

DELIVERING QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL IN IBERO-AMERICA

Rethinking the foundations of transformational change



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Abstract

Taking a global perspective, the aspiration to develop national education systems committed to quality, equity and inclusion dates back at least to the 1970s and the pioneer national efforts of Italy and Portugal. It's now more than 30 years since an influential UNESCO conference in Salamanca, Spain identified inclusive education as the preferred way forward. These trends are well-reflected in both law and policy in most of the countries of Ibero-America and there are impressive examples of what this might mean in practice seen in the experience of some students, some schools and occasionally in whole systems of education, for example in the La Pampa province of Argentina.

However, these achievements remain the exception. More commonly, current systems of education fall short in what they offer children, teenagers, and adults alike, compared to what each needs to become an autonomous and active member of their community.. Students who are disadvantaged in their communities because of poverty, ethnic origins, disability etc. are also disadvantaged in education. Families face a lifetime of struggle to help their children realise the rights apparently guaranteed in legislation. The two authors of this article work in different ways and sometimes together to address the challenges suggested by this diagnosis. Recently, we participated in the first Ibero-American Congress on *Inclusive Education as a Social Movement* in Asunción, Paraguay, where leaders from nine countries came to share their ideas and challenges.

Reflecting on this and other experiences, we try here to identify what it takes to deliver transformational change in education and what is holding back progress. In each country, the opportunities and constraints may vary. The pathways to progress need to adapt to these realities. In particular we encourage both local and national leaders, across the education sector and civil society, to work together to review existing improvement strategies and ensure that they adequately address nine key requirements. These centre on:

- Developing a common vision based on a commitment to benefitting all students and a renewed understanding of the empowering role of schools in local communities;
- Promoting a more equitable partnership between teachers, students and their families in delivering local change;
- Thinking differently about achieving transformation in complex human systems through linking national and local action and encouraging radical innovation in delivery;
- Ensuring that regular schools develop the cultures, policies and pedagogical practices that enable all students to succeed; investing in relevant professional development for teachers;
- Providing the multi-stakeholder leadership required to integrate these efforts so as to achieve sustainable transformation.

I. Introduction

Across the world there is widespread understanding that a better future for today's youth, and indeed for our societies, depends on achieving universal quality education. As the fourth of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG4) expresses this, our countries need to:

'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'

SDG4 highlights three main axes for progress, relating to quality, equity and inclusion. This is a challenging agenda for leaders at all levels. As an important UNESCO document puts this (1), implementing the message that 'every learner matters and matters equally' will likely require 'changes in thinking and practice at every level of an education system, from classroom teachers and others who provide educational experiences directly, to those responsible for national policy.'

The authors of this article have a keen interest in how the countries of Ibero-America can best make more rapid progress towards successfully developing education systems that deliver SDG4. Rosa is Peruvian. She trained as a psychologist and is now part of an important development agency, *Aliados por la Inclusión*, that works with schools, teachers and local education systems to advance inclusive education. David is a British sociologist who directs the London-based *Centre for Inclusive Futures*. Over the last 20 years he has been a regular visitor to several South American countries, working voluntarily with civil society associations, schools and education policy-makers in their efforts to improve *Education for All*. We (Rosa and David) have worked together in Perú. We have also been partners in two international initiatives. In 2024, we joined a Uruguayan team in a study visit to the La Pampa province of Argentina, to learn about its progress in implementing inclusive education at the local level. In April 2026, we participated - again as members of the Uruguayan group - in the first Ibero-American Congress on *Inclusive Education as a Social Movement* in Asunción, Paraguay.

Reflecting on these experiences, we recognise that better education for all depends on the collaboration of many people in what are complex national systems for delivering education. We draw on some impressive examples of progress to show that transformational change is possible and explore how this is being achieved in practice. But we also draw on the diagnostic work done by each country in preparation for the Asunción Congress to identify why, in most places, this is an incomplete and failing transformation.

For sure, we should learn from what is working. We should also learn from what is not working so as to create more effective strategies. We are not seeking to be comprehensive here but identify nine keys to achieving transformation and invite readers to use these in considering how best to make better progress in their own situation.

II. Yes, we can! Some lessons from progress.

As we have noted, the journeys in different countries towards delivering on the main requirements of SDG4 are proving long and uneven. In the Americas, the Canadian province of New Brunswick was an early pioneer, starting this journey in the 1980s. (In Canada, as in Argentina, the main governmental responsibility for education policy is at the provincial level.) The distinguished educationalist, Gordon Porter, has been central to New Brunswick developments - as teacher, school principal, district official and adviser to Education Ministers - throughout this period.

David has undertaken to document stories of transformations like these as a way of sharing lessons with educational leaders elsewhere. With Gordon Porter, he has produced a series of pamphlets describing and analysing the *processes* involved in transformational change, starting with the New Brunswick story (2). This story embraces the whole system of education in the province. Subsequent pamphlets focus on the level of the school (3), with case studies drawn from Canada, the UK and three countries of Ibero-America; the level of the classroom (4) where we interviewed teachers in all these countries; and the advocacy role of civil society associations (5) seeking to support families in securing quality education for their own children while exercising influence to improve education for all.

Meanwhile, in Peru, Rosa and her colleagues at *Aliados* have been engaged in several initiatives to promote inclusive education in both regular and technical education institutions. Based on the different needs identified, the *Aliados* team works at two complementary levels: a closer, hands-on level with educational teams, and a wider, systemic level with governmental and non-governmental agencies. On the one hand, *Aliados* conduct training sessions for private and public schools in different provinces of Peru on the Universal Design for Learning framework, which allows teachers to have more strategies to respond to diversity in their classrooms. On the other hand, they provide technical advisory services to



promote the implementation of Educational Support Services with the aim of shifting the attention of education sector professionals from what a student cannot do to identifying and removing barriers in the environment for learning.



However most relevant to this analysis is a recent study visit we made to La Pampa (6). The map below shows the location of La Pampa in the centre of Argentina. It is a largely rural area spread around several small towns, with a population approaching 370,000. For at least two decades but with increasing momentum over the last ten years, the political leadership has been seeking to advance equity and inclusion through education. In this they started from the experience and aspirations of each family to identify what would be needed for their sons and daughters to flourish through their school and post-school career. Moreover, they and their officials have understood that this requires a 'whole system' transformation in which education policy, sector organisation, school practice, teacher training and student and family participation are all aligned around shared goals. This programme remains 'work in progress'.

We were impressed with this progress. Not long ago the province had 21 special schools but by 2024, almost all the province's 98,000 students are included in the regular schools and are expected to transition through preschool, primary, secondary and vocational provision. Specialist staff have been redeployed to support the regular teachers in their more diverse classrooms and assist them in major pedagogical innovation. In this, the curriculum is flexible, learning is personalised, teaching is informed by Universal Design principles and the schools make reasonable

adjustments to facilitate everyone's participation. In **Box I**, we summarise our understanding of how progress in La Pampa has involved weaving together seven main strands of strategy.

Box I. La Pampa: Elements in a provincial strategy for educational transformation



1. Leadership - A guiding coalition of people with the vision and authority to shape a process of transformational change, providing the conditions for effective action at all levels.
2. Vision - A clear sense of direction and shared beliefs to inform all the discrete activities involved in this transformation, focused around enabling every student to flourish alongside their peers.
3. Partnership and shared responsibility - A commitment to dialogue with all the stakeholders in education, including students and their families, to build consensus and promote action.
4. Creative problem-solving - Making the education system work well for everybody is a collective challenge. It relies on mobilising available expertise to support students, especially students encountering difficulties.
5. Pedagogical innovation - Investing in ensuring that all the regular schools are well equipped - that is, develop the cultures, policies and classroom practices - to successfully welcome diversity and that teachers have both the time and support to learn on the job.
6. Repurposing specialist resources - Focusing human resources on improving practice in the regular schools, especially through creating multi-professional teams offering support to teachers and students.
7. Making education itself a learning system - Creating processes that ensure the whole system learns from the experience of transformation and that success in one classroom or one school becomes a resource to problem-solving elsewhere.

David first visited New Brunswick in 1993. He was impressed with the similarities between the enthusiasm and sense of purpose evident then and what now characterises the education community in La Pampa.

III. So what is going wrong?

What we saw in La Pampa is very encouraging and builds on the global movement to transform education. But if not unique in Ibero-America, this progress in Argentina is certainly unusual. How can the reality of what is happening elsewhere across the Continent be understood? Fortunately, the Asunción Congress and the preparation for it in each participating country offer significant insights into this question.

In the month or two before the Congress, its organising team encouraged leaders in all nine participating countries to arrange national workshops designed to engage a wide range of civil society and other stakeholders in developing a *diagnosis* of progress towards inclusive education in their country and to share this with other Congress participants. Rosa participated in the Peruvian workshop and, as 'honorary' members of their group in Asunción, we took a particular interest in Uruguay. It is our impression that these workshops were skilfully facilitated and well recorded. Of course, the countries involved are different in various ways but what is striking from these nine reports is the extent to which similar issues emerged nearly everywhere.

We provide a summary of the Uruguay report in **Box 2**. Looking across countries, we have identified seven interconnected barriers to achieving system-wide change.

Two emerged most strongly: the large gap between nationally declared policies and the concrete experiences of teachers, students and families in everyday schooling; and the widespread complaint by the families of students seeking inclusive schooling that their children are not being equally valued: rather the families are being forced to do the work of securing their inclusion. Of course, these two issues are related and in turn shaped by a number of other aspects of education sector culture and organisation, including:

- Ambiguities and contradictions in how quality, equity and inclusion are being understood. In many countries, the labelling and segregation inherent in the 'special education' paradigm is casting a long shadow. It is still common for some young people, usually with disabilities, to be identified as the 'inclusion students' within regular schools rather than as just being part of the wider diversity inherent in the local population.
- Over-centralised approaches to policy implementation that promote fragmentation in provision, both 'vertically' (national policies not engaging sufficiently with the realities of local delivery) and 'horizontally' (not giving appropriate voice to families and students as partners in the educational enterprise). There may also be fragmentation in management structures that leave responsibility for achieving change ill-defined.

- Change strategies that rely too much on particular instruments - pilot projects (Uruguay) that are not scaled up into whole system change, investment in student support services (Perú) that are not yet part of wider pedagogical innovation, individual educational plans (Colombia) that also require wider changes if they are to impact the classroom, teacher training opportunities (in several countries) that are not embedded in everyday practice, etc.
- Pedagogical theories and practices that diminish the liberating potential of education through prioritising knowledge acquisition and conformity rather than student autonomy, creativity and resilience in meeting 21st Century challenges.
- A corresponding failure to prepare and support teachers in fulfilling their roles in this process of liberation and enabling them to successfully manage diversity in their classrooms.

Box 2. Uruguay: Regulatory advances, system contradictions and delivery failures.

The Uruguay workshop recognised that inclusive education implies a 'whole system' transformation so that education can respond to the diversity of its participants and enable all students to learn on an equal basis. To this end, following ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, both laws and protocols were established to offer a positive national framework and several pilot projects have demonstrated the possibility of school-level innovation. However this progress co-exists with widely reported experiences of frustration and exclusion among students with additional needs and persistent complaints from their families that they, rather than the education sector, are carrying the main burden of securing their children's right to education - the more so for families that are already economically or otherwise disadvantaged.

Viewed systemically, it seems that other characteristics of the education sector have not been transformed to meet the requirements of national legislation. The commitment to inclusion exists alongside older paradigms and structures associated with 'special education', including pedagogical practices and assessment methods that undermine effective delivery. A particular complaint is the tendency of schools to require families to pay for an adult assistant if their child is disabled as a condition for their enrolment. Equally, limitations in the training, ongoing support and time necessary for teachers to work in new ways leaves them feeling poorly equipped to meet the challenges of seeing diversity as a necessary and desirable feature of educational communities.

IV. Rethinking transformational change in large systems

In all our countries, education is a very large human system. Even among the small population of La Pampa, there are 98,000 individual students each with families and wider networks. These students spend 10 years or more participating in schools and other educational institutions. We can guess there are around 200 of these and perhaps 3000 classrooms. Perú is 100 times larger. Maybe 300,000 classrooms! In all these the quality of education depends on the interaction between people: students, teachers, families and others. If we are to improve education, we need ways of thinking about and acting on this complexity. And we need fresh ways of thinking and acting to overcome the weaknesses reported by the participants in Asunción.

In part this fresh thinking must start from how we understand the purposes of education and the way students learn. There is a wealth of insights in the work of both the 20th Century education theorists and those now trying to redefine educational processes for this Century. We come back to these ideas in **Section V**.

We also need a better understanding of how large human systems work: that is, theories of social change. Of course, there is a vast literature - actually several literatures - that illuminate this question, for example, in the fields of culture studies, large group interventions, policy implementation, organisational dynamics and social innovation. This is not the place for a review but in summary, we have identified five sets of ideas and methods helpful in the design of educational change strategies.

First, start from people. 'Culture' is the name given to the more-or-less taken-for-granted concepts and beliefs that shape our everyday existence, that define how we see the world. This links to the sociological proposition that 'reality' is socially constructed. But what we construct, we can also change. We can be curious about what is taken-for-granted, we can reflect, we can even imagine that things could be otherwise. We have learnt that if we bring people together under the right conditions, they can gain new insights and together achieve radical innovation. New possibilities will emerge if we take seriously the practice of listening to, and learning with each other.

There is a variety of large group methodologies that operationalise this understanding. One of the simplest of these is *The World Café*. This offers a simple logic:

- Get relevant people together to share their experiences and perspectives;
- Pose a big question that many people believe to be important;
- Create an environment and offer hosting that provides a safe space for challenging conversations;

- Facilitate a process for multiple group discussions of this question in which strong themes that emerge are recorded and presented for whole group reflection;
- Provide opportunities to consider their implications for change.

Second, create a spiral of positive change. As the last bullet suggests, methods like this can play a part in stimulating change in ways that put responsibility for taking action in the hands of the people affected. Mel Ainscow has been an influential consultant at UNESCO over three decades. He has also worked in Uruguay with several schools using a methodology called 'collaborative inquiry' (7) that invites participants to review existing performance as a route to developing their own school improvement plans.



Third, find ways of engaging the larger systems of which educational institutions are a part. In traditional public administration, policy implementation is often understood as a process that starts from the 'top', the Education Ministry, and is delivered at the 'bottom', in the classroom. But this is fiction. In her own classroom, the teacher is as much if not more of a policy-maker than the Education Minister. The former knows her class and the students in it; the Minister knows very little about either this class or the other 300,000. It is productive therefore to think of policy-making also 'from the bottom up'.

Going back to the spiral of change, improving classroom education requires engagement with a complex social field in which the opportunities and barriers that are close to the students are themselves shaped by, but also influence, the way larger systems impact on the small and local. A

useful metaphor here can be derived from how modern ecology understands life itself: in this view, the smallest organisms in their immediate environment, the bigger systems of which they are a part... up to the earth as a whole, constitute a multi-layered living system that has evolved in mutual interaction. In the education sector, certainly in large countries, there are several such layers with different responsibilities at each level.

From this perspective, achieving sustainable change for students in their schools and local communities... and so on 'upwards', requires that we find ways of enabling people at these different levels to see and feel how the whole system is working.

Fourth, we have to be aware that organisational cultures are often conservative: change efforts end up more-or-less where things started! Scottish educationalists have shown the usefulness of what they call the 'Three Horizons' framework that looks at proposed 'improvements' in terms of how far they are likely to reinforce existing practices, may do this but are also capable of being part of something different or, on the Third Horizon, provide the seeds of more radical change. Theories of social innovation, notably *Theory U*, (8) argue that transformational change cannot be built on what came before through rational and incremental improvements. Rather it requires that we disrupt the past in order to discover something new. The 'U' represents the shape of this process, involving in this context:

- Surfacing our current mindsets about diversity and what this means for education;
- Opening our minds to thinking afresh as we listen, observe and explore widely;
- Finding time and confidence to let go of what is unhelpful and create new visions of possibility;
- Taking actions small and large to test new ideas in practice; and
- Incorporating innovative practices which show promise into how the multi-level system routinely works.

Fifth, in large systems, like education, strategic change requires that we build networks that link local efforts like those focussed on schools not only 'vertically' so that management and policy are informed by, as well as inform very local experience but also that we create networks in which local innovators 'share across' their learning, to inform local innovation elsewhere.

V. How can we do better? Nine propositions

Let us now bring the analysis in the preceding four Sections together. We see in La Pampa - and in other national and provincial education systems, like New Brunswick - that transformational change *is* possible. But we have also seen the several ways in which such transformation can be undermined and the need for fresh thinking on *how* transformation can be achieved in large and complex human systems.

We have taken the view that improving education for all students is everyone's business if our societies are to meet the challenges of our times. When we speak of leadership therefore, we have in mind people taking leadership roles across the education system and at all levels from the classroom to the Ministry, including policy-makers, professional educators and civil society networks, especially those engaging students and families. Here we invite these leaders to review what is happening in their schools, localities and wider systems in the light of the key lessons from this analysis, seeking over time to ensure that the review process brings together both government and civil society perspectives.

We summarise these lessons in the form of nine themes that together constitute the *transformational change matrix* illustrated in **Box 3**. On each theme, we suggest four questions: What's working? What's not working? What more is possible? What should be our next steps?

Box 3. Advancing transformational change in education

Strategic theme

1. Developing a widely shared vision of quality, equity and inclusion
2. Building partnership between teachers, students and families
3. Integrating national policy and local action
4. Equipping regular schools to ensure all students can succeed
5. Investing in relevant teacher training and continuous development
6. Fostering learning and mutual support among students
7. Providing advice and advocacy support to students and families
8. Facilitating learning exchange across the educational system
9. Strengthening the broad leadership coalition driving change

What's working? What's not working? What more is possible? Next steps?

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Of course, important though, for example, La Pampa and New Brunswick are as beacons of progress, not everywhere will be able to replicate the 'whole system' strategies for change they have established over time. Provinces differ. Countries differ. Change leaders face different opportunities and constraints, not least in the human and other resources available for improving delivery. In using this matrix, leaders need to make a careful assessment of the wider context for action and focus effort on what may be the most important building blocks for transformational change. Accordingly they will be creating different pathways for progress and learning from their particular experience.

Let us enlarge on each of the nine themes:



1. Developing a widely shared vision of the purpose of education and the role of schools in their local communities.

We saw in La Pampa that the development, dissemination and discussion of a 'norte' - an explicit vision of what constitutes good education - was fundamental in giving direction to a radical programme of change. But we also saw how progress in many countries is being undermined by ambiguities and contradictions in working assumptions, often imported from earlier ideas about education. Dialogue across people and agencies to build clarity of intent is the first theme in our matrix.

The Sustainable Development Goals have wide global commitment. SDG4 on education is therefore one strong starting point for this dialogue. Importantly, the three pillars of SDG4 - quality, equity and inclusion - are addressed to all students, even if especially sensitive to those who are most at risk of disadvantage. Quality we can define in terms of the purpose of education: the British educationalist, Ken Robinson expresses this succinctly as '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'. To advance this aspiration our schools must promote equity - celebrating the many forms of diversity among students. Accordingly, teachers need to attend to what is important to each child's development by adapting a broad and flexible curriculum and encouraging them to explore a multiplicity of possible paths. In turn, this requires an inclusive approach that we define as 'delivering quality education through common learning environments where all young people learn with their peers and where diversity is seen as bringing benefits to everyone'.

Achieving these goals requires an evidence-based philosophy of how people learn. Here early theorists - John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Maria Montessori etc. - offer us a rich pedagogical guide addressing the diversity in ways each child learns, the role of the teacher as facilitator as students take responsibility for their own learning and the importance of social and emotional, as well as cognitive development. Some of these ideas are found in the recent application of Universal Design principles (9) to teaching and learning.

But schools are more than a collection of young individuals: typically, they are both among the first formal institutions that children join and the base for a small community in which they are participants for several of their most formative years. Both aspects of this membership are important to their development as social beings and future citizens. In this context, schools can just be transmitters of whatever are the dominant trends in the wider culture. Or education can be thoughtfully critical of the wider world and offer students the opportunities to discover that another world is possible. The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, famously offered us the *Pedagogy of Hope* (10) as well as the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. A contemporary restatement of these ideas uses the metaphor of *Rewilding Education* (11).

2. Resetting the relationships between teachers, students and families as partners in delivering this vision.

As we have seen, the national workshops that preceded the Asunción Congress identified the common complaint of families whose children have additional needs that they carry the burden of securing their rights to quality and inclusive education. Indeed, discussion at Asunción often demonstrated a three-way fragmentation in which teachers reported inadequate preparation for their roles in more diverse classrooms; families expressed frustration at the difficulties they often face at the hands of insensitive schools; and students, especially those with disabilities, argued that their views on their educational experiences were neglected. Of course, dialogue between people in these roles and those who represent them take place, or should take place, at many levels in the education system and the practical issues involved in building better partnership vary according to the level.

However, better progress in many places will require a reset in these relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. Leaders in both the education sector and civil society have the responsibility for negotiating these more effective partnerships in the knowledge that all these perspectives and voices are important in improving education whether at the school level or more widely.

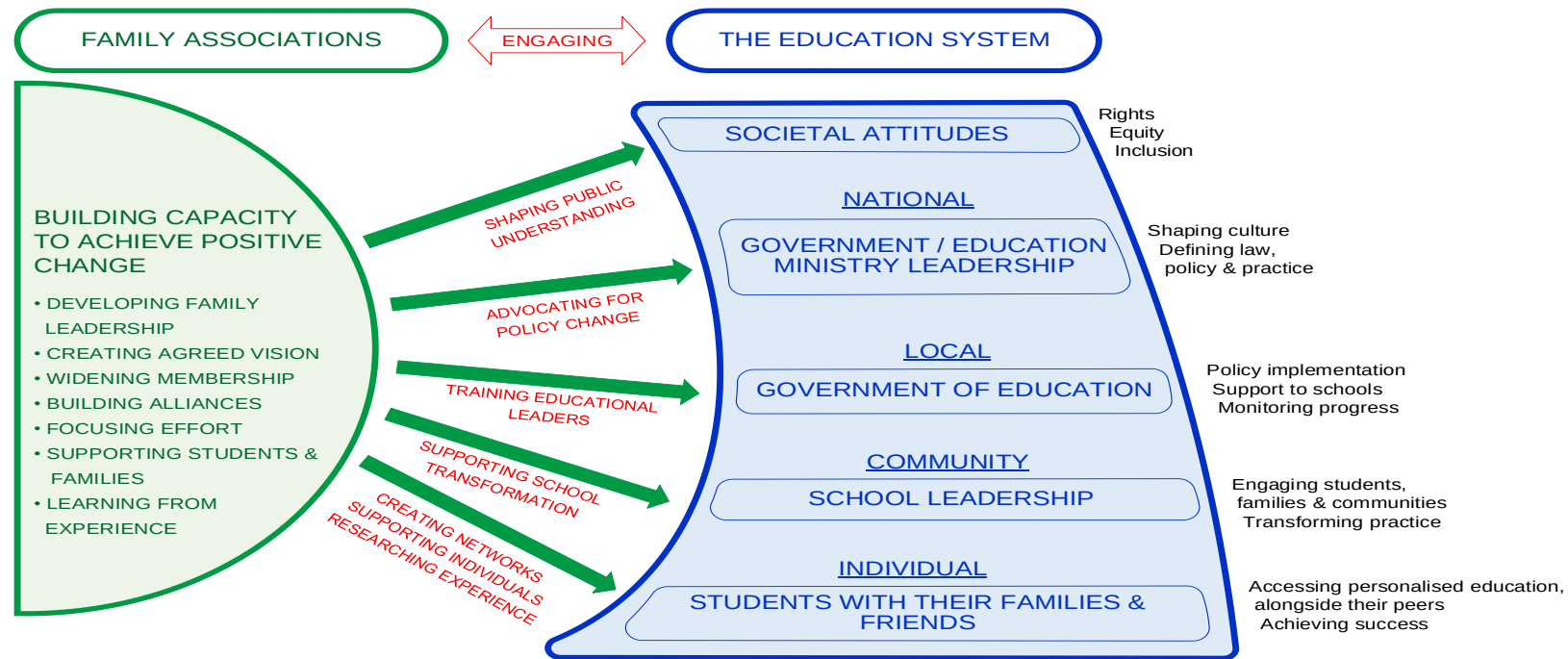
In La Pampa, the Education Ministry itself makes a big effort to reach out to other participants in the provincial education system both to involve them as partners in policy implementation and to engage them in joint problem-solving when difficulties arise. At all levels, the *World Café* principles offer one approach to generating new kinds of conversation. At the school level, where face-to-face discussion is easiest to arrange, the *collaborative inquiry* methodology can be organised to ensure that all relevant stakeholders contribute to the collection of information, assessment of progress and identification of 'what more is possible'.

3. Thinking differently about achieving transformation in complex human systems through linking national and local action and encouraging radical innovation at the periphery.

Also common in the reports of the national workshops in Asunción was the perceived gap between national statements of law and policy and the reality of local experience. Clearly, achieving quality, equity and inclusion at the school level also has implications for policy, management and resourcing in the whole education system and the relationship between the education sector and civil society at every level.

David and Gordon Porter's study (5) of a sample of national family associations advocating for inclusive education produced this diagram (**Box 4**) of the functions of the education system at each main level and what these mean for the relationship between the sector and civil society associations.

Box 4. Multi-level engagement between civil society associations and the education sector



This diagram and the second theme give prominence to what we might call the 'lateral relations' between education and society. But we have also commented on the weaknesses in the traditional 'top down' view of policy and its implementation. Rather strategic change requires an approach that orchestrates a common sense of direction, addresses the whole system of relevance, welcomes the diversity of perspectives and contributions, fosters a variety of innovation and seeks to shape and reshape action through learning from experience. It requires 'vertical integration'.

In organisational development jargon this implies finding ways of 'getting the whole system into the room'. Of course, given the size and complexity of the education sector, this is a metaphor. It means using processes that enable leaders in different parts of the system (including civil society) to be able to see something of the whole picture so they can relate their own contributions to the shared vision. It especially means learning from success and failure in local innovation what is required at 'higher' levels in the system. It means extending the processes of

collaborative inquiry 'upwards' so that the conditions required for success are better understood. It means providing the whole system with a 'mirror' with which to view its own activities.

4. Equipping regular schools with the cultures, policies and practices that enable all students to succeed.

The progressive vision of education summarised in the first of these themes typically requires radical changes in the culture of schools and other education centres and in their pedagogical practices. The school principal and other leaders need to find good ways of working with teachers, other staff, students and families in a continuous process of school improvement inspired by the three pillars in SDG4.

Aliados supports schools that want to understand their own starting point and carry out a participatory diagnosis that takes into account the voices of the different actors within the educational community. Activities such as focus groups, surveys, classroom observations and reviews of management instruments make it possible to identify facilitators of inclusion, as well as contextual barriers that limit the participation and learning of all students.

We introduced the concept of *collaborative inquiry* in **Section IV**. Fortunately there are now quite a lot of schools who are undertaking this journey, for example the *Escuelas Mandela* in Uruguay and those involved in the UNICEF-sponsored *Más Inclusión* (12) initiative in Perú. Especially useful here is a comprehensive workbook produced by UNESCO, *Reaching Out To All Learners* (13). Essentially this invites school participants to review a number of indicators of inclusion (16 indicators are identified in *Reaching Out*) and together decide which to prioritise in their school improvement plan, then set up processes for investigating performance against this indicator and identifying proposals for change. This is innovation at the periphery. *Theory U* suggests a process for making this exploration radical.

5. Providing teachers with the training, continuous professional development and support to manage classroom diversity.

All those involved in schools and their local communities need to be participants in the processes of change identified in this fourth theme. Clearly however the major investment in training and continuous professional development needs to be focused on teachers and those who support them in their classrooms. In part this requires new approaches to basic and post-basic teacher training designed to ensure that teachers acquire a broad pedagogical perspective addressed to welcoming diversity and helping every student to succeed. In *Aliados'* experience, the most requested topics are training on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and on curricular adaptations for students who require greater support. However, just as important as the technical content is the need for teaching staff and other education professionals to relearn where to direct their attention and action —towards barriers in the environment— before turning to new pedagogical strategies.

Teaching fundamentally requires skills that are learnt through practice...and reflection on the experience of this practice. Accordingly, innovative projects referred to above, like the *Más Inclusión* initiative in Perú, typically offer schools experienced mentors to work with teachers on the job and introduce a variety of opportunities (like 'Solution Circles') for reflection and sharing among colleagues during their working time. Currently public policy nationally in Perú is moving towards establishing such facilitation and mentoring posts ('SAEs') in all schools.

In turn, this kind of learning is reinforced where teachers and others are able to share their experiences across different schools, both face-to-face and on-line, thereby creating much wider 'communities of practice'. The process of strengthening the practices of an educational community should aspire to become self-sustaining, drawing on the knowledge, capabilities, skills and strengths of its own members.

In many countries that have traditionally invested in special education, there are significant resources - of money, staff and physical assets - invested in separate 'special schools'. La Pampa was one example. A common challenge here is to find ways over time to repurpose these resources to better support teachers and students in the regular schools.

6. Fostering peer group learning and mutual support among students.

School communities are primarily made up of students. They learn much more than what their teachers teach them! They learn from each other in the classroom, the play ground and elsewhere. School leaders can promote the benefits of peer relationships to enhance the impact of more formal instruction. Students, in different ways at different ages, are essential partners with the staff and each other in building an inclusive and equitable culture and supporting one another's learning. At the level of the school, students can be encouraged to take on leadership roles and become inclusion champions. These champions help to ensure mutual support and cohesion in the school community.

Most important, their experiences are a critical test of school effectiveness. At both the school and the classroom level, their partnership with staff and their views on what is working well and what isn't are essential in the process of school improvement.

7. Ensuring that advice, advocacy and support are available to help students and their families navigate the education system.

Our second theme here seeks a reset in the relationships between teachers, students and families. A common observation in the Asunción Congress was that currently these relationships are undermined by a large in-balance in power between the three groups, especially when students and families are seeking something different. An important way of reducing this in-balance is by ensuring that families have access to reliable sources of information about their and their children's rights and help in efforts to realise these in the local education system. Civil

society associations should be involved in this and willing to support advocacy initiatives. In countries that have statutory offices defending human rights, these agencies can be important in monitoring and reinforcing citizen action.

8. Investing in independent facilitation to make the whole of education a learning system.

The approach commended in this *transformational change matrix* is significantly different from how large public services usually work. In **Section IV**, we have emphasised the importance of vision, partnership, inquiry, innovation and system-wide learning as inter-related elements in achieving and sustaining radical change.

Both the change in relationships among key stake-holders and the methods of collaborative inquiry are easier to achieve when change programmes have the assistance of trusted facilitators. A major programme in the whole of Scotland described by Ainscow and colleagues (7) was supported by a University Department (the Robert Owen Centre for Educational Change) which both collected information on progress at different levels in the Scottish system and made this available to both local schools and the Education Ministry, effectively promoting a conversation between practitioners and policy-makers and building a national learning system for educational improvement.

More modestly, Rosa's development agency in Perú, *Aliados por la Inclusión*, has been engaged in a sufficient mix of projects to be able to gain some understanding of how the whole education system is working. The *Aliados* team meets with other independent agencies, for example involved in advocacy, to test out this understanding against their perspectives. In turn, the *Aliados* carry this understanding into new projects and their continuing dialogue with the Education Ministry and international organisations, like UNICEF and UNESCO.

9. Building a multi-stakeholder coalition of people with the mandate to drive transformational change.

In our account of the impressive progress in La Pampa, it is clear that the ability of people in the government to build and sustain a leadership coalition capable of steering a programme of radical change in the province was key to success. This leadership was based in government but reached out to strengthen partnership with schools and communities to produce sustained effort over many years. In New Brunswick, civil society associations, especially those advocating for disabled students, were part of the pressure for change from the outset. We have argued that transformational change needs such partnership between the education sector and civil society not just nationally but at all levels in the system as sketched in **Box 4**.

This is a big challenge. On both sides, government and civil society, fragmentation is likely. On the side of government, separate Ministries and even separate departments within the Education Ministry are likely to have their own agenda. We have mentioned Uruguay and Perú here. In the former, the Education Ministry is not responsible for the school system which has been out-sourced to a separate national administration. In

Perú, there is pervasive instability in the national government, seen most clearly in frequent changes of President. The public sector needs to work hard to create some coherence in educational reform.

Equally or even more so, civil society associations operating at the national level - usually meaning active in the capital - do not find it easy to build coalitions that have wide support. In Asunción, we were inclined to regard our colleagues from Uruguay and Perú as in some sense 'representing' these countries. We are not sure whether anyone else did.

But the capitals are not the country. And **Box 4** points to at least four levels at which partnership would be desirable. The education sector has representatives at each of these levels in different parts of the country. It is hard for any civil society coalition to achieve the same. Leadership requires continuing efforts to reach out to other interests so as to widen the coalition, as well as building partnership at different levels. Success in this, certainly in large countries, will never be more than partial. It follows that national change programmes may also need to be 'patchy', in the sense of proceeding faster in some places and/or some types of schools than in others. As we have seen, leaders need to construct pathways to sustainable change that reflect a careful diagnosis of their particular situation. All the more important that there is effective learning across the system.

We offer these reflections and the *transformational change matrix* as a resource to all those working to advance quality, equity and inclusion in education. *¡Sí se puede!*

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