



**ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
FOR AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY**

***REFLECTIONS ON A JOURNEY IN LATIN AMERICA
SPRING, 2011***

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1. Introduction

This is the story of a journey. For three weeks in the Spring we had the privilege of travelling to four countries (Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Colombia) and seven cities (Mexico City, Guatemala City, Managua, Jinotepe, Bogotá, Cali and Bucaramanga / Floridablanca) meeting people active in leading local and national strategies designed to advance inclusive education in Latin America. It was a journey of exploration in which we sought to learn from experiences in different countries and help the people we met share their learning with each other. We also had the opportunity to work with civil society and educational leaders in Colombia (Cali and Bucaramanga) as they planned further efforts to achieve ‘education for all’¹.

In this short report we try to summarise what we learnt during this journey as a resource to others, especially in Latin America, who share the vision of seeing every child and young person in these diverse societies get a high quality education together in local schools which serve the whole community.

One of us, Heidy, is a Colombian graduate in international relations and development studies and currently works as programmes assistant for the charity [Children of the Andes](#) (COTA). COTA is dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable children in Colombia, mainly through supporting the activities of innovative NGOs, working in impoverished areas. Currently COTA is considering proposals to invest in advancing inclusive education, especially in the city of Cali and the Valle de Cauca department. Our journey was an opportunity to help COTA develop its thinking about these proposals in the light of wider experience.

The other, David is the British Director of the London-based Centre for Inclusive Futures (CIF). CIF is one node in a network of people and organisations dedicated to promoting the equal citizenship of disabled people. Following the 2006 Congress of [Inclusion International](#) (the global association of family organisations campaigning on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities) in Acapulco, he has been visiting Latin America (especially Colombia) regularly to work with civil society leaders on ways of implementing the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), which Inclusion International helped to negotiate. A particular focus of this work has been Article 24 of the Convention, concerned with inclusive education. Our journey was an opportunity to learn more about progress on this front in the four countries.

In each place we visited, we tried to understand something of the wider context influencing policies and practices in education: the political orientation of governments and the national economic situation; progress in ratification of the UN Convention; the nature of traditional education and the extent of private schooling; the pressures on children and young people and the proportions not in school at all; the extent of urban/rural differences; the sources of population diversity. But this was not a systematic study of these countries: rather our main ‘method’ was to meet innovative

¹ A more detailed itinerary is appended

leaders both of influential NGOs and public education systems and listen to their stories of how, sometimes over many years, they have been seeking to achieve inclusive schooling and with what success.

We don't tell any of these stories in depth. Often these organisations have already done this for themselves on their websites, to which we make reference. What we do instead is to describe briefly key aspects of what is happening in different places so as to build a picture of what is involved in achieving radical change.

This report then is our commentary on local and national strategies for innovation in educational practice and the contribution being made by visionary NGOs.

We offer it not so much as a set of conclusions but rather as a stimulus to interested readers to reflect on their own experiences of advancing inclusive education - as an essential part of building more inclusive societies.



2. A perspective on inclusive education



We try to capture the main strands in our analysis in the form of the diagram in section 7. In what follows we focus on particular themes represented in pieces of this diagram, before putting all the pieces together.

We believe, certainly in relation to disabled people, that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) provides a powerful vision (as well as strong legal support in countries ratifying the Convention) of what a commitment to equal citizenship and social inclusion should mean in the 21st Century.

In particular we welcome the unequivocal commitment to advancing inclusive education. Article 24 obliges governments to:

'recognise the rights of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realising this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and life-long learning...'

Of course, this is a bold aspiration and most countries in the world, not least in Latin America, currently fall far short of its realisation. Indeed the journey to inclusive schooling is proving to be a very long one.

In 1990, a majority of countries met in Thailand with the support of UNESCO to launch a global movement to secure [Education For All](#), a goal subsequently incorporated (in relation to primary education) in the UN's [Millenium Development Goals](#) (2000). In 1994, also with UNESCO sponsorship, many countries met again in Spain to agree the [Salamanca Statement](#) setting out the path to inclusion for students with 'special educational needs'.

More recently UNESCO (2006) describes inclusive education as:

'a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through inclusive practices in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.'

In 2009, under the auspices of Inclusion International, another Conference in Salamanca met to consider an excellent global report on progress in [Better Education For All](#) which provides a useful context for our more limited explorations. A main conclusion from this study proved important in our discussions: namely that the global progress towards 'education for all' has not so far adequately incorporated the Salamanca commitment, now embodied in the UN Convention, to advancing inclusive education.

In the 'rich' countries of the 'North', including the UK, almost all children are in (mainly) state-funded schools, but the system in many places still segregates children with 'special educational needs' (i.e. with physical, sensory or intellectual impairments or challenging behaviour) in 'Special Schools'.

The challenge for us is to change the system so that every child can learn from personally tailored educational programmes in the same classrooms as other children of the same age from their communities.

In the countries we visited the challenge is significantly greater. Many disabled children and young people (who make up perhaps 10% of the population²) are excluded from schooling. Many other children are also not in education for a variety of reasons, including needing to work to support the family economy; gang membership; displacement due to conflict; ethnic discrimination; etc. And of course many schools, especially serving the poorest children, are poorly resourced not least in needing to include large numbers of students in the same classroom.

We came therefore to see the goal of inclusive education being about both securing more comprehensive participation in mainstream education which reflects the diversity

² WHO, World report on disability 2010:
http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/concept_note_2010.pdf

of local communities ('education for all') *and* ensuring that the school system is sufficiently adaptable to successfully include disabled children in the regular classrooms. We summarise this goal as being to achieve **inclusive education for all**.

The word 'successfully' here is important. In many of the places we visited there has been past experience of 'integrating' disabled children into some classrooms but only at the expense of their continuing marginalisation.

In Colombia, despite progressive reforms from the Education Ministry, it still seems common for schools to link annual progression to pre- defined academic standards so that slower learners may well be 'held back' and thus find themselves learning alongside increasingly younger children.

How are civil society and educational leaders confronting these multiple challenges in the four countries we visited?



3. The importance of small-scale innovation

In all these countries, one route to improvements in education has been through careful investment in small scale innovation designed to demonstrate inclusion in practice.

Sometimes this starts very small, as in Floridablanca where an enterprising teacher, with the support of her Principal, has been widening the diversity of entry into her reception class and helping other teachers prepare for the passage of children with more diverse educational needs through the school.



Also in Colombia, but on a larger scale, we heard how Fundación Saldarriaga Concha (FSC), working in partnership with the family association ASDOWN, is seeking to promote the pre-school inclusion of disabled children in three disadvantaged areas of Bogota.

The most well-developed demonstration of inclusive education that we were able to visit for ourselves however was Instituto Patria in Mexico.

Instituto Patria, Mexico City

Instituto Patria is a physically accessible, private school in the Jesuit tradition, situated in pleasant suburbs of Mexico City. It serves around 200 children in pre-school, primary and now the early years of secondary education. It attracts sufficient income from fees to offer small classes (varying from 6 to 20 pupils) with flexible teaching.

Inspired by its founding director over ten years ago, it is committed to including up to 15% of pupils with special needs, mostly disabled children. The school is bi-lingual (there is teaching in Spanish and English) but its third main theme is inclusion, so nearly a third of its teaching staff also have skills in psychology, speech therapy and other disciplines and increasingly all teachers are acquiring some of these skills in their own classroom practice.

Three coordinators of teaching programmes (respectively in Spanish, English and inclusion) work with the Principal and other teachers to shape the curriculum for each pupil and plan its delivery.

The inclusion team is available to partner the classroom teachers in their classes when these include children with additional needs and ensure they (and others) get individual support when required.

The school invests in fortnightly in-house training both to help teachers explore Jesuit philosophy, strengthen their common understanding of inclusion, ensure specialist skills are used to advance this and to develop their skills as a teaching team.

Parents are encouraged to understand the diversity of the school before registering their children and every child has the opportunity to 'try out' the school before accepting entry.

From our observations, the culture of Instituto Patria seems to combine a strong commitment to learning with a warm welcome for its diverse members.

Probably not many private (still less public) schools in Mexico achieve this quality of teaching in small classes, but the model the Instituto provides of a small, inclusive society is inspiring and encouraged us to explore further what can be done in more disadvantaged situations and on a larger scale.

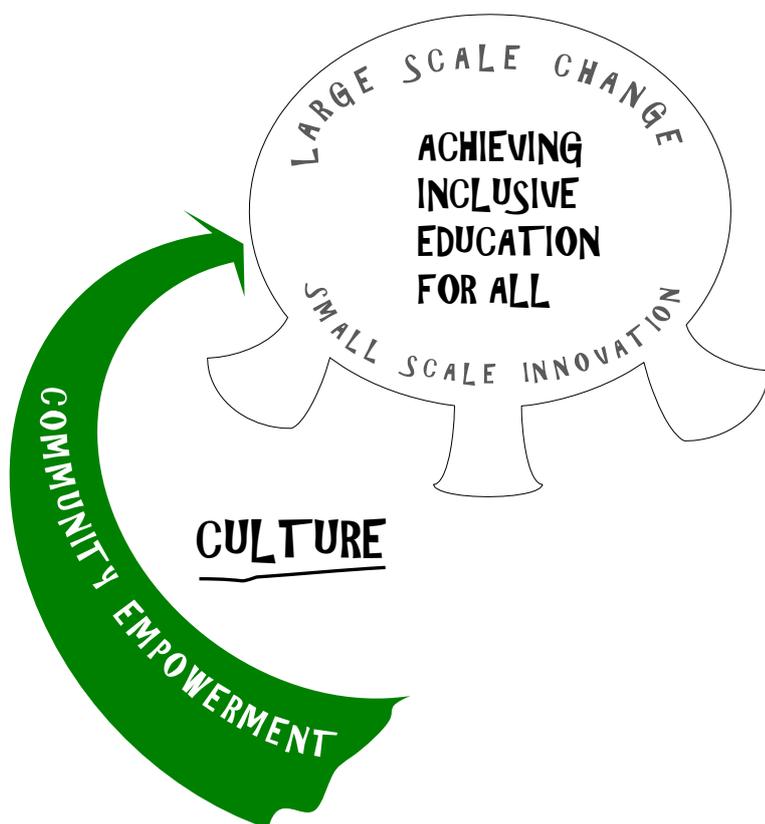
Clearly small-scale innovations are important in developing the practice of inclusion but larger-scale change, especially in publicly-funded education systems, is required to deliver inclusive education for the many, not just the few. It is to this goal that we now turn.



4. Advancing inclusive education through community empowerment

It was a common position of the civil society and other leaders we met on our journey that efforts to tackle discrimination against disabled and other marginalized people need to start from them and their communities.

CISEE (in Mexico City) was created through an alliance between the University and a community organisation and always grounds its efforts to develop educational practice in the needs and aspirations of this community.



The FSC/Asdown partnership (referred to above) in Bogotá started with efforts to understand better the three disadvantaged communities in which this project is based and develop the awareness of families about the rights of their children. This community empowerment approach was most fully developed in the work of ASNIC in Nicaragua

ASNIC, Managua

ASNIC, Asociación Nicaragüense para la Integración Comunitaria, has been working with a UK development agency, CODA, Community Development and Action International (with funding from the UK Big Lottery), to address the massive educational disadvantage among disabled children in Nicaragua. ASNIC is working on several fronts, for example to draw attention to their situation through the mass

media, link Disabled People's Organisations to the Education Ministry and empower teachers to enhance their skills in meeting this challenge. The main focus of its approach is in raising awareness of the rights of disabled people in local communities, strengthening their capacity for informed advocacy and showing how their inclusion benefits everyone.

Since the 1979 Sandinista revolution, Nicaragua has had a strong history of civil society organising and there are many local NGOs. Because of both the revolution and the war against the USA-sponsored 'Contras', there are also many disabled veterans. We were privileged to participate in a community meeting in the town of Jinotepe where more than fifty leaders of these and other disabled people's associations (e.g. representing different kinds of impairment) met to review their local advocacy strategy and set new priorities. One of these had already been a joint campaign (we have the T-shirts!) to promote enrollment and secure the admission of disabled children into the public schools.

The ASNIC hypothesis is that empowered communities, and the cultural changes established through this new awareness, will drive the changes in public policy and educational practice required to advance inclusion.



5. Advancing inclusive education through structural reform

Of course, community empowerment can foster the political support for radical change but it still requires governments (central and local) to take the lead in educational system reform.

As the sub-title of a book³ *From Poverty To Power* from Oxfam (the largest UK international aid agency) puts this, we need both 'active citizens and effective states' to change the world.

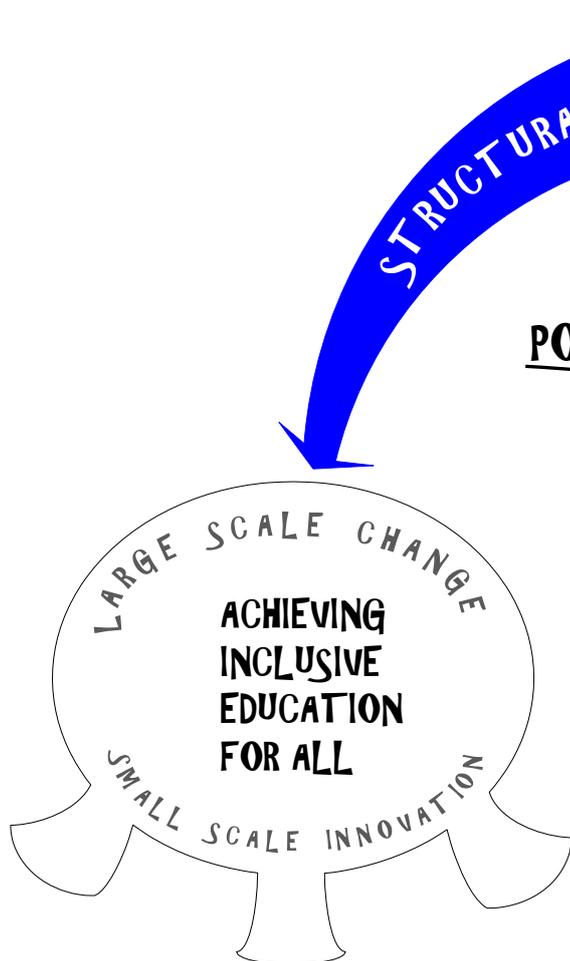
Inclusion International's 2009 global report *Better Education For All* suggests the following as key elements in a system-wide strategy:

- I. Establish political leadership and government responsibility for inclusive education.
- II. Establish a national/state-level 'Partnership for Inclusive Education' with representatives of government, educators and civil society.

³ Duncan Green *From Poverty To Power: How active citizens and effective states can change the world*. Oxford, Oxfam International, 2008

III. Develop and implement national/state-level plans for inclusive education that focus on:

- legislation for inclusion and non-discrimination, and guidelines for accommodation.
- ensuring government education department is responsible for education of all children.
- identifying children with disabilities and access, quality and outcomes of education.
- outreach to parents.
- training of teachers.
- providing supports.
- accessible facilities.
- transportation to/from school.
- transitions.
- public awareness.
- human rights complaints system.
- a knowledge network for inclusive education.



Indeed, in Mexico the Federal Government currently has a Commission established to develop its policies for achieving education for all. In Guatemala we met the civil servant leading the national government's strategy for inclusive education and in Colombia the law already mandates inclusive schools.

The best example we encountered of a comprehensive strategy for structural reform was in Cali.

Municipality of Cali, education system reform

Cali is the third largest city in Colombia and is characterised both by many kinds

of population diversity and by massive economic inequalities. The current Mayor was elected on a platform of tackling these inequalities and promoting Cali as an 'inclusive city'. To this end, the Mayor established three years ago a municipal office focused on inclusion which in turn has undertaken a wide-ranging study to produce a socio-spatial map of the city measuring different dimensions of exclusion.

A key focus of its work has been inclusive education. Equipped with this map it has been able to target, through the Education Department, both the communities and the schools with the largest numbers of vulnerable children in a rolling programme of interventions which will be spread more widely as resources allow.

The strategy combines consultation with these communities about the challenges with a package of policies, incentives and supports, including:

- Free schooling and subsidised uniforms and transport, books and tools for poor students.
- A significant programme of post-graduate training for selected school Principals and teachers, prioritising those involved in 'school improvements committees'.
- A central team supporting schools in preparing and implementing their own transformation plans.

The Education Department is trying to find excluded children and young people, assess their support needs and link them to local schools.

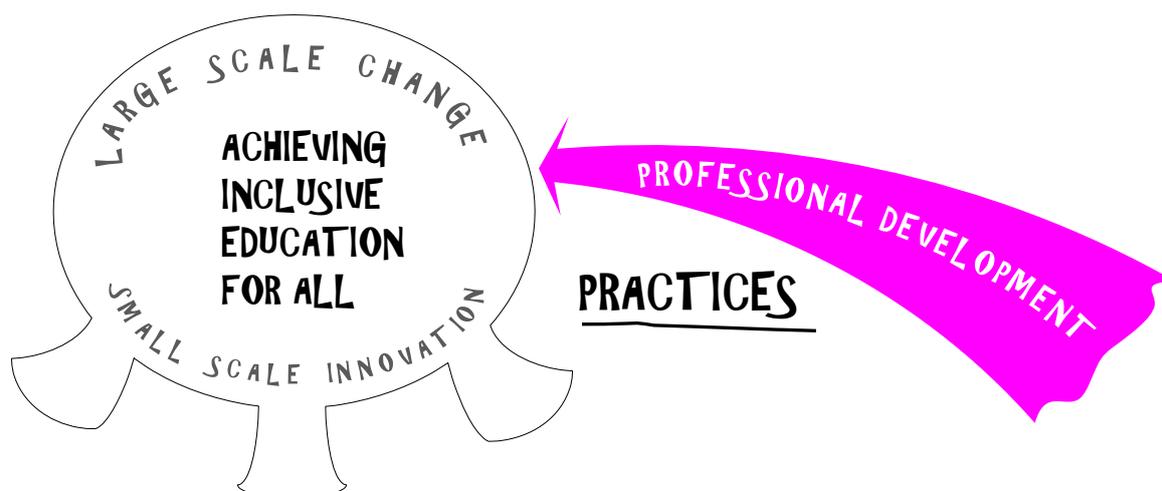
In some respects it is still early days for this radical programme but the municipality is able to demonstrate major improvements in school attendance and the start of cultural change in the schools. What remains an open question, with Mayoral elections this year, is whether public support for the results so far will be sufficient to maintain this political momentum.



6. Advancing inclusive education through professional development

As the Cali initiative clearly recognises, complementing these structural changes in the education system is the need for significant investment to develop the understanding and skills of teachers to work in new ways and support continuous development in classroom practices.

Indeed in all the places we visited, there was a strong emphasis on working with relevant Universities to produce and support the teachers these countries need for a more inclusive future.



But developing practice involves more than good undergraduate and post-graduate education. It also involves teachers and their schools in learning from their everyday experience about individual children and sharing this learning within the profession.

In this context, we were especially impressed with the work of ASCATED (Asociación de Capacitación y Asistencia Técnico en Educación y Discapacidad) in Guatemala.

ASCATED, Guatemala

The national NGO, ASCATED, has worked for 20 years to improve the education of disabled children, with support especially from Spanish Foundations.

Over this time it has helped to create local parent associations, building confidence in the rights of their children and sharing experience of enhancing their participation in the things other children take for granted.

It has worked with government to develop progressive education policies and with Universities to modernise teacher training. It has also supported the National Disability Council in seeking the support of Presidential candidates for manifesto commitments to disability equality.

Underpinning these efforts is a continuing commitment to finding ways of helping individual children and young people gain access to quality education.

We were privileged to join a meeting with disabled people, family members, teachers and leaders of local NGOs which support the inclusion of people with different kinds of impairment (e.g. visual impairments, Downs syndrome, etc) in a review of their experience of making progress.

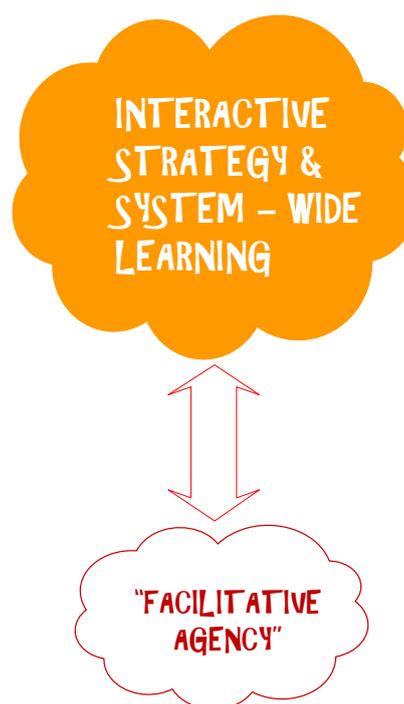
A key function of this and similar networks is problem-solving around individual children. We heard about how NGOs with their specialist

knowledge have been working together with good teachers, families and students to raise expectations of the child, design personalised education programmes in regular classrooms and support the teachers in implementing and reviewing these programmes – thus securing inclusion ‘one child at a time’. We also heard about the similar work of an NGO focusing on employment in helping to secure labour inclusion for disabled school leavers.



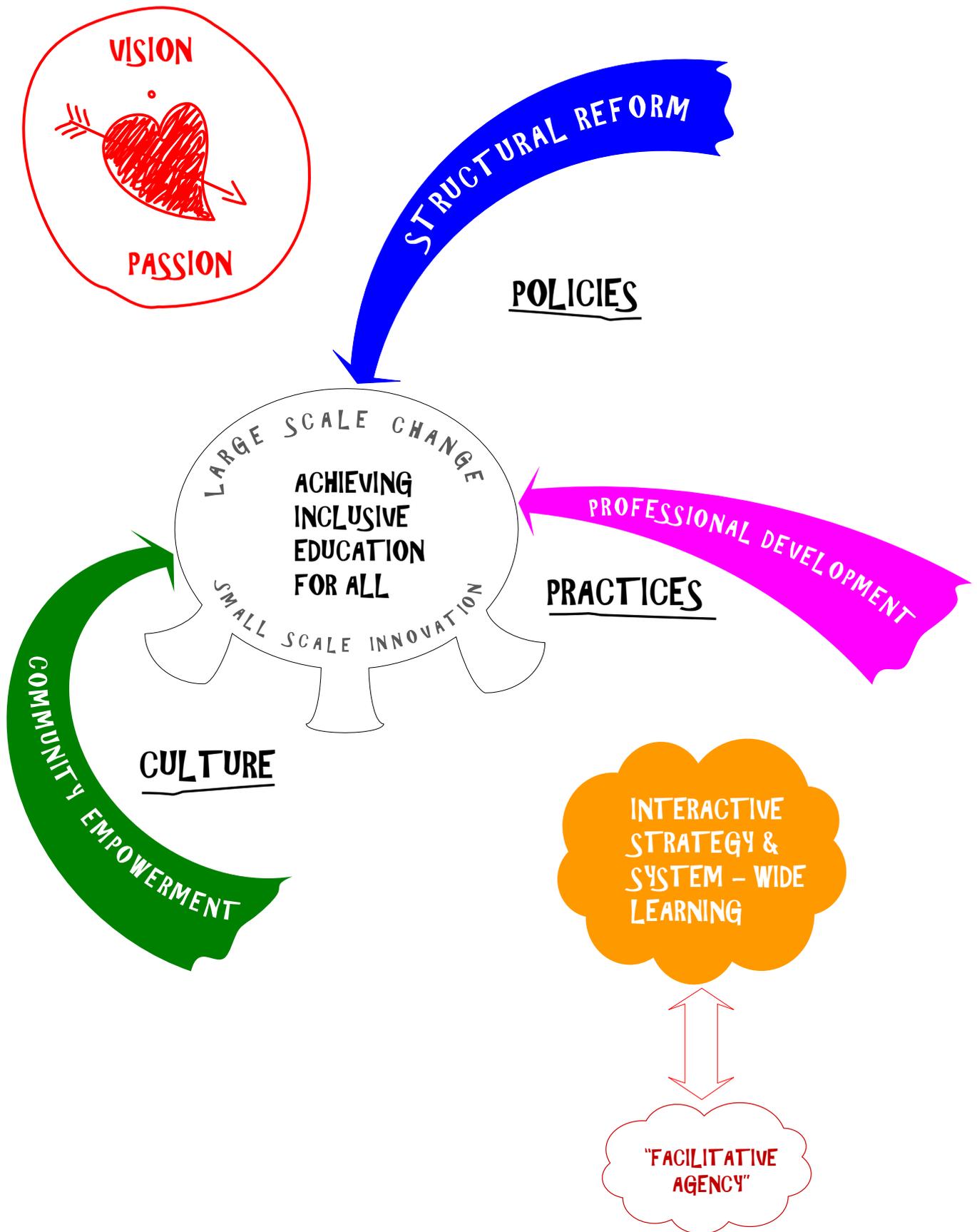
7. Putting the pieces together: crafting interactive strategy

As our journey continued, we came to see that achieving success in advancing inclusive education whether at the level of the school, the municipality or the country, requires all three of the strategies: community empowerment, structural reform and professional development which we have so far described. Indeed, reflecting on the experience of ASNIC, ASCATED and FSC we borrowed the term *crafting interactive strategy*⁴ to capture how their work judiciously combines different strands of strategy at different times to deliver educational system change.



We summarise this concerted set of approaches in the following diagram.

⁴ Henry Mintzberg 'Crafting Strategy' *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1987, pp66 - 75; Normann R. & Ramirez R. *Designing Interactive Strategy* Chichester, Wiley, 1994; Wheatley, M. *Leadership and the New Science* San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler, 1999; and Bunker B.B. & Alban B.T. *Large Group Interventions: Engaging the whole system for rapid change*. San Francisco, Josey-Bass, 1997



**Achieving Inclusive Education:
An Overview Of Key Elements In Social Change Strategies**

This is demanding work, typically requiring sustained partnerships between visionary NGOs (often with international support), civil society leaders and local and/or national government agencies over many years, always struggling to achieve the 'critical mass' of efforts necessary for radical system change. It is also demanding because these different strands of strategy have different requirements as we show in a rather simplified form in the chart which follows.

ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: STRANDS OF STRATEGY

Approach	Main method	Stance	Form of diagnosis	Evaluation	Focus
Community empowerment	Community development	Listening, Enabling	Community issues/ aspirations	Attitude change, Empowerment	Disabled people, families, their organisations and alliances.
Structural reform	Technical assistance	Advising, Consulting	Policies and outcomes	Implementation, Performance	Policy, law, implementation processes and resources.
Professional development	Education and training	Teaching, Support	Training needs analysis	Competencies in practice	Teacher and other professional expectations, approaches and skills.
Interactive strategy & system-wide learning	Large group facilitation and whole-system working	Supporting learning across boundaries	Whole-system participative review	System change, New relationships	Multi-stakeholder processes for strategy development and review.

We have had to borrow further from the literature on managing large-scale change to find succinct terms for this fourth kind of strategising but the important ideas in this context include recognising that:

- the educational system is complex, with many different interests who need to be parties to 'co-producing' radical change;
- different approaches are required for different challenges and these need to be combined for sustainable success;

- strategies need to adapt to the opportunities and constraints which emerge: it is useful to have a rough map of the intended journey but not usually possible to make a precise plan in advance;
- a lot of attention is required to making space within and across groups for strengthening the common understanding of inclusion and learning from experience.



8. Establishing facilitative agencies

It follows that large-scale change in public and other educational systems needs investment in what we call ‘facilitative agency’ – by which we mean an organisation, or more probably an organisational network, which combines visionary leadership, the capacity to bring together different stakeholders (including governmental agencies) to build effective partnerships and the skills to facilitate and/or advise on these three main strands of strategy as well as spread the learning more widely.

As we say above, we came across three agencies (four if we include CISEE in Mexico), ASNIC in Nicaragua, ASCATED in Guatemala and FSC in Colombia which seem to have earned the status and developed the capacities (with their partners) to fulfil these functions at the national level in their countries. The work of the first three of these agencies is described in more detail on their websites, referenced in the Appendix.

We think that this analysis has significant implications for the work of Foundations like FSC and other funders, like COTA and the UK Big Lottery, if their investments are to move beyond demonstration projects to seeding large-scale change.





9. Universities as facilitative agencies

Two of the agencies named above are well-established NGOs and the third, FSC, is a well-funded Foundation with a strong social mission. There are however another set of institutions in these countries which combine social status, some reputation for independence and a major role in both knowledge creation and preparing leaders, including educational leaders, for the future: the Universities.

Our main host in Bucaramanga was UNAB, the Autonomous University of Bucaramanga. The teacher mentioned in Section 3 had recently taken on coordination of UNAB's post-graduate programme in inclusive education and the University was keen to further strengthen its role as a resource to the local education systems and perhaps more widely.

We have already seen, for example in Guatemala, in Nicaragua, in Bogotá and in Cali, that educational reform initiatives need the support of relevant Universities in modernising the education of future teachers and supporting professional development among practicing teachers. But our visit to Mexico pointed to ways in which Universities could do much more than this to themselves become facilitative agencies. We were especially impressed by our visit to CISEE, Centro de Investigación y Servicios de Educación Especial, attached to UNAM, the Autonomous University of Mexico.

CISEE, Mexico City

CISEE emerged in 1977 as a joint enterprise between a local family association concerned about a better quality of life for their children with intellectual disabilities and the Faculty of Psychology in UNAM. Now, more than thirty years on, it continues to develop as a bridge between the University and the community, seeking to combine four main functions – service provision, training, research and dissemination – all grounded in a strong commitment to the values of equality and inclusion. It is thus a beacon for policy and practice in this field and a model of the University as a facilitator of informed change.

The service contribution combines out-reach to disabled people and families and a set of adult education programmes, including employment training, to young people using the Centre's facilities. The services also provide opportunities for student placements and professional training, linking students (from several Universities) to the world of practice. In turn the research programme, including that done as part of post-graduate degrees, is focused on understanding issues facing the wider community in including disabled people and the delivery of better services. The status and experience which comes from this 34 years of collaboration in turn makes the Centre a valued resource to other agencies and a base for policy advocacy.

In Colombia there is already a network of Universities committed to advancing inclusion. Extrapolating from the CISEE example, we worked with leaders at UNAB to envision the inclusive University of the 21st Century, serving its communities.

Strengthening training in inclusive education for current and future teachers is clearly a key part of this, but of course Universities educate other professional leaders e.g. in medicine, nursing, architecture and engineering, who also need to orient their future practice to the requirements of diverse societies. Moreover this educational function, in partnership with employing organisations and professional associations, needs to extend into supporting qualified practitioners to play their full part in the radical change programmes described earlier in this report.

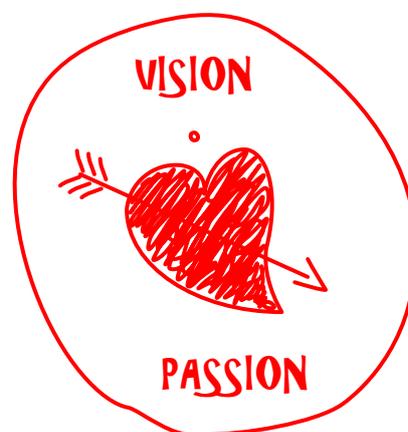
In turn, of course, Universities need to attend to the diversity in their student intake and ensure that they have non-discriminatory employment practices for their own staff.



10. Sustaining inspiration for change

The final piece in our diagram we picture as a heart. We have presented our analysis largely in terms of the elements in strategies required for radical change and the examples we explored in different countries.

But everywhere we went there was one other critical component in sustained efforts to build more equal and inclusive societies: the leadership offered, sometimes initially by a few individuals but typically now by leadership groups in innovative organisations and wider networks, by people who bring a strong vision of a better world to their efforts and sustain these with intelligence and passion, sometimes over a lifetime – always checking carefully what is really working to enhance the quality of people's lives and changing course where necessary.



As a teacher said to us in Nicaragua, this is a labour of love. And the leaders we met in the initiatives we have described, as well as in other more local efforts like the work of HRBC volunteers in Cali and the small network we have been visiting in Bucaramanga over the last four years, are all exemplars of this commitment.

Some of these leaders are disabled people reflecting on their own experiences, some family members, some other citizens who have sensed the injustice in current social arrangements and want to change this, some professionals like the teachers who want to serve all children well, some officials in public agencies who see public policy as an instrument for genuine progress and some politicians who see the importance of promoting sustainable and inclusive communities if our children and grand-children are going to experience quality in their lives.

It has been our privilege to meet these people during our three week journey and learn from their experience.

We offer this effort, no doubt with some misunderstandings but also we hope with useful insights, to all of them with sincere thanks.

¡Hasta la próxima!

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Itinerary

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY SPRING 2011 LATIN AMERICA LEARNING EXCHANGE

20-22 March **Mexico City**

Host: Inclusion Interamericana (President: Raquel Jelinek www.inclusion-ia.org) together with Libertad Hernandez (www.dis-capacidad.com).

Raising awareness and progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Latin American progress in inclusive education. Visits to CISEE at UNAM and Instituto Patria (www.ipatria.edu.mx).

23 – 25 March **Guatemala City**

Host: ASCATED (Director: Gabriela de Burbano www.ascated.net).

Progress in advancing inclusive education in Guatemala. Family associations and their role in advocacy.

25 – 30 March **Nicaragua, Managua and Jinotepe**

Host: ASNIC (Director-General: Indiana Fonseca www.asnic.org.ni).

Progress in advancing inclusive education in disadvantaged communities.

31 March and 1 April **Colombia, Bogotá**

Host: Asdown (Director: Monica Cortes www.asdown.org) and Fundación Saldarriaga Concha (Coordinator of Communications, Luisa Fernanda Berrocal and Senior Projects Coordinator, Jacopo Gamba, www.saldarriagaconcha.org).

Progress in advancing inclusive education in Colombia.

2 – 4 April **Colombia, Cali**

Hosts: Fundación HRBC (Director: Libia Rodriguez <http://fundacionhrbc.jimdo.com>) and COTA (Projects Coordinator: Barbara Inglin www.childrenoftheandes.org)

Progress in advancing inclusive education in disadvantaged communities. Inclusive education, community development and the inclusive city.

(Municipality of Cali, Consultant on Social Inclusion, Martha Cecilia Aguirre Rodriguez www.caliciudadesinlimites.com).

6 – 10 April **Colombia, Bucaramanga**

Host: UNAB (Coordinator of post graduate programme in inclusive education: Gloria Sierra Delgado <http://www.unab.edu.co>).

Progress in advancing inclusive education in Bucaramanga / Floridablanca.

Universities as a resource to local action. Campaigning for inclusion (Red Santander).