the seminar (Curriculum integration and Content evaluation) were recommended to be applied jointly in further efforts of curriculum reform or not.
- A high level of collegiality was perceived among participants. They were willing to share experiences and to learn from one another. This will certainly be an asset in the future, especially in regional networking and capacity-building activities. However, given that these efforts require a great deal of "hands-on" experience, a larger percentage of the agenda should be devoted in the future to collective, creative and constructive tasks in forthcoming seminars and workshops.
- Participants felt that the presentation of the decomposer tool should have been followed by a hands-on practical exercise to get a better picture of the possibilities of the tool. Therefore, the tool should be completed and finished, and a working version should be available in Arabic for training activities at the local level.
- Country reports were evaluated as useful and they were perceived as opportunities to foster exchanges on matters of common interest. Participants expressed their

need to have more time in the future for the preparation of country reports, to be able to give a more comprehensive picture of the situation in each country.

- It would be useful to implement a systematic procedure to request the opinions of organizers and participants about the expected outcomes of future seminars / workshops, in advance and in writing, to reach a high level of ownership among participants and to allow organizers to build an agenda that reflects the concerns of the participants.

- The presentations and documents have been considered very useful, but in successive meetings participants would prefer to have all documents available in Arabic versions. This could also be a way to make them more familiar with the content and objectives of the seminar in advance so as to allow richer discussions. They hope that the rest of papers and presentations will be translated and sent to them as soon as possible.

- More attention should be given in the future to the presentation of concrete examples, e.g. study cases about patterns of integration, and also to allocate more time for the analysis of said examples. Curriculum integration was discussed theoretically, but participants would have also liked to analyse strategies for practical application. This includes strategies to help students, teachers and parents to apply integration. More practical examples of curriculum integration are needed, including examples from each ABEGS countries so as to benefit from others' experiences.

- Comprehensive information about the curriculum development processes, structures and needs of the region should be built and disseminated in order to define and plan new capacity-building activities.

LESSONS LEARNED AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

There was a general feeling of participants that the GASERC-ABEGS II project and the seminar as such has contributed significantly to improving participants' awareness of needs and possibilities for curriculum change in the region. It also highlighted needs and possibilities for capacity building in ABEGS countries and set good grounds for wider dissemination of project outcomes. Based on discussions regarding seminar outcomes and needs and possibilities for follow-up, several issues were tackled, in terms of lessons learned and recommendations for improving project planning, activities and achievements in the future.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to learn from other Arab Countries and to exchange experiences in curriculum processes. They expressed that they had gained more confidence in domestic efforts. Some of the participants were happy to discover that they are already practising integration to some extent in their countries.

The topic of integration was highlighted as an important issue, and the discussion of integration pros and cons has been considered by the participants as very interesting. Also the ideas included in the different integration levels have been perceived as useful. They will want to go deeper in the discussion of strategies for developing curriculum integration from the stage of planning to execution, beginning with the development of relevant local models of curriculum content analysis.

About the depth of curriculum integration, the participants felt the need to decide if integration efforts have to include the whole curriculum, or if it is enough to create a new integrated subject or practice integration across the existing subjects.

They would like to know interesting, successful application examples, and lessons learnt from those who are practising integration, and therefore they would like to participate in further activities to build capacity, for example seminars on international and regional successful projects of curriculum integration, as well as on the field of content evaluation. They would appreciate workshops on curriculum analysis and evaluation, including the use of the decomposer tool, on the development of integrated learning materials and strategies, including teacher training and textbook-writing, as well as on the design of integrated curricula.

A number of activities centred on curriculum evaluation could be developed as follow-up activities including the elaboration of criteria for evaluating content, either at local level or in a cooperative setting. Other capacity-building activities could include workshops for the development of policy papers about integration efforts, including stakeholder participation and risk-benefit analysis.

Sharing information among ABEGS countries was perceived as an enriching activity. Country experts in the region would benefit from study visits to sister countries, as well as visits to countries with outstanding practices in curriculum. They would like also to be engaged in further regional/local activities such as workshop and seminars. Arabic-based electronic networking is also one of the methods envisaged for the exchange of information that could be considered in the future.

Several difficulties accompanying change in educative systems are the amount of effort required to convince leaders that change is important and needed. Even when they might convince the decision-makers, difficulties are expected in getting the required resources to provide for curriculum integration. Therefore participants would like to see the decision makers on the state level involved in workshops and seminars about these issues, and to find occasion for developing their own skills in negotiation, communication and leading change.

A set of resources including case studies, examples of integration, and transference strategies would be appreciated as a help to move forward. A web site (in Arabic) concerned with curriculum integration issues, such as building study units, teaching-learning strategies etc. could be an interesting and useful way to exchange resources. For exchanges with the larger world community of experts, an accessible storehouse of curriculum materials and policy documents could be made available in languages other than Arabic.

ANNEXES

SEMINAR AGENDA

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

REPORTS OF EVALUATION OUTCOMES

PRESENTATIONS

**DAKMARA GEORGESCU
BACHIRA TOMEH
PHILIP STABBACK
ANTHONY MACELLI
KAWSAR KOUCHOK
CECILIA BRASLAVSKY**