



**CENTRE FOR INCLUSIVE FUTURES**  
POLICY, ORGANISATION & COMMUNITY ACTION LEARNING

## **EDUCATION FOR A BETTER TOMORROW**



## **OPENING THREE WINDOWS ON TRANSFORMATION TO A SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE**

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# Introduction

Over the past six years, we have had the opportunity to visit Colombia and some other Latin American countries regularly to work with teachers, community networks and non-governmental organizations concerned with advancing inclusive education in very diverse societies. Heidi is Colombian and works for the charity *Children of the Andes* whose mission is improving the lives of disadvantaged children in that country. David is the British Director of the *Centre for Inclusive Futures*. Both organizations have their base in London.

This is the third short paper in a series designed as resources to teachers taking the lead in improving *Education For All* in Colombia. The first, *Advancing Inclusive Education For An Inclusive Society* (1) reports on a journey we made across Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Colombia in 2011, exploring the routes to educational reform. The second *Teachers As Leaders In The Journey To Inclusive Schools* (2), published in 2012, offers a guide to teachers leading transformation in their own schools. This third paper arose from an invitation to contribute to an international Congress in Palmira in the Spring of 2013 whose theme was *Education and Human Development: In, from and with diversity*.

At a time when, locally and globally, children at school and entering education like those pictured on our cover face huge uncertainties about the kind of world they will inherit as adults, we chose to focus this contribution on the fundamental question for all education: what do these children need to prepare them for this unknown future?

Looking ahead 20 years or more, we can envisage that they will themselves have families and be responsible as mature local citizens for the kind of lives they share with others in their communities. So we invite attention here to a stronger question:

*What education do these children need to prepare them to shape a better future for themselves and their generation?*

We chose to focus this exploration in two main ways. First, the main title for this Congress was *Education and Human Development*. There are many challenges to human development in Colombia but the most important here and globally in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is concerned with whether humankind can find a way of living in harmony with Mother Earth, with *Pachamama* as we call her in deference to the wisdom of the indigenous peoples of Latin America (3). If we don't successfully address this challenge, all the others will be of little significance: so our main theme is *education for sustainability*.

The sub-title to this Congress was concerned with the importance of both recognising and welcoming *diversity* in our communities and in our schools. There are obvious reasons why this should be a concern in Colombia. Just as the natural world thrives on biodiversity, we shall be arguing that both achieving a sustainable future and living

cooperatively with our neighbours require that we value human diversity and welcome everyone's contribution. We shall be exploring therefore what it would mean to achieve *a sustainable and inclusive future* for Palmira and other localities.

Our second way of focusing this contribution is through offering some simple tools for reflection and action that we hope people in Palmira and elsewhere find helpful in efforts to address our big question. That is, we try to identify some ways of thinking that might help educational leaders find promising routes to a better future.

We believe that these routes will require radical change from the course we are on so we have called these tools *Three Windows On Transformation*. Our basic proposition is straightforward, even if some of the detail is not. We need to work 'backwards' from the future to identify what we need to do now in our schools to anticipate that future.

We shall be asking in turn:

-  What might a sustainable and inclusive future look like in Palmira?
-  What would students in this generation need to learn in order to create this future?  
And
-  How can teachers and their allies bring about the transformation of today's schools so as to promote this learning?

## **The 21st Century Imperative: Living in harmony with our planet**

Let's start with the bad news! These are global issues for which the 'rich' countries of the North and now also rapidly industrialising large countries like China and India have most responsibility but since Colombia cannot leave this globe and Palmira can't leave Colombia, we are all implicated.

Essentially we can't go on as we are. There is overwhelming scientific consensus that the threat posed by man-made climate change is both serious and urgent. Our failure to rise to this challenge promises an intolerable future for later generations as we destroy our own habitat and the wonders of nature that depend on it. Long before then, we may have passed the peak in oil production even as energy needs rise with global population growth. Quite visibly, for example in the massive extinction of species and rapid disappearance of the polar ice caps, our culture of over-consumption is causing huge damage to important eco-systems upon which human well-being depends. These environmental crises are closely connected to the failure of the global economic system from which we seem to have learnt very little. We are living with massive and growing inequalities both between and within countries that make many dysfunctional for their own people (4). In most of the 'richer' countries, people's life satisfaction is declining. Put simply we are living in a global situation which is unsustainable, unstable, unfair and unhappy.

**It doesn't have to be this way!** As citizens we can join together with hope to address these multiple crises and regain control over the future, accepting our responsibility to today's young people and those who will come after. We can develop a more intelligent perspective on the inter-relationship of environment, economy and society that recognises the ecological limits to human activity. Indeed we can rediscover our debt to Pachamama. We can create a new vision of having what one British author calls *Prosperity Without Growth* (5).

This is not just a theory. Across the globe, these new ways of thinking are finding a myriad of practical expressions locally, most notably in the *Transition Towns* movement (6), now a global network of citizen-led initiatives bringing people together to tell a new story about the places where they live and what they could become in a sustainable future (7). For example, in preparing this paper we came across some excellent work in New Mexico that has involved local people mapping in detail the future patterns of energy and food production they will require to live sustainably (8).

Of course in every locality we will need similarly radical thinking about housing and transport, mitigation of the effects of climate change and protection of the local environment, and how we are going to live together in these different times.

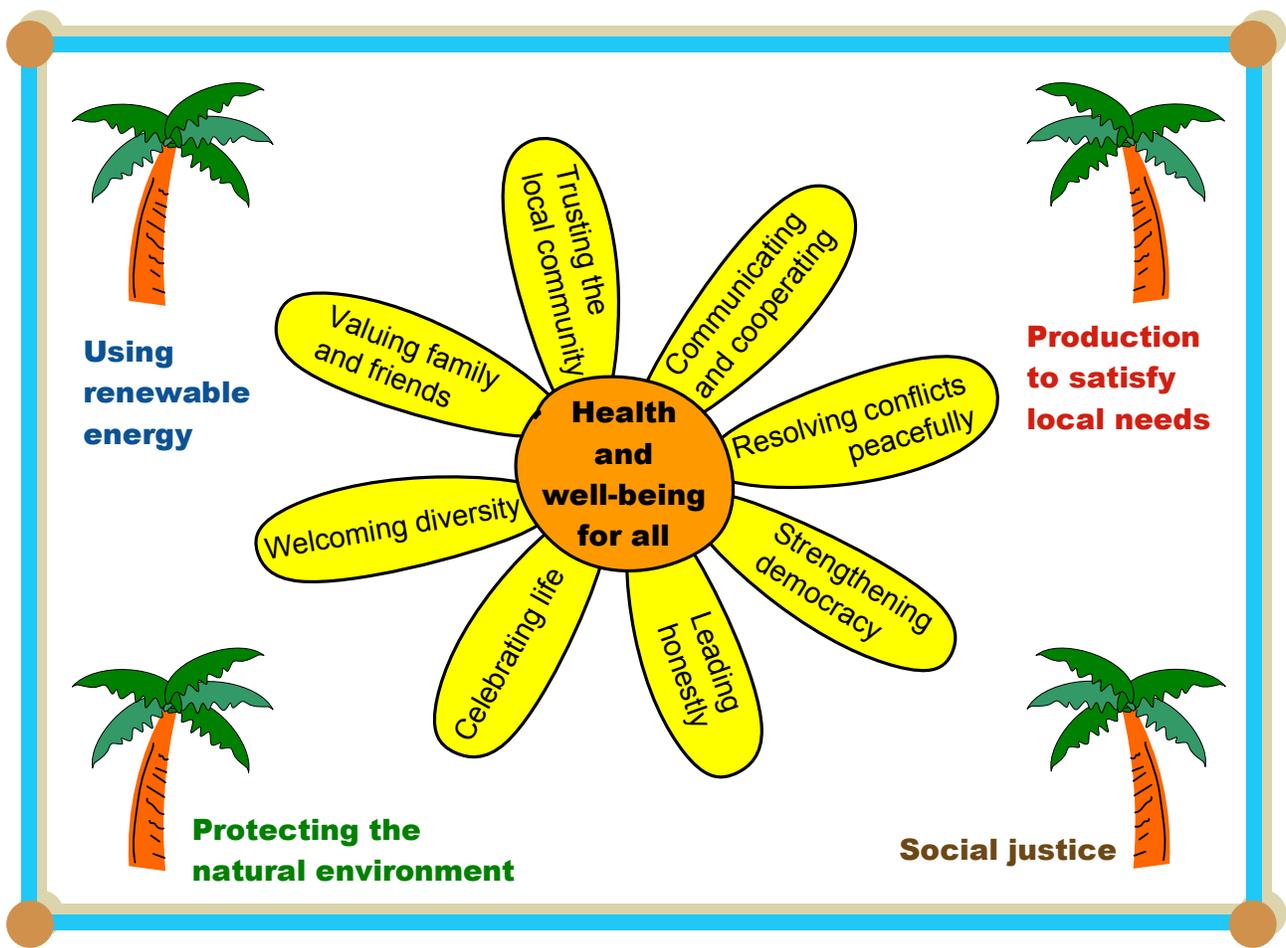
## A compelling vision

Our First Window (Box I) draws on these local innovations to start the process of *Envisioning A Better Future*.

We suggest that the goal should be to secure health and well-being for all in our communities. The practical details of what will be required to achieve this have to be worked out in each place as the New Mexico example suggests but given the major threats we have identified, we shall certainly need to find ways of:

-  Protecting the natural environment, promoting biodiversity, looking after our forests, conserving our water supplies.
-  Using less energy and generating what we need from natural sources: the sun, the wind, flowing water and our own efforts, for example through pedal power.
-  Producing most of what we need to consume locally, especially food.
-  Treating each other fairly so that everyone feels committed to helping with these tasks and everyone gets their share of what is available.

These propositions of course are not new in Palmira. The Mayor's strategic plan (9) for 2012 – 2015 makes strong reference to environmental sustainability, conservation of water and other natural resources, alternative energy supplies – like the solar panels providing electricity in rural schools – adaptation to climate change and achieving local food security.



#### Box I, First Window: Envisioning a Better Future

In turn these requirements for living sustainably require big changes in economic and social organisation – and the values on which these are based. The current version of global capitalism is economically illiterate. Stability is dependent on ever increasing growth in consumption in a finite planet; a psychological correlate makes materialism central to our social identity: ‘I am what I buy’.

Looking to the future we shall need to have established and acted on a better set of values that include:

- 🧑 Defining prosperity not in terms of consumption but rather as residing in the quality of our lives, the health and happiness of our families, the strength of our relationships and our trust in the local community. For example, can we rely on our neighbours to help us out when life gets difficult?
- 🧑 Communicating openly and honestly about what concerns us and working cooperatively with others to address local challenges.
- 🧑 More specifically, seeking to understand conflicts and resolve them peacefully.

And to achieve these changes we shall need to enhance the capacity of our communities to solve problems together through:

-  Strengthening everyday democracy: the opportunities citizens have for influencing the things that affect their lives.
-  Establishing authentic civic leadership that can mobilise all our contributions.
-  Building respect for everyone's human rights and actively welcoming diversity in our communities.

And finally here, we shall need to build on Colombian traditions of art, music and dance to ensure that there are lots of opportunities to celebrate life together and appreciate our new relationship with Pachamama!

Again, at least some of this already appears in the Mayor's strategic plan, including proposals to preserve cultural diversity, strengthen civic participation, reduce violence and promote social inclusion.

## Making everyone a part of this

An important theme of the Palmira Congress was diversity.



The photo here is of a coral ecosystem, actually one of the vital ecosystems most threatened by current human behaviour. We know that natural ecosystems thrive on diversity. So it is in human society. Everyone is different. Human life also thrives on diversity when we ensure that difference is welcomed and everyone is encouraged to contribute their distinctive skills. Diversity fosters the creativity we need to overcome new challenges. Inclusion promotes the solidarity we need to build a better future.

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# Education for a better tomorrow

So, working back from the future, what does this mean for the education of today's children?

We take a broad view of education as being about what students *learn* from their daily experiences, not just what they are *taught*. Clearly school is central to this but so is family and indeed we can think of the education 'system' as including experiences with other students, everyday life in their communities and more distant influences, most obviously from the internet and other mass media.

Schools cannot control the other parts of this system but they can help to orchestrate what students learn from this variety of influences, not least by encouraging a culture of critical reflection in the classroom.

This brings us to our Second Window. If education is preparation for life, by reflecting on our First Window, our vision of a desirable future, we can start to identify key topics in an education for tomorrow. In Box II we have drawn out eight topics which we characterise as: Respect for Pachamama; Energy; Living Sustainably; Democracy and Social Justice; Family and Community; Language and Communication; Conflict and Mediation; and Enhancing life through culture. In each of these we expect the learning process to explore the links between the past, the present and the future.



Box II, Second Window: Education for Life

We are also speaking here about both what students learn – sometimes called the curriculum – and how they learn, although of course ‘what’ and ‘how’ are interconnected.

Let’s make this clearer by expanding on our Second Window in two further Boxes.

In Box III we distinguish how the curriculum is often described in traditional schools – like the ones both of us attended, even though our educations were nearly 40 years and the Atlantic Ocean apart – and what we might expect in schools transformed to anticipate a sustainable future.

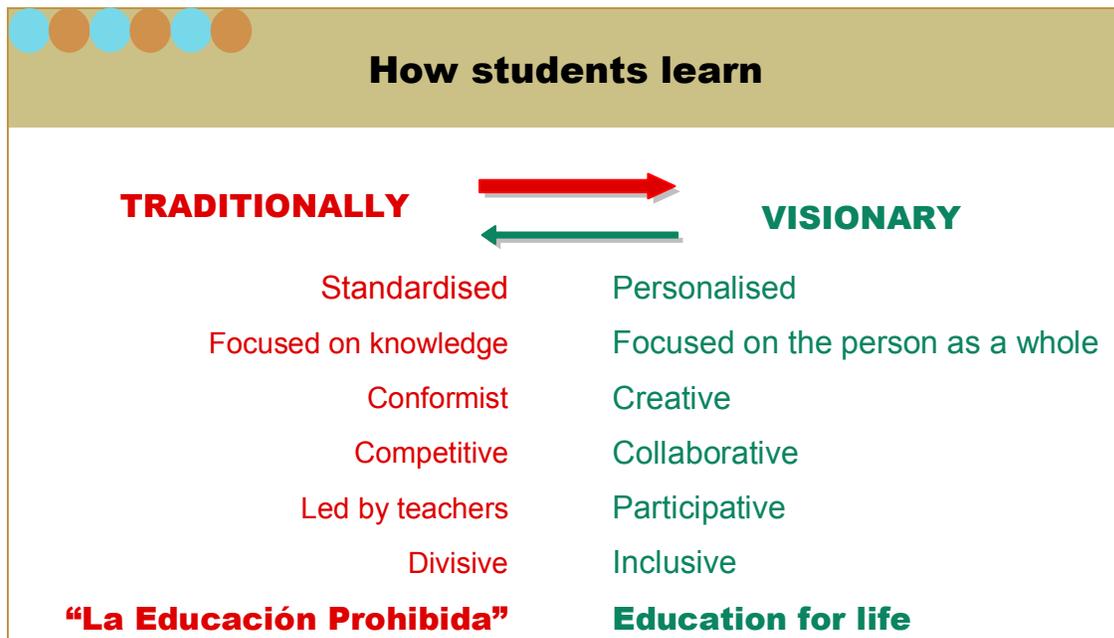
<b>What students learn</b>	
<b>Comparison ...</b>	
<b>TRADITIONAL</b>	<b>VISIONARY</b>
Science	<b>Pachamama Studies</b>
Maths	Climate Energy Ecology Biodiversity
Geography	<b>Sustainability</b>
IT	Water Food Construction Employment
Religion	<b>Politics</b>
History	Citizenship Government Democracy Justice
Languages and Literature	<b>Relationships</b>
Politics	Family Communication Health Cooperation
Arts	<b>Culture</b>
Music	Literature Arts Music Dance

Box III, Traditional and Visionary Curriculum

We are not suggesting here that all the traditional curriculum and ways of studying it should be abandoned: it might still be a good idea, for example, to learn Mathematics and Spanish at least in part as we do now. But what those two arrows at the top mean is that when we are studying traditional ‘subjects’, we should try wherever possible to show their relevance to the content of the visionary curriculum....and when we are exploring the new curriculum, we should draw attention to how traditional disciplines contribute to our understanding. For example, we need some physics to understand climate change and its likely effects on rainfall.

There are different ways of expressing the new curriculum but in our analysis we have identified five main clusters of studies concerned respectively with Pachamama, Sustainability, Politics, Relationships and Culture. (The third edition of the *Index of Inclusion* (10) describes many of these ideas in more detail.)

Box IV focuses on how children learn. The visionary proposition here is that if the future requires active citizens with different skills, working collaboratively and creatively to find sustainable solutions to 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges, then these attributes need to be developed during their school years. The excellent Latin American film *La educación prohibida* (11) sets out many of the weaknesses in traditional educational practice. The right-hand side of this Box identifies some key features of what we are calling ‘education for life’: in classrooms which welcome diversity, we shall need learning to be tailored to each student; learning will need to engage our heart and our hands as well as our minds; creativity will be fostered; teachers will encourage student participation in the work of the school; and children will learn how to cooperate with others so as to achieve shared goals, including that of making their school a great place to learn.

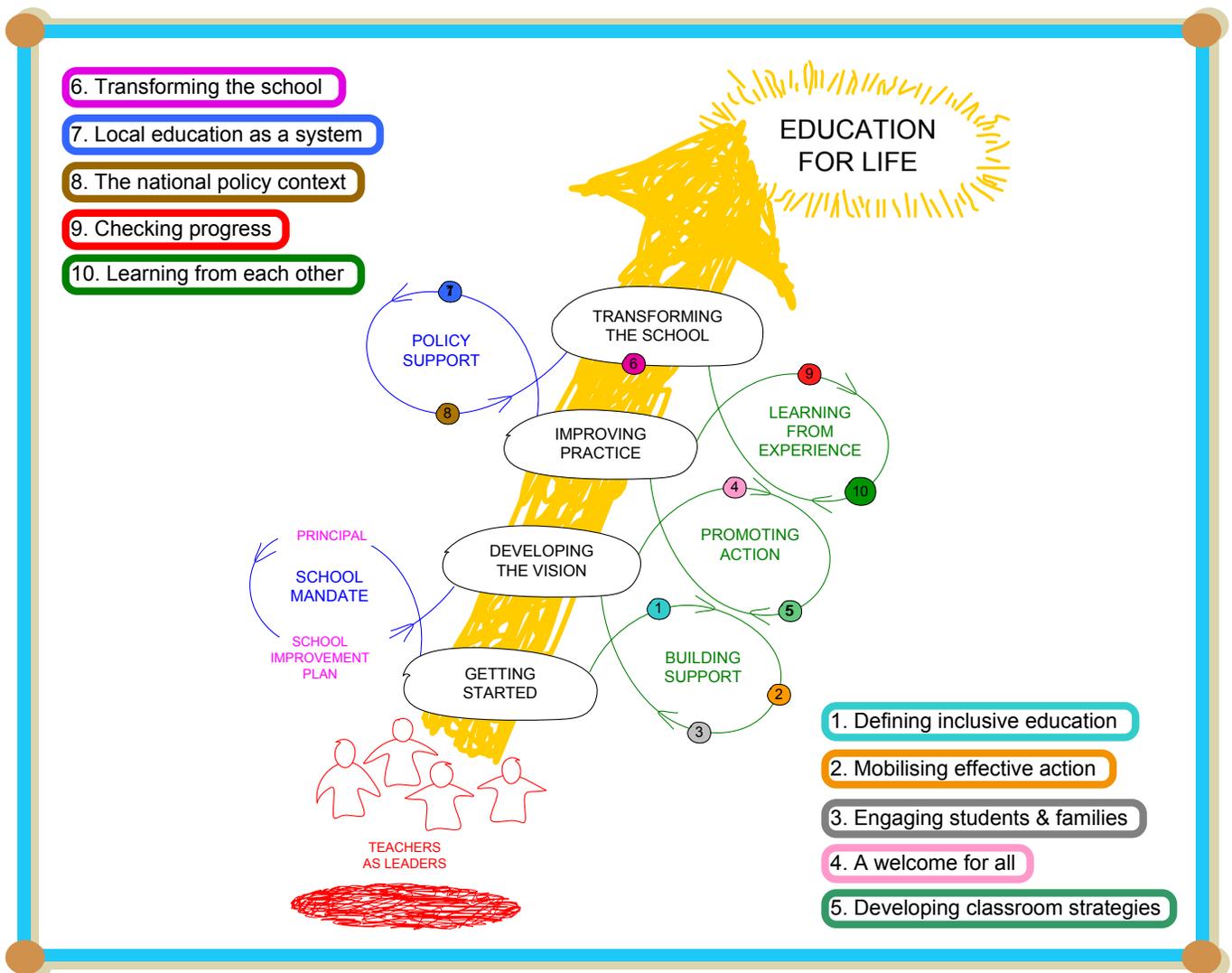


Box IV, How children learn

# Transforming today's schools

Probably most schools and indeed our education systems fall considerably short of meeting these requirements. It follows that those of us active in shaping education today, especially but not only teachers, have a big responsibility in offering leadership for the necessary transformation. We say not only teachers because sustainable reform in education also requires significant change in educational policies and new expectations from the communities schools serve, as well as the active participation of students themselves.

Our Third Window provides a planning tool for teachers leading transformation in their own schools to plot the route to achieving the vision set out in our Second Window. Box V comes from the short guide we wrote last year for Colombian teachers we had met in previous visits. The guide (12) identifies key features of what we envisage as a journey of discovery in every school.



Box V, Third Window: Teachers as Leaders in School Transformation

This journey starts when some good teachers come together to ask the question with which this paper began: What education do our children need to prepare them to shape a better future for themselves and their generation? It makes progress as these teachers seek to involve colleagues and also find ways of engaging students and their families.

It goes further when local participants agree that the purpose of education is to equip every student to play their part in community life and start to create their vision of what this should mean for educational practice as we have done in the Second Window. In turn this vision provides a framework for consulting on what's working around here and what isn't, a little as *La educación prohibida* does more generally.

Then the whole school can be involved in identifying priorities for what needs to change and taking some positive action, for example to make Pachamama studies central to the curriculum and encourage students to explore the environment of the school. Good teachers and their students will be able to find any number of interesting ways that students can discover more about both how the habitat is being damaged and what can be done to change this.

And of course, as these efforts gather momentum, transformation has to be made central to the School Improvement Plan and increasingly reflected in local education policies.

To conclude. No-one says this transformation is going to be easy. Indeed there are formidable barriers.

We have to reshape global capitalism in the face of powerful vested interests. In Colombia especially, the history of conflict and inequality make community action in the common interest challenging. Governmental agencies are better at declaring progressive objectives than delivering them. Corruption doesn't help. And at the level of the school, traditional ways of doing things cast a long shadow.

But change is essential and we have important assets. There are many people in education with great ideas and a lot of enthusiasm for learning from each other. Both in Colombia and across Latin America there are many examples of communities preparing for a better future and of schools demonstrating 'education for life'.

Most importantly there are many teachers who are passionate about education, recognise the need for radical change and have the courage to provide authentic local leadership in creating schools fit for the future.

**The time is now. To quote Alice Walker,  
' We are the people we have been waiting for '**

## Notes

1. Heidy Tatiana Araque Sierra & David Towell *Advancing Inclusive Education For An Inclusive Society: Reflections on a journey in Latin America* (2011) Available in English at [www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/](http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/) and in Spanish at <http://www.dis-capacidad.com/nota.php?id=1509>
2. David Towell & Heidy Tatiana Araque Sierra *Teachers As Leaders In the Journey To Inclusive Schools: A guide to local action* (2012) Available in English at [www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/](http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/) and in Spanish at <http://www.dis-capacidad.com/nota.php?id=1945>
3. A modern representation of this historic understanding of Pachamama is found in recent Bolivian legislation to recognize the rights of Mother Earth: *Ley de Derechos de la Madre Tierra (Ley 071)*, Bolivia, 2010
4. The social ills produced by inequality are comprehensively explored in Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better* Allen Lane, 2009
5. Tim Jackson *Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a finite planet* Earthspan, 2009
6. For an overview, see Rob Hopkins *The Transition Companion: Making your community more resilient in uncertain times* Transition Books, 2011
7. For examples of Latin American cities which form part of this network, see *Cidades em Transicao Brasil* <http://transitionbrazil.com>
8. See for more details *Map to the age of renewables* [www.dreamingnewmexico.org](http://www.dreamingnewmexico.org)
9. Available at <http://www.palmiraavanza.com/plan-de-desarrollo-2012-2015>
10. Tony Booth & Mel Ainscow *Guía para la Inclusión Educativa*, 3a edición, Fundación Creando Futuro, Chile, 2011 See also UNESCO *Guidelines For Inclusion; Ensuring Access to Education For All* Paris, 2005
11. *La educación prohibida* [www.educacionprohibida.com](http://www.educacionprohibida.com) See also Sir Ken Robinson *Cambiando Paradigmas* [vimeo.com/16669082](http://vimeo.com/16669082)
12. Reference 2, above.

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