



iNcLuSive EduCation FuNd

ThE UrUgUayAn ExPeRiEnCe

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Introduction

This report describes the experience developed jointly by the Uruguayan National Department of Public Education (ANEP) and the World Bank in the implementation of a School Inclusion Fund (FIE). The goal is to provide a concrete example of what countries can do to implement inclusive education in practice within the framework of the strategies proposed by the "Education for All" initiative and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The document does not attempt to provide details of the conceptual framework or political arguments setting the international guidelines for inclusive education programs¹, but rather to respond to the demand for practical examples to illustrate an operational strategy. One of the specific characteristics of the Uruguayan experience with the School Inclusion Fund was that it did not require additional programs or resources; rather, the experience was incorporated as a new tool within an overall strategy for improving the quality of education in the country. Although the fact that the Fund has just recently been implemented (2003) prevents an exhaustive study of its results and impact thus far, publicizing the experience internationally is justified because of the need to document actual experiences developed at a national scale and allowing the public to envisage models for the implementation of inclusive education.

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¹ For further information on the conceptual aspects and main conclusions on inclusive education, we recommend the report "Education for All-Together: including children with disabilities", by Susan Peters, part of the World Bank Series on Education.



Executive Summary

This document describes the common experience developed jointly by the National Department of Public Education (ANEP) of Uruguay and the World Bank in the implementation of a School Inclusion Fund (known by its Spanish acronym, FIE).

In 2003 and 2004, FIE has supported the implementation of School Inclusion Projects in 125 Schools of Regular Education, and in 13 School Inclusion Projects in Uruguay. The regular schools are using FIE to allow for architectural improvements (to facilitate access and mobility by children with visual, hearing, or mobility disabilities within the school space), to obtain specialized support and train its teachers to satisfy the academic needs of all its students and to promote inclusive participation by families and the community as a whole. Special education institutions and civil society organizations linked to the work with people with disabilities participate in the strategy as support and advisory resources.

The implementation of the School Inclusion Fund within the framework of a set of policies tends to reinforce social integration based on equality and poverty reduction, and the lessening of exclusion in Uruguay. As "inclusive education" tends to contribute to quality education for all, the benefits of this project are not limited to those children with a disability or special academic needs but encompass the entire school population by modernizing teaching and learning strategies and promoting the development of social, cognitive and emotional skills so as to achieve better performances from all both at school and outside.

Introducing FIE as a component of a on-going program to improve academic quality allowed the project to benefit from previous learning and from the experience accumulated by Uruguayan teachers and schools in designing and implementing projects. This facilitated the speedy implementation of the fund and the regular and special schools and regional education authorities (called Departmental Inspections in Uruguay) involved participated in a transformation process based on their own needs and resources.

Through these projects, students with disabilities and other special academic needs participate in an inclusion process whose goal is total participation in academic life. Participating schools initiate a process in which they must adapt their teaching and learning strategies to each student's needs and capabilities while at the same time they benefit from the provision of technical and financial assistance needed to carry out the improvements.



I ALTERNATIVES FOR SCHOOL INCLUSION

1 What is Inclusive Education?

Many children enrolled in school, as well as many who are not currently attending school have special needs.

Inclusive Education is an essential resource for working with these children, reintegrating them and defending their space in school. The fundamental principle is that all children should have the same opportunity to learn, and that everybody benefits when children with disabilities and without them learn together. This means that regular schools should be prepared not only to recognize and meet the needs of all students, including those who have traditionally been not only excluded from an access to education, but also to ensure their participation in school under equal conditions.

“Inclusive education” means that schools and teachers adapt to diversity and can respond to the individual needs of their students.

Inclusion of diversity itself already benefits the school, teachers, and all students, allowing them to recognize what is common and different in the schools as part of the same community. The ultimate objective is a healthy and productive population in which everyone fully contributes to and enjoys economic, social, and cultural life.

There are many more children with disabilities than most people realize. According to a 1991 report by the Special United Nations Rapporteur on Human Rights and Persons with Disabilities, in most countries **at least one out of ten persons has a physical, cognitive, or sensory disability** (the latter including deafness and blindness). These 10% represent approximately 50 to 55 million primary school-age children in developing countries. Of these, it is estimated that fewer than 5% finish primary school - a goal set by the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All initiative.



Of a total of 411,000 students registered in the Uruguayan Elementary Education, about 8,800 go to special education schools (boys and girls with intellectual, visual, mobility disabilities, and with personality disorders). Another 3,900 children with disabilities are integrated in regular schools. These children have different types and levels of disabilities that range from learning, speech, physical, mobility, cognitive, sensory, behavioral to emotional. Others have disabilities that are neither obvious nor easily detected. All these children are less likely to attend school, more likely to drop out early or to repeat a grade. Inclusive Education places emphasis on the individual contributions that these children make to the schools they attend and is concerned that they have the opportunity to play an active role in school, overcoming the physical and social barriers that limit their access.

Inclusive schools are built with the participation and agreement of all the educational stakeholders and view the students' learning process as a consequence of their inclusion in the school. Inclusive schools are based on the right that boys and girls have to be recognized, and to recognize themselves, as members of the community to which they belong, regardless of their social context, cultural background, ideology, gender, ethnic group, or personal conditions resulting from a physical, intellectual, or sensory disability or intellectual giftedness.

However, it would be a mistake to believe that the beneficiaries of an inclusive education are limited to the children with disabilities. Diversity benefits the school population as a whole by generating changes that stimulate the social, cognitive and emotional skills and performance of everyone in the school community.



2 The challenge of diversity

The difficulties arising from each child's own characteristics can be compensated for, minimized, or even aggravated as a function of the educational response and characteristics of the school setting in which the child develops. Each school has its own culture, knowledge, values, rituals, and expectations; its own structure and functional dynamics; and its formal and informal communications networks. All of this affects the school's resistance to (or willingness for) change, its flexibility in the face of pressures, and its capacity for openness to diversity. The degree of institutional identity also indicates the possibility of a homogeneous culture coexisting in the school with various heterogeneous cultures, sometimes establishing needs for regulating and formalizing its organizational culture.

3 What are special educational needs?

Special educational needs (whether temporary or permanent) refer to barriers that act by blocking or detaining learning, which encompasses a large number of persons and situations. Nevertheless, there is a longstanding tradition that equates "Special Education" exclusively with students with disabilities, without taking other types of children and needs into account.

It is also true that "special educational needs" do not necessarily have to be met through specialized services or more sophisticated materials than those needed for a regular classroom. Using transformed teaching practices as a starting point can solve many of the requirements of a child with special needs.

The barriers that prevent boys and girls with special educational needs from participating and actively enjoying school are related to highly diverse factors, including the following:

- Cultural and attitudinal barriers involving discriminatory behaviors by other children, their families, and the teaching staff.
- Teacher training, which does not always train teachers to approach the individual needs of their students.



- The curricular design and grading and passing systems, which tend to be based on standard, non-inclusive models.
- Lack of complementary technical and pedagogical resources to reinforce the school's capacity to deal with diversity.¹

4 Why include?

In all of Latin American and the Caribbean, schools have been rethinking their work based on new paradigms and premises, seeking to introduce other ways of reasoning, working, and living together. It is now widely recognized that high-quality public education is a universal right and a fundamental

element for social inclusion. It is also acknowledged that all boys and girls have unique capacities and potentialities, so that diverse characteristics require different responses.

The overall challenge for the future is as simple and complex as answering the following questions: Which values should the school impart in an increasingly segregated, violent, and competitive society? Which knowledge should be transmitted as a priority? What should be done in order to move towards a school with greater equality and better quality?

The value of **Inclusive Education** lies in the possibility of diversifying teaching-learning strategies, adjusting institutional frameworks, linking in different ways the approaches by which students can complete their course of study, highlighting the evolution of each learning process, and considering the different paces required by each individual student.

"Inclusive education is sincerely concerned with all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, and other conditions. Schools with an inclusive orientation should welcome disabled children, children who live on the street, and those work, children from remote and nomad peoples, children from linguistic, ethnic, and cultural minorities, and children from other underprivileged or marginalized groups or areas."

Salamanca Declaration, Point 3 of
the Action Framework



To say that we live in an increasingly diverse society is nothing new. To successfully make this diversity an enriching experience for all is a challenge for everyone, and it will be the main challenge of the new century. Dealing with this challenge requires wagering on new educational, cultural, political, legal, technological, and economic proposals, in a global effort to make the emerging globalized world viable and sustainable. School inclusion becomes effective when a set of school, social, and community actions are organized, planned, and operationalized, and when they adapt in order to guarantee non-exclusion and acceptance of differences. This means not only placing students with disabilities or other special needs in regular classes, but also removing the barriers that prevent their participation in learning, thereby accepting and celebrating individual differences.

5 International Legal Framework

A vast international legal framework on boys and girls with disabilities regulates their right to Inclusive Education and establishes the responsibility of the states to provide it:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989)
- First World Conference on Education for All (Jontien, 1990)
- Inter-American Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Organization of American States, 1999)
- Uniform Standards for Equality of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 1993)
- World Conference on Special Educational Needs, Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994)
-
- Santiago Statement, Second Summit of the Americas (1998)
- World Education Forum, Dakar (2000)
-



- Meeting of Ministers of Education from Ibero-America (2000)
- Millennium Summit (New York, 2000)

- 7th World Congress on Educational Inclusion (San Luis, 2002)

What all these conventions, laws, degrees, declarations, and regulations express is the commitment by the states to effectively incorporate people with different capacities into the various aspects of community life. While their scope varies in terms of their applicability or enforcement, their main motive is to combat discrimination as a threat to the enforcement of the rights of children and adolescents.

This also involves acknowledging the need to include the rights of people with disability in public policy.

6 Is Inclusive Education more expensive?

In the past, many governments failed to provide education for children with disabilities in regular schools, claiming that educational inclusion is costly and produces limited benefits. Nevertheless, the evaluation of international experiences with educational inclusion² has demonstrated that it is no more expensive to educate a child with special educational needs in a regular school than in a special school. In fact, a 1994 study by OECD estimated that the inclusion of children with special educational needs in regular classes might be seven to nine times more cheaper than their placement in special schools.³ Research has also demonstrated that when an inclusive education

² Audit., HMI Commission on Special Education (1992) in CSIE Inclusion Information Guide, www.inclusion.uwe.ac.uk/csie

³ OCDE (1994). *L'integration scolaire des enfants et adolescent handicapés. Ambitions, théories et pratiques*. Paris: OCDE. It is necessary to recognize the need to maintain the focus on "special education" in some cases. Nearly all countries still provide special education for some deaf and blind children. For the deaf population, for example, the positive self-image developed by children in a setting in which sign language is used can be more valuable than the benefits resulting from their inclusion in a regular class.



approach is adopted, there is an increase in overall learning performance and results obtained by all children.

The costs of exclusion are high in terms of lost productivity, wasted human potential, and harm to health and wellbeing, as shown by the following table:



Total annual GDP lost due to disabilities

GDP lost (billions of U\$)	Maximum estimate	Minimum estimate
High-income countries	1,300	900
Medium-income countries	480	339
Low-income countries	192	135
TOTAL	1,936	1,365

Source: R. L. Metts (2000)



II THE URUGUAYAN EXPERIENCE

1 Educational context

Uruguay was a pioneer in Latin America in achieving universal primary education (since the late 1950s). This important achievement has been strengthened in recent years through a strong investment at the preschool level, allowing the country to rapidly universalize access to this level of education for the four-to-six-year-old population.

The transition from a paradigm of social homogeneity to one characterized by heterogeneity is one of the principal challenges for policies in the educational sector. Besides being a challenge, this new reality represents an opportunity for rethinking schools through the paradigm of inclusion.

But in addition to achieving universal access, Uruguay has invested decidedly in improving educational quality and retention rates in primary education, so that some 90% of the population now finish the six years of primary education, placing the country above the average for Latin America and on the road to achieving the same standards as developed countries.

Rapid social transformations in recent decades and deterioration of “educability conditions” (Lopez-Tedesco, 2002) for a major portion of boys and girls attending public schools create an unprecedented scenario for education in Uruguay. The conditions for educability deteriorate when families cannot guarantee their children’s preparation for the requirements of school, but also when schools fail to adapt their work in order to compensate for difficulties and deal with social, cultural, and linguistic diversity.

Thus, the existence of “special educational needs” transcends the issue of disability, and there is an increasing need to make adaptations in the school curriculum and the teaching-learning process in order to cover all students in classrooms in public primary schools. From this perspective, the development of strategies for school inclusion responds to a paradigm shift in education, seeking a transition from the homogeneity model to that of diversity, from exclusion to inclusion, attempting to provide equal



opportunities and meet the needs of all persons. The transition from the social homogeneity paradigm towards one characterized by heterogeneity and inequality (with all the implications in the processes of socialization and construction of knowledge) is one of the principle challenges for policies in the educational sector. This means an opportunity for rethinking schools through the paradigm of inclusion:

- fostering new forms of teaching, in keeping with the “conditions for educability” and including everyone;
- providing greater flexibility in institutional frameworks in order to seek a better link between families and the school community; and
- an inclusive approach to the completion of students’ course of study in school, highlighting each student’s progress as required in each individual case so as to interrupt the vicious circle of segregation and dropout by the weakest.

2 Attention to “special educational needs” in Uruguay

In Uruguay, the right to education is linked to the democratic tradition and the ideals of the founders of a public school system that has been a model in the Latin American and Caribbean region, based on the principles of universal, free, and mandatory schooling.

Historically, however, attention to children with “special educational needs” has been the responsibility of Special Education Schools. The noteworthy expansion of special schools led to a total of 75 establishments countrywide by the mid -1960s, a figure that has remained constant since then, reflecting a policy that seeks to invest public resources in inclusive approaches and equal opportunities.

Along with these developments in the field of Special Education, Uruguay has been a pioneer in the Latin American and Caribbean region in terms of including deaf and blind children in regular schools. This policy was also backed for many years by the inclusion of teachers with visual and hearing disabilities in regular schools.



In 1985, with the return of democracy to the country, the Board of Primary Education developed a Special Education Project proposing the elimination of closed classes in regular schools and moving to a system of support classes for students with special educational needs. Pioneering experiences were conducted, such as that in School No. 70 and several kindergartens, in which the goal has been to train and advise regular school teachers. This process led to the creation of “support teachers” and “itinerant teachers”, aimed at responding to the educational needs of boys and girls integrated through a personalized proposal within the framework of regular schools.

Since 2001, collaborative projects have been carried out with the Organization of American States (OAS) in 6 schools in Montevideo.⁴ This experience emphasizes teacher training and extends the concept of special educational needs to include those resulting from critical socioeconomic settings and expands the inclusive universe into secondary education.

The “Educational Policy Guidelines” proposed for 2001-2004 provide a new milestone that additionally demonstrates an inclusive and pro-diversity approach to the management of overall educational policies. These guidelines emphasize the need to foster successful learning through a series of tools based on the concept of inclusive attention to special educational needs:

- The teacher’s attention to each child’s individual pace and unique characteristics;
- Attention to the diversity of cultural and psychosocial situations;
- Promotion of teaching strategies that are adjusted in order to work with diverse populations;
- Orientation of school management according to children’s rights; and
- Facilitation of coordination and intra- and inter-institutional integration, developing networks for school-community interaction.

⁴ “Educating through Diversity in the Mercosur Countries”, a Multinational Project for Technical Assistance and Personnel Training in Special Education, OAS



3 Legal Framework

International norms and commitments signed by Uruguay in the Treaties for the Rights of Children and the International Conventions on Disability provide the inspiration and shape for educational policies that seek inclusion of all boys and girls in school. National Act No. 16.095 (1989) on “Comprehensive Protection for Persons with Disabilities” establishes the principle of “equalization of opportunities” and safeguards the right to education for boys and girls with disabilities or other special educational needs, besides emphasizing the importance of promoting inclusive environments in the school and community.⁵

Within the framework of advances in school inclusion policies, Uruguay is currently reviewing the school standards and rules related to grading and passing systems to adjust them to the principles of diversity and seek to have all children allowed to obtain appropriate certification for their course of study in school.

⁵ Other pertinent Uruguayan legislation includes Act 16592 on “Severe Disabilities”; Act 13711 on “Diagnosis of Mental Retardation”; Act 16095 on the “System for Guaranteeing Comprehensive Protection for People with Disabilities”; and Act 16,169, “Amendment to Provision of the Act on the System for Comprehensive Protection”.



4 Alternatives for School Inclusion

Students with special educational needs (whether resulting from disability or otherwise) can be part of a school inclusion project in a regular school through various curricular options displaying different degrees of inclusion in common spaces:

OPTION 1: The student participates in all activities in the regular course and receives specialized attention in an individual class with the help of a special itinerant teacher (in a complementary mode).

OPTION 2: The student participates in all the activities in the regular course and in those learning areas or sub-sectors in which he or she requires more significant curricular adaptations in the resource classroom with the special itinerant teacher.

OPTION 3: The student participates in some learning sub-sectors with the regular course, while the areas or sub-sectors with the curriculum adapted to his or her special educational needs are conducted in the resource classroom with specialized itinerant support.

OPTION 4: The student participates in a special curriculum, attending all the activities in the specialized classroom and sharing recess, official acts and ceremonies, and extracurricular activities in general with his or her schoolmates. This represents an option for the boy or girl's physical and social integration.



III DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL INCLUSION FUND

1 Composition of the School Inclusion Fund (FIE)

The development of the **School Inclusion Fund (FIE)** emerged in Uruguay in 2003 as part of the process of Improvement in Educational Quality that the country had been implementing since 1994.

With resources from the National Department of Public Education and the World Bank, the FIE

funds school inclusion projects, providing Uruguayan schools with the opportunity to practice school inclusion policies within an overall strategy for defending equity and improving educational quality.

The integration of the School Inclusion Fund as a component of the Project for Quality Improvement in Primary Education (MECAEP) allowed the country to capitalize on the lessons learned and the experience accumulated by teachers and schools in the formulation and management of Educational Improvement Projects (PME).

2 A contribution to educational quality

Since it is contained within the framework of an overall strategy to improve educational quality, the **School Inclusion Fund** reaffirms a paradigm that transcends the traditional view of disability and the way schools respond to special educational needs by joining with (and contributing) to the overall processes of institutional empowerment, autonomous school management, teacher training and development, and improvement in family-school-community links.

The School Inclusion Fund is implemented within the framework of a set of social policies aimed at strengthening social integration on the basis of equity and the reduction of poverty and exclusion in Uruguayan society.



To improve quality requires enriching the educational processes by which students develop their learning experience. It involves adjusting and updating the curricular content and teaching activities as ways of helping students develop socially significant and relevant learning, allowing them to perform adequately on the cognitive, emotional, productive, ethical, and social levels.

The integration of the School Inclusion Fund as a component of a broader educational program already under way allowed the country to capitalize on the lessons learned and the experience accumulated by teachers and schools in the formulation and management of Educational Improvement Projects.

From the perspective of its contribution to the improvement of educational quality, the implementation of Educational Improvement Projects with financing from the School Inclusion Fund allowed for advances in two concrete objectives:

- 1. Stimulating decentralization and school autonomy, allowing the educational institutions to strengthen their Pedagogical Projects (i.e., Educational Development Projects or School Projects) as a way of progressively achieving tangible improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.*

Educational Improvement Projects have become a real and effective tool for autonomous school management in Uruguay, since teachers themselves (in consultation with children and their families) conduct an analysis of the school's overall situation and its variables (physical, spatial, organizational, and relational), interpreting what is most visible, meanwhile unveiling the less obvious factors that condition the life of the entire educational community. From there on they build their own path towards the implementation of educational changes, carrying out what is possible, identifying the difficulties, and maximizing the strengths and resources of both the school institution and the community.

Participating schools have shown progress in the development of strategies for autonomy. Favorable indicators of this process include the growing use of innovative teaching and learning methodologies, increased opportunities for teacher training, and strengthening of family-school-community ties.



2. Establishing conditions and strategies for the inclusion of all children.

In a context of heavy socioeconomic deterioration and social transformations that affect all groups, schools are increasingly committed to their role of integrating and weaving the social fabric. The exclusion of underprivileged boys and girls (either because of their different abilities or differences resulting from their socio-cultural backgrounds) raise the challenge for educational institutions to provide an appropriate response to such diversity.



IV THE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL

1 A tool for change

The **Educational Improvement Projects (PMEs)** represent an initiative of the National Department of Public Education (ANEP), the head educational authority in Uruguay. The Projects' implementation comes under the Board of Primary Education (CEP) with national budget funds and financing from the World Bank within the framework of the Project for Quality Improvement in Primary Education (MECAEP).

Educational Improvement Projects provide schools with the opportunity to invest in change by means of strategies emerging from the teaching staff's own initiative and as a function of the existing curriculum, with the children as the center of the teaching process.

Uruguay began implementing the PMEs in 1995 as a tool for institutional and pedagogical transformation with the aim of producing a positive impact on the quality of learning. The Educational Improvement Projects aim to enrich the teaching-learning process and provide the school with a medium- and long-term plan to integrate classroom and extra-curricular activities in a theme chosen by the educational community itself, based on its relevance and capacity to optimize the learning processes at all levels.

Until 2001 the Educational Improvement Projects component underwent a process of experimentation and validation under the MECAEP. Having evaluated their success and achieved their consolidation, the Projects were incorporated institutionally as a regular program of the Board of Primary Education. MECAEP monitors the entire process with capacity-building for the schools in both drafting proposals and management of projects.

Since the beginning of the program in Uruguay, more than 1,600 PMEs has been funded, reaching a total of nearly 420,000 students and at least 18,050 teachers participating directly. Some 64% of these PMEs have targeted urban schools, 19% rural schools, and 17% special schools. More than half of the projects are in schools



with students from socially underprivileged backgrounds. An average of one out of three proposals has been funded, and each project has lasted from one to two years. The funds allocated have averaged U\$2,100 per project, depending on the student body at each school.

2 Types of Educational Improvement Projects (PMEs)

From their initial implementation until 2001, the PMEs covered the more traditional areas of the school curriculum: Language, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Art Education, as well as those linked to crosscutting areas: Education in Values, Health, and Environment. These PMEs are known as “classics”.

Through the Educational Improvement Project, the school seeks to generate spaces for creation and reflection that allow it to identify its priority problems and build possible strategies to solve them, with the teaching staff as the main manager in the process of change and the children as its main protagonists.

In the year 2002 a new classification was adopted to give greater specificity to projects in the areas of Health and the Environment. These projects aim to integrate “*education for life and the environment*” into the school’s daily life, as part of commitment to the children’s formation and integral development, fostering healthy habits and responsible behaviors in relation to themselves and the environment.

3 Preliminary Results

An impact study conducted in Uruguay in 2000 showed the following in relation to Educational Improvement Projects:

- The Projects improve school efficiency and efficacy in management and scheduling.
- They strengthen teachers’ work culture and improve their relations with students’ families and communities.
- They improve students’ curricular performance.



- They help reduce the gap between the academic performances of schools from favorable as compared to underprivileged socioeconomic settings.
- From 1996 and 1999, the improvement in student performance was greater in schools with PME as compared to the national average.

In addition, it was shown that the benefits of PMEs go beyond their direct educational impact on students. The school dynamics as a whole are transformed when PMEs are implemented, including: the relationship between the school and the community, between teachers and students, and among teachers themselves, concentrated on a common project, with a common objective. This strengthens teamwork and increases the level of motivation, which influences everyone's attitudes. The very preparation of a work plan to submit a proposal for a PME is highly positive because of the critical analysis and strategic thinking it requires of the school.

4 PMEs for School Inclusion and Transformation of Teaching Practices

The **PMEs for School Inclusion and Transformation of Teaching Practices** (ITP/PMEs) incorporated in Uruguay since 2003 and financed by the School Inclusion Fund are a highly valuable resource for the democratization of education. They are implemented within the framework of a series of public policies aimed at strengthening social integration based on equity and the struggle against exclusion in Uruguayan society. School inclusion is thus seen as a strategy that helps promote an inclusive society in which everyone (children and adults) is able to participate, regardless of gender, age, race, background, ability, or disability.

The main proposal of the ITP/PMEs is to contribute to improving the quality and equity of Uruguayan education. A specific goal is to provide an appropriate and relevant response to the diversity of needs emerging from the students' family and individual realities and which impact teaching practice in classrooms.



The ITP/PMEs are based on teachers' prior knowledge of the methodology for formulation and management of school projects. The contextualization and decentralization of the pedagogical task are two characteristics that guarantee their gradual process of empowerment in the schools through this initiative.

When a regular school's classrooms receive children with special educational needs (SEN) and ensure the completion of their schooling and participation with equal opportunities, it becomes an Inclusive School. The ITP/PMEs offer regular schools the possibility of accessing "special" technical and financial resources that allow them to organize strategies for inclusion.

5 Some examples

In Uruguay, since 2003 School Inclusion Projects are being developed in 125 schools and in 13 Departmental Inspections.

Some of these projects are using FIE to pay for the architectural changes needed to facilitate access and mobility by children with visual, hearing, or mobility disabilities within the physical space of the schools themselves. Other projects use the resources provided by FIE to hire specialists and to incorporate innovative practices such as "yoga in schools" (which fosters a climate of friendship and openness to the needs of all).

What are an Inclusive School's values?

- To build a sense of community, promote everyone's belonging and participation, and help achieve democracy and citizenship.
- To develop a sense of empathy by teaching that all persons have unique characteristics and abilities.
- To promote the value of diversity, favoring the learning of skills for living in a community.
- To help recognize that all students have strengths, cultivating self-esteem, strengthening the sense of self-respect and individuality.
- To increase creative ways of dealing with challenges, teaching collective problem-solving, and developing teamwork skills.
- To provide all children with stimulating surroundings in which to grow and learn.



Other institutions have improved their institutional capacity by training teachers and updating their libraries and academic resources.

To learn from selected ITP/PMEs examples in Uruguay in 2003-2004, visit:

Access stories written first-hand by teachers and students by visiting Uruguay's Elementary School Council's electronic bulletin at:

http://www.cep.edu.uy/InformacionInstitucional/InspecDivDptos/Deptosyservicios/PME/Inclusion/ultimo_boletin.htm



V OPERATIONAL ASPECTS

1 How is an Educational Improvement Project formulated?

The procedures for drafting a proposal for an Educational Improvement Project (PME) can be explained simply as follows:

- The school's faculty starts with its observation of a current and real situation which is considered unsatisfactory and improvable within the classroom framework.
- Having analyzed the situation, the school's staff proposes the search for solutions to what is considered the "main problem". They thus propose strategies and actions focusing on an integrating thematic line.
- A project document is drafted based on the PME Drafting Manual.
- The project's documents are evaluated and selected by an ad hoc committee including school inspectors, directors of Teacher Training Institutes, and superintendents/principals of so-called Practice Schools (for teachers-in-training).

The forms used by schools to design their Inclusion Projects and Operations Manual can be obtained at the following internet address:

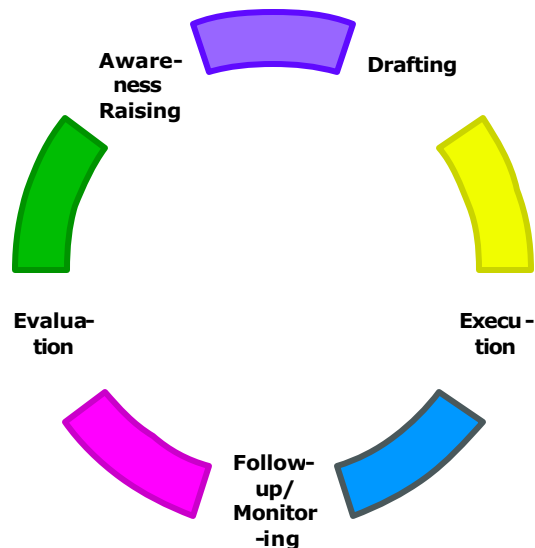
<http://www.cep.edu.uy/InformacionInstitucional/InspecDivDptos/Deptosyservicios/PME/Inclusion/documentos.htm>

2 From awareness-raising to evaluation: the project cycle

The development of an Educational Improvement Project involves a series of stages aimed at institutional relevance and definition of appropriate and useful objectives in light of the priorities of each school and community (relevance). A project cycle thus unfolds in which a series of successive stages can be observed:

- **Awareness-raising**, the stage in which it is necessary to encourage and motivate the various players in the school and the community to become involved in the initiative for producing changes in the school.
- **Drafting or formulation**, in which the entire school community is involved in envisaging the project's achievements and "expected results" based on the identification of a problem situation, target-setting, and development of an action plan.

- **Execution**, consisting of the implementation of the activities planned in the Project.
- **Follow-up and monitoring**, the process of on-going evaluation and verification of the project's development and results, including adjustments in the original plan.
- **Evaluation**, the process which captures learning experiences and provides information on the achievement of goals and objectives, serving as input for reopening the project cycle.



3 Who participates?

All institutions belonging to public primary education participate in the Call for Projects financed by the School Inclusion Fund:

Regular Urban Schools

Special Education Schools

Rural Schools

Full-Time Schools

Practice Schools

Kindergartens

All the schools are invited to draft proposals and apply for the resources available through the School Inclusion Fund. In order to be selected, the applicant schools (both



urban and rural) should have a staff of three or more teachers. Rural schools with only one or two teachers are eligible as so-called "consolidated school groups", by which up to three schools pool together to develop an Inclusion Project, sharing the technical and financial resources allocated to them.

4 How are participating schools selected?

The allocation and distribution of funds for Educational Improvement Projects is based on an open contest in which all public schools in Uruguay are invited to participate. Schools only participate if they are interested in doing so.

The Call for Projects is conducted annually. The projects are evaluated by a specially designated panel which bases its work on an Evaluation Manual specially designed for this purpose.

In order to keep Project selection from concentrating on the schools with the greatest institutional and project-drafting capacity, the allocation of Educational Improvement Projects is guided by the principle of equity, establishing a system of vacancies based on socio-economic characteristics included a positive discrimination for schools displaying the greatest needs and/or unsatisfactory educational results.

An index based to also understand the project distribution in the urban and rural schools was created based on socioeconomic, institutional-functioning, and results indicators. For rural schools, the indicator adopted was the repetition rate. Distribution is as follows:

1. 50% of PME in high-risk schools

What are the alternatives for drafting School Inclusion projects?

- A regular school drafts a School Inclusion project.
- Several regular schools from the same rural area pool together to draft a School Inclusion project.
- A State School Inspection Division drafts a School Inclusion project.
- A Special Education school drafts a project to develop itself into a Resource Center to support inclusive schools.



2. 30% of PME's in medium-risk schools

3. 20% of PME's in low-risk schools

This overall strategy led to a distribution of PME's with some 85% in urban schools – including special schools - and 15% in rural schools with more than one teacher.

5 How are the funds calculated?

The financial support for Educational Improvement Projects is provided by the National Department of Public Education through the Project for Quality Improvement in Primary Education (World Bank). As of the year 2003, the MECAEP Project had funded a total of 1,250 Educational Improvement Projects in public schools all over Uruguay.

The average amount allocated per project varies from U\$1,500 to U\$3,000.

The amount of funds that the school receives to develop its Improvement Project is calculated on the basis of the number of students enrolled for the school year under way at the time the proposal is submitted, applying the following formula:

Basic Amount (same for all schools) U\$1,000
Additional Amount (proportional to the number of students) U\$4.40 x N (where N is the number of students enrolled)

Having signed the institutional agreement, the funds are disbursed in two equal installments.



6 What are the benefits received by schools?

The schools selected to develop an IPT/PME receive technical and financial assistance for a period of one year. This assistance is provided gradually over the course of the year in which the Improvement Project is implemented. During the development of the Projects, each school must submit regular progress and accounting reports, as well as a Final Report when the Project is concluded.

Financial Assistance

The financial assistance covers a series of additional expenditures beyond the school's regular budget, allowing it to make investments and improvements as a function of its Improvement Project objectives.

Technical Assistance

1. At the beginning of year, Project Management Advisory Workshops are held with the Principal and Teachers who are named the "Educational Improvement Project Teacher-Coordinators".
2. In the middle of each year, "Learning School" workshops are held with the participation of the teachers and principals of all the schools that are implementing Educational Improvement Projects. These workshops aim to foster a formal space for exchange on the progress and difficulties faced by the Projects, sharing innovative strategies and materials.

The schools receive

Technical Assistance

- ❖ Teacher training
- ❖ Follow-up and supervision
- ❖ Participation in exchange activities
- ❖ Access to national and international networks

Financial Assistance

- ❖ For purchase of educational materials
- ❖ For extra expenses linked to project activities
- ❖ For minor improvements aimed at removal of architectural barriers and improvement of non-classroom spaces



3. Many school districts hold Educational Improvement Project exhibits with participation by students and teachers in order to publicize the progress to the broader community.
4. Monitoring and follow-up of each Improvement Project is done by the State School Inspection Division, specifically by the School Inspector corresponding to the given School, in coordination and collaboration with staff from the PME Department in the Board of Primary Education.



VI COMPLEMENTARY STRATEGIES

The schools that implement School Inclusion PME's begin a long process, full of challenges and difficulties, for which they need on-going support and follow-up actions.

Uruguay has worked to develop a sustainability strategy that promotes mechanisms for cooperation among all the persons and institutions participating in the School Inclusion Project, fostering greater and better utilization of resources, exchange of information, and the development of learning networks and communities. This strategy seeks to develop and strengthen some key factors for support and follow-up of the work by Inclusive Schools:

- **Institutional commitment and technical support by the State School Inspection Divisions of the Board of Primary Education.**
- **Conversion of Special Education Schools into Centers for Inclusion Resources.**
- **Mobilization of (and collaboration with) civil society and nongovernmental organizations.**
- **Development of a Network of Inclusive Schools and a virtual community of teachers and students involved in the Project.**
- **Sustained action in advocacy and social communications.**
- **Facilitating of a component involving child leadership for inclusion.**



1 The Role of State School Inspection Divisions

The State School Inspection Divisions⁶ can also participate by submitting proposals oriented towards improving school inclusion in all the schools under their jurisdiction. The Educational Improvement Projects carried out by State School Inspection Divisions were introduced in 2003 and have already received highly positive feedback.

The School Inspection Divisions participate by proposing an Improvement Project based on the same criteria used for drafting school projects: identify a priority theme or institutional weakness, propose the action strategies to solve it, and draft an annual activities plan. These projects are seen as complementary strategies, making School Inclusion feasible at the overall State level and playing a key role in consensus-building and mobilization of regional resources.

The ITP/PMEs headed by the State School Inspection Divisions receive a fixed sum of U\$1,000 and generally have such objectives as community awareness-raising, training of teachers within their jurisdiction, or development of exchange and networking activities among the participating schools.

Examples of ITP/PMEs headed by School Inspection Divisions and approved in 2003 included: school district courses, meetings and exchanges between participating schools and teachers, professional symposia to disseminate the theme of inclusion, consultancy for the drafting and management of ITP/PMEs, and networking.

2 The Role of Special Education Schools

The School Inclusion Fund also allows for the conversion of Special Schools into Resource Centers in order for them to be able to provide support to the regular schools and their communities in the inclusion process. Special Education Schools are invited to submit Improvement Projects oriented towards the development of Resource Centers, and if selected they receive a fixed sum of U\$2,000.

⁶ Uruguay is divided into 19 *Departamentos*, the equivalent of States or Provinces.



The ITP/PMEs headed by the Special Education Schools can take shape through various actions:

- Relocation of students to regular schools
- Dual school programs
- Organization and management of itinerant teachers' services
- Pedagogical research and consultancy
- Multidisciplinary reports and diagnoses
- Collaboration in curricular adjustments
- Monitoring and follow-up of inclusion
- Response to queries and requests by fathers and mothers
- Technology consultancy to regular schools for the formulation, management, or evaluation of school inclusion projects.

3 The Role of Civil Society

The relationship between schools and civil society organizations is not new to Uruguay. There are experiences with collaborative activities and civil society organizations that date back many years and they display a distinct degree of development. In such innovative areas as environmental education, there is significant participation by nongovernmental organizations through collaborative projects with schools. This provides a wealth of significant experiences, and although these collaborative experiences have not been fully evaluated, their sustained expansion suggests that the schools regard them highly.

At the international level, all specialized agencies emphatically recommend that schools promote participation by civil society organization both in school management issues and in quality improvement and strengthening of the school-community link, recognizing the latter as social capital and considering it an indicator of the quality of social responsibility and citizenship. Based on these recommendations, it has been proposed that several elements be taken into account in the quality of "principles" to develop an effective link between schools and civil society organizations:



Definition of adequate and pertinent goals

It is necessary for civil society's collaboration to adjust primarily to the school's needs and priorities and only in second place to the supply of cooperation.

Program monitoring

It is necessary to provide follow-up on the collaborative activity, regularly monitoring and evaluating its quality, feedback, and impact.

Sustainability

To the extent that the involvement of civil society organizations in school activity is only possible through volunteer work or the mobilization of additional resources, it is necessary to consider the issue of sustainability and define expectable objectives and results in the short and medium term.

Dissemination

It is important to create a "database" that recompiles the available technical, financial, and human resources in the nongovernmental organizations.

4 Development of a Network of Inclusive Schools

Technological progress in communications opens up new challenges and opportunities for education. The circulation of knowledge, experiences, educational tools, and school support materials is increasingly intense, among other reasons thanks to the Internet. With the constant growth of connectivity and progress with new communications technologies, the utilization of web-based strategies and online tools is increasingly becoming a real alternative for teachers, students, and schools all over the world.

The utilization of network strategies and information and communications technologies to support inclusion projects has valuable antecedents in experiences carried out in the United Kingdom, Spain, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Peru, and elsewhere. The development of these virtual networks and communities has sought to foster



participation by students, their families, and civil society organizations, under the premise that interaction among peers enriches the teaching and learning processes.

Uruguay has proposed to develop a virtual community joining the Inclusive Schools and all those who participate in the teaching and learning processes, seeking to provide a tool for permanent support and solve problems of time, distance, and resources.

The cooperative work involving State School Inspection Divisions, Special Schools, and teachers participating in the project through a “Network of Inclusive Schools” allows the common implementation of the foundations for Inclusive Education as well as the instruments and resources that are produced in the implementation of the projects at the classroom and school levels. The development of a Network of Inclusive Schools in Uruguay points to the provision of the following services:

- Making specialized information available to the schools
- Responding to queries
- Facilitating exchange of experiences
- Orienting information searches through links to specialized sites
- Organizing forums on issues and concerns raised by the participants
- Announcing events (congresses, courses, seminars)
- Sustaining the membership of persons and institutions in a network of inclusion-based practices.



Some School Inclusion Networks around the World

- Red de Inclusión Educativa de Chile www.inclusioneducativa.org
- Inclusion International www.inclusion-international.org
- Inclusion Network www.inclusion.org
- Centre for Studies on School Inclusion (UK) www.inclusion.uwe.ac.uk/csie
- Red de Integración Especial www.redespecialweb.org/
- The School as a Caring Community in Canada, www.quasar.ualberta.ca/ddc/incl
- Supporting Individual Educational Needs in the United Kingdom www.inclusion.ngfl.gov.uk/
- Inclusive Education www.uni.edu/coe/inclusion/
- Inclusive Education in Europe www.uva.es/inclusion/
- Alliance for Inclusive Education in the United Kingdom www.allfie.org.uk/
- Circle of Inclusion www.circleofinclusion.org/spanish
- Red de Discapacidad e Educación Especial www.especiales.org/
- Inclusión Interamericana. www.inclusion-international.org/Regions/americas.htm
- Paso a Paso, Venezuela www.pasoapaso.com.ve
- Educación Inclusiva para Niños Ciegos www.manolo.net
- Enabling Education: resources for inclusive education <http://www.eenet.org.uk/>



5 Advocacy and Communications Strategies

It is necessary to support the work done by Inclusive Schools through permanent advocacy and dissemination of the principles, objectives, and achievements, because the social demand for these kinds of projects is often low, and frequently the potential benefits are not clearly visible. Sometimes the issue of School Inclusion runs up against established beliefs and social norms, or the perception is that inclusion will demand more resources (both technical and financial) than those available to carry out the proposals.

Based on the above, advocacy and communications actions become fundamental tools for support and follow-up to develop and advance the School Inclusion Fund. This means a sustained strategy in public relations and consensus-building with all the stakeholders: middle-level employees in the State School Inspection Divisions, teachers, families, unions, and NGOs.

Main objectives of advocacy and communications strategies

- Achieve adherence by key actors (school inspectors, special education administrators and teachers, principals, and teachers) for the project drafting stage.
- Encourage the development of an inclusive school culture.
- Position the Educational Improvement Projects for School Inclusion and Transformation of Practices as benchmarks for establishing Inclusive Schools.
- Make the initiative known to the entire educational community to ensure support and participation.
- Raise overall public awareness concerning the issue of social inclusion in order to commit stakeholders to the implementation of the necessary changes.

In the Uruguayan experience, both communications work and advocacy (through political and institutional support by educational professionals and authorities) have been key factors in favor of Inclusive Education ever since it was launched, leveling the playing field and seeking a positive response to the projects in the schools.



The advocacy and communications activities seek to achieve four essential objectives: information, motivation, dissemination, and networking.

Information: explaining and awareness-raising

It may be that the various social actors are aware of the existence of socio-cultural diversity and the right to Education for All, but that not everyone feels equally committed to its implications. To inform on the need for social and educational inclusion for all persons means to make the issue known and to generate a collective awareness of this right.

Motivation

Since inclusion represents a new way of conceiving education, it is important to not assume that everyone will automatically understand this conceptual framework and its implications. To communicate the various dimensions and scopes of an inclusive strategy means to provide backing and commitments to a diverse and inclusive school, and not merely a campaign “to be nicer” to “different” people.

Presenting the project

Presenting the project means making the theme of inclusion known to the various actors in the educational community and related institutions in order for it to be understood and accepted by the strategy’s various target publics.

Connectivity network

This activity involves collaborating in the development of a connectivity component in order for Inclusive Schools to integrate, participate in exchanges, and share educational resources and information and teacher training materials.



The advocacy and communications strategy of the School Inclusion Fund has targeted a set of actors and sectors in which it has sought to raise awareness and a sense of commitment for them to act as promoters and key disseminators of inclusion. This task has included all those directly involved in the theme of Educational Inclusion (the educational community, professionals, and related institutions) and social leaders, opinion-makers, and the community at large. This has meant including “segmented” actions and messages both within and outside the educational system:

Internal Public

State and national school inspectors
School superintendents and principals
Teachers
Students
School promotion committees
Families and the Community

External Public

Social communications media
Public forming a support network for educational inclusion:
National agencies (Ministries and Social Action Agencies)
International Agencies
Academic Institutions and teacher training institutions)
Civil society organizations (parent associations, NGOs, academic and scientific societies, social and sports clubs, religious institutions)



Communications pieces developed to date

- PME/ITP logotype
- Poster
- Promotional leaflet on the initiative
- Teachers' support document for "communication with families"
- Teachers' support document for developing an informational leaflet for parents⁷
- Webpage
- Newsletter⁸

Suggested promotional and communications actions

- Public awards for community members who work to promote inclusion
- Art / music / dance workshops for children in public places
- Inclusion Concert
- Art Exhibit for Inclusion
- Walk for Inclusion
- A star soccer match for inclusion, held in the National Stadium
- Distribution of flyers at stoplights by the children and teachers themselves
- Creation of a song by local musicians
- Reading of stories on inclusion in public places (by writers and academics)
- Posters, flyers, and leaflets in public-use areas (public and private)
- Painting of murals in schools (painting donated by a private sponsor with collaboration by volunteer artists)
- Inclusion workshops for parents in schools (led by people from the support network)
- Painting contest among schoolchildren to be used in an almanac

⁷ It was considered more appropriate for each school to be able to develop its own "tailor-made" leaflet rather than having a single leaflet. A support document for teachers was developed for this purpose.

⁸ Monthly newsletter targeting teachers, educational institutions, and families.



6 The role of schoolchildren as agents for inclusion

In the final analysis, the future of every school inclusion strategy depends on the participating schoolchildren and teachers making the objectives and strategies their own. It is necessary for the principles of inclusion and diversity to succeed in permeating both the classrooms and recess, thereby becoming an everyday and gratifying experience for all. During the year 2004, Uruguay has carried out a pilot experiment seeking to develop a child leadership component in the School Inclusion initiative.

These “inclusive leadership” training and empowerment activities with boys and girls participating in the ITP/PMEs have attempted to:

- Record the living dimension of the experience of boys and girls participating in the Project for Inclusion and Transformation of Practices in a group of schools.
- Prove (in a pilot mode) a methodology to strengthen the leadership and participation of boys and girls as agents for school inclusion.
- Examine the perceptions of boys and girls concerning the inclusion process and share with them a first analysis of the initiative’s principal barriers, strengths, and weaknesses.

Participating in the project were 4 regular schools that are currently implementing School Inclusion Educational Improvement Projects. The schools invited to participate in this proposal were selected from among those developing Projects with a strong component of schoolchildren’s participation in achieving the objectives of inclusion.



The selected schools were:

In Montevideo

- School No. 38, classified as a regular urban school and which has students with special educational needs based on visual disabilities, with an inclusive modality.
- School No. 336, with a critical socio-cultural context.

In Las Piedras

- School No. 226, classified as a Practice School (for teachers-in-training) and which has students with special educational needs based on hearing disabilities, with an integration modality.
- School No. 149, a regular urban school.

In each school the activity involved fourth- and fifth-grade boys and girls. The sample population was chosen on the basis of strengthening each institution for multiplying the experience. The groups had diverse characteristics in terms of their social contexts and cognitive skills. They were chosen at random, without explicitly seeking students with special educational needs.

The exchange activity included a total of 63 boys and girls selected by their own peers.

In a first stage (preparation, sensitization, warm-up), the team of educators and specialists heading the project visited the selected schools and carried out the preparatory activities in a meeting among the schools. These activities had a playful focus aimed at:

- exploring game dynamics in relation to the issue of inclusion (participation, leadership, segregation, resistance);
- laying the foundations for the preparation of a “project task” to be developed by the boys and girls with the objective of raising their awareness and



providing continuity for this first activity, while preparing the ground for the second activity; and

- identifying the boys and girls most sensitized to the issue of inclusion.

Subsequently, an exchange meeting was held among the schoolchildren from the participating schools, seeking to take a first step towards the integration of a network of boys and girls committed to the principles of inclusion. It is expected that in the future they will be able to replicate in their own schools the activities they experienced in the exchange as a way of facilitating feedback and dissemination of the learning process, while practicing modalities of leadership and participation.

Schoolchildren's traits as agents for inclusion

- Attuned to cooperative group work.
- Ability to engage in dialogue with peers.
- Willingness to organize themselves and others for the group task.
- Positive attitude towards the work.
- Know how to clarify and precisely describe ideas and feelings.
- Ability to sum up the key points in the inclusive message, demonstrating their understanding of the essence of what is said.
- Ability to show empathy, putting themselves in the other's place.



VII ALTERNATIVES AND CHALLENGES

1 Certification of included schoolchildren

The certification of boys and girls attending inclusive schools is still one of the main challenges, both in administrative and legal terms and for educational quality. How has this issue been dealt with in the Uruguayan experience?

Just as the curriculum must adapt, grading and evaluation must also be made flexible, assessing the students' achievements based on individual characteristics, paces, and learning styles. A personalized curricular proposal and flexible evaluation will allow the student to move through the various stages in the mandatory course of study. Certification is provided through a document that reflects the level of competence achieved by the student.

Traditionally, upon completing their course of study, students attending Special Schools in Uruguay have received a certificate of school completion which enables them to continue some studies: in night schools, courses in the National Plenary for People with Disabilities, and attendance through the (scarce) places offered at the *Universidad del Trabajo* (Work University). The latter has consolidated and expanded its number of included students, depending on the willingness of the various departments to become "inclusive centers". The enactment of new legislation in 1989⁹ established the principle of "equalization of opportunities" and launched the process of approval of standards in Secondary Education to allow the effective inclusion of students with different abilities.

Awareness-raising in society and expansion of the inclusion policy have made it necessary to rethink the support provided to teachers and students to guarantee the schoolchildren's mandatory course of study with quality and equity. Inclusion projects have demarcated a "before and after" in the inclusion process and become a key factor for the established standards to materialize, guaranteeing the students' completion of the full course of mandatory schooling. This means that for every included student in the regular school system, a curriculum will be developed that is adapted to his or her possibilities. In addition, it is necessary to sign inter-institutional agreements that guarantee an inclusive setting and support, allowing access to the curriculum.

Some strategies for certification of included students

- **Incorporate a "Student's Portfolio" from Primary Education through the third year of Secondary Education**

This portfolio records basic information on the child (cards, technical reports, records of characteristic moments in the process) in order for teachers to be able to accommodate the curriculum, adapting it to the student's educational possibilities.

⁹ Act 16.095 "Comprehensive Protection for Persons with Disabilities"



- **Establish quality indicators in the inclusion processes and conditions for detecting signs of the absence of such processes**

The indicators to be taken into consideration are:

- ✓ Work environment and inclusion
- ✓ Level of significant activity by the student
- ✓ Time reference and continuity of the adaptations
- ✓ Degree of participation in classroom activity

2 Guide the transformation of Special Schools into Resource Centres for Inclusive Education

Although it is important to have the special education schools voluntarily comply with the inclusive education focus and generate their own strategies to transform themselves into resource centers, this process can not be but guided and spearheaded by clear policies that stimulate changes and present tangible tools to favour inclusive education.

The Inclusive School Fund can and should put economic incentives and institutional policies in motion so as to overcome the logical resistances to change by presenting concrete alternatives to transformation and by spreading the most accomplishing of experiences.

3 Address the socio-cultural dimension of inclusion

Any strategy for School Inclusion is ultimately a strategy for social inclusion. That is why the existing barriers in the socio-cultural dimension of the inclusion process should be taken into account and dealt with. Amongst these, we can list some that have been more evident in the Uruguayan experience:

- Attitudes by fathers and mothers:
 - resistance to change, both for the children already attending the schools and those we are seeking to include;
 - fear of having less individual support available; and



- fear of losing special benefits;
- A strong “culture of homogeneity”:
 - It is felt that children with special educational needs will achieve worse results in regular schools.
 - It is believed that the presence of children with special educational needs in regular classrooms will delay the learning process for the entire group.

Removing these barriers is a long process, since it requires attitude changes. Along the way, they are some guidelines that can orient the process and help everyone overcome the barriers to inclusion:

- Get families involved.
- Open the schools to the community and civil society organizations.
- Strengthen networks and alliances between the school and the community.
- Work together with the Special Schools to narrow the gap between regular education and special education.

4 Developing Mechanisms for Monitoring and Evaluation

The brief period since implementing Uruguay’s School Inclusion Fund does not allow a summative evaluation of the results. In spite of that, and beyond corroborating the existence of a favourable and enthusiastic climate in those schools already participating with projects supported by the School Inclusion Fund, it can be stated that some advances have taken place that would allow the development of instruments that can account for the effect the inclusion projects have had in schools.

A first advance towards this objective involves two “dimensions” in teaching in which an impact by inclusive actions can be observed:



- a. Development of an inclusive culture**, by considering if the teaching staff does share and support inclusion and how this is communicated to the school community and to those new students and teachers that start school

- b. Teaching Practice**, considering how classroom practices reflect an increased sensibility and greater teaching response based on the objectives forwarded by the inclusion project.

In addition, a first exercise in (qualitative) evaluation and self assessment performed in cooperation with administration and teachers in participating schools allowed the identifying of a group of basic indicators that intend to explain the quality of the inclusion process, and to evaluate the impact of the project on:

a. The school as inclusion organization

- Improvement of the organizing structure (establishing facilitating times and spaces)
- Incorporating resources to allow for accessibility
- Sharing information
- Contacts with other institutions and inclusive NGOs
- Signing institutional agreements on integration and inclusion.

b. School Curricula and classroom space

- Development of materials and curricular accommodations based on known needs
- Time references and continuance of adaptations
- Level of real academic learning by students
- Amount of participation in classroom activities
- Criteria and implementation of summative assessments

c. Teaching Staff

- Agreement, commitment, and participation levels in the project's activities
- Incorporating practice analysis tools
- Use of a variety of teaching styles and strategies that benefit students with special learning needs (N.E.E) and the rest of studentship
- Participation in trainings
- Focusing on academic inclusion



- Technical assistance in planning and curricular accommodations

At first, these indicators may be approached in terms of three achievement levels (achieved, partially achieved, not achieved)



School No. II from Colonia: A history of inclusion

In the year 2003, some 35 proposals submitted by schools from all over Uruguay were selected to develop Improvement Projects with a focus on School Inclusion, receiving resources from the FIE ranging from U\$2,000 to U\$3,000 each. One of them, School No. 2 in Colonia, has been working since then on an innovative strategy that seeks to fully transform the school's work, making it more inclusive and open to diversity. The school has a total enrollment of 335 children and in the first year has achieved the permanent inclusion of 2 girls with hearing disabilities, while 7 boys and 5 girls are integrated and participate in the majority of the school's activities and spaces.

"Our Educational Improvement Project for Inclusion and Transformation of Practices is interweaving the work that the school had already been developing for several years in terms of citizenship training. We seek to foster a greater sense of social responsibility and a greater commitment by the children to the city and all its inhabitants," reports School Principal Sandra García.

"For many years the school had a classroom that we referred to as "speech therapy", attended by children with hearing disabilities. However, these children were not even integrated into the school's life, there were a lot of conflicts, and we realized we weren't handling all the codes needed for communicating well. We therefore proposed that the entire school (students, teachers, and administrative staff) learn sign language. We thus think that the project will benefit the entire student body, not only the children with difficulties. The interest also grew spontaneously among all the schoolchildren, and they themselves began to ask to learn sign language."

The school has highlighted the commitment and motivation among teachers and administrative staff, who have found this experience to be a refreshing and gratifying educational "adventure". The ITP/PME has provided training for the school staff to deal with special needs. It has also allowed for the purchase of educational materials and organization of activities that are open to families and the community.



In the subsequent months there have been significant improvements in the overall school performance. *"The opportunity to learn and use sign language has been a highly enriching experience for everyone. We have seen the progress both in the acquisition of reading and writing and improvements in the possibilities for symbolic and body expression. We see the contribution by the inclusion focus to the school's overall project and to the development of values by children, whose ability to communicate opens them to others to whom they would not previously have related."*

The challenge is now to consolidate and systematize the experience, strengthening its visibility and impact in the community. For this purpose, an agreement is being organized between the school and the Uruguayan Association for the Deaf, which has offered to provide a permanent instructor in sign language which will reinforce the teaching and foster follow-up of the educational project by civil society.



ATTACHMENT I Organization of the Uruguayan Educational System

In Uruguay, mandatory education includes two years of preschool and nine years of basic education: six years of Primary School (1st through 6th grades) and three years of the Basic Middle School Series (1st through 3rd years), provided in lyceums and technical schools with the same curriculum. From the administrative point of view, primary schools depend on the Board of Primary Education, the lyceums on the Board of Secondary Schooling, and the technical schools on the Board of Technical and Vocational Education, which are in turn decentralized bodies of the National Department of Public Education (ANEP), an autonomous institution governing pre-primary, primary, and middle-level public education.

Primary school and middle school structure in Uruguay

LEVEL	AGE	GRADES	TYPE
Initial or Pre -primary Education	4-5 years		Mandatory
Primary Education	6-11 years	1st through 6 th grades	
First Series of Middle School (<i>Ciclo Básico</i> , or CB)	12-14 years	1 st through 3 rd year	
Second Series of Middle School (<i>Bachilleratos</i>)	15-17 years	4 th through 6 th years	Non-mandatory



ATTACHMENT II: Stages in the Social Communications Strategy

STAGES 1: Initial steps

OBJECTIVES	PROPOSALS
"School Inclusion" Project submitted in various formats.	<p>Logotype design</p> <p>Design and production of poster and leaflet.</p> <p>Design of manual</p> <p>Design of website content structure.</p> <p>Design of newsletter content structure.</p> <p>Design of document for joining the project (Support Network)</p>

STAGE 2: Launching / Internal Public

OBJECTIVES	PROPOSALS
Educational community <u>informed</u> of the initiative.	<p>Informational leaflet.</p> <p>Personal letter.</p> <p>Presentation of the initiative by the inspectors.</p>
Educational community motivated for project participation and development.	<p><u>Information:</u> Build a database of the resources available in various support formats (bibliography, e-mails, audio cassettes, audiovisuals, etc.).</p> <p>Newsletter.</p> <p><u>Training:</u> Facilitate participation by teachers and principals in workshops, courses, seminars, and conferences on the theme of educational inclusion.</p> <p><u>Connectivity:</u> Present the project on the Internet (www.anep.edu.uy).</p> <p>Facilitate other communications channels with the project: bulletin boards, fax, telephone, mail.</p> <p>Exchange of experiences with principals and teachers from inclusive schools.</p>



STAGE 2: Launching / External Public

OBJECTIVES	PROPOSALS
<p>Support network formed.</p>	<p>Present the Project to institutions that are outstanding for their support to the community on the theme of different abilities, in order to involve them and empower the project. Official letter of introduction, MECAEP/CEP.</p> <p>Present the Project to all the professionals and institutions involved in education of children and adolescents. Official letter, MECAEP/CEP.</p> <p>Issue invitation to assume a commitment to the initiative, signing a symbolic network membership document.</p> <p>Invite members to participate and engage in exchange, providing details on the project's communications mechanisms.</p> <p>Present the project's webpage and establish links to the pages of the network's members.</p> <p>Organize a seminar for exchange among the institutions and professionals belonging to the network and project.</p> <p>Consolidate a database of the network members to send the electronic newsletter.</p>



STAGE 3: Project Development / Internal Public

OBJECTIVES	PROPOSALS
<p>Public School principals and teachers motivated.</p>	<p><u>Information:</u> Update the database of available resources (in different support formats). Continue the newsletter.</p> <p><u>Training:</u> Facilitate participation by teachers and principals in workshops, courses, seminars, and conferences related to the theme of educational inclusion.</p> <p><u>Visibility:</u> Develop a strong presence for the project inside the schools: posters, leaflets, and bulletin board announcements.</p> <p><u>Connectivity:</u> Promote the use of the project's webpage. Exchange of experiences and resources. Promote the development of shared projects between various schools. Foster the development of an electronic group (chat) of teachers.</p>
<p>The promotional committee in each school evaluates the benefits of an Educational Improvement Project.</p>	<p>Prepare informational materials for families.</p> <p>Develop an outstanding presence for the projects inside the schools: posters, leaflets, and announcements on bulletin boards.</p> <p>Promote the use of the project's webpage.</p>



STAGE 3: Project Development / External

OBJECTIVES	PROPOSALS
Support network consolidated.	<p>Promote participation and exchange through a discussion forum (chat) on the webpage.</p> <p>Make room for innovations and proposals that favor the project's objectives.</p>
Public opinion aware of the rights of persons with different abilities.	Generate stories and interviews in the mainstream news programs in Montevideo and the interior of Uruguay to provide more in-depth information.
Attitudes to support social inclusion achieved.	Distribute leaflets, posters, and stickers to the institutions and business centers where large numbers of people circulate.
National coverage obtained.	<p>Programmed press campaign.</p> <p>Dissemination of the project's webpage.</p>



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