Final Report - 1st Phase

Argentina

According to the information available on net primary enrollment rates, Argentina has one of the highest percentages of coverage in Latin America. In the last fifteen years, policies have proven to be more efficient to provide school vacancies rather than to improve academic quality (Tenti Fanfani, 2007). In spite of the system's achievements regarding education coverage, we face new challenges associated with segmentation and inequality. For instance, difficulties to access early education levels and high dropout rates are still present at secondary levels, which mostly affect neglected sectors (Mezzadra, et at, 2011).

Argentina is one of the countries with the widest achievement gaps between schools (OECD, 2010). This shows that there is hidden and unconsidered value in the educational system. Therefore, it is still possible though, to identify institutions that comply with the responsibility to teach and include children living under poverty conditions. These are schools that, even in contexts of high social vulnerability, manage to achieve real inclusion at school and in the world of knowledge. The knowledge and skills developed in these schools, which counterbalance daily problems and have a positive impact on the final results, should be recognized, strengthened and brought to light.

We will now present the most important aspects learned from these experiences to build a systemic improvement process. These are inclusive practices that despite addressing a specific context suggest significant meanings that should be transmitted and replicated in other schools in order to provide answers to one of the major challenges in educational policy.

Methodology and Research Process

A sample of 3 schools was selected to conduct an in depth qualitative research based on the analysis of indicators of social vulnerability, efficiency and learning outcomes provided by the Ministry of Education of the City of Buenos Aires. Given the limitations imposed by Law 17622/68 in relation to the dissemination of statistical data of educational units, the selection of schools was handled by the Ministry of Education, which ultimately let

CIPPEC[1] make the final selection of the 3 schools, but did not provide the quantitative data corresponding to each of them. The criteria used for the selection were:

- Schools with people with the highest Social Vulnerability Index of the jurisdiction[2]

- Schools with low Educational Vulnerability Index[3]

- Schools with higher learning results (Quality Index and Educational Equity IECEP of the City of Buenos Aires)

Due to the fact that Resolution 3906/04 does not allow disseminating statistical information from schools, the analysis and the selection were carried out by the technical teams of the Ministry, and do not include the list of schools selected for the development of this summary. However, since the objective of such regulation is to evaluate the feasibility of entry in the selected schools, this was also taken into account in the final selection.

Presentation of the schools

Institutional settings

The selected are School nº 3 and nª14 of Villa Lugano and School nº 5 of Barracas with an average of 700 hundred pupils grouped in 24 sections. From 1st to 3rd grade they belong to the 1st cycle and form 4th to 7th to the 2nd one. As it usual in the country's schools, all of them operate as two single-shift institutions: one in the morning and the other one in the afternoon.

The buildings are shared with kindergartens and in the case of School nº5 there are some places of common use (schoolyard and auditorium) with the High School. Most of them have computer labs, a library, a small teachers' room, and School nº3 also posses a multipurpose room (where students watch films and dance tango), a room for music classes and another one for technology. In addition, most of classrooms are spacious and

1   Center for the Implementation of Public Policy for Equity and Growth, "Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento (CIEPPEC)" is the original version in Spanish.
2   Social Vulnerability Index, "Índice de Vulnerabilidad Social (IVS)", is the original version in Spanish (2011) Reports of the Statistics and Investigation Direction of the Education Ministry of the City of Buenos Aires. https://equidadycalidadeducativa.buenosaires.gob.ar/archivos/estadistica/indicadores/03_Informes%20y%20publicaciones//03_3%20%20%C3%8Dndice%20de%20vulnerabilidad%20social.pdf
3   Educational Vulnerability Index, "Ìndice de Vulnerabilidad Educativa (2009)" is the original version in Spanish. Reports of the Statistics and Investigation Direction of the Education Ministry of the City of Buenos Aires.
(IVE)https://equidadycalidadeducativa.buenosaires.gob.ar/archivos/estadistica/indicadores/03_Informes%20y%20publicaciones//04_4%20-%20%C3%8Dndice%20de%20vulnerabilidad%20educativa.pdf

colorful, just as Principals offices. The management teams and the secretaries work in the same office.

As regards human resources, the schools management teams are often made up Principal, the Vice Principal and one or two secretaries. The teaching staffs comprise approximately 40 teachers, who work in curricular and special areas[4], as well as Support Teachers and caretakers for integrated students. The latter two do not depend on the school, but on the social welfare of each student. Each school has 2 Support Teachers (one per shift and focus their work on the 1st grades)

Socioeconomic context

Students who attend these schools come from heterogeneous contexts where the socio-economic level varies between middle and low social strata, with a high percentage of children coming from the *slums,* which in Argentina are referred as "*villas*"[5].

School No. 5, for its part, is located in the area of Barracas, in the southern area of the City of Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina. Historically, Barracas was an area of country houses and mansions of the city's upper class (Puccia, 1998). However, during the twentieth century, it became an industrial and immigrant neighborhood, which has now deteriorated and degraded due to successive crises, and policies to eradicate industries out of town (Rodriguez and Di Virgilio, 2013).

In Barracas, more than 55% of the population belongs to mid-low and low strata (33.8% and 21.9%, respectively) (Alvarez de Celiz, coord. 2011). Also, according to the last Population and Housing census (2010), the community has the largest number of *villas* and precarious urbanizations throughout the city, which represent 17.2% of its population. In fact, between 2001 and 2010, growth of the population living in that context intensified by 56% (Lépore, 2012).

One of the characteristics of the population living in these areas is the presence of unemployed heads of household (Census Report 2010, 2015.) Unemployment in the area exceeds the average of the jurisdiction; reaching 9.1% (Di Pietro and others, 2013) It is not surprising that the workforce combines high rates of informality and precariousness with the lowest per capita family income of the city of Buenos Aires. In turn, housing conditions have high percentages of overcrowding and lack of coverage of basic needs. According to Di Pietro and others (2013), in terms of education, there are also high dropout rates at the secondary level.

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[4] Physical education, Music, Art, Informatics
[5] "Villas" are a type of shanty towns or slums found in Argentina, mostly around the largest urban settlements

Schools Nº 3 and 14 are located in the neighborhood of Villa Lugano, southwest of the City of Buenos Aires. It is also one of the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of slums, characterized by overcrowding, informality and poor working conditions (Cosacov and others, 2011). Between 2001 and 2010, the commune experienced an important population increase that quadrupled the jurisdiction's average value (Di Pietro and others, 2013). This population growth is a distinctive phenomenon of the neighborhood, which is mainly explained by the increase of settlements in slums "(32.9% of the total population of the neighborhood.)

One of the distinctive characteristics of *villas* at Lugano is the large number of Bolivian immigrants, who work in the textile industry as seamstresses in independent workshops or factories. They now represent the 2nd or 3rd generation, so their children acquired Argentine nationality and represent a large proportion of students of state schools, as is the case of School No. 3.

Meanwhile, urban infrastructure conditions have exposed people to health risks and the environment to other hazards. Despite being the neighborhood with the highest concentration of green areas in the city (Cosacov, op. Cit), it presents high levels of pollution due to the presence of open dumps and "automobile graveyards" of the *villas*, visible on the sidewalks adjacent to the school. Also, the area lacks of resources and options to access to cultural, artistic and recreational institutions, including theaters and cinemas.

While the context of socio-economic vulnerability from which the children come from entails problems of another kind, such as lack of support of families, domestic violence or illiteracy, the aim of these schools is to tackle those issues providing opportunities to constantly improve school performance.

Main findings

In terms of management, atmosphere, teaching methods and community relations the analyzed schools develop practices that are in the process of being inclusive. Here we briefly present experiences from each case study that are worth being widespread as they have achieved an impact on academic achievement of communities with high levels of socio-economic vulnerability.

School management - Frame for inclusion

Regarding the factors at management level that have improved schools performance, the most remarkable and shared elements where: an integral vision and pedagogical project, resource management, pedagogical support, Information management and leadership.

Integral Vision and an Art-oriented educational project. The development of an integral vision, a global objective or a pedagogic project has resulted in a great asset for education improvement at School nº 3 and nº 5. At the first one, it has revitalized the identity of the institution, being the driving force of the school through two pathways. On one hand, it has been used to deal with expression of emotions and affective needs by offering new channels and alternative languages to speak up and raise their voices. This has helped to tackle low self-esteem and derangement of students, teachers and parents. On the other hand, working with art expanded the "possibility frontier" of the neighborhood's children lacking of cultural and academic background. It became a way to provide access to cultural goods that are often absent in vulnerable contexts. This project routed successfully teachers' work towards the same horizon, inspiring and engaging them with a new vision of the school.

A similar case has been identified at School nº 5. Social segregation, practices and conceptions of traditional schooling among other things constructed a homogenizing vision that schoolteachers and administrators changed to promote a more inclusive school. To achieve this, sharing a common vision was crucial. First, they sought to eradicate the logic of labeling the *"bad student,"* since it affects negatively the student's ability to learn. Teachers and Principals are now convinced that everyone can learn, that every situation can be reversed and they therefore seek to provide new opportunities for children with more difficulties. This view was spread by example, starting with the Principal's actions and her ways of dealing with problematic students. Good examples of this were the replacement of sanctions with works on emerging conflicts, the eradication of segregation between boys and girls in the morning or afternoon shifts, and the permission for students to wear piercings or elements that help them identify themselves.

Resource management

Bridging networks. The constant search for external support and the creation of networks to achieve joint collaboration have helped the Principals of school nº 5 to address situations that they were unable to solve before. An eloquent example is the case of school nº 14, who's Principal, has develop a strong relationship and gets a constant support. This has enabled them to establish contact with many other schools from the area dealing with the same problematic and issues. Thanks to the bond with the supervisor they get advise, better communication and counseling among them.

Prioritizing efforts and resources. At school nº3 the Principal formed a team that showed a type of management that prioritizes actions that benefit students. The professionalism of the management team is also highlighted in the way they make decisions. With grounds justifying each step and action they take major improvements have been registered by focusing measures on students learning. School nº 14 manages towards the same direction. Every program and project from the government the school receives is adapted according to what it bests fits their needs and reality.

Management Team and Leadership. Project implementation and school improvement can be carried out with a consistent management team, with divided and defined tasks and a strong leadership. This has identified in the three cases with subtle differences that enriched their worked. At school nº 14 the team is organized in 3 Secretaries grouped in 3 sections (1st, 2nd, and 3rd on one side, 4th and 5th in another one and finally 6th and 7th). This helped to focus the managing pedagogical support and to follow students progress with a better vision.

As for School nº5, they have developed horizontal leadership. Instead of representing the "Head" of the institution, the Principals positioned themselves as a part of the team. They managed to create horizontal relationships, in which they encourage not only the involvement of various parties in the decision-making process, but also exercise leadership prioritizing the review and analysis of their own strategies and measures. Before putting the emphasis on the problems of children and their families, they choose to reflect upon their own practices.

In this line of collective work, they managed to engage all teachers in episodes of conflict with the students. With the motto "they are all our students," they have generated in teachers a shared responsibility even with students who do not belong to their own grades. To achieve this, the Principals have worked to empower teachers and to reconstitute their authority. At school level, they showed them that they are not alone, and that they have support. They have created a mechanism where all teachers work together to support and help each other. At the class level, they managed to promote conflict resolution in the classroom through dialogue. Thus, they avoid the logic of "sending the student out" and referring them to the Principal´s office in case of trouble. Teachers then develop mechanisms and methods to integrate the student who presents problems both of conduct and learning. Therefore, this kind of leadership promote solidarity between teachers and students, which ultimately contributes to the creation of a peer culture (Mezzadra, et al 2011)

Information management. Thoroughness and systematization in the management of school information was another key for school improvement. General statistics of

qualifications, absences, registration of meeting were present at school nº14. Each question is based on data that have been gradually collected. Each meeting with parents, Pedagogical Consultants, and coordinators has its own form where meetings are registered. This data helps to visualize which grades are located in the lower range, and help to detected who needs support and where to strengthen the assistance ir order to prevent dropouts or fails.

Pedagogical support

Most of the Principals share with the Vice Principal their pedagogical role. Every month they review together teachers' planning, strategies and format of the assessment. After the entrance´s shifts, they usually walk around the classrooms. The goal is not to monitor, but to accompany. To accomplish this, some tend to supervise notebooks, ask for the day's activities, and dialogue with students on a daily basis. Teachers feel supported, and they believe they can work in peace because there is someone to turn to in any case.

High expectations. At school nº 3 principals and teachers of the school strongly believe that inclusion is not only about getting school vacancies. Their ultimate goal is to encourage students to keep going. They are expected to reach the secondary level, a not very usual step in the community. By closely monitoring students performance they overcame the starting conditions of the children and they managed to identify where action is needed more urgently and through what kind of strategies.

Tools for pedagogic coordination. The management team at school nº5 coordinates teachers' work with special importance in achieving consensus or agreement through dialogue. As group meetings are not that frequent they use notebooks named "History of the group" to avoid losing sight of the pedagogical coordination. From the 1st grade, teachers record all kinds of information, from the content they presented and meetings with families, to those who need reinforcements. In addition to this, the Principal pays special attention to evaluation as an instrument as tool that allows teachers to reflect on their own practices. They have managed to redefine the meaning of what, why and when evaluations take place defining institutional guidelines on the diagnosis and assessment process.

School atmosphere

According to students, parents, teachers and management members, getting to know the realities, background and conditions of the students, as well as understanding their context, was crucial to create a work climate of harmony and compromise, to bond with

families and to focus on teaching strategies and projects adapted to the real needs of students in order to enhance their performances.

Teachers – every day models for inclusion

All analyzed school showed that the only way to keep pupils motivated and encouraged is by meaningful and contextualized content flexible planning. Teachers tend to choose content according to the interests of the students. They also make efforts to bring up activities were pupils can express their views, provide hypothesis, and draw conclusions.

Organizing and planning activities and projects by different areas or departments, exchanging students' reports or classes feedbacks are practices that generate synergy in the team. As an example, at school nº 14, Language practice is frequently carried out at Natural Sciences lesson. Through informative texts Reading, children tend to incorporate better vocabulary and grammar structures from a different lexicon.

At school nº 5, teachers share a clear guideline to work on diversity. They address the issues with emphasis on culture, tradition, culture and language of each region. Especially students of Paraguayan and Peruvian origin are given more time to tell where they come from and what their customs are in order to make them feel respected and valued. This recognition is essential to ensure access to knowledge (Mezzadra, et al, 2011)

Students – in the focus
Student's motivation is a permanent guideline at the three schools. Besides counting on their teachers, schools emphasize the importance of strengthening self-confidence of students. Being accepted and feeling of belonging are revealed as key elements that stimulate learning. For example, teachers are expected to give personalized feedback for each student in the School Report.

More for those who need it the most

Learning Support. To support students with more difficulties, teachers work together with Support Teachers. Support Teachers focus on teaching and learning of students who need different and extra resources to keep up with the rest of the class. Through individualized work and alternative strategies, and also with activities within the grade, students are provided with more opportunities to improve their performances. In this way, they avoid labeling the most disadvantaged students while fostering a relationship of complicity. An eloquent example carried out by Support teacher of School nº3 is the case of 6th grade group. They were a group of students who dealt with overage and due to their behavior

and constant absences were at risk of repeating the grade. However they were allowed to graduate to the 7th grade with the condition of attending 6th grade lessons as listener. Thanks to an intense work with their Support Teacher they managed to overcome the gaps and reinforce the contents required. This experience came through with flying colors since results were remarkable.

Another key strategy that show teachers efforts to focus on students need is the use of nodal artistic projects like radio workshops and online journal in which space and place are provided for students to talk and write about their own interests.

School – parents - community relation

Building a sense of belonging. Sharing responsibility with parents about student's learning is another pillar of School nº 3. To achieve this they tried to engage families by increasing their sense of belonging. Since most of their pupils come from immigrant families from Bolivia, they wanted to show them that school needs them as much as they need the school to improve their children' future.

By inviting parents to open classes to see how teachers give their lessons and to learn what contents are about School nº3 strengthened the family school bond. Storytelling workshops are frequent, and also Bolivian celebrations like birthday and national days, were parents are called to participate with the decoration, cooking, or even with costume making. School offers them meaningful activities that capture the family's interests and abilities to empower them at their educational role. In addition to this, school ceremonies are replaced by workshops. Instead of celebrating the Independence Day with traditional format, the school provides activities for parents and students where they can learn together. They try to generate an alternative space to foster sharing a space for dialogue in school.

Contact with the community. Schools aim to widen pupils' opportunities by showing what's outside their neighborhood. Going on excursions, visit to museums, and general contact with other kinds cultures and forms of expression is a shared measure in the three schools. They strongly believe how important it is for children to be recognized both by others and by themselves like equals and capable of performing activities related to knowledge. Since at school nº 3 and 14 activities tend to focus more on art, they often invite artists of the neighborhood to give talks to the students about what inspired them and how they accomplished their goals.

Schools tend to bridge with other institutions according to their needs and availability. Hospitals, pharmacies and health centers promote lectures on health and childhood. For its part, the cultural organizations like drama clubs, or music band often performs at schools auditorium. Through the theater and the popular dance movements like *"murgas"* students and parents get from School nº 5 get involved in a community organization's art project. Networking with centers for social action that offer tutoring, or Radio Programs from the neighborhood contribute to improve learning opportunities offered to students in the schools.

Success ingredients in the school

The schools analyzed in the Argentinean contexts offer outstanding practices to follow do have an impact on school improvement

- School vision and integral projects that provide more and alternative opportunities for students from vulnerable contexts. Spreading a message from the head to the staff full of convictions against determinism and pupils labeling following the motto "everybody can learn"
- Resources management prioritizing what benefits the school main goals and bridging networks to enlarge the school capacities Regarding the factors at management level that have improved school performance the most remarkable and shared elements where an integral vision and pedagogical project, resource management, pedagogical support, Information management and leadership.
- Systematization of information collected in the school to get a global picture of school performance with hard data.
- Leadership through horizontal relationship and strong and committed teams.
- Provision of pedagogical support to empower and back up teachers
- Deep and personalized knowledge of every student. This contribute to a better understanding of reality and bond between members of the school, thus improving the school atmosphere
- Contextualized and meaningful content complemented with flexible planning giving place for emergent knowledge. Connecting curriculum with pupils interest engages most of them enabling better access to knowledge.
- Motivation and acceptance are the key elements of the school's work with students. Support Teachers becomes a crucial element to encourage and help those with more difficulties by working through projects or alternative methodologies.

- Involving parents in open classes and workshops to learn and participate as relevant actors in their children educations by building a sense of belonging to the school
- Networking with institutions outside the school where students are respected and valued.

Challenges and aspects to improve

- Frequency of teacher meetings, class observations and feedback from Principals on a regular basis
- Bonds with parents and community with more participation in classes.
- Principal pedagogical role
- Support Teachers for the upper grades
- Loss of class hours
- Interdisciplinary project with more areas
- Formative assessment.

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