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Rethinking Education in Catalonia: The Escola Nova 21 alliance – A case study

Introduction

A civil society initiative to
promote educational change

A participatory bottom-up
process of co-creation

Sustaining the momentum

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ABSTRACT

In spite of a long history of educational innovation, most Catalan schools, like many around the world, are still rooted in their 19th century origins and bound by an industrial school model born 150 years ago. Successfully making the paradigm shift from the industrial model of schooling to competency-based education requires us to rethink schools and education systems, and their many interconnected and interdependent parts. This paper outlines the experience of the Escola Nova 21 alliance in Catalonia to move the education system towards competency-based learning. This civil society-led, public-private alliance builds on the heritage of the New School movement. It has also been inspired by UNESCO's Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good? (2015), OECD research, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This paper highlights the opportunities and challenges of multi-stakeholder partnerships to promote educational change, using a bottom-up approach. The experience demonstrates that for system-wide transformation to be effective, schools have to be at the heart of the decision-making process.

INTRODUCTION

This is a historic commitment by all of us to transform lives through a new vision for education, with bold and innovative actions, to reach our ambitious goal by 2030.

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2016), p. 11, §20.

The universalization of public education in 19th century Spain was based on the Prussian and French bureaucratic and centralized models. Public schooling was conceived to be an extension of the State that managed the transmission and acquisition of facts through rote learning, memorization and mechanical repetition. Schools were designed to work

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from a standardized and prescriptive curriculum, and teachers were the transmitters of this curriculum. This began to change in the wake of the spread of The New School movement, or *Escola Nova* in Catalan, across Europe over 100 years ago. Indeed, the first modern institutions of Catalan self-government (1914, 1931) promoted initiatives to steer education towards learner-centered and holistic education, building on approaches to learning promoted by thinkers such as

John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Célestin Freinet (AA.VV., 1993). Although the movement was stalled by two periods of military dictatorship in Spain in 1923-30 and 1939-75, the knowledge and experience gained through that influence continued to guide the generation of schools that followed. During the later years of the Franco dictatorship in the 1960s, many schools resumed the active and progressive approach to learning that had emerged in the early years of the 20th century². The reestablishment of democracy in Spain and of a government in Catalonia in the late 1970s set fertile ground for the growth and expansion of the movement.

Despite these efforts to implement change, however, contemporary schools in Catalonia are still largely characterized by traditional patterns of teaching and learning. The main components of educational transformation promoted by great thinkers a century ago are still considered to be innovations in Catalonia, and in Europe, today. In spite of a long history of educational innovation, Catalan schools, like many around the world, are still rooted in their 19th century origins and bound by an industrial school model born 150 years ago. Successfully making the paradigm shift from industrial schooling to competency-based education requires us to rethink schools and school systems and their many interconnected and interdependent parts. Until this transformation takes place, it is likely that changes made at the classroom or school level, will ultimately be stifled by the weight of the overall system - official prescribed curriculum, standardized tests, weak school autonomy, and traditional teacher training.

Successfully making the paradigm shift from industrial schooling to competency-based education requires us to rethink schools and school systems and their many interconnected and interdependent parts.

This paper outlines the recent experience of the *Escola Nova 21* alliance in Catalonia and its efforts to move the education system towards competency-based learning. It highlights the opportunities of partnerships, particularly among civil society actors, to promote educational change using a bottom-up approach. The experience demonstrates that for system-wide transformation to be effective, schools have to be at the heart of the decision-making process.

2 Education in Catalonia is regulated by the Government of Catalonia's Ministry of Education, under the basic framework of the Spanish legislation and the Catalan Act of Education. The Barcelona City Council, which has special responsibilities in education, shares the management of its schools with the Government of Catalonia's Ministry of Education through the joint mechanism of the Barcelona Consortium of Education.

A CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Over the 15 years to 2030, democratization of decision-making processes is expected to increase, with the voices and priorities of citizens reflected in the development and implementation of education policies at all levels.

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2016), p. 57, §79.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE GLOBAL CONVERSATION

As the Education for All initiative (EFA) sunset in 2015, and as the world was shaping its new commitments towards 2030, the Center for UNESCO of Catalonia and the Barcelona-based education think tank Jaume Bofill Foundation organized a

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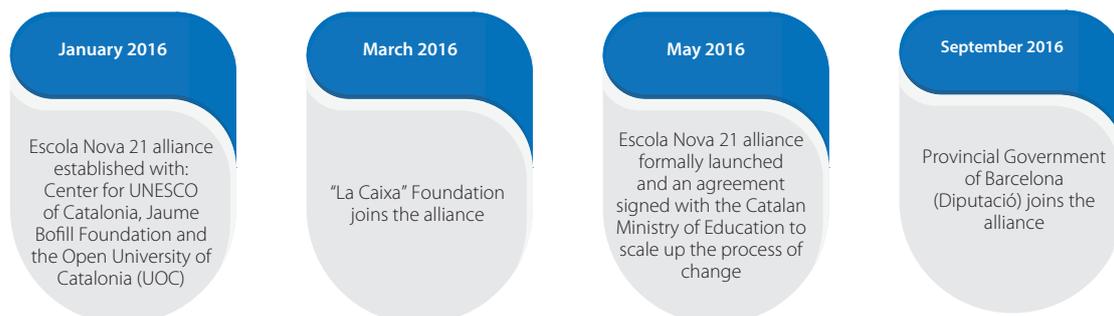
year-long debate entitled "Education Post-2015: Equity and Quality for All". The aim was to contribute to, and contextualize, the global conversation at the local level. The debates explored issues of equity, inclusion, quality in education, and the nature of competencies required to promote sustainable development. Seeking to understand effective teaching and learning practices in schools – within Catalonia and beyond – the Center for UNESCO of Catalonia also visited dozens of innovative

schools to identify patterns that could serve as reference points for a progressive transformation of the education system. These experiences were analyzed in the context of Catalan pedagogical traditions as well as in connection with the global educational debate. The contact with schools, the outcomes of the debates and the launching of Rethinking Education (UNESCO, 2015), also published in Catalan, were foundational elements for what became the Escola Nova 21 alliance and programme. The programme set out to respond to UNESCO's call for collaboration between civil society and government to advance educational change. It proposed to do so by contributing to a no-return momentum for the transformation of the Catalan school system in partnership with schools, teachers, parents, universities, public administrations, and other interested stakeholders.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ESCOLA NOVA 21 ALLIANCE

The Escola Nova 21 alliance was established between January and September 2016, with five partners³ convening over several months to implement the programme in the following three academic years (See Figure 1). In May 2016, the alliance was formally launched in partnership with twenty-five Catalan schools⁴, already working within a learner-centered and competency-based framework. Comprising different types of schools and education levels, these Reference Schools brought significant insight and experience to the implementation of the programme. Following the launch, the alliance signed a cooperation agreement with the Catalan Ministry of Education to work together to initiate change in other schools following the three-year programme – a process in which the Reference Schools would play a key role. The alliance progressively built a shared vision and a collective dynamic towards what is understood by quality in school, laying the foundation for a transformation of public policy and the traditional school model.

Figure 1: Timeline for establishing the Escola Nova 21 alliance and framework



3 Center for UNESCO of Catalonia; Jaume Bofill Foundation; Open University of Catalonia (UOC); "la Caixa" Foundation; Diputació de Barcelona (provincial government of Barcelona).

4 18 public schools and 7 privately-managed publically funded schools, including both primary and secondary schools.

THE ESCOLA NOVA 21 VISION AND ADVANCED SCHOOL FRAMEWORK

“Quality education fosters creativity and knowledge, and ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical, problem-solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills. It also develops the skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, make informed decisions, and respond to local and global challenges through education for sustainable development and global citizenship education.”

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2016), p. 8, §9.

Stressing that quality of education and equity in education are inter-related, the Escola Nova 21 vision is one of a school system in which all children and youth participate in, and enjoy, relevant, meaningful, and empowering learning experiences. The understanding of quality education on which Escola Nova 21 is inspired by the definition provided in by the 2015 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. The vision’s commitment to equity and equality of opportunity in education is reflected in the programme’s objective of developing and sharing scalable and feasible approaches to change for all schools, making quality education accessible to all children.

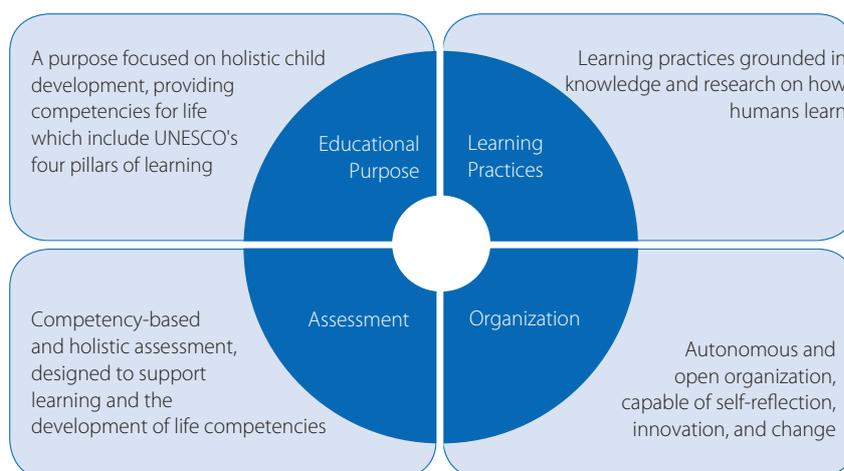
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The Escola Nova 21 programme was founded on the premise that a common roadmap of educational change, shared by all schools and the public administration, was a prerequisite to ensure

a sustainable route to the transformation of the education system. Serving to channel the efforts of schools, educators, families, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders, the creation of a common framework was the first step in the social movement to promote educational change. The Escola Nova 21 Advanced School Framework provides a conceptual framework that synthesizes commonalities among schools that follow a competency-based approach supported by current research-based learning practices. It is composed of four elements, which draw on UNESCO and OECD conceptual frameworks and reports⁵, as well as on the experiences and practices of schools and educators at the leading edge of this movement (See Figure 2 and Annex)⁶.

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Figure 2: The Escola Nova 21 ‘Advanced School Framework’



Source: Escola Nova 21

5 More specifically, the framework draws on UNESCO’s flagship reports *Learning: the treasure within* (UNESCO, 1996), *Learning to be* (UNESCO, 1972) and *Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?* (UNESCO, 2015). It also draws on OECD’s Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) “7+3” framework (OECD, 2015) -designed by the OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation research.

6 The Framework was presented and further elaborated during the Symposium on Education Change, held in Barcelona in fall 2016, which was co-organized by Escola Nova 21, UNESCO, and the OECD. Symposium participants, including schools, education administrations, and universities, worked collaboratively to connect school practices and public policy to UNESCO’s focus on the development of life competencies, the OECD’s research around the Innovative Learning Framework (ILE) “7+3” framework, as well as wider academic research.

A PARTICIPATORY BOTTOM-UP PROCESS OF CO-CREATION

Partnerships at all levels must be guided by the principles of open, inclusive and participatory policy dialogue, along with mutual accountability, transparency and synergy. Participation must begin with the involvement of families and communities to boost transparency and to guarantee good governance in the education administration. Increased responsibility at the school level could strengthen efficiency in the delivery of services.

Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2016) pp. 57-58, §79.

Throughout the development and implementation of the programme, Escola Nova 21 sought to engage in a process of participation and co-creation with schools and education administrations – a process capable of transcending existing political boundaries. Such partnerships were core to creating conditions for a sustainable transformation of the school system, as well as for the empowerment of teachers and schools during a transitional period of change and innovation.

As such, the programme was keen on transferring any knowledge, tools, or lessons-learned developed throughout the course of its three-year implementation to these administrations and agents.

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In the spirit of instilling change from the bottom up, and as proposed in the 2030 Agenda, an open call was launched in May 2016 inviting schools eager for change to apply for the Escola Nova 21 programme. The goal of the programme was to reach up to 200 schools, among which to select a representative sample of 30 schools to pilot the process of school change in collaboration with the initial 25 Reference Schools. The three-year pilot (2016-18) adopted a collaborative approach in the implementation of the Advanced School Framework, providing intensive support to the selected schools, generating knowledge, tools, and processes that could potentially be used to scale-up the programme across the system. Some 500 schools, or approximately 16% of all schools in Catalonia, applied for the programme. Given that the programme could only accommodate less than half of the applicants, Escola Nova 21 reached an agreement with the provincial government of Barcelona (Diputació) to join the programme and work with the municipalities to create local-based networks. This approach ensured the inclusion of all interested schools, and the programme would have an impact at the meso level (OECD, 2013). So, the alliance established a range of agreements to ensure that all interested schools could participate by way of local collaborative learning networks, each comprising a group of 5-12 schools. Figure 3 below shows the types of collaborative partnerships throughout Catalonia for the network's development: three alliances, 60 local networks, and 486 schools.

Figure 3: Partnerships to support the Escola Nova 21 local networks implementation

	Provincial government of Barcelona (Diputació)	Barcelona Consortium of Education, in collaboration with two organizations*	Catalan Ministry of Education
When	September 2016	February 2017	March 2017
Networks/ Schools	29 networks across the province / 266 schools	21 networks / 119 schools in Barcelona city	10 networks in other three Catalan provinces (excluding Barcelona) / 111 schools
How	Financial support and technical expertise, plus municipalities' staff as facilitators	Leadership by the Consortium and assigned Consortium staff as facilitators	Assigned Ministry staff as facilitators

*Note: In the city of Barcelona the networks operate under a programme called Networks for Change ("Xarxes per al Canvi") lead by the Consortium, which additionally committed to incorporating 50 new schools per year into the programme over the following three years.

TWO PARALLEL ACTIONS FOR CHANGE: SAMPLE SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLS IN NETWORKS

Escola Nova 21 aims to catalyze and channel the movement for educational change through four related lines of action: (a) Generating and experimenting with protocols for intensive, system-wide change with a representative sample of 30 schools; (b) Engaging with some 500 schools through networks to collaboratively orientate them towards educational change; (c) Supporting and consolidating already existing reference schools and initiatives for innovation and transformation in the system; and (d) Building alliances with education administrations and local governments to develop co-responsibility for change.

There were two parallel actions for school change throughout the three-year programme. First, the 30 Sample Schools, focused on applying an intensive change strategy that aims to generate protocols for system-wide transformation; and second, the close to 500 Schools in Networks, focused on orientation for change, through cooperative learning in local networks. The Sample Schools received significant support from programme staff, clinical training, and mentorship from the 25 Reference Schools that co-launched the Escola Nova 21 alliance. The Schools in Networks followed a process which was intended to raise awareness for the need for change and develop autonomy in their orientation to change processes.

In both cases, schools reflected on the educational purpose, with teachers, families and children; created a new vision for their schools, based on the Advanced School Framework through their reflections on the educational purpose; and, established teams within each school to lead the transformation, referred to from hereon as the “driving teams”.

SAMPLE SCHOOLS PILOT THE PROTOCOL FOR CHANGE

The sample of 30 schools selected for the initial pilot represents the Catalan education system’s share of public and publically-funded privately managed schools, primary and secondary schools, those with disadvantaged students, in urban or rural areas, and by geographical distribution within Catalonia. Sample Schools serve as a laboratory to develop and refine a protocol with tools and procedures that could be used to intensively transform any school throughout the system.

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The three-year change protocol tested with the Sample Schools includes (1) orientation to foster learner-centered and competency-based approaches, (2) training to empower school staff in the transformation process and (3) mentorship to support schools throughout the process.

1. In terms of orientation, it is crucial that all actors share a common understanding of what change means. The Rubric of Educational Change was developed to provide this detailed framework. It specifies the four axes of the Advanced School Framework in 18 criteria each of which include nine stages of development, guidance questions and possible evidences⁷. This tool is the result of a collaboration between a small team of school headmasters, education inspectors, educational experts and the Escola Nova 21 team. It draws on international research evidence from UNESCO and the OECD, as well as on the regulations of the Catalan educational system.

In addition to defining this framework (what is change), supporting schools in the process of changing (how to change) was also required. Building on existing research, a five-step process on institutional transformation was developed⁸. Individual schools necessarily adapt the phases, timings, tools, and resources to their own particular circumstances and context. They consider the several stages. First, the creation of a driving team with teachers who volunteer to cooperate with the principal’s team in promoting the school’s vision. Second, initial reflection of teachers, students and families on the educational purpose of the school, and involving the broader educational community in the need and urgency for change. Third, engagement of the school in a participatory process to define its new vision, based on the outcomes of reflection and dialogue on the purpose. Fourth, prototyping minor changes⁹, testing hypotheses and feeding a continuous process of learning, in order to move closer to the school’s vision. Finally, scaling the changes previously prototyped, taking institutional steps that ensure the sustainability of the changes implemented.

7 See www.rubicadecanvi.cat for more information.

8 Particularly, from John Kotter’s ‘Leading Change’ (Harvard Business Review, January 2007).

9 Sample Schools use the Minimum Viable Product methodology to conceptualize and test hypotheses about the kind of changes that will be effective and possible to implement and to feed a continuous process of learning and improving, in order to move the School closer to the vision put forward by the Advanced School Framework.

2. Principals and driving teams receive several trainings related to the direction of change as well as to the process of change, to become empowered to lead the transformation in their schools. One of the most important training experiences are the clinical residencies of the driving team members in the Escola Nova 21 Reference Schools. The trainings consist of two-week or one month-long residencies of the driving team members, where they observe and actively contribute their knowledge and perspectives of working in a fully competency-based environment¹⁰.
3. Offering external support to the driving teams in this cultural change in schools is also vital. Mentors meet with the driving team every two months to monitor and support the school transformation process. They are trusted professionals (in general from Reference Schools) who provide data, tools and guidance in the autonomous, but intensive change process. They are not trainers, but rather help facilitate the reflection processes and advise/guide the driving team.

SCHOOLS IN NETWORKS COLLABORATE FOR EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The key mechanism to orientate Schools in Networks towards the change occurs through collaborative learning within the community of schools. Keeping in mind that research demonstrates that both top-down and micro- bottom-up initiatives for education change are too narrow to be effective (OECD, 2017; OECD, 2013). The programme focuses on reinforcing the meso level, comprised of many networks, communities, and initiatives already committed to educational change.

This approach is based on the assumption that transformation must come from within the educational community which also possess the essential tools and knowledge needed to advance this change. Thus, rather than recommending “recipes” of specific actions, curricula, or learning methodologies, the spirit of Schools in Networks is rooted in a process of change that is supported by the tools and resources generated by the programme.

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Driving teams from Schools in Networks reflect on their process of orientation towards change in regular network meetings led by Escola Nova trained facilitators. Those meetings are based on activities to share ideas for creating the conditions for change, as well as reflecting about the school’s educational purpose re-imagining its vision based on the Advanced School Framework. The meetings represent first steps towards change, by using the Spiral of Inquiry (Timperley et al., 2014) methodology and the Rubric of Educational Change as guidance. Driving teams and principals, coordinated through the network meetings, engage in their respective schools, with the community of teachers, families, and students in the same discussions, helping the schools to move their vision forward. The individual schools necessarily adapt the phases, timings, tools, and resources to their own particular circumstances and context, understanding that the main contribution of Escola Nova 21 is to orientate their work towards change.

A digital network also supports connections between educators and school leaders from participating schools - some 10,000 people in total. In addition to regular network meetings, intensive summer trainings are held in partnership with leading institutions of the Catalan education community and education administrations. These trainings allow teachers who do not participate in network meetings to have direct access to the programme. Some 2,500 teachers from Schools in Networks joined a 15-hour, week-long training focused on rethinking their conception of the school, developing a deep understanding of the Advanced School Framework, and envisioning how their own schools could be transformed.

CONSOLIDATION OF EXPERIENCES AND GOOD PRACTICES

Escola Nova 21 acknowledges that many Catalan schools already use a learner and learning-centered approach. The 25 Reference Schools are examples of these efforts, and the programme supported them in the process of mentoring other schools to adopt the innovations of the Escola Nova programme. The alliance aims for these schools to formally become Reference Schools, eventually holding training residencies for initial teacher education, and act as institutions where innovation could be tested and research undertaken. As such, using the Rubric of Educational Change is an initial way to identify potentially new reference schools. However, the frequent mobility of civil-servant teachers within the different

 10 Other training opportunities are provided such as visits of training for principals about the process and its leadership, visits of driving team members in Reference Schools and Summer trainings for the driving team members.

public schools and their primarily transmission-based training has made advanced educational practices difficult to maintain at the public school level. As a result, Escola Nova 21 has sought to raise the profile of these schools and to promote their public reputation with the idea of supporting their long-term survival, consolidation, and enhancement by modifying the conditions that make that maintenance difficult.

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ALLIANCES ESTABLISHED TO IMPACT PUBLIC POLICY

Given Escola Nova 21's commitment to catalyzing change at the system-level, public demand is fundamental. In part, the programme's goal is to demonstrate that change is not only urgent and necessary, but also that it is realistic and possible, in order to consolidate social movements for school system reforms as defined by the Advanced School Framework. A significant part of this effort therefore involves engagement with key public education administrations. Following the agreement with the Barcelona provincial government to create local-based school networks in early 2017, the Barcelona Consortium of Education also reached an agreement with the Escola Nova 21 initiative to make it a public policy for education change ("Xarxes per al Canvi") in the city of Barcelona, lead by the Consortium itself. Moreover, in April 2017, all political groups of the Parliament of Catalonia asked that the agenda for education change of Escola Nova 21 become the agenda of the Government of Catalonia's Ministry of Education.

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The involvement of many municipalities throughout Catalonia has contributed to create a general public consensus for change despite competing political agendas. This transversality has been key to achieve a key goal of the alliance - to bring together multiple agents and actions to advance education, behind the shared goal of educational

transformation, and established as a public policy. By December 2018 - two years and a half after the alliance was launched - the Government of Catalonia and all the municipalities reached an agreement with the Escola Nova 21 alliance to adopt its work into public policy for education change, potentially available for all schools in Catalonia. A procedure was also established to transfer the knowledge and procedures of the programme (within 18 months) to be used for the public administration to generalize school transformation to the whole system, a procedure that the Barcelona Consortium of Education has already started.

SUSTAINING THE MOMENTUM

OVERCOMING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

As rightly emphasized by Edgar Faure in the UNESCO flagship report almost half a century ago (1972), "traditional formulae and partial reforms cannot meet the unprecedented demand for education arising out of the new tasks and functions to be fulfilled". Since then, most countries have not been entirely successful in transforming their education systems. While a shift in educational discourse has been observed in many countries, too many practices remain unchanged. This gap between policy and practice is

evident in discourses articulated around competency-based approaches and the need for active and autonomous learners, yet where methods are still largely disciplinary and textbook based and rote learning still the norm. This gap between policy discourse and practice has to do with a number of interrelated factors. This includes outdated teacher education and selection processes, bureaucratic structures limiting schools autonomy, assessment systems that incentivize teaching to the test, or fear to implement new learning approaches for which the system has not been designed. As a result, it is difficult to know what to do to change the system, leaving school as the only solution for parents to better respond to the learning needs of their children.

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The Escola Nova 21 theory of change is based on the premise that educational change can happen at system level only if a critical mass of citizens - families, teachers, and many others - share a common understanding of what change means and are willing to publicly advocate and work for school transformation. Escola Nova 21's role has been to promote a cultural change of what is quality in education by channeling, encouraging, and highlighting this growing movement to create a new consensus on what should be done in public education. The Escola Nova 21 alliance was designed to catalyze in three years the will for educational change towards a no-return momentum, with three main expected outcomes (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Expected outcomes of the Escola Nova 21 three-year programme

To change what is generally understood by “quality education” and to raise awareness of the necessity and urgency of educational transformation in order to see it enacted in public policy

To activate a process of educational transformation within a significant number of primary and secondary schools, in partnership with educators already working towards change

To socially recognize the contributions of the reference schools and many educators at the forefront of change, and to cooperatively develop and share processes and tools that enable transformation in all schools

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Yet, groups opposed to change and those uncomfortable with what appeared to be a new disruptive actor, have questioned both the legitimacy and intention of the institutions promoting the Escola Nova 21 programme, as well as the proposed approach to quality in education. Escola Nova 21's response to these two criticisms was to ground its perspectives in established research, as well as in the Incheon Declaration and Education 2030 Framework for Action, which represents global frameworks and standards in education. Concerns have also been raised about the possible unintended impact of the programme on increased segregation and inequity in the system, as its change could only reach a small percentage of the schools in Catalonia. While legitimate, such concerns are inherent to pilot programmes such as Escola Nova 21 which aim to use their limited reach to generate a healthy demand for change at the system-level, and to demonstrate how educational change may be scaled up to the entire system.

Escola Nova 21 is grounded in the principle that public administrations must be the agents that ultimately bear responsibility for and enact long-lasting reforms to an education system. But at the same time, to advance that reform, support from civil society, the educational community, and families is fundamental. In Catalonia, over the last decade, there have been many advances in educational policy aimed at implementing a competency-based curriculum which transforms learning practices, updates teacher training, and increases school autonomy. Nevertheless, the cultural and institutional obstacles for change are strong, and a social awareness and mobilization strategy is needed to overcome them. In this regard, the voluntary engagement of thousands of teachers and parents with the common goal of a new vision for education has been central. The impact can be observed in the extensive local press coverage in favor of

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educational change since Escola Nova 21 started. Furthermore, some of the most important work of Escola Nova 21's first year was to engage with a wide-range of government agencies - from the Catalan Ministry of Education to local municipal governments to build a broad coalition among government, municipalities, schools, and civil society institutions to advance educational transformation. The government leadership and commitment is indispensable in order to both enact

deep systemic change and to guarantee quality and equity in all schools, as well as to create the conditions for further innovation; but the engagements of schools and teachers in the process of change is also fundamental to make it possible.

Finally, educational transformation will not be complete if it does not impact the university environment, since much resistance to change is influenced by a university system that still largely depends upon rote learning (Vallory, 2019). Through diverse interactions with participants in the Escola Nova 21 alliance, some recent initiatives have reinforced change in this area in Catalonia, such as a new competency-based mid-career programme for teacher education, where Escola Nova 21 Schools of Reference collaborate by serving as case studies. Furthermore, influenced by the wave for education change, in the summer of 2017 the Catalan Government created the Margalida Comas Programme for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning at the University, in order to extend updated teaching and learning methods to the university system as a whole.

THE WAY FORWARD

Following the 2018 agreement with the Catalan Government and the municipalities to adopt the agenda of educational change, Escola Nova 21 will transfer procedures and standards to public administrations to make available to any school through the public institutions the tools to initiate a process of change. This will now need the commitment of public administrations to use the experience to promote a general program to update the education system, like Skola 2030 in Latvia or the Strategic Plan for the Renewal and Improvement of the Educational System of Andorra (PERMSEA).

For Catalonia, however, the end goal is that each school is empowered, autonomous, and able to ensure alignment with the competency-based curriculum and its active learning approach, as established by the education public administration, to guarantee the right of every child to an inclusive quality education. Meanwhile, in order to assess the outcomes and processes, Escola Nova 21 will undergo an independent evaluation. The evaluation will aim to assess the programme's overall effectiveness, results and impact relative to its stated goals.

Transforming an education system requires rethinking the basic characteristics that define a quality education, which every learner should find in any school. The purpose of this education is to develop competencies for life, including metacognitive skills that support lifelong learning. It conditions a competency-based curriculum, how we learn, how spaces are organized, how we assess learning, the role and profile of the teacher and teacher training, the autonomy and governance of schools and their institutional ability continually learn and improve. The role of public administration must be to generate the conditions that enable the education system to respond to the needs and the changing reality of children and society in the historical context in which we live, through meaningful and relevant learning experiences that enable them to have lives of dignity, well-being and freedom. This has been the endeavor of the Escola Nova 21 Alliance, bridging research and policy, mobilizing stakeholders at various levels, and ensuring a participatory process of bottom-up co-creation to promote a system-wide dynamic of educational transformation in Catalonia.

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ANNEX: THE ADVANCED SCHOOL FRAMEWORK

EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE: THE WHOLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD, PROVIDING COMPETENCIES FOR LIFE

Educational purpose is the central element of the Framework, and conditions the other three axes. It is focused on the whole development of the child, by providing competencies for life from a competency-based conception of curriculum. Competencies are defined as, “the ability to use knowledge (information, understanding, skills, values and attitudes) in specific contexts and to meet demands” (UNESCO, 2015). The purpose also reflects the four pillars of learning, described below, proposed by UNESCO (1996) and updated to face the global challenges, taking into account that learning to learn has never been as important as it is today (UNESCO, 2017; UNESCO, 2015; Marope, 2017).

- Learning to know - a broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects.
- Learning to do - to acquire not only occupational skills, but also the competence to deal with many situations and to work in teams.
- Learning to be - to develop one’s personality and to be able to act with growing autonomy, judgment, and personal responsibility.
- Learning to live together - to develop an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence.

LEARNING PRACTICES: GROUNDED IN RESEARCH ON HOW PEOPLE LEARN

In order to develop competencies for life, learning practices must be based on evidence of how people learn. These practices reflect the Innovative Learning Framework’s seven principles of learning, created based on extensive research, and which work integrally, rather than as individual elements (Dumond et al., 2010):

Learners at the center: the learning environment recognizes learners as its core participants, encourages their active engagement, and develops their understanding of their own activity as learners.

1. The social nature of learning: the learning environment is founded on the social nature of learning and actively encourages well-organized cooperative learning.
2. Emotions and motivations are integral to learning: the learning professionals within the learning environment are highly attuned to the learners’ motivations and the key role of emotions in achievement.
3. Recognize individual differences: the learning environment is acutely sensitive to the individual differences among the learners in it, including their prior knowledge and experiences.
4. Learning should be demanding for each learner, without overload: the learning environment devises programs that demand hard work from all, but without excessive overload, grind or fear.
5. Assessments for learning: the learning environment operates with clarity of expectations using assessment strategies consistent with these expectations; there is a strong emphasis on formative feedback to support learning.
6. Building and promoting horizontal connectedness across activities, disciplines, and in- & out-of-school: the learning environment strongly promotes “horizontal-connectedness” across areas of knowledge and subjects and well as to the community and the wider world.

ASSESSMENT: HOLISTIC AND COMPETENCY-BASED MECHANISMS THAT SERVE TO IMPROVE LEARNING

Assessment is part of learning practices. However, in many cases it has become the actual purpose of learning: either by teaching to the test, or by taking the entry exam to university as the main purpose of secondary education. That is why, within the Framework, assessment is highlighted to ensure that learning practices support the development of the life competencies established by the Educational Purpose and serve to regulate and improve systems, processes, and learning experiences as a whole. Both formative assessment, which serves to bolster and improve learning as it happens, and summative assessment, which allows us to establish what has been learned, focus on developing competencies for life. In a holistic approach, the competencies evaluated include the physical, social, emotional, and ethical dimensions.

A holistic, interdisciplinary approach to assessment is essential to develop transferable competencies. Assessment is not based on the results of a subject, or a combination of several subjects, but rather in the overall and integrated development of the person and take into account the development of all competencies, and not only those related to traditional knowledge acquisition. As mentioned in *Rethinking Education* (UNESCO, 2015), “the current international education discourse couched in terms of learning is essentially centered on the results of educational processes and tends to neglect the process of learning. In focusing on results, it is essentially referring to learning achievement that is, to the knowledge that can most easily be measured” (UNESCO, 2015, pp. 81). Assessment must also ensure that learning takes place in an environment of respect and personal welfare. (OECD, 2015).

ORGANIZATION: OPEN AND INDEPENDENT, CAPABLE OF SELF-REFLECTION AND CHANGE

The school should be versatile, reflective, and capable of making evidence-based choices. It unfolds its purpose and learning practices in an environment that follows the three key characteristics of an innovative learning environment (OECD, 2017; OECD, 2013):

- Innovate the pedagogical core of the learning environment, including the core elements (learners, educators, resources and content), or dynamics and methodologies which connect them (pedagogy and formative assessment, use of time and the organization of educations and learners), or combinations of both.
- Become “formative organisations” with strong learning leadership that is informed by evidence about the learning achieved through different strategies and innovations.
- Open up to partnerships, create synergies, and enhance professional, social and cultural capital by working with families and communities, higher education, cultural institutions, businesses, other schools and learning environments in ways that can shape the pedagogical core and the learning leadership.

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