

ADVANCING THE JOURNEY TO INCLUSIVE AND QUALITY SCHOOLING IN LATIN AMERICA

Reflections on a journey through Bolivia, Peru and Colombia during October, 2019



Stephanía Duarte Mora

and **David Towell**



Introduction

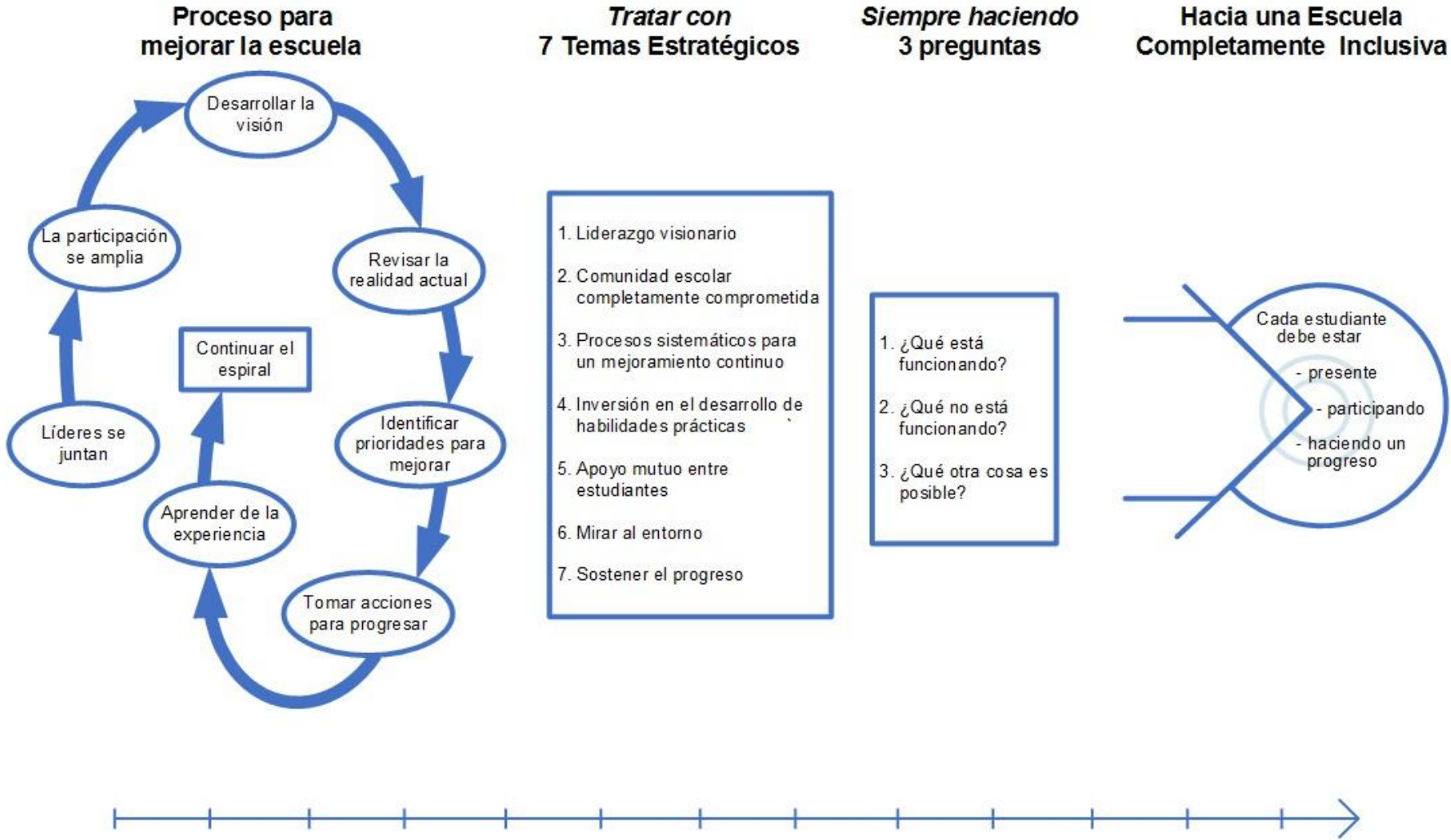
In Latin America as elsewhere, significant efforts are underway at the level of governments and also at the level of schools to advance the fourth of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4): *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Three times in the last year or so, we have had the privilege of travelling through parts of Bolivia, Peru and Colombia to explore progress in this objective with educational leaders. We have been the guests of campaigning civil society associations *Programa Mundo Inclusivo* (Bolivia), *Sociedad Peruana de Síndrome Down* (Peru) and *Asdown* (Colombia), and in the most recent visit, also of *UNICEF* (Peru).

In October 2018 and March 2019, we mainly visited schools and met members of their educational communities - school principals, teachers, students and families. We have described lessons from these visits in a recent pamphlet *Continuando La Conversación Sobre El Avance Hacia La Escolarización Inclusiva*. Following the March visit all three of our hosts agreed to organise workshops in their capitals designed to bring interested schools together to share experience and learn from each other about key steps in their individual journeys towards inclusive and quality schooling. (The programme for the two-day La Paz workshop is appended*.) In addition, UNICEF organised workshops for individual schools in Pucallpa and the Carabayllo district of Lima; we spent half-a-day at Liceo VAL in Bogotá; and we spent two days working with the Rector and educational community at the school where Stephanía is herself a teacher, Colegio De La Salle in Bucaramanga, Colombia. As our photos suggest, we were very fortunate through these activities to meet many inspiring people making impressive efforts to achieve *better education for all*. We thanks them all most sincerely.

With the school workshops in mind, David and his Canadian colleague, Gordon Porter prepared a guide to 'advancing school transformation from within', *La Ruta Hacia La Escuela Inclusiva*. This includes eight case studies from school leaders in three continents telling their stories, one of which focuses on Liceo VAL and two others describe schools in La Paz (Colegio Santa Tomás) and Lima (Colegio De La Inmaculada). The new guide offers a framework for developing and reviewing school strategies for transformation summarised in the **Figura** which follows. In this commentary, we reflect on the workshops and school visits to draw out observations on key elements in this framework. We hope our colleagues in Latin America will test our observations against their own experiences with a view to strengthening school strategies for achieving further progress.

* *The cover photo shows participants in the school-to-school exchange workshop, La Paz, Bolivia - 5&6 October.*

Figura: MODELO PARA TRANSFORMAR LA ESCUELA



CRONOGRAMA: Metas en el camino hacia la educación inclusiva

Starting from fundamentals: What is education for?

Clearly if we are to develop **quality** in education, this must start from a coherent definition of the purposes of education. In many countries, governments have been trying to answer this question through an emphasis on national curricula (typically prioritising sciences and other 'STEM' subjects) tested by standard national assessments and promoting competition, not just between schools but also between countries, as measured by examination success. This is a very narrow conception of education which preferences academic ability over all else and contributes to the exclusion of students who shine in other ways. As some parents asked during one of the school workshops, 'Why are all the awards focused on academic performance when there are so many other ways of being successful?'

In his book, *Creative Schools* (Penguin Books, 2016), the distinguished British educationalist, Sir Ken Robinson, offers a radically different definition: the purpose of education is *'to enable students to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens'*. Education is for life - learning how we can best live in harmony with ourselves, each other and the natural world so as to play our part in achieving a better future for people and planet. Intelligence embraces much more than academic ability: we are developing as whole people who can contribute effectively to a rapidly changing world of work, certainly, but also appreciate cultural diversity, understand society and participate positively in our communities. If this is our goal, we must promote schooling which has: 1) a broad and flexible curriculum; 2) creative and personalised approaches to learning; and 3) a culture which celebrates the full range of diversity among its students.



Students at Liceo VAL, Bogotá

These three features of schooling are also essential if we are to address the other aspect of SDG 4 - ensuring **inclusive** education, that is, successfully *Reaching Out To All Learners* (to quote the title of an UNESCO publication). A school that 'reaches out' will fully engage children and young people who are at risk of marginalisation and exclusion, including those living in poverty, from minority ethnic groups, refugees, different faith traditions, experiencing disability, etc. Inclusive schooling we simply define as *delivering education through common learning environments where all students learn with their peers in community schools*.

Visionary leadership

Attention to these fundamental questions provides the basis for schools to clarify their vision of better education for all: a vision to give direction to a wide range of actions, small and large, designed to make a positive difference. A key task of leadership, both formal and informal, is to articulate this vision and build support for it through the participation of the wide range of stakeholders which make up each school's educational community.

In the La Paz and Lima workshops (Bogotá was designed a little differently) and in some of the school visits, we saw impressive evidence of such leadership. The workshops were designed to promote school-to-school learning: each participating school (nine in La Paz, three in Lima) sent small teams made up of formal leaders, teachers, parents and students. In advance, these teams prepared their 'school stories' (using poster or power point presentations) which set out their visions of inclusive and quality schooling, described the progress they had been making and the lessons they had learnt in their journeys to date.

Some schools had come further than others in these journeys and a few already demonstrated very well-developed models of good practice. We visited Liceo VAL in Bogotá which had been founded more than 25 years ago precisely to offer inclusive and quality schooling, based on a distinctive pedagogical commitment to self-directed learning ('auto-aprendizaje'). The founding principal is still providing charismatic and committed leadership to a school where all staff members are seen as the 'inclusion team'. We visited many classrooms where very diverse groups of students were participating and learning while pursuing versions of the curricula adapted to their interests and capacities. Students in an English class told us what they value about this school is that everyone feels welcome and able to learn from their differences while shaping their own agenda through self-direction.

This is a private school but we were also impressed with the story of a public school, Unidad Educativa Fe y Alegría (in the Bolivian town of Copacabana), where over 12 years the school had developed its own culture of inclusion and reliable methods for planning for diversity. And we heard about systematic approaches to welcoming diversity in a Lima school, Colegio Clarentino.

Engaging students and families

Designated school leaders and teachers (considered further below) are clearly essential participants in school improvement but each school is part of a wider community, especially of course including students and parents.



Mafer y Estrella, 'We can work this out together'

School communities are primarily made up of students: in many schools they are the only 'resource' in plentiful supply! As such, they are essential partners with staff in building an inclusive culture and supporting one another's learning - as we have already seen illustrated in the discussion with students at Liceo VAL. Another nice example arose spontaneously in the Lima workshop. There were enough students in this workshop to permit a group session devoted just to students (while other stakeholders were also meeting in their own groups). Here we saw students from different schools and with different skills, helping each other in articulating their own perspectives about school life and what would make it better.

Turning to parents, they need to be involved with teachers and their own children in developing and delivering each student's educational programme - their knowledge of their own children is a unique asset. Parents collectively can also play an important part in mutual aid to each other and in strengthening confidence that inclusive schooling can work for everyone.

All the workshops acted on this principle: parents were active members of each school's team. Similarly parents were well-represented in the two days of stakeholder meetings we had at Colegio De La Salle. These parents brought concerns but also many thoughtful insights to the discussion of school improvement.

But as Astrid Cáceres, herself a parent, explained at the Bogotá workshop hosted by Asdown, parents can often be discouraged from full participation by common myths like that other students will be hostile, their children need expertise not available in 'ordinary' schools or they need to be 'made ready' in advance of joining these schools.

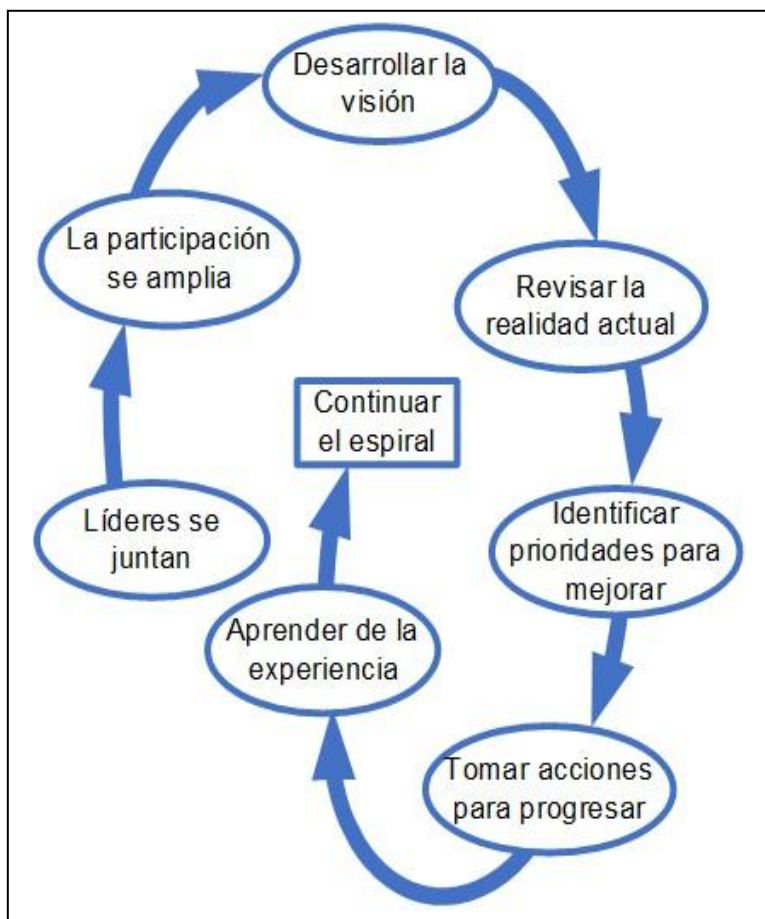


Parent discussion in Lima

Moreover some parents, perhaps especially those who look back unfavourably at their own school days, may be diffident in meetings with professionals. It follows that schools themselves and advocacy organisations like Asdown and SPSD need to invest in building parent association confidence and ensuring that engagement with families is undertaken in a spirit of understanding and equal respect.

Systematic improvement over time

Leadership, vision and widespread participation are critical elements in mobilising the process of continuing school improvement represented by the spiral in our model (shown again below). For the schools which had got furthest in this journey like Liceo VAL, this is a never ending journey - there are always new challenges and new opportunities to do better. However, the experience of this and other leading schools suggests that after three or more years of sustained effort, it is possible to reach a 'plateau' where the work continues but in a context where there are established ways of accommodating diversity and a common belief that the differences among students are assets from which we can all learn, not problems which make inclusion difficult.



This is the good news. However before reaching this plateau the terrain can seem quite steep - and certainly some schools we met are seeing more challenges than opportunities.

From the stories schools shared we could begin to see that three things are especially important in achieving real progress. First, each school needs to adopt some systematic approach to reviewing current performance against their vision in order to identify priorities for improvement. UNESCO's *Reaching Out To All Learners* offers 16 indicators (8 at the level of the school, 8 at the level of the classroom) with which to assess progress and our new guide, *La Ruta Hacia La Escuela Inclusiva*, develops these indicators into a simple evaluation tool by asking of each:

- What's working?
- What's not working? and
- What more is possible?

Second, school strategies need to attend to issues of culture, policy and practice in order to create reinforcing elements in a programme of sustainable change. Efforts which focus, for example, just on raising the awareness of teachers can be undermined if these are contradicted by other aspects of school culture (e.g. a lack of time for lesson preparation) or indeed by wider policies (e.g. a rigid national assessment system).

Third, the school and its stakeholders as a whole need to become a learning community, always willing to explore different perspectives and reflect on experience as this journey proceeds.

Practice development

Within these systematic strategies for school improvement, the schools we met all agree that encouraging the commitment of teachers to better ways of working and developing their capacity to practice inclusion and quality education in their classrooms is the most fundamental investment. At the level of the school, this involves developing a culture which welcomes diversity and celebrates all kinds of contributions to school life. At the level of the classroom, it means teachers giving careful consideration to the way they manage lessons and the adjustments they make to reflect individual differences among students, for example using universal design for learning, differentiated instruction and cooperative learning groups. At the individual level, it means teachers personalizing learning and making inclusion a reality for each student. As the diagram below suggests, developing effective practice is also multi-faceted.



This investment in developing practice requires both that teachers have appropriate time and support to reflect on their own experiences and that there are significant opportunities for continuous professional development. For sure, this means access to training workshops like some in which we participated, but it also means the availability of a number of methods for promoting creative and reflective practice.

The schools we met highlighted three of these processes:

- Teachers can learn a lot from each other's stories. In the Carabayllo workshop, organised by UNICEF, teachers at IE La Flor school, with support from their school directors, shared several very thoughtful accounts of how teachers had developed positive relationships with students seen as having difficulties and thus helped to motivate their positive participation in the classroom.
- Both the UNICEF team of school facilitators and their SPSP counterparts have spontaneously discovered that making time available on a 'drop in' basis for individual consultations with teachers facing classroom challenges often contributes more to practice development than is possible in more general workshops. A variant of this approach involves using 'Solution Circles' to work with small groups of teachers in mutual aid meetings. It also seems that 'action learning sets' might be very useful for people in key leadership roles like school principals and inclusion coordinators.
- All the schools which seemed to be most advanced in their pedagogical practice had found it productive to establish 'inclusion support teams', with the function of working continuously with teachers, students and families to promote every student's full classroom participation. It was wisely observed that by supporting teachers, schools also support students and enhance their success.



Teachers reflecting together in the Pucallpa workshop

Looking outwards: schools in the wider educational system

So far, our focus has been on the school as an organisation and an educational community. However schools are embedded in wider systems and networks. First, staff, students and families are all part of the wider society and bring perspectives and experiences from this into their school participation. School leadership has to manage the tensions between school culture and these wider forces. Second, schools and their members are part of wider educational networks: indeed the workshops in La Paz, Lima and Bogotá were innovative efforts to mobilise school-to-school learning and establish mutual aid networks for the future. Third, schools, both public and private, are part of the wider education system: both have to shape their efforts within national policies and legislation...and the public schools in particular need to work within an extensive governmental bureaucracy, both local and national.

On this third front, our impressions are that often there is scope for improving the partnership between government and schools. We were encouraged that in Perú, government officials and the development agencies (UNICEF, SPSD) have started to explore how lessons from the 'project' schools (i.e. those being supported by the two agencies) could inform policy-making and vice versa - through creating a stronger 'learning system' which unites the policy and practice levels. We also sense that the relationship between local government officials and school leaderships sometimes has too much of an administrative bias (officials issue instructions and exhortations, school directors take responsibility for their implementation) when creative schools actually need to demonstrate more autonomous leadership, negotiating 'upwards' with officials about how best to meet shared educational objectives.

Looking forward: strengthening multi-faceted strategies for school transformation

Our reflections here are based on participation in the school-to-school workshops in three countries and visiting four schools to study current achievements in more detail. Clearly we and the schools themselves have much more to learn about how best to deliver inclusive and quality education for all the students in their diverse communities.

However their stories already provide a clear sketch of the multi-faceted elements in the strategies required for school transformation and the time-scales required for whole-school change. These schools are developing visionary leadership based

on an understanding of education as preparation for a life in which everyone's talents are recognised. This points to the need for a broad and flexible curriculum, personalized approaches to learning and a culture which celebrates the full range of student diversity.



Bogotá workshop participants: 'Sí se puede'

In turn, this leadership needs to engage different stakeholders in the educational community, especially students and their families, in a systematic programme of school improvement attending to issues of culture, policy and practice at the level of the school and the level of the classroom. For teachers, this requires developing their practice in universal design for learning as much as making adjustments for individual students: they need the time and support to become reflective practitioners, including from 'in-house' inclusion support teams.

All this is made more possible where education authorities address the tensions between school plans and wider policy directives (concerned, for example, with curricula, examinations and teacher training and work-load) and encourage schools to become creative innovators.

For our colleagues in the four development agencies (Programa Mundo Inclusivo, SPSD, UNICEF and Asdown) as well as the leaders we met in individual schools, this understanding of strategy offers food for thought on the optimum design of external efforts to facilitate sustained school improvement.

We much look forward to continuing these conversations.

Stephanía Duarte y David Towell
November, 2019

Resources:

Stephanía Duarte Mora y David Towell (2019) *Continuando La Conversación Sobre El Avance Hacia La Escolarización Inclusiva* Centre for Inclusive Futures, London. <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/12-lecciones-de-amrica-latina.html>

Gordon L. Porter and David Towell (2019) *La Ruta Hacia La Escuela Inclusiva* Centre for Inclusive Futures, London. <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/la-ruta-hacia-la-escuela-inclusiva.html>

Ken Robinson y Lou Aronica (2016) *Escuelas Creativas* Grijalbo.

UNESCO/IBE (2016) *Reaching Out To All Learners: A resource pack for supporting inclusive education* (disponible en inglés: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/stes/default/files/resources/ibe-crp-incluideeducation-2016.pdf>)

TALLER

“Avanzando en la Ruta hacia la Escuela Inclusiva”

Objetivos

- Ofrecer la oportunidad a nueve escuelas interesadas de compartir sus experiencias de avanzar con la escuela inclusiva;
- Asistir a estas escuelas en la revisión y desarrollo de sus propias estrategias para avanzar con la escuela inclusiva.
- Identificar lecciones para avanzar con la escuela inclusiva más generalmente.
- Establecer una red de ayuda mutua entre estas escuelas.

Fecha y Hora 5 y 6 de octubre de 2019, de 09:00 a 18:30

Primer Día

09:00 – 09:30 **Ingreso y registro de participantes.**

09:30 – 09:40 **Palabras de bienvenida.**
Dr. Edwin Soto, Director a.i. CONALPEDIS.

09:40 – 09:50 **Palabras de circunstancia**
Lic. Dolly Aliaga, Directora P. S. Cáritas Diocesana Coroico.

09: 50 – 09:55 **Reglas de taller.**
En plenario se establecen cuáles serán las reglas que permitan desarrollar el taller en óptimas condiciones.

- 09:55 – 10:10** **Presentación de la metodología del taller y presentación de David Towell**
- 10:10 – 10 55** **Dinámica de sentido de pertenencia y bienvenida en las escuelas.**
En grupos de 3 o 4 personas se analiza la siguiente pregunta: “En nuestra experiencia, qué factores han ayudado a los estudiantes a sentirse bienvenidos y a tener sentido de pertenencia en sus escuelas”. Después de 25 minutos de discusión, se tiene 20 minutos adicionales para socializar en plenario.
- 10:55 – 11.25** **Refrigerio**
Se dará este espacio para que los participantes se conozcan e intercambien experiencias.
- 11.25 – 12.00** **Presentaciones y muestras de los carteles.**
Cada equipo será invitado a traer un cartel describiendo como su escuela aborda el avance a la inclusión y que se ha obtenido hasta la fecha.
- 12.00 – 13:30** **Tres equipos presentaran sus carteles en más detalle para una discusión del grupo entero.**
Repetiremos este proceso tres veces durante los dos días para que cada equipo tenga la oportunidad de presentar su trabajo.
- 13:30 – 14:30** **Almuerzo**
- 14:30 – 15:30** **Grupos por roles: ¿Qué estamos aprendiendo acerca de nuestros roles para el avance de la escuela inclusiva?**
Grupos separados para directores, coordinadores para la inclusión, maestros, padres y estudiantes.

- 15:30 – 16:00** **Presentación por grupo.**
En un socio-drama, cada grupo socializa sus conclusiones.
- 16:00 – 16:30** **Refrigerio.**
- 16:30 – 18:00** **Otros tres equipos presentaran sus carteles en más detalle para una discusión del grupo entero.**
- 18:00 – 18:30** **Revisión de Día 1; Preguntas importantes para el Día 2.**
Se hace un resumen de los puntos más importantes del día 1 y cuáles serán los principales ejes para el día siguiente.
- 18:30 – 18:35** **Cierre de la jornada.**

Segundo Día

- 09:00 – 09:30** **Ingreso y registro de participantes.**
- 09:30 – 09:45** **Repaso del día anterior.**
Mediante una dinámica se recapitulan las ideas principales del día anterior.
- 09:45 – 11:15** **Otros tres equipos presentaran sus carteles en más detalle para una discusión del grupo entero.**
- 11:15 – 11:40** **Refrigerio.**
- 11:40 – 13:10** **Grupos de preguntas.**
Los participantes escogerán una de una serie de sesiones simultaneas para explorar preguntas claves para avanzar la escuela inclusiva, posiblemente incluirían:

- La política pública y el marco legal para avanzar la inclusión.
- A qué nos referimos con educación inclusiva.
- Estudiantes como apoyo mutuo.
- Desarrollo de capacitaciones dentro de la escuela.
- Apoyo especialista para los maestros y estudiantes.
- Alianzas con las familias.

13:10 – 15:00

Almuerzo y trabajo en equipo

En este espacio y unos minutos más, se aprovechará para discutir cómo podemos mejorar la estrategia de nuestra escuela para avanzar la inclusión: ¿cuáles son nuestras prioridades?

15:00 – 15:25

Refrigerio

15:25 – 16:30

Compartir nuestras propuestas

¿Qué tomamos como lecciones de este taller para compartir en nuestras escuelas?

16:30 – 16:50

Revisión

¿Qué podemos agregar a esta base en los próximos meses?

16:50 – 17:00

Agradecimiento y cierre.

