Policy dialogue is obviously connected with the generic concept of “good management”, understood as the way of foreseeing and implementing more democratic policies based, according to UNDP, on the degree of institutional efficiency and the rules that represent transparency, participation, reaction to situations, the obligation to be held accountable and the rule of law. The “lessons learned” over the four intertraining seminars on policy dialogue that the IBE has carried out since 2003, in partnership with ADEA, for the benefit of high-level officials in the ministries of education of sixteen French-speaking African countries, have shown us that, in practice, while specifically basing ourselves or referring to good management or “modern management”—which could be the “same rhythm” in the proverb given above—the way policy dialogue was actually carried out could adopt different forms (“different dances”). This is not at all surprising since each state has chosen its own path in this domain and democratic management does not “take” like a serum or a vaccine. Some countries may rely on a procedure that has already been in use for a considerable period of time; others are only just beginning. Nevertheless, everywhere it seems that it is going to be a long and painful process since, beyond the political will, the legal framework, the institutions or the structure, it means a complete change of mentality.

During our African seminars, we have found ourselves sharing with participants, each according to their own experience, concepts, questions, truths, doubts and convictions concerning policy dialogue. This has allowed us step by step to establish and refine a “definition” that we propose to share with our readers, not as a finalized concept but rather as a call for further redefinition:

Policy dialogue is an institutionalized process involving all partners in the system (political authorities at different levels, the administration, teachers and other staff, parents, civil society, the business world, the media, “donors”, etc.) in the preparation, the implementation and the evaluation of a democratically agreed educational policy based on efficient partnerships and directed towards improving the quality of education.

Following our experiences in Benin, Portugal, Mali, Mauritius and Niger presented in number 137 of Prospects (March 2006), five other monographs/studies of African situations form the Open File in this issue. Each in its own way illustrates one aspect or another of the foregoing definition. Through the study carried out in Senegal on the acceptance of the ten-year programme for education and on the participation of those
involved, the importance becomes clear of good communication and a participatory approach at different levels: technical dialogue, social dialogue and policy dialogue. The experience of Togo, which describes the setting up of community schools and relay schools in the savannah region, presents not only the successes but also the limitations and the difficulties of balanced co-operation between a government and an NGO. The operation of school management committees (COGES), presented by Côte d’Ivoire, demonstrates at the local level actual ownership and community mobilization around the school and its proper functioning in the process of “dynamic partnership”. The study on Burkina Faso tells us about negotiations with a multilateral partner and bilateral co-operation agencies in order to finance the first phase of a ten-year development plan for basic education. Among the difficulties identified and the “lessons learned” so far, we may note in particular the need for an excellent grasp of the paperwork and a high-level of agreement at the ministerial level. As the study clearly shows: “Most of these difficulties could have been avoided if the national team had been better prepared and had adopted a common front.” The last study in the Open File, drawing on Senegalese experiences, throws light on the importance and the positive outcomes arising from a policy that has for a number of years been firmly based, both in formal and non-formal education, on real partnerships. It also presents the requirements for carrying out this policy, in terms of legitimacy, contractual and operational structures for mobilization, at the national, regional or departmental levels. It closes with one certainty, drawn from long experience: “Only partnership can move the world.”

As we have already indicated at the end of the editorial for Prospects number 137:

Not one of these experiences can be considered as a “model”, but the authors carry out their analysis with lucidity and a critical attitude. In this context, the “lessons learned” will be of particular interest to our readers. Varied and written by the people directly involved, these (good) practices witness real-life situations that took place at a particular time, in a particular place in a particular country. However, beyond diversity, they all bear witness to a strong vision, to an actual will and commitment in favour of policy dialogue for the better management of education. It is in this way that they can, we hope, contribute to the thought and action of those involved in education in other parts of the world, who may be asking themselves about the possibilities of transferability and relevance.

In the introductory article to this number 138 and in the hope of establishing “useful interactions with other policy dialogue projects that are presented in this and the preceding issue of Prospects”, Charles Magnin, Professor of the History of Education at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (FPSE) at the University of Geneva describes, in the form of “a chronology and a summary of incomplete interdisciplinary research”, the stages and some of the achievements of the original research carried out jointly between 2002 and 2004 by the IBE and FPSE, with the collaboration of the Summer University on Human Rights and the Right to Education (UEDH) and with the financial support of the International University Network of Geneva (RUIG). This original research, mainly because the project’s ambition was to place the matter of policy dialogue in its strictest sense in an interdisciplinary perspective, brought together the