



International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030

**The future of teaching as a collaborative profession:
The importance of teacher agency and inclusive learning communities
in increasingly diverse and uncertain educational settings**

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Abbreviations and acronyms

COP	Community of practice
DI	Differentiated Instruction
EADSE	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education
EI	Education International
GGIS	The Goodison Group in Scotland
GHPS	Government Higher Primary School
ICT	Information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLC	Professional learning community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFF	Scotland's Futures Forum
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TC	Teacher community
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Abstract

As pandemics, wars, climate change and migration challenge our world, uncertainty and disruption in learning is increasing. In this context, creating and sustaining inclusive learning communities, virtual or in-person, is critical to ensure both continuity and change in education. Teachers' responses during times of crisis – such as the COVID-19 disruption – have demonstrated their potential to act as agents of change, sustaining inclusive learning communities, ensuring continuity in students' learning and providing for learners' needs, including emotional support. Collaborative practices within teacher communities, and within wider learning communities, have been critical in supporting students in situations of crisis, when professional decisions and actions must be taken rapidly, often without the usual guidance and consultation processes.

This report considers what can be learned from these experiences. Teachers, as agents of change empowered to engage through different learning communities, are not only essential in times of crisis, but are also key actors in progress on any transformative agenda, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Inclusive learning and teaching communities that support the learning and well-being of all their members will become increasingly important as the institutional boundaries of learning become more fluid, whether due to temporary physical building closures, widening inequalities, increasingly diverse student populations or technological change. School closures around the world have reminded us that people (teachers, students and their families) rather than physical buildings make up the school and learning communities. Sustaining relationships that create a sense of togetherness and participation are essential for building effective and resilient education systems.

This report focuses on the changing roles of teachers and the related teacher development opportunities and conditions that are required to empower educators to act and learn together with their students, colleagues and wider communities. Traditionally, teaching and teacher education policies have

¹ Dr Pantić currently holds an additional appointment at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies (University of Helsinki)

² Ms Persson is now affiliated with the University of Glasgow.

positioned teachers as role-implementers in an isolated teacher-classroom activity. However, teachers do not act in isolation, and educational outcomes arise from complex interactions between many actors. This report considers the changes that are required for supporting teaching within broader communities of practice, in which teachers work closely with other professionals, families and community members to address a range of student needs. Specifically, the paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the role of teachers in developing inclusive learning communities that support the learning and well-being of all their members?
2. What kinds of teacher education and professional learning are required for collaborative working and supporting inclusive communities?
3. What policies are needed to enhance the role of teachers as agents of both change and continuity who can build and sustain inclusive communities?

To address these questions, the paper reviews international reports and research to outline the changing contexts of teachers' work and make a case for reconceptualizing teaching as a collaborative profession, vital for creating and sustaining inclusive learning communities. Examples from around the world are used to illustrate these ways of working and to show how they can be supported in teacher development, highlighting effective policies and directions for change.

This report identifies the following key messages in relation to the three research questions:

1. **Teachers have a key role to play in developing inclusive learning communities**

In the context of increasing diversity and uncertainty, **teachers' roles extend beyond the focus on learning achievements to encompass holistic support for personal and social development**, particularly for fostering belonging and learning among diverse students. Such a role implies the need for new pedagogical and curricular practices and learning together within communities.

Relationships and collaboration with colleagues, families and other professionals are critical for building inclusive learning communities. They help teachers better understand and incorporate diverse perspectives in their practice. They are also important for responding to crisis and building resilience during disruptions.

As systems thinkers who reflect on their practice and working contexts, teachers can contribute to the improvement of education provision overall. Teachers are well placed to see the impact of education provision on students and families. To fully use this knowledge, they need to understand how their practices are shaped by the larger systems and contexts.

2. **Teacher education and professional learning can support collaborative working and inclusive communities**

Teachers cannot be expected to develop all the specialist knowledge and skills that might be needed for supporting every different learner. Rather, there is a **need to develop teachers as learners** who engage in inquiry and experimentation, linking theory and practical knowledge to identify and address the issues students face.

A key capacity teachers need to develop is how to identify and seek support from others, including colleagues, other professionals, families and wider communities. Collaboration between schools and teacher education institutions can foster (student) teachers' collaborative experiences that are situated in workplace contexts and real needs for support.

Reflecting and learning about other systems can help teachers better understand and identify improvements needed in their own context. **Engagement with research and international learning in teacher education can support teachers in critically examining policies** that shape their practices and student experiences and identifying the need for systematic change.

3. **Effective policies can enhance the roles of teachers as agents of both change and continuity**

Teachers' extended roles need to be recognized in policy discourses and structural conditions. Teachers need **autonomy to respond to the diversity of their students' needs**. This support should be a norm in all educational provision, rather than having a specialized focus on specific groups. This also implies the need for the teaching workforce to reflect social diversity.

To allow teachers to engage with others in problem-solving, professional learning and inquiry, **time for building relationships and communities needs to be part of contractual hours** alongside time for instruction. Inclusive communities need to be part of quality evaluation and policy interventions, on par with learning outcomes.

Teachers need to have **opportunities to participate in decision-making** at different levels, including choices of pedagogical and curricular approaches, as well as wider system development. Their voice is critical in meeting the needs of all learners.

1. Background and context: Teachers need support to face an uncertain future

Increased diversity and uncertainty have caused significant change in education around the world, making learning environments more fluid. Higher enrolment rates, greater mobility, climate change and large-scale classroom disruptions in times of crisis are changing schools and education systems. Improved access and increased movement across national borders have introduced diverse abilities, backgrounds and experiences into classrooms. Children and young people make up 14 per cent of the world's estimated 258 million migrants (UNICEF, 2017) and 40 per cent of the 80 million forcibly displaced people (Warren and Wagner, 2020), bringing different languages and cultures into learning environments all over the world (UNESCO, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic was a moment of significant uncertainty, and the upheavals that took place at that time shed a spotlight on how unpredictable the future can be. At the peak of the pandemic, 95 per cent of countries had partially or fully closed their schools (UNESCO, 2020a), impacting around 63 million primary and secondary school teachers (UNESCO, 2020b). The pandemic exacerbated existing educational inequalities: marginalized groups were the hardest hit. In 2020, it was estimated that between 9.7 million and 10.9 million children were at risk of dropping out of school due to the compounded effects of poverty and the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020d; Warren and Wagner, 2020). The poorest families faced the most significant barriers to accessing online learning technologies, highlighting disparities in access to education (Herold, 2020). Only one in five children in sub-Saharan Africa had adequate access to online learning technologies, compared to over four in five in Western Europe and North America (Giannini, 2020).

Periods of crisis and uncertainty have a substantial impact on teacher well-being and the teaching profession. Already navigating multiple roles, teachers take on expanded responsibilities. They may act as humanitarians, health workers, guardians and counsellors. Providing psychological support for students, parents and peers is common. As one teacher in post-conflict and post-Ebola Liberia explained, 'a teacher's responsibility of just providing knowledge and skills in the classroom is no longer enough, he/she has to de-traumatize the students and people' (Adebayo, 2019, p. 8). Teachers are also expected to be agents for peace (Altinyelken, 2013; Lopes Cardozo, 2015), as in the case of post-conflict Cambodia (Hawrylenko, 2010), and to communicate public health messages to the community (UNESCO, 2020b). Associated shocks to the economy can also affect the education budget, leading to pay cuts, job losses and hiring freezes, which make teaching positions more precarious, especially for contract teachers (Hargreaves and Flutter, 2013; Means, 2019). These factors inevitably have a negative effect on teachers' satisfaction and lead to higher turnover rates. Crises, along with the budget cuts and increased turnover that they produce, contribute to the global teacher shortages challenging the achievement of SDG 4.

Managerialism has had negative effects on teachers and teaching

The negative impact of crises on teachers magnifies existing issues with the managerialism approach to education, creating a vicious cycle. Managerialism is part of neoliberal reforms first implemented in the 1980s (Hursh, 2005). It focuses on efficiency and cost-cutting and is accompanied by increased privatization and marketization (Smith and Benavot, 2019). In this approach, teachers are limited to objects to be managed (Bascia and Stevenson, 2017) and seen as a human capital input (Bengtsson et al., 2020), needing to 'demonstrate publicly that they fulfil accountability requirements' (Larsen, 2005, p. 300). Responsibility for education is shifted from national governments to schools and individual educators (Matanović, Romstein and Bushati, 2018). Education is conceived of in quasi-market, transactional terms, and this, combined with a customer orientation (Simkins, 2000), creates a competitive culture (Edwards,

2019) in which schools and teachers are pitted against each other for status and resources. As the Korean Teachers Union noted, after neoliberal reforms were implemented in a top-down manner without input from teachers and students (Smith and Benavot, 2019), the resulting atmosphere ‘played a role in breaking the cooperative culture among teachers’ (Symeonidis, 2015, p. 34).

Under managerialism, teachers have less say in what is taught in the classroom and are often absent from conversations about policies that directly impact them. Policies are often imposed on teachers from above, with no opportunity for teachers to have input into policy development (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020).

Teachers are faced with doing more, with less autonomy, often without the benefits of secure employment. The shift of responsibilities from the national to the local level is part of an ongoing responsibilization of teachers (Done and Murphy, 2016), in which teachers take on ‘roles that in a previous era would have fallen to parents and grandparents, local communities, the church and other social agencies’ (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020, p. 29). At the same time, teachers are progressively evaluated based on their perceived contribution to student achievement (Robertson and Sorenson, 2018) and student test scores are used as a tool to hold educators accountable (Smith, 2014). Across 33 participating countries in the 2013 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), test scores were the most common component used in teacher appraisals (Smith and Kubacka, 2017). An obsession with test scores can lead to a culture in which students are valued, in part, based on their likely success on the test, creating an ‘ideal type’ of student, reducing celebrations of diversity and shaping approaches to teacher education (Hedegaard-Sørensen and Hamre, 2019; Slee, 2013; Smith, 2016). Teacher unions in Costa Rica, Fiji, Ghana, Guinea, Honduras, Japan, Liberia, Malawi, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain and the United Kingdom have reported that test scores are regularly used to hold their teachers accountable (Symeonidis, 2015), with 42 per cent of more than 100 unions from around the globe indicating test scores are tied directly to teacher pay (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020).

Performance-related pay is not only an attempt to incentivize teachers, but is also used to restrict public spending and resist general pay increases (Hargreaves and Flutter, 2013). The use of contract teachers has a similar rationale, while further undermining teacher security. In 2018, just under half of teachers in 129 countries were on a fixed-term contract (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020). Increased privatization has given commercial actors greater power to hire and fire teachers (Hall et al., 2015; Hood, 1991) and standardization practices have, at times, reduced teachers to content conduits, making them seem easily replaceable with others who can ‘deliver’ the curriculum (Means, 2019). All of this makes teacher employment more precarious.

The increasingly limited role of teachers is likely linked to the erosion in trust in teachers (Smith and Benavot, 2019). Austerity measures and approaches that see teachers as objects to be managed have undermined teachers’ status, and negative projections are regularly amplified by the media (Alhamdan et al., 2014). For instance, teacher unions in Cyprus reported a 40 per cent reduction in new teacher salaries following austerity measures, and the uncertainty of the position contributed to growing negativity in the portrayal of teachers in the media (Symeonidis, 2015). Discourses that de-professionalize teachers can affect teachers’ sense of purpose. For instance, in Scotland, teacher beliefs around their agency were limited by a performative narrative that valued teachers’ worth based on student achievement (Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015).

In an era of uncertainty, teachers need autonomy and support to adapt their practice

The educational environment is fraught with challenges and disruptions to the delivery of education are

becoming more frequent. In light of these challenges, teachers need help to successfully navigate a volatile and uncertain future. Recent international crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the need to reimagine the nature of teaching and teacher education (Flores and Swennen, 2020) and to challenge some established practices – including using the curriculum only to pass on past knowledge, instead of looking towards a new future (Brennan, 2017). Traditional teacher education assumes a linear progression in individual development, but in fact, students and teachers need to learn together to think outside the box and practise creative problem-solving (Hodges et al., 2020). This learning increasingly takes place in a variety of social settings.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were pushed to learn new approaches and skills beyond those based in traditional forms of academic knowledge. Globally, over 50 per cent of 135 countries surveyed responded to school closures by continuing teaching through a variety of learning modalities: television, radio, online, take-home packages, or a combination of these methods (UNESCO, 2020b). Teachers in many countries were quickly trained in emergency remote teaching, providing alternative online delivery of instruction to meet the circumstances of the crisis (Hodges et al., 2020). This highlights the need for adopting flexible pedagogy that allows teachers the ability to exercise their agency. Flexible learning includes dimensions of pedagogy, including when and where learning occurs, what technologies are useful, and when and how to assess and evaluate learning (Huang et al., 2020). Socioemotional competencies have also emerged as essential: social awareness, reflexivity, communication skills, empathy and the ability to cope with changing conditions were clearly necessary to deal with the complex and evolving challenges of the pandemic (Hadar et al., 2020).

Flexible, adaptive practices can be supported in teacher communities that provide space for peers to share their experiences, learn from each other and develop teacher agency. To survive and thrive in a volatile and uncertain environment, Lawrence (2013) and others (Cruz, 2021; Gilead and Dishon, 2021) have suggested that greater vision, understanding, clarity and agility are needed. For teachers and communities, this includes being flexible, sustainable and able to provide various types of support (professional, psychological, etc.) for community members (Zaalouk et al., 2021). Teachers need the autonomy and authority to quickly decide on the best practices for their students in the given context, and to adapt them as needed. Teachers also need to have the capacity and resources to effectively apply a variety of pedagogical approaches, meet the needs of all learners and make decisions in uncertain contexts. Finally, they need stability, where possible, with the confidence that conditions will not dictate their employment status.

Existing approaches are not adequately preparing teachers for increased diversity

Previous approaches have been insufficient in preparing teachers for increased diversity and uncertainty. Traditional, rigid structures and curriculum that focus on individual competences limit teachers' ability to adapt to local circumstances. Teachers too often feel unprepared for encountering and teaching in diverse classrooms (UNESCO, 2018) and lack the authority to determine practices in their own classrooms and schools. Across 68 teacher unions, 36 per cent stated they do not have the freedom to determine what and how to teach without interference, according to professional standards (Symeonidis, 2015). Lack of professional autonomy is clearly captured by one primary teacher in Türkiye: 'Teachers are under pressure. A path has been set. They must go that way. They cannot go any further.' (Mutluer and Yuksel, 2019, p. 191).

Teacher uncertainty about teaching diverse students suggests that current modes of teacher preparation and development may not be adequate for the changing contexts of education. Across the 24 European Union countries that took part in the 2018 TALIS, only 2 in 5 teachers felt prepared to teach in mixed

ability classrooms and 1 in 4 in classrooms with multiple languages (UNESCO, 2021). While these numbers increased slightly across OECD member states in the 2024 TALIS, with recent graduates feeling better prepared than experienced teachers, a lower percent of teachers reported received relevant training (OECD, 2025). There is often no clear relationship between the level of diversity in the classroom and the training of the teacher (UNESCO, 2018).

Within teacher education programmes, content regarding diversity is more likely to have taken place during in-service training than in pre-service training and is unlikely to be mandatory. In one review, among 105 programmes that included an element of diversity, only 19 were mandatory (April et al., 2018). This may be due to the variety of stakeholders that offer diversity training and the limited extent of such programmes within traditional teacher education institutions. For instance, in the 105 programmes studied, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or private organizations were the most common providers, offering 40 of the programmes. Others were provided by universities, teacher unions or the government. Of government-provided programmes, 63 per cent were mandatory, while all of the other 75 programmes were considered voluntary (April et al., 2018). Examples of mandatory courses on providing support for students from diverse backgrounds can be found in teacher training programmes in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway (UNESCO, 2018).

Teachers also need support to fill capacity needs highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The most common area of support for teachers during the pandemic was skills and pedagogical approaches using information and communication technology (ICT), but just half of middle-income countries and one out of five low-income countries offered specialized training (UNESCO, 2020b). Across the 48 countries that participated in the 2018 TALIS, just under 60 per cent of teachers had ICT training as part of their initial preparation (Darling-Hammond and Hyler, 2020). Support for social-emotional competencies is noticeably worse. Among 105 teacher training programmes, training on psychological interventions was included in only 20 per cent (April et al., 2018). Of 15 low-income countries reporting on responses to the pandemic, none indicated providing teachers with professional psychological or emotional support (UNESCO, 2020b) and prior reviews of the literature report that development of social-emotional competences is largely absent in teacher preparation (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Teacher agency and inclusive learning communities can help address the challenges of the future

Past approaches to supporting teachers have insufficiently prepared the profession for challenges resulting from diversity and disruptions. To address future global challenges, coordinated approaches are needed, both within and beyond schools. Effective teaching necessitates an understanding of how educational opportunities and outcomes arise from the complex interactions of many actors, all of whom contribute their diverse perspectives and expertise in order to achieve these outcomes together. This report reviews how teachers can be better prepared and supported to exercise their agency in building inclusive learning communities for addressing the needs of students and teachers in an uncertain world. Inclusive learning communities that account for diverse perspectives, values and knowledge are key to supporting both teachers' and students' learning, participation, well-being, sense of belonging and positive relationships, and are a necessary element in providing flexible responses to the increasingly dynamic delivery of education.

Including teachers in collaborative decision-making and leadership roles in their schools, communities and larger educational systems is increasingly recognized as essential for the creation of inclusive learning communities. Empowering teachers in this way positions them not only as members to be included in the community, but also as stakeholders able to make the school community inclusive for others. This report considers the mutually formative relationship between teacher agency and inclusive

learning communities, which encompass teacher collaboration in professional communities, as well as collaboration with families, other professionals and wider communities.

Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted teachers' untapped potential for creatively responding to problems and collaborating in professional networks within and beyond their schools. Working in this way enabled them to develop collective agency to tackle losses in learning and rising inequality (Ehren et al., 2021). Inclusive communities helped teachers to overcome the challenges of the pandemic by providing space for collaboration and consolation and to offer support in coping with the social and psychological challenges of disruption and disease (Avalos-Bevan, 2021; Zaalouk et al., 2021). These communities advance inclusive attitudes, influence the implementation of policies addressing the needs of diverse learners, improve teacher satisfaction and increase the likelihood that teachers will try new pedagogical approaches in their classroom (Lehtomaki et al., 2020; OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2018).

When they see themselves as active agents within their schools and education systems, teachers can use their agency to build inclusive communities that welcome and support all learners. However, the current global climate, focused on performativity, is a major factor that restrains teacher agency by directing desired action towards narrowly defined notions of achievement and learning outcomes. This concerning trend can be further aggravated by the deeply hierarchical systems that position teachers as implementers of policies designed by others, rather than building their capacity to act as highly knowledgeable partners who understand the wider needs of their students and communities, and therefore should have an important voice in devising as well as implementing solutions. Inclusive learning communities, supported through school staff agency and leadership, have the potential to address some of the most pressing global challenges – including access to education, even in difficult conditions.

2. Research questions and key terms

Aims and research questions

This report considers the future of teaching as a collaborative profession, focusing on the role of teacher agency in building and sustaining inclusive learning communities. The report first clarifies the key terms of teacher agency and communities, before considering relevant teacher education and policies that create the necessary conditions for supporting teacher agency and collaboration within communities. Specifically, the report addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the role of teachers in developing inclusive learning communities that support the learning and well-being of all their members?
2. What kinds of teacher education and professional learning are required for collaborative working and supporting inclusive communities?
3. What policies are needed to enhance the role of teachers as agents of both change and continuity who can build and sustain inclusive communities?

Examples that illuminate key features of successful practice are included in boxes within each section.

The final section of the report offers a brief conclusion, refers to the summary of recommendations (Appendix 1) and situates these recommendations in the 1966 International Labour Organization/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ILO/UNESCO) Recommendations Concerning

the Status of Teachers (2019) (Appendix 2³).

Key terms

Teacher agency and community building are essential factors in educational change and teacher development towards greater inclusion, and therefore, form the key concepts that underlie this report. In this section, we define the key terms of teacher agency, teacher community and inclusive learning community.

Teacher agency

Agency has been defined differently in different disciplines. One clear dichotomy lies in the question of whether agency is primarily an internal, individual trait (a psychological perspective) or a socially defined trait, predominantly shaped by cultural and structural contexts. For example, sociocognitive theory emphasizes the role of actors' sense of efficacy as part of a personal ability to control their motives, social and emotional situations (Bandura, 2001), while sociocultural perspectives emphasize the role of social contexts that shape what actors see as possible actions within a given environment (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Some of the most influential educational theories, such as the ecological perspective of agency (Biesta and Tedder, 2007), define agency as a capacity to respond critically to problematic situations. Applied to teachers' work, such agency is not something that teachers 'possess' to different degrees, but rather something that can be 'achieved' in particular situations and enabled in particular conditions (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015).

Most recent empirical studies indicate that professional agency in education is largely a socially-embedded or mediated phenomenon (Parker, 2016; Vähäsantanen et al., 2020). As agency is embedded in the environment, it is difficult to fully distinguish the individual from their associated relationships and communities. Li and Ruppert (2020) define teacher agency for inclusion as 'a temporal, individual and collective engagement in active decision-making on curriculum, assessment and everyday inclusive educational practices' (pp. 11–12). This position rejects the idea of agency as a purely individual trait and instead recognizes agency as just one, albeit important, aspect that drives social action (Parker, 2016). Studies of teacher agency for inclusion and social justice (Pantić, 2015; 2017) and inter-agency work to address risks of exclusion (Edwards, 2010) further highlight the situational and relational nature of agency, whereby teachers are both influenced by and capable of transforming their environment. For example, studies show that the same teachers act in different situations as either proactive agents of change or role-implementers, depending on their understanding of the problem at hand and the resources they are able to mobilize (Pantić et al., 2021).

This report endorses the view of agency that focuses on the relational and collaborative aspects particularly relevant for building inclusive communities that welcome and support all learners. In particular, we cover three key aspects of teacher agency: 1) sense of professional purpose – how teachers see their role, for example with regard to supporting student well-being as well as learning; 2) community building – how teachers work with each other and with other players to achieve their purposes; and 3) reflexivity – teachers' capacity to critically monitor their practices within the wider social and educational systems (Pantić, 2015; 2017; 2021). Central to this understanding of agency is teachers' potential to influence change and address challenges as members of a community who

³ An earlier draft of the report was provided as background to the Fourteenth Session of the Joint ILO–UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel, held in October 2021. The final report from that session and updated recommendations are available at <https://www.ilo.org/resource/conference-paper/final-report-fourteenth-session-ceart-october-2021>.

develop spaces for an authentic culture of collaboration among themselves and with diverse stakeholders (Baker-Doyle, 2015; Little, 2002; Zeichner, 2010).

Teacher communities

Teacher communities (TCs) provide a space for teachers to engage as learners, broadening their understanding through sharing experiences, and imparting a sense of professional belonging. These communities can be a safe environment for teachers to open their practice to peers for examination, as long as there is trust and respect within the group as well as a collaborative and cooperative spirit (Vangrieken et al., 2017). When they form part of a cohesive group, teachers are better able to critically deal with the political, social and economic conditions, such as climate change and public health crises, in which their students exist and in which they, as teachers, can make an impact (Admiraal, Akkerman and de Graaff, 2012). Teacher communities have been defined as ‘groups of teachers who come together to engage in regular, systematic and sustained cycles of inquiry-based learning, with the intention to develop their individual and collective capacity for teaching to improve student outcomes’ (Brodie, 2021, p. 560). While the focus is often on teachers and their pedagogical practices, variants can also include other staff within the school and address school-wide issues. Engagement within TCs allows members to identify collective priorities and recognize their shared responsibilities.

In their review, Vangrieken and colleagues (2017) identify three common types of teacher communities (Table 1), in which teachers play different roles in creating and sustaining the community. Teachers are included in the origination and leadership of formative communities and of member-oriented communities with a preset agenda, which means these types of communities are more likely than formal communities to provide space for teachers to enact their agency and to have trust in the activities, processes and outcomes of the community.

Table 1 Types of teacher communities

Types of teacher communities	Origination	Leadership	Goal(s)	Participants	Timeframe
Formal	Government initiatives	Initiated by outside experts to transfer knowledge to teachers	Preset: Implementation of education standards at national level	Compulsory or voluntary; from 1 or more schools	Limited time period
Member-oriented with preset agenda	School principal, teachers, authors of studies	Members, school principal	Preset: Creating a teacher community which uses teachers' experiences to enhance teachers' professional development	Usually voluntary; from 1 or more schools	Ongoing
Formative	Teachers	Rotating leadership from within TC	Not preset; goals and agendas are set over time	Voluntary	Ongoing

Source: Adapted from Vangrieken et al. (2017).

The essential and enriching elements that TCs weave into teachers' experience, as well as into the schools within which they work, inevitably have an impact on the learning and experiences of students. TCs facilitate collective experiences and expertise, enable teacher inquiry to understand issues from macro to micro levels and allow teachers to participate in informed decision-making (Admiraal, Akkerman and de Graaff, 2012; Brodie, 2021; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Formal TCs have 'a structure for continuous school improvement through the building of teachers' competence for learning and change' (Vangrieken et al., 2017, p. 48). Two commonly used structures of formal TCs are professional learning communities (PLCs) and communities of practice (COPs), both developed to replace traditional and ineffective single-shot professional development modes (Vangrieken et al., 2017). PLCs emerged as an answer to teacher isolation and constitute an effective means for collaborative decision-making, raising teacher satisfaction and improving student achievement. PLCs are commonly defined as TCs 'with the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing student learning' (Bolam et al., 2005, p. 145). COPs in teaching originated as groups of teachers who participate together in discussions and decision-making while sharing and building collective knowledge and group identity, shared goals and shared repertoire (Brouwer et al., 2012). Although the terms come from different backgrounds, the terms PLCs and COPs are often used interchangeably, since the two structures usually have the same goals, strategies and concepts regarding professional learning and use the same strategies to achieve these goals. However, it is problematic to limit TCs to PLCs and COPs, as these two modes are not the only formal ways in which teachers engage in community in schools or with other educators. Moreover, considering TCs as only PLCs and COPs ignores the informal ways in which teachers engage in communities together, which also improve individual professional and school capacity.

Inclusive learning communities

Inclusive learning communities that support equitable education for all extend beyond teacher communities to include stakeholders in the broader communities. Inclusion can be seen as a social movement against exclusion, in society and in education (Slee and Allan, 2001). Inclusive learning communities are made up of a variety of members including, but not limited to, students, their families, teachers, school staff (i.e. office, janitorial, cafeteria, transportation), school leadership and other community members (i.e. after school care, medical). Genuine inclusion does not just provide access to community discussions and decisions, but ensures an equally valued voice in these spaces. In an inclusive school community, all members of the school community are considered essential, especially those who have been traditionally excluded and disenfranchised, including those of different ability, race and ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion and class (Forlin, 2010; Jarvis et al., 2020; Li and Ruppert, 2020).

To include and meet the needs of all members, deep changes to structures, cultures, practices and pedagogy may be necessary. School communities are inclusive when they: (1) promote learning and meaningful participation of all their members; (2) establish and maintain collaborative and cooperative relationships between all members, including families, students, communities, leadership and teachers; and (3) reflectively enact inclusive education principles in pedagogical and wider school and system practices (Carrington and Robinson, 2006; Jarvis et al., 2020; Siegel-Hawley and Frankenberg, 2012).

3. Research question 1: Teachers have a key role to play in developing inclusive learning communities

Teachers play an important role in developing inclusive school communities that support the learning and well-being of all their members. In this section, we review the different aspects of teacher agency that support inclusive practice. First, we consider teachers' beliefs and practices that underlie inclusive

pedagogical approaches within and beyond classrooms. Next, we outline the collaborative skills required for creating and sustaining inclusive relationships within and beyond school communities. Finally, we consider the role of teachers' reflection and inquiry in making them systems thinkers who understand the ways in which education intersects with wider social contexts in order to make use of and change support systems.

Teachers' roles extend beyond a focus on learning achievements

To play a role in developing inclusive learning communities, teachers need to develop beliefs and practices that meet the wide-ranging needs of diverse learners (Carrington and Robinson, 2006). Teachers' beliefs about the purposes of education and about their roles underlie their sense of professional agency, as they work to achieve the aims that they see as worthwhile. Studies show that teachers' beliefs about their professional roles both reflect and go beyond a focus on learning achievements (Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015; Pantić et al., 2021). Teachers exercise agency to support students' well-being as well as their learning, providing emotional support and seeking ways to understand and remove the barriers to learning that students experience. Recognizing and actively working to fulfil the right of all children to a quality education is part of teacher agency (Fullan, 2006) and central in teachers' professional philosophy for inclusion (Li and Ruppert, 2020). Inclusion requires a shared sense of responsibility for the education of all children (Forlin, 2010) and necessitates seeing individual differences as 'opportunities for democratizing and enriching learning', rather than as barriers that need to be remedied (UNESCO, 2017, p. 13). In examining inclusive schools in Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States, Kugelmass (2006) noted that the foundation of the school culture was an uncompromising recognition of diversity as a resource.

Supporting all learners also requires teachers to reflect on their own practice, remain open to new perspectives and adopt an inquisitive mindset that includes being willing to question their own assumptions, adapt past practices and venture into new areas (Carrington and Robinson, 2006). This kind of reflective practice requires personal and professional development based on a willingness to work with and learn from others, recognizing the diversity of knowledge and experience and working in a collegial spirit with supportive ideals (Forlin, 2010).

At the level of classroom practices and direct work with students, teachers play an important role in developing students' academic and social skills (Siegel-Hayley and Frankenberg, 2012). Approaches such as inclusive pedagogy (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011) and culturally responsive teaching (Villegas and Lucas, 2002) have incorporated teacher agency frameworks (Florian and Pantić, 2017; Siegel-Hayley and Frankenberg, 2012) to explore how teachers can meet the needs of their diverse students. Inclusive pedagogical approaches require a shift in thinking about inclusion: instead of seeing inclusion as providing something additional or special to some groups of learners, inclusion must be seen as providing to everybody what is ordinarily available (Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011). This way of thinking recognizes individual difference as an inherent feature of human development but avoids the discrimination that can inadvertently arise from labelling some groups of learners with fixed categories based on specific assumptions. Instead of trying to predict who can learn what and at what stage, teachers are invited to consider a spectrum of diverse strengths and achievements that students can bring to their learning and socialization. Importantly, this approach acknowledges that teachers do not have the capacity to develop the specialist knowledge and skills needed to support every different type of learner. Rather, it suggests that a key capacity teachers need to develop is how to identify and seek support from others, including colleagues, other professionals, families and wider communities (Florian and Pantić, 2017).

Capacity to design and adapt curricula, as well as to implement them, is an important domain in which teachers exercise their agency for inclusive and culturally responsive teaching (Jarvis et al., 2020; Villegas and Lucas, 2002). Villegas and Lucas (2002) discuss teacher agency for change in the context of teaching culturally diverse learners. They suggest that teachers need to be seen not as technical implementers of curricula designed by others, but as professionals who use their social and political awareness of the contexts in which they teach, including challenges for minority groups (Siegel-Hayley and Frankenberg, 2012) and other sensitive issues, to make their teaching relevant and inclusive for all learners. The capacity and freedom to adapt curricula can be important in creating an inclusive classroom, since in many countries, curricula do not include issues of multiculturalism and diversity (UNESCO, 2018).

Examples of curricular practice that aim to benefit all learners are Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) (Jarvis et al., 2020). Using the planning framework of UDL, teachers can design curriculum and learning activities that maximize accessibility for all students by offering multiple opportunities for engagement. DI aids are used to design learning experiences to address differences in students' readiness, interests and learning preferences. These ways of working have implications for how to prepare teachers for the diverse academic and non-academic needs of students, bridging gaps between prior knowledge and new content (Siegel-Hayley and Frankenberg, 2012).

Relationships help teachers understand the needs of learners

Relationships are at the heart of communities and provide powerful conduits for understanding the needs and experiences of others to support both cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Relationships are also important in themselves, as part of learning how to be and thrive together with others in an increasingly diverse world. Different worldviews, cultural heritage or political views can be sources of conflict, but can also be harnessed creatively to enrich education and drive innovation. Learning is a social as well as a cognitive process, and it is (and increasingly will be in the future) organized as a networked activity. Teachers have a role in nourishing positive relationships and fostering an atmosphere of collaboration rather than competition.

Relationships in learning communities both shape and are shaped by teacher agency. In situations where teachers act as agents of change for inclusive pedagogy, they have significantly more interactions with other teachers, leadership and specialists than they do in situations where they act as role-implementers (Pantić et al., 2021). Teachers' capacity to identify relevant sources of information and expertise and to mobilize their support networks forms an integral part of a particular form of 'relational agency' that is exercised through purposeful interactions with others in order to achieve what matters to them as a professional community – in this case, taking collective responsibility for supporting the learning and well-being of all students in their charge. These interactions can be seen as building blocks for developing more stable supportive relationships within and beyond the school community.

Teachers' relationships may be both intra-professional, within the teaching profession, and inter-professional, with families, other professionals and community members (Jarvis et al., 2020). These relationships enable holistic support to be provided for students, by ensuring that outreach and specialist advice is available to be drawn upon when needed and by effectively communicating student and school challenges to parents and communities to collectively meet students' needs (Tsokova and Tarr, 2012). While teachers are best placed to have close knowledge of and communicate about such supports for students, the management of resources and opportunities can be led by any community member, and successful communities direct these resources towards their shared goals.

Students are a vital part of inclusive learning communities and need to be recognized and valued as full members. Sharing responsibility and brokering more inclusive practices through extended relationships

may be challenging for teachers more accustomed to traditional power relationships and working in isolation (Carrington and Robinson, 2006). Head teachers can help bridge this gap by creating space for teachers to express their agency, while working with students and their families to identify and achieve common goals (see Box 1).

Box 1: India: Transformative leadership improves access and attendance among vulnerable children

Summary

The case of Achchappa Gouda, a head teacher in a rural school in India, exemplifies the importance of engaging with the community to address barriers in accessing education. Working one step at a time and securing support from both teachers and parents, he has led a process of improving attendance, with the result that the number of students attending school now almost matches enrolment numbers. This case study illustrates the critical role of head teachers in creating opportunities for school staff to work collaboratively with each other and with the wider community to understand and address challenges faced by students and their families.

Context

Children enrolling in school but not attending classes is a common problem in most rural schools in India. Achchappa Gouda took charge of the Government Higher Primary School (GHPS) in Jumalapur Dodda Thand as its head teacher in 2015. The villages around the school have nearly 400 households, with most families owning a small amount of land and working in agriculture. Around 40 families belong to the Lambani community, one of the poorest communities in the region, whose members are agricultural labourers.

GHPS had many challenges related to access to education. Children had to walk for a kilometre to fetch drinking water. Part of the building had become dysfunctional. The number of classrooms was insufficient and the school premises were not big enough for all the children from the communities served. Out of 500 students enrolled, only 50 per cent attended the school from June to October. There were no toilets and the midday meal scheme functioned erratically in the absence of a full-time cook. Financial resources were limited. The community was unhappy with the school's capacity to acquire and use resources for its development and suspected financial irregularities.

Teacher agency and leadership

Achchappa Gouda had been an assistant teacher for years, so he was familiar with the school's access issues, and when he took charge as head teacher, he saw an opportunity to change the situation.

To do so, he created space for teachers to exercise their agency in defining and achieving common goals. His account illustrates the transformative power possible when those who have close knowledge of their students and their families are encouraged to think creatively and work together to devise solutions.

The teachers began to assume shared responsibility for addressing the issue of attendance. They took the initiative to visit families when students were absent for a long period of time. They talked to parents and encouraged them to send their children to school regularly. They worked together with the head teacher to help the children from the Lambani community, who were particularly vulnerable to dropping out. Teachers discussed plans on how to match attendance with enrolment and realized that engaging with the community was key.

Engaging with the community

Achchappa Gouda and his team had to understand the problems faced by families and the reasons why children were not attending. Attendance would drop after the month of October, because the seasonal nature of agriculture work meant families had to migrate to find work. Lambani community

members regularly migrated to work in the sugarcane fields in the neighbouring district, where harvesting usually starts in October and continues for about five months. Families took their children along. Being out of school for almost half the year led to challenges in learning.

Children from the Lambani community face an additional challenge in the medium of instruction. These children speak the Lambani language, while the medium of instruction in schools is Kannada. In the early grades, they have difficulties in understanding lessons, and by the time they begin to understand the language of instruction, they have already completed at least a couple of years of their schooling. The teachers acknowledge that this language barrier is an impediment in interacting with the children from these communities, which is compounded by large class sizes of about 60 students per class.

The impact

Under Achchappa Gouda's leadership, a hostel was built and a makeshift classroom was constructed with the help of the community. An adjacent piece of land was bought from a community member at a concessional rate. Three guest teachers were hired to fill vacant teachers' posts. Teachers started staying after school to take care of the children who stayed in the hostel on a rotating basis. They began to employ multi-grade instructional settings to overcome language barriers.

As a result, attendance started to improve, until the enrolment number and the number of students attending school almost matched. Children from neighbouring villages also started to enrol in GHPS Jumalapur. The community gained trust and respect for teachers' work. Achchappa Gouda said it would have been impossible to overcome the challenges without the team of talented and dedicated teachers he had with him. He described the team as a family, and his role as that of an elder brother.

Working together, the GHPS team managed to change the community's perception of the school, and now have full faith that the community, whose goodwill they have earned with their hard work, will continue to support the school with financial and human resources.

Source: Based on Sure and Kulkani (2020).

Times of disruption can create a sense of togetherness and shared purpose, which can support the development of relationships and community. The creative potential in times when structure and tradition are challenged can give teachers space to reflect on and experiment with their professional identity. This moment of collective opportunity was clear in Ireland during the COVID-19 crisis, when 'students, teachers, school managers and policymakers were, in many respects, united by their vulnerability' (White and McSharry, 2021, p. 4). School closures created new opportunities, as teachers creatively tried new approaches, transforming schools and practices (White and McSharry, 2021).

Teachers must engage in professional reflection and systems thinking

To develop inclusive communities that support the learning and well-being of all their members, teachers must be systems thinkers who understand the ways that education and social supports work. This includes knowledge of the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice (Fullan, Cuttress and Kilcher, 2005). It also involves a shift in mindset: rather than seeing problems as caused by a distant, detached entity, teachers need to be able to see how their own actions can influence the problems they experience. Engaging as systems thinkers require teachers to exercise both personal and collective agency, for example to identify problematic aspects of their practice and conditions that can enable or constrain change. As Box 1 illustrates, a change process may start as a personal initiative to engage with and develop collaborative communities, which in turn facilitates exercise of collective teacher agency in problem-solving or innovation.

Reflexivity is an important aspect of teacher agency. It can guide teachers in monitoring and regulating their own actions and social contexts, and can enable them to contribute to building inclusive learning communities that can sustain continuity as well as work towards systematic change (Li and Ruppar, 2020; Pantić, 2015). To be systems thinkers, teachers must first recognize and understand the system they are in. Reflecting on their own practice and learning about other systems can help teachers better identify the structure and associated factors in which they work and become aware of potential alternative approaches. This increased awareness aids the critical examination of policies and practices needed for systems to change. When teachers feel the full transformative potential of their work, and also have knowledge of how change in the system occurs, they can be powerful advocates for students and can act as systems thinkers, using their agency to create positive experiences for community members, students, teachers and school staff.

4. Research question 2: Teacher education and professional learning can support collaborative working and inclusive communities

In the context of increasing uncertainty and the need to support diverse communities, providing adequate professional learning for teachers requires reframing teacher education and its foundations. This includes recognizing the need for professional learning to take place within teachers' own work context, with colleagues and over extended periods of time (Jarvis et al., 2020). In this section, we will review how teacher education can help develop teacher agency for working in dynamic and diverse environments, including in the three aspects of their roles covered in section 3 of this report:

- Supporting all students' learning and well-being
- Engaging in and helping build inclusive learning communities
- Acting as systems thinkers in the development of inclusive practice and systems.

In this paper, the term 'teacher education' refers to the many ways in which teachers engage in professional learning, including initial teacher education programmes, continuing education programmes and courses, and professional learning and development in both formal and informal teacher communities. Changes in teacher education are often thought of as either structural or curricular changes, but in fact, changes may be structural and curricular at the same time. Teacher education structures can both model the content they espouse and provide teachers with opportunities to develop and practise a capacity to critically engage with the structures and cultures of their work. This is especially relevant in preparing teachers to work with diverse student populations (Forlin, 2010).

Teacher education must prepare teachers to support all students in contexts of diversity and uncertainty

How inclusion is understood and who is considered responsible for ensuring inclusion is a crucial factor in teacher education and development programmes. A key part of teacher education for supporting all students in an increasingly diverse world is modelling values, such as celebrating diversity as a resource, and providing time and space for teachers to explore, demonstrate and internalize these values. When diversity is understood as a norm, the implication follows that inclusive approaches need to permeate all elements of teacher education, rather than just the parts devoted to certain student groups under the purview of select teachers. Inclusion appears to be an element in most teacher education programmes: 61 per cent of 168 countries claim to provide some form of training on inclusion (UNESCO, 2020c). However, the vast majority of programmes focus solely on children with disabilities, and teacher reports suggest the offer of inclusion training differs widely across countries – for example, less than one in ten primary school teachers across ten countries in sub-Saharan Africa reported receiving relevant training

(Wodon et al., 2018).

Argentina provides a positive example of a broad understanding of inclusion, embedded across teacher education and provided for all teachers. All teachers and student teachers are expected to have a basic understanding of inclusion principles and inclusive pedagogies, and this expectation is supported by general teacher education curricula that include introduction to inclusion courses and education on specific themes, driven by local needs. For instance, in the province of Rio Negro, primary-level pre-service teachers take a multidisciplinary course during the third year of their studies which uses a teacher-as-learner approach to identify and address the various needs in the community and to recognize and value the various expressions of diversity. In the following year, the same cohort takes a four-month seminar on socioeducational problems. With the aim of building inclusive school communities, the seminar uses collaborative action research to help teachers reflect on stigma and stereotypes, power and sociopolitical constructions of inequality (Lehtomaki et al., 2020).

The variability and uncertainty of changing educational contexts make it difficult to predict all future competencies teachers may need. Thus, developing teachers as learners should be a fundamental premise of the profession. Paired with opportunities for agentic action, reflective, inquiry-focused approaches can further teachers' understanding of diversity and equity, and of how the two are interrelated (Siegel-Hawley and Frankenberg, 2012). To prepare for uncertain futures, Li and Ruppap (2020) suggest teacher education should help teachers to develop their imagination and ability to visualize alternative approaches. To respond swiftly to future challenges, teachers need to be flexible in their ability to teach through multiple platforms, as well as prepared to work with a diverse student cohort, including students who come from different backgrounds, speak different languages and enter the classroom with a wide variety of needs.

Teacher education policies can challenge the traditional structures that compartmentalize academic disciplines and related school subjects, helping to move towards more cross-curricular, collaborative approaches in which teachers rely on each other's inputs to support the needs of students within and beyond their own classrooms. Curriculum also needs to move beyond assuming a homogenous grouping of students to instead recognize the diversity of student cohorts, embracing the philosophy of teaching all students (Forlin, 2010). To align with the principles of inclusion, teachers need to be prepared to identify students' needs and differentiate instruction to meet learners where they are in order to help them move forward (Smith and Johnstone, 2023).

In designing curricula for teacher education programmes, it is important to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge (Forlin, 2010). Practical knowledge can include issues related to evaluations, workloads and school hierarchies, among others (Brodie, 2021). The practicum experience, in which student teachers are placed in schools as part of their initial training, is an essential step in gaining practical knowledge. However, with disruptions in education systems making placements more intermittent, teacher education programmes will have to rethink what providing teachers with 'real practice' looks like (Menter and Flores, 2021).

Teacher education must instil the importance of inclusive learning communities in its teachers

Teacher education can help instil in teachers the importance of building relationships within and outside schools to develop a shift in understanding of teaching, whereby teaching is seen as collaborative work, not solitary practice. This shift can enhance teachers' motivation and resilience and can support teachers in acquiring skills and strategies to navigate different relationships and school settings (Li and Ruppap, 2020). Collaboration that engages with and strengthens the entire school community, including parents and students, helps advance inclusion (Lehtomaki et al., 2020). For example, teachers in a rural

South African school reported that collaboration with parents and caregivers positively impacted their capacity to deliver inclusive education, while strengthening the sense of shared responsibility for student learning (Themane and Thobejane, 2019).

To support capacity for building inclusive learning communities, teacher education needs to provide sufficient time for collaboration and space to include non-teaching members in training. Collegiality and navigating peer relationships are important aspects of successful teaching. Good relationships influence teachers' trust of each other and can break down competitive barriers, increasing the likelihood teachers share and learn from each other's practice (UNESCO, 2020c). Establishing inclusion committees in schools can be one step towards improved collegiality. In Kenya, inclusion committees brought together students, teachers and head teachers to discuss challenges to inclusion and work towards a more collaborative atmosphere (Elder and Kuja, 2019). In Lisbon, Portugal, parents and teachers teamed up to develop more inclusive curricula, increasing people's trust in schools as all parties improved their understanding of school and home cultures (César and Oliveira, 2005). This example demonstrates an asset-minded approach to diversity, where students' lives are recognized beyond the classroom and home and community cultures are seen as an asset in meeting shared educational responsibilities (Gichuru et al., 2015; Wells, Fox and Cordova-Cobo, 2016).

The collaborative experiences provided during teacher education helps teachers to recognize and value different types of knowledge while developing transversal skills such as 'critical thinking, collective knowledge building, problem solving and a co-operative spirit' (Zank, 2020, p. 108). Collaborative relationships between schools and teacher education institutions can help foster these experiences. Pre-service teachers' practical experiences in school settings allow the next generation of teachers to gain confidence in working in situated workplace collaborations. Exposure to a diversity of placement settings during teacher education can also help teachers to reflect on their own experiences, while increasing their understanding of learner needs. Box 2 provides an example of how the Universidad de Santiago de Chile partnered with teachers from Santa Victoria's School in Huechuraba to improve collaborative learningBox 2.

Box 2: Chile: Collaborative learning improves pre-service and in-service teacher education in Santiago

Summary

The case of collaboration between pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes in Santiago, Chile addresses a common issue: the gap between teachers' theoretical and practical preparation. A collaborative learning process was set up for university-based student teachers and primary school teachers in Santiago, which enabled both groups to develop research-informed practice while helping student teachers prepare for collaborative work in real school settings. Jointly, teachers applied the principles of inclusive teaching practice to analyse and design lesson plans that promote all students' participation and learning in the context of diverse student populations.

Context

Initial teacher education in Chile is delivered entirely by the universities, while most in-service teachers receive training from private institutions hired by schools. Lack of regulation means that teacher education provision and student experiences are highly variable, depending on specific initiatives and relationships between universities and schools.

Inequitable educational provision has been a major challenge. In recent decades, the state has developed a series of education policies aimed at achieving equitable education for all, which recognize education as a universal right. These policies have led to a significant increase in coverage at primary and secondary levels.

However, high levels of inequity and segregation between different population groups have persisted. Most students have low learning results and many are discriminated against for personal, social and cultural conditions. Continuing exclusion in the Chilean education system is related to the fact that policies based on a comprehensive perspective of inclusion coexist with those that focus on students' deficits. Additionally, the system has seen a deepening of the market-oriented, neoliberal educational model, which has undermined the public education system and established a system of individual accountability, with major implications for the well-being of educational communities and teachers.

Universal design for learning has been introduced in education policy, but it has not been able to transform students' classroom experiences, due to structural conditions and because teacher education for inclusion is largely theoretical and preparation for UDL is decontextualized.

Teacher development programme

A joint programme was designed between a university and schools to prepare pre-service and in-service teachers to use UDL. This research-training experience was intended as an opportunity to recover the meaning of UDL as a pedagogical framework that allows teachers to reflect on the limits that curricular design may force upon student learning and participation.

The initiative emerged from a strong conviction that the development of inclusive teaching practices requires teacher education that does more than just improve knowledge. Teacher education must also provide practical experiences of collective enrichment, where teachers are able to collaborate, discuss and design educational opportunities that place children's and young people's rights at the centre of the discussions.

The initiative developed as an attempt to strengthen collaboration between the university and schools and to generate mutual benefits for teachers in both contexts. The initiative has the potential to be amplified to other pedagogical and didactic areas, as well as to be integrated into institutional policies that allow this kind of collaboration to be sustained

Collaborative teacher education

Ten student teachers from the Universidad de Santiago de Chile participated in the process, together with eight primary and two secondary teachers. The initiative formed part of a compulsory subject in inclusive education, but taking part in the project was voluntary. Additionally, five teachers from Santa Victoria's School in Huechuraba in Santiago de Chile joined as volunteers. The participants came from different disciplines, including math, history, technology, music, biology and philosophy.

The project took place in two stages. Stage 1 preparation was conducted in 2019 in a classroom-based context and included: a) contact with the school; b) an invitation to both groups to participate in the project; c) an initial assessment of the perceived inclusion teaching competences; d) training in topics related to inclusion in education, inclusive pedagogy and UDL, aimed at student teachers (in 7 sessions of 90 minutes) and school teachers (in 3 sessions of 120 minutes); and e) the formation of small groups with two pre-service teachers, one in-service teacher and two members of the university team. The group formation exercise incorporated a visit of student teachers to the school classrooms.

The beginning of Stage 2 was suspended for six months, due to social unrest in Chile at the end of 2019 and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. As a result of the pandemic, the second stage of the collaboration took place in a virtual context. This stage covered: a) relationship-building between participants, rebuilding the sense of the initiative and organizing the work to be done online; b) two sessions of analysis and redesign of a lesson plan; c) a session with all teachers to share their proposals and to receive feedback; and d) a final assessment of inclusive teaching competences and the evaluation of the experience.

The impact

The evaluation of results revealed changes in two dimensions. Firstly, both pre-service and in-service teachers radically changed their conceptions of inclusive education. They built new perspectives on student diversity, understanding diversity better and recognizing its value for learning. Secondly,

collective reflection allowed teachers to diversify the ways in which they present knowledge. They designed activities that promoted student participation and fostered a welcoming classroom climate.

Participating student teachers valued the opportunity to practise the theoretical principles they had previously studied, and to discuss and learn collaboratively to enrich themselves with different experiences as well as to work together to devise new teaching methods.

Teachers suggested improving the initiative with a longer term of work that would enable the creation of stronger ties between student teachers and teachers from the schools. They believed that reflection on planning and implementation of UDL should be a regular practice in schools and universities.

Source: Herrera-Seda, Vanegas-Ortega, Vicencio-Callejas and Maldonado-Amaro (2021).

Practical, collaborative experiences can be provided in a range of ways, facilitating cooperative learning by connecting in-service teachers, either with each other or with pre-service teachers. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the national teacher union hosts learning circles, bringing teachers together to identify educational obstacles and strategize on areas of improvement (El, 2018). Professional learning communities are one way to formally support this activity, involving a 'group of educators working to improve teaching and learning through ongoing critical reflection of instructional practice' (UNESCO, 2017, p. 79). Activities and lessons learned are usually shared among peers, but occasionally also with the larger public. PLCs have recently been recommended in all schools in South Africa (Feldman, 2020), aiming to 'interrogate and re-invigorate ... practice rather than to recycle old ideas' (South Africa, DBE, 2015, p. 5). In Singapore, the Ministry of Education supports schools in choosing among three PLC models.

Lesson study is one of the available PLC options in Singapore and is common throughout Eastern and South-eastern Asia region. In Japan, over 95 per cent of teachers participate in lesson study. This methodology entails a group of teachers working together to refine and deliver a demonstration lesson. Following delivery by one of the group members, the group collectively reflects and identifies areas for improvement. This cycle is repeated with the rest of the group, with the entire process usually taking three to six months. Research suggests that lesson study improves teacher content knowledge while building a more reflective and collaborative school community (UNESCO, 2017).

Teacher clinics are another approach that provides a collaborative opportunity, connecting teachers in training with current teachers (Bakker, 2018). Teacher clinics are based on a service-learning approach that combines learning objectives for pre-service teachers with community service. Current classroom teachers identify existing challenges and collaborate with pre-service teachers to find evidence-based solutions. Examples of collaborative projects from teacher clinics in a course for students at a university in Austria included incorporating elements of education for sustainable development into a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) course consisting largely of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and generating data that could be used to improve student feedback in language courses. The results of the project showed that the pre-service teachers found the experience eye opening, and both pre-service and in-service teachers reported an increased desire to collaborate, largely meeting the teacher clinic's goal of 'building the capacity of students as agents of change' (Biberhofer and Rammel, 2017, p. 66).

Teacher education should facilitate professional reflection and systems-thinking

When they act as systems thinkers, teachers recognize how their practice is embedded in the larger system. This enables them to seek out the factors behind the challenges in education and find evidence-based approaches to addressing them. They are prepared not just to implement solutions, but to

recognize and have a deep understanding of the problems preventing inclusion.

Positioning teachers as learners includes developing teachers' praxis as they reflect on the relationship between theory and practice. It is critical to the future of teaching that teachers develop skills as critical thinkers and collaborative problem-solvers, alongside the ability to adapt swiftly to change (Forlin, 2010). Moreover, lifelong learning should not be limited to classroom activities, but should include adopting an inquiry mindset on all areas that affect teaching.

Engaging with research that includes examining the diversity of learners' needs is particularly important in developing systems thinkers for inclusive learning communities. This often starts with teacher educators modelling reflective practices and research-informed instruction. Opportunities to participate in real learning communities, including practical experience in classrooms and schools, help teachers process, critically reflect on and evaluate theory and practice to learn how to use their agency for community building and collaborative work. Conceptualizing teachers as learners suggests that teachers are not just absorbing the research of others, but are actively engaged in the process of identifying and addressing research questions to prepare for inquiry-based teaching practice (Menter and Flores, 2021).

Action research is one common approach to research in teacher education programmes. This approach is value-oriented; it begins by identifying a problem, which is then systematically investigated, providing teachers with a better understanding of themselves and the systems in which they work (Zank, 2020). Platteel and colleagues (2010) allude to two interrelated conditions in building successful collaborative action research partnerships. First, research needs to be supported in the school or programme through the provision of resources, such as readings, and of time for workshops and meetings. Second, participants need to approach the project with an open mind and collegial spirit, ready to participate in critical and constructive dialogue. When these conditions are absent, tension between members can increase, harming collaboration and reducing the potential benefits of the partnership. For instance, during action research carried out in 2019 at the University of Pécs, Hungary by second-year student teachers and local classroom teachers, mistrust grew as participants became uneasy when confronted with their own misconceptions. To work to mend relationships, regular teambuilding exercises were added and sessions were included to strengthen a collective sense of purpose and to identify shared and individual responsibilities (Zank, 2020).

Exposing teachers to international perspectives can help them understand their own systems better. Cross-national examples can help teachers understand the potential for their class, school and system, facilitate expansive reflection and encourage teachers to critically engage in analysis of their profession (Pantić, Taiwo and Martindale, 2019; Pantić et al., 2021).

5. Research question 3: Effective policies can enhance the roles of teachers as agents of both change and continuity

Policies guide the work of all education and teacher education institutions. They can direct change towards a more autonomous, collaborative teaching profession that can develop inclusive school communities in which all members' learning and well-being are supported. Policies help establish shared terminology and values, and set the initial conditions needed to facilitate teacher agency and collaborative communities and support all students, teachers and their communities in the face of disruptions.

This section sets out the following areas for policy action: (1) changing the environment by supporting teacher autonomy and placing the inclusion of all learners at the forefront of laws and policy, including

by modelling and supporting diversity through teacher recruitment practices and support for in-service professional development; (2) providing space and time for collaboration; and (3) endorsing teachers as systems thinkers by recognizing teachers as a profession and including teachers in relevant policy decision-making.

Supporting teacher autonomy can help ensure inclusive education

SDG 4 calls on countries to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. To reach this end, a broad, systematic approach to inclusive education is needed, which ensures learners’ rights and provides the support structures and resources to facilitate the implementation of those rights at all educational levels. The crucial role of outlining the vision of inclusive education falls to regional and national policymakers and is then transferred into policy frameworks for schools and teacher education (EADSE, 2012). These policies must be developed using evidence-based research and then aligned and cross-referenced so that they are mutually supportive and work towards the same goals.

At their core, inclusive laws and policies demonstrate a country’s commitment to valuing all members of society (UNESCO, 2017). Countries can show their commitment to meeting the needs of all learners by ensuring a broad understanding of inclusion is present in education laws and policy. Unfortunately, only 10 per cent of countries around the world adopt in their inclusive education laws a view of inclusion that refers to all learners. Policies are slightly more likely to refer to all learners in relation to inclusion, with 17 per cent, or 34 out of 196 countries, connecting inclusion with all learners (UNESCO, 2020c). Exemplars of broad inclusive education laws and policies can be found in Argentina, Ethiopia, Ghana, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Zanzibar (United Republic of Tanzania). For example, in Argentina, National Education Law N 26.206 focuses on issues of injustice, marginalization and discrimination, while recognizing that all learners are affected by socioeconomic, cultural, geographic and other factors that may hamper their right to education. In Ireland, an intercultural education policy strategy was established in response to rapid demographic shifts. The strategy set out five goals, including valuing and appreciating home cultures, by prioritizing partnerships among schools, parents and communities (UNESCO, 2018).

Laws and policies also guide teacher education programmes and practices (Lehtomaki et al., 2020). Connecting policy with teacher education expectations helps ensure a continuum of support for teachers (EADSE, 2012), so that inclusive education is acknowledged as a collective task in which communication and collaboration with a range of professionals and community members is essential. Direct links between inclusive education policy and teacher education that recognizes the needs of all learners can be found in Cambodia, Chile and Colombia (UNESCO, 2020c). Cambodia’s 2015 Teacher Policy Action Plan included training focused on teaching in multilingual settings, with additional support for remote and underperforming schools. This was further supported by the country’s 2019–2023 Multilingual Education National Action Plan (UNESCO, 2020c).

Teacher diversity needs to be increased through recruitment

As student populations grow more diverse, research has documented a disconnect with the largely homogeneous and predominantly female and ethnic-majority teacher workforce (Yip and Xu, 2025). Teacher diversity, and the ability to connect to diverse student populations and communities, can be enhanced through recruitment and entry requirements, which should be carefully reviewed to ensure teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds are both sought after and allowed access. Recruitment and retention of diverse teachers can provide support amid changing demographics by increasing students’

sense of representation and belonging, in addition to improving teachers' intercultural competence. All students benefit, since teachers of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds are more aware of issues and discriminatory practices and their possible solutions. The cultural norms and values that candidates bring into their teacher education programme can be viewed as a starting place for the acquisition of knowledge and expansive learning that challenges stereotypes and helps build deep sensitivity based on understanding diversity (EADSE, 2012). Beyond intercultural understanding, teachers benefit from exposure to diverse perspectives, which helps further develop critical thinking, systems thinking and analytical skills (Siegel-Hawely and Frankenberg, 2012).

Countries' efforts to increase diversity in teacher recruitment and retention often include attempts to raise the status of the teaching profession or initiatives that specifically target underrepresented populations. In 2008, Iceland increased the education requirement for becoming a teacher to a master's degree, resulting in an increase in teachers' status nationally (Symeonidis, 2015). Increasing teacher salary is also often used to draw in a greater number of more highly qualified individuals to the profession. This tactic is, at times, used to increase the appeal of working in remote areas. For instance, Australia and the United States provide interest-free loans or loan forgiveness for teacher candidates willing to work in hard-to-staff rural areas (Yang, 2019). In Uganda, teachers are given an increased salary and housing support for teaching in hard-to-reach areas (Mulkeen and Chen, 2008).

Countries can also increase diversity in the teacher workforce by recruiting directly from underrepresented communities. This approach has been practised in many countries, including Chile (UNESCO, 2015), Ghana and Kazakhstan. In Ghana, districts sponsor candidates for teacher training, based on the assumption that locally sponsored teachers are more likely to thrive in their own place of origin (Cobbold, 2006). In Kazakhstan, teacher education institutions grant preferred admissions status to applicants from rural areas and those with disabilities or those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan Information Analytic Centre, 2017). Finally, recruiting career changers can increase teacher diversity by attracting individuals from different sectors and with a range of life experiences (Li and Rupp, 2020).

Flexible and rapid response in instruction should be supported

As front-line providers, teachers need to be able to make adjustments to meet the needs of their learners and quickly adapt to changing conditions. Autonomy allows teachers to be 'sensitive to the particularities of their academic situations and receptive to the opportunities of their sociopolitical circumstances' (Dampson, Apau and Amuah, 2019, p. 36). Pearson and Hall (1993) suggest two types of teacher autonomy: general autonomy, which relates to decisions around school norms and discretionary pedagogical decisions, and curricular autonomy, which largely focuses on choices around what is taught in the classroom and how it is evaluated.

Policies that provide freedom within curricula for teacher autonomy in enacting changes needed for inclusive pedagogy and practices enhance and motivate the collaborative work that teachers do within inclusive school communities, and establish a space in which 'curricula can be adapted locally to embrace diversity' (UNESCO, 2018, p. 87). With autonomy, teachers are better able to recognize the diversity in their classrooms, increasing intercultural awareness and values. In addition, autonomy and collaboration are mutually reinforcing. Across the 48 countries that participated in the 2018 TALIS, Nguyen, Pietsch and Gümüş (2021) found a significant, positive relationship between reported teacher autonomy and collaborative culture.

Teacher autonomy varies widely across countries. For example, across the OECD, on average 84 per cent of teachers feel that they have control over 'determining course content' (Schleicher, 2020). In contrast,

in many developing countries, a top-down rigid national curriculum often leads to a culture of compliance. In one survey of South African teachers, over 30 per cent agreed that the prescriptive national curriculum inhibited their autonomy (Ramatlapanana and Makonye, 2012). This lack of freedom to exercise professional knowledge is found in many countries that adopt a managerialist approach to teachers (Coetzee, 2019; Wabule, 2020). In these managerialist cultures, teachers are seen as an entity to be managed and monitored to ensure obedience in the hopes of increasing productivity, ultimately to the benefit of the parent as consumer.

Although autonomy may be limited in rigid, hierarchical systems, it is not altogether absent. Dampson, Apaul and Amuah (2019) found that in the Central Region of Ghana, teachers' sense of general autonomy was greater than their feeling of curricular autonomy. Teachers felt they had most freedom over the teaching approach and strategies that they used in the classroom, while decisions on curricular guidelines and procedures were largely out of their control. In the highly standardized system in South Africa, Shalem and others (2018) suggest that teachers enact weak autonomy through engaging with 'autonomy opportunities'. Necessary conditions for teachers to take advantage of these opportunities include the presence of a high-quality curriculum that provides teachers with clear preferences, as well as teachers having the pedagogical and content knowledge to appropriately select within the recognized structure of preferences. Examples of 'autonomy opportunities' observed in the research included teachers bringing in additional examples outside the standardized curriculum and adjusting the time dedicated to teaching a concept. This is reinforced in the survey conducted by Ramatlapanana and Makonye (2012), which found that 70 per cent of teachers sampled were not likely to use the curriculum if they felt their students were not prepared for it.

The level of teacher autonomy provided in a given society is often dictated by the trust that society has in teachers as an authority, which in part depends on their having sufficient pedagogical and content knowledge. To help teachers improve their professional knowledge and stay up to date with different approaches and technology, professional development needs to be regularly available and free for teachers. Financial support for professional development is often seen as a barrier to participation, including by teachers in Indonesia (Tanang and Abu, 2014) and Ireland (McMillan, McConnell and O'Sullivan, 2016). Teachers frequently have to pay out of pocket for professional development. In a global survey of teacher unions, just over half reported that teachers must pay for at least part of their professional development (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020). Among participants in the 2008 TALIS, paying for professional development was most common in the Republic of Korea, with over 70 per cent of teachers indicating they had to cover at least part of the costs (OECD, 2009). In a review of ten countries across Africa, Pryor and colleagues (2012) found that fully-funded professional development was limited and often consisted of one-off workshops covering generic teaching skills or introducing new curricula.

Paying for teachers' professional development can stretch resources, especially in already underfunded education systems. The cascade model or 'training of trainer' approach is often seen as a cost-effective approach and is commonly used in many countries, including Malawi, South Africa and Zambia (Sayed and Bulgrin, 2020). However, the cascade model has been criticized for providing inadequate coverage and resources and for being ineffective at supporting curriculum delivery (Armour and Makopoulou, 2012; Sayed and Bulring, 2020).

Localized professional development delivered over a long period of time through an inclusive community is an alternative, potentially cost-effective solution, which can better tailor professional development to local needs (Gathumbi, Mungai and Hintze, 2013). Two promising examples of how inclusive school communities can provide a structure for professional development delivery are teaching clusters in South Africa and the Professional Institutional Engagement Model as adapted in parts of Uganda.

In Mpumalanga, South Africa, teacher clusters brought together educators from across a set geographical area to focus on knowledge sharing and building, curriculum analysis and planning. Clusters provided time for teachers to develop common practices while discussing instructional and curricular guidance. Interviews with participating teachers indicate that the benefits of the teacher cluster approach include increased motivation for collaboration and the development of teacher leaders (Jita and Mokhele, 2014).

In Uganda, a Professional Institutional Engagement Model was implemented in one school as a trial to push back against traditional approaches in the country, which provide teachers with limited autonomy and few opportunities to express their agency. The model brings together teachers and administrators with the intention of ‘promoting the teacher’s own learning in a collaborative culture’ where members ‘become peers and mentors as they socialize and accumulate lived experiences within the school’s setting’ (Wabule, 2020, p. 57). Participants recognize the influence of the context in which they work, while identifying concerns and working to build compromise. Results suggest that teachers increased their content knowledge and that trust among members improved through regular communication (Wabule, 2020).

For collaboration to succeed, time, space and resources are needed

Policies increasingly recognize the need for teachers to collaborate with each other and with other members of the community. Teachers who collaborate are more likely to be satisfied with their work and to experiment with new practices (OECD, 2019). Teachers have reported that time to collaborate is one of their most important considerations in staying in the profession (Darling-Hammond and Hyler, 2020). However, the importance of collaborative time is not always reflected in the structural conditions of teachers’ work, which are still largely focused on classroom instruction. Furthermore, it is not clear exactly how much time is officially allocated to collaborative activities, especially with non-teaching members of the school community, or how much time beyond that included in the contract is actually spent on collaboration. Time for collaboration is often left off surveys of teachers’ time (Bettini et al., 2014), and when it is included, is generally limited to collaboration among teachers for pedagogical purposes. In some cases, there is a substantial difference between contract hours allocated to collaboration and teachers’ self-reported time dedicated to collaboration, suggesting that much collaborative activity is voluntary and unpaid (Kaplan et al., 2015). Given the data limitations, in the remainder of this section we review non-teaching time provided to teachers as an important structural element in promoting collaboration.

Surveys suggest that countries prioritize collaborative time for teachers to different degrees. Across a survey of over 60 national teacher unions in 2015 and 2018, 33 per cent and 20 per cent of unions reported teachers in their country allocated no work time for teachers to participate in continuous professional development (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020). Estimates from the 2018 TALIS indicate that less than half of teachers from participating countries engaged in the basic collaborative activity of frequently exchanging teaching materials (Darling-Hammond and Hyler, 2020). Across Europe, contract time dedicated to professional development varies widely, with self-reports suggesting that time is available for only 25 per cent of teachers in Portugal and 30 per cent of teachers in Spain, compared to 90 per cent of teachers in Ireland (OECD, 2009). In many countries, total contract time is approximately equal to expected teaching time, leaving no margin for collaboration with others. This is true in Honduras, Iraq, Türkiye, Uruguay and Zimbabwe, among others (Symeonidis, 2015).

One country with clear challenges to collaboration is the United States, where only three in ten teachers feel that the time allocated for collaboration is sufficient (Johnston and Tsai, 2018). While teachers are often expected to work together with peers, teachers report having to use their personal time to meet

with their PLC members (UNESCO, 2017). This may be due to the massive amount of instructional time required of teachers. US middle school teachers in the 2013 TALIS survey reported being responsible for 40 per cent more instructional time per week than the OECD average. This placed the United States ahead of all other countries for instructional time and, not coincidentally, near the bottom in time dedicated to collaboration (Darling-Hammond and Hyler, 2020).

France, Italy, Japan and Shanghai (China) offer strong examples of how collaborative time can be supported through policy. In 2015, France prioritized a policy supporting teaching in disadvantaged schools. To support teacher training and well-being, teacher schedules were reorganized, placing greater emphasis on non-teaching time and space to work with colleagues and collaborate with parents (Schleicher, 2020). In Italy, 80 hours of teacher time are dedicated to collegial work every year (OECD, 2019). Japan and Shanghai both provide time for PLCs as part of a teacher's workload, with Shanghai providing financial bonuses for teachers that take on PLC leadership roles (UNESCO, 2017).

Providing time for collaboration is not enough to fully support the practice. Teamwork with colleagues at school or elsewhere is often included as a mandatory aspect of teachers' work in regulations in OECD countries, but it is rarely compensated. Chile and England (United Kingdom) are exceptions: both countries permit reductions in teaching time for collaborative purposes. France and Israel, meanwhile, both provide additional financial compensation for collaboration (OECD, 2019). But in many countries around the world, teachers report no remuneration for work outside of the classroom, reducing their motivation to collaborate and thus making collaboration less likely. In a survey of 13,500 teachers across 129 countries, 75 per cent of teachers from the Middle East and North Africa and 82 per cent from Africa reported receiving no financial support for non-teaching activity (EI, 2015).

Teachers must be empowered to act as agents of change and decision-makers

If teachers are to act as agents of change, they need to be treated as such. The Incheon Declaration and Education 2030 Framework for Action recognizes that 'teachers and educators, and their organizations, are crucial partners in their own right and should be engaged at all stages of policy-making, planning, implementation and monitoring' (UNESCO et al., 2015). National policies and discourse, however, often limit teachers to implementers of policies designed by others in the system. Policies that explicitly provide structures for teachers to engage throughout the policymaking and implementation process position teachers as agents of change towards greater inclusion and equality. Structured opportunities tap into teachers' rich and close knowledge of their students' needs and the wider communities in which they work.

In many countries, teachers are rarely consulted in decision-making. In a 2018 global survey of teacher union leaders, approximately three in ten stated that unions rarely or never participated in policy decision-making (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020, p. 36). A similar survey in 2015 found teachers were less involved in decisions that most directly related to their classroom instruction, such as the development of curriculum and teaching materials (Symeonidis, 2015). In some countries, teachers are not included in national education boards or commissions, as has been the case in Bangladesh, Benin, Fiji and Sri Lanka. In 2015, the teachers commission of the National Education Board in Rwanda did not have a single teacher representative (EI, 2015).

Managerialism and austerity measures have damaged perceptions of teachers as a profession and contributed to limiting engagement with teachers as decision-makers (Symeonidis and Stromquist, 2020). As an object or input to be managed, teachers are often reduced to a form of capital. SDG target 4.c, 'substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island

developing States', has been criticized for aligning with this philosophy, limiting teachers to a simple input in education (Bengtsson et al., 2020). This kind of discourse has also been found in donor agencies. In his analysis of three strategy documents from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Ginsburg (2017) found that the most common way of speaking about teachers was as a human resource input. Teachers were not identified as learners in any of the three documents, and were rarely mentioned in areas of school or national governance (including just once total in the two most recent strategies). In this context, where teachers are perceived as unprofessional workers in need of management, it is hardly surprising that when teachers attempt to speak up, they are often shut out. In Gabon, the role of unions in different commissions was greatly diminished once their views failed to align with that of the government (Edwards, 2019).

With no active role in decision-making and forced to implement top-down policy, teachers often lose motivation. Ninety per cent of teachers feel that education reform is imposed on them without any consultation (EI, 2015). Among teachers interviewed in Türkiye, the majority felt that they were not appreciated by the education ministry and that the government was 'not interested in teachers' ideas and wishes' (Mutluer and Yuskettl, 2019, p. 192). This sense of despair can drain teachers' motivation and limit them to engaging in the tasks directly in front of them, instead of working to change the larger structure in which they are embedded.

Structured democratic voice has been put forward as one model for diverse education stakeholders to engage in a coordinated and sustainable way throughout the policymaking and implementation process (Smith and Benavot, 2019). The approach mirrors similar mechanisms in participatory democracy, where 'all parties should be included in reaching governing decisions' (Ryan, 2004, p. 449). Including teachers as decision-makers improves trust in the profession and further endorses teachers as systems thinkers, while highlighting education as a shared responsibility. Providing structured democratic voice also increases teacher motivation, as 'participation in such a process increases actors' sense of ownership and encourages them to view policies as legitimate and evaluation of their efforts as fair' (Smith and Benavot, 2019, p. 197).

Latin America has a history of practising structured democratic voice. One of the clearest examples can be found in Brazil, where in 1997, the Brazil National Education Council initiated a series of consultations with educators and civil society organizations to help develop national education guidelines.

Consultations led to the National Forum in Defence of Public Schools, which created and submitted a plan for guidelines that was adopted and in place from 2001 to 2010. Following that success, the Ministry of Education has set up regular conferences at the municipal, state and national level. In the build-up to the next education plan, over 3 million people participated in consultations (Smith and Benavot, 2019). In Nicaragua, meanwhile, the Foro de Educación y Desarrollo Humano de la Iniciativa por Nicaragua (the Forum for Education and Human Development of the Initiative for Nicaragua) fosters participation through local education roundtables that bring together educators, ministry officials and community members in a communal decision-making space (UNESCO, 2017).

Box 3 details an example of structured democratic voice outside of Latin America. It illustrates how Scotland's Futures Forum and the Goodison Group led a range of consultations across stakeholder groups, culminating in discussions in the Scottish Parliament and feeding into the *Future Schooling, Education and Learning, 2030 and Beyond* report.

Box 3: Scotland: Teachers' voice in policy debates helps generate future-facing ideas

Summary

This case exemplifies how teachers and other stakeholders in education can be involved in shaping future education policy and practice. Scotland's Futures Forum (SFF) and the Goodison Group in Scotland (GGIS) are policy think tanks that have held debates/fora among a cross-section of people from education, including teachers, head teachers, representatives from the government agency Education Scotland and education consultants, to help stimulate and influence thinking and inform the parliamentary discussion on education policy and practice. Their *Future Schooling, Education and Learning, 2030 and Beyond* project ran for three years and explored a number of areas, including the factors and trends that will influence and challenge educators. The report offers some fresh ideas around different aspects of education, including teaching and leadership of change.

Context

Scotland's Futures Forum and the Goodison Group in Scotland gathered a large community network to reach teachers, head teachers and education professionals and enable them to participate in particular debates in education, including leadership of change. Each discussion and debate was stimulated by an input from an expert in the field and/or children and young people. Early discussions were held in the Scottish Parliament, and subsequently, activities were moved online to engage with more people.

Engaging teachers and other stakeholders

Participants were encouraged to think about what schooling, education and learning might look like in 2030 and beyond. At the end of each session, participants sent a Postcard from the Future describing what school and learning was like, what they were doing and how they were feeling. The postcards and views helped develop and inform the future schooling scenario, at the heart of the *Future Schooling, Education and Learning, 2030 and Beyond* report. After each session a report was produced documenting the presentation and the main themes and ideas that came from the discussion. The final output is a SFF/GGIS community report incorporating the views and ideas of all attending, including teachers and education professionals. The reports were then posted on the SFF website.

Outputs

The *Future Schooling, Education and Learning, 2030 and Beyond* report explored challenges and opportunities in the area of teaching and leadership, among others. Some participants described the current education system as 'linear, inflexible and even boring, held back by structures and funding constraints'. Conversely, models of possible futures were described as 'less hierarchical and more collaborative, adaptive, free flowing, supportive or colourful', with more scope for greater cross-fertilization and bringing in those who had previously been disengaged.

The report suggests that today's complex changes in education require a shift to an approach that encourages ownership, as well as the humility to recognize that no one source has the right answer, and that all stakeholders need to be engaged to make change a collaborative process. The report points to a need to move from thinking of schools as franchises, where quality is defined as faithful reproduction of a single view, to thinking of them as the embodiment of a process where we learn through a strategic exploration of agreed goals. To do that, there is a need to:

- Consult on and clearly set out the values and nature of the change we want to see
- Recognize the complexity and unpredictability of the world we live in
- Bring in a better understanding of the international, national and local context

Recognize that the ecosystem of education sits within a broader set of interconnected ecosystems. For leaders to flourish, policymakers must start with a common vision for the education system that

can be shaped by teachers and schools.

Leadership of change

The project identified a need to develop leadership that promotes collegiality, greater democratic decision-making and creative collaboration, on the basis that leadership is about relationships, not individual people or processes. The principles of cooperative learning that support leadership include:

- Group processes and multi-agency working that put the child at the centre
- Social skills and interactions that can help to share and model the behaviours and values that create the education culture.

Innovation and risk

Teachers need to be encouraged to be innovative, creative risk-takers both in their teaching and in their relationships with employers, parents, communities, colleagues, children and young people. A culture that encourages innovation, experimentation and learning from mistakes must be created. The culture should:

- Share and celebrate the innovative and creative work already taking place
- Undertake research and explore how to celebrate risk-taking in schools
- Keep teaching fresh and relevant, e.g. by moving teachers or offering sabbaticals.

Cooperation, collaboration and partnerships

People in the education system, including teachers, need to develop effective relationships with all those who have a stake in education: learners, parents and carers, businesses, other public services and the wider community. This could help to build capital and agency, co-create learning opportunities and develop the future workforce. To do this, we could:

- Create resource and spaces for trust-building initiatives and meaningful engagement between schools, colleges, universities, businesses and communities.

Empowerment and structures

Moving from a hierarchical education system to one that is flatter and more trust-based would empower teachers and schools to be imaginative and creative. To do this, we could:

- Shift power, control and influence away from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament and develop more transparency and engagement in the development of education policy
- Establish targets for the involvement of children and young people in the design of their education
- Explore how technology can be used to alter power relationships in schools.

Flexibility

More flexibility needs to be encouraged in the system, including potentially in the school day, school year, delivery models, the curriculum and the environment. Services should be joined up so they work for children and young people, which may include working to:

- Introduce more co-design, including by working with learners and teachers whom the system has failed
- Create 'para-professional' type roles in the classroom to draw in a broader range of people to share their skills and experiences
- Review teachers' employment contracts to allow for different work patterns.

Research and impact

Initiating research and gathering evidence remains important to underpin, drive and validate change in the system. To do this, we must:

- Disseminate and build on excellent research and keep reviewing any gaps between theory and reality.

Teacher education and development

Acknowledging that teachers are key drivers of change, there is a continuing need to deliver high-quality, inspiring Initial Teacher Education courses. The structure for continuing professional development should provide space for teachers to think. This will help to create a system in which teachers can be co-creators of learning with children, parents and communities, with a shared understanding that learning happens everywhere. To do this, we could:

- Encourage a wider group of people into teaching beyond those who meet the current required competencies
- Nurture the skills needed for our society in 2030, such as creativity.

Source: United Kingdom, The Scottish Parliament, Scotland's Futures Forum and Goodison Group in Scotland (2020).

A review by Pagatpatan and Ward (2017) highlights some of the challenges that countries may face when considering structured democratic voice. These include: (1) political will, as decision-makers need to be open to a diversity of voices; (2) time to build trust and come to an understanding of shared and individual responsibilities; and (3) motivation to provide genuine inclusive participation where discussions are of high-quality dialogue and all inputs are valued.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

An increasingly complex, volatile and uncertain world requires a reimagining of how teachers are understood, valued and supported. Evolving mobility patterns, climate change and more frequent disruptions increase the diversity of student populations and experiences and the fluidity of learning, including what is learned and how and where it occurs. Past approaches that establish rigid guidelines and view teachers as mere implementers of solutions are not sufficient to prepare teachers and the teaching profession for the challenges of tomorrow.

Greater flexibility is needed to succeed in this new reality. Teachers must be able to consider and apply a range of pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students. Teaching can no longer be an isolated practice. Instead, teaching should be recognized as a relational practice, embedded within a larger system, that supports and draws from a variety of community members. Within this community, teachers must have the capacity and autonomy to adapt their practice as needed to meet the demands of the changing world, and must be given the authority to make changes quickly, without the traditional lengthy consultations. In addition, teachers need the resources to enact changes and ensure they meet the needs of all learners, and should be able to feel a sense of stability in their position, especially in times of crisis. While we need to be realistic about the challenges of change, we should also acknowledge that disruptions to the system present a potential opportunity, creating a policy window that provides space for transformation.

This report suggests that strengthening teacher agency and building inclusive learning communities can help meet these needs and reshape the culture of teaching. Teacher agency and communities work in a virtuous loop, with proactive agents aiding the establishment of inclusive communities which further

nurture teacher agency. Teacher agency is relational and situational: when teachers understand the conditions and system in which they work, they influence change as highly knowledgeable partners. Inclusive learning communities help develop an authentic culture of collaboration among teachers and other diverse stakeholders invested in education. Inclusive communities support the learning and well-being of all members, provide fora to discuss and identify shared responsibilities and offer a safe space for teachers to explore and experiment with new practices and contribute to wider system improvements.

Appendix 1 details the teacher roles, teacher education practices and education policies that are needed to support teacher agency and inclusive learning communities. Appendix 2 extends the recommendations of this report by situating them within key suggestions of the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers.

In addressing this report's research questions, three specific areas for attention were articulated, spanning the levels of policy and practice. First, teachers' role in supporting all students extends beyond a focus on achievement and requires an open-minded attitude to creatively respond when needed, drawing on a range of teaching practices to support the diverse needs of students. Second, collaboration must be valued, modelled and practised, constructing a sense of community and openness to learning from the experiences and expertise of others. Finally, teachers need to be recognized and supported as systems thinkers, able to apply inquiry mindsets to understand the ranging influences that contribute to inequity in education and collective problem-solving.

If these efforts are realized, a culture can be established in which teachers can creatively and effectively exercise their agency, creating a space that encourages teacher reflexivity and increases their awareness of the multiple possible systems outside their own. Such a culture recognizes that collaboration and inclusion are not just another competence, but should be a pervasive belief and practice permeating all aspects of education. This coordinated approach can extend within and beyond schools, creating the sense of togetherness and shared purpose needed to build an inclusive and resilient education system.

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Appendix 1: Summary of recommendations

	Teachers should...	Teacher education should...	Education policymakers should...
Supporting all students in contexts of diversity and uncertainty	- Extend their focus beyond learning achievement - See education of all students as a shared responsibility - Consider diversity as a resource - Believe that all students can and should be learning - Maintain an open, inquisitive and collegial mindset - Use their agency to: - Promote inclusive pedagogy - Identify and seek support to remove barriers to learning - Develop and adapt curricula to respond to student diversity	- Model diversity and provide space and time to explore, demonstrate and internalize inclusive approaches in all teacher education, rather than making inclusion an add-on provision - Recognize the diversity of all learners, rather than seeing inclusion as narrowly tailored to a single group, and education on inclusion should be provided to all teachers - Expose teachers to diversity and opportunities for collaboration in real settings - Prepare teachers to flexibly adapt practice by including multiple pedagogical approaches and delivery mechanisms - Decomartmentalize practices and move toward interdisciplinary curriculum - Integrate theory and practice through collaboration between schools and teacher education providers	- Place inclusion at the forefront of laws and policies - Outline an inclusive vision for education that connects across national and regional policy and teacher education - Model and appreciate diversity through teacher recruitment practices, including targeting underrepresented groups in recruitment and providing incentives for individuals to teach in marginalized communities - Increase teacher autonomy by decentralizing relevant responsibilities - Provide general autonomy, in which teachers have freedom to decide their instructional approach, and increase autonomy over curriculum - Provide in-service professional development that is available within contract hours and free of charge - Invest in inclusive professional learning communities as a cost-effective structure for the delivery of professional development
Building a collaborative community	- Understand learning as a social process - Work to build relationships within and beyond the school - Be given the collaborative space that can open up areas to express and develop teacher agency	- Provide sufficient time for collaboration and space to include non-teaching members in training - Create collaborative relationships between teacher education institutions and schools to help student teachers develop real-world collaborative practices - Support formal structures for within school peer learning, such as professional learning communities	- Collect data to fully understand the extent of teacher responsibilities and collaborative activities - Include time for collaboration with teachers and others in the inclusive school community in teachers' contract time - Provide support for collaboration through shifting the balance by permitting reduction in teaching time
Teachers as systems thinkers	- Understand the way the system and broader social factors affect education and engage to enact change - Reflect on their own actions and social contexts and contribute to building inclusive learning communities - Develop an awareness of other potential approaches through examination of alternative systems	- Promote teachers as learners, to encourage exploration and understanding of the problem, not simply implement the directed solution - Provide opportunities to critically examine theory and practice - Make available occasions for teachers to engage as researchers in investigating education challenges and identifying practical solutions - Provide opportunities for international learning	- Shift national discourse to recognize teachers as co-equal partners in education, instead of as mere human capital inputs or implementers of policy - Provide structured opportunities for teachers to engage with policymakers and other stakeholders throughout the policymaking and implementation cycle

Appendix 2: Related ILO/UNESCO recommendations

The foresight included in the original recommendations is commendable, and many clearly remain relevant to teachers today. However, this report highlights some expansions needed to the recommendations, along with some new areas needed to support teachers and the profession in an unpredictable future. Importantly, as a rights-based framework, the ILO/UNESCO recommendations champion inclusion, starting with the basic recognition that all learners have the right to education.

***ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #3:** Education from the earliest school years should be directed to the all-round development of the human personality and to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and economic progress of the community, as well as to the inculcation of deep respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; within the framework of these values the utmost importance should be attached to the contribution to be made by education to peace and to understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and among racial or religious groups.*

This report is consistent with the humanistic values that underlie the ILO/UNESCO recommendations in discussing the role of teacher agency and community building for the wider purposes of education as public good.

The following ILO/UNESCO recommendations **strongly align** with the evidence needed to build inclusive school communities and strengthen teacher agency.

***ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #6:** Teaching should be regarded as a profession: it is a form of public service which requires of teachers expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study; it calls also for a sense of personal and corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge.*

- Education is a shared responsibility. Within education, teachers must be regarded as professionals with the expert content and pedagogical knowledge to enable them to easily adapt to the changing demands in their profession. Teacher education and policy are essential to supporting the development of multiple pedagogical approaches and collaboration by creating time and opportunities for relevant in-service professional development within regular working hours and free for teachers.

***ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #32:** Authorities, in consultation with teachers' organizations, should promote the establishment of a wide system of in-service education, available free to all teachers.*

- To stay up to date and be ready to design and apply new approaches, teachers need to have relevant in-service opportunities for collaborative improvement of their practices, available free from cost and embedded in their workplaces. Inclusive learning communities are one cost-effective way to provide professional development and draw on local expertise through peer learning.

***ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #36:** Authorities should encourage and, as far as possible, assist teachers to travel in their own country and abroad, either in groups or individually, with a view to further their education.*

- Exposure to cross-national examples helps teachers better understand their own system while gaining an awareness of alternatives. Such exposure broadens teachers' understanding of what is possible, models inclusive values and helps teachers to critically examine the challenges faced in their own context-dependent situation.

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #76: *Authorities and teachers should recognize the importance of the participation of teachers, through their organizations and in other others, in steps designed to improve the quality of the education service, in educational research, and in the development and dissemination of new improved methods.*

- Teachers and other stakeholders need to be continual learners. Teachers should be understood as systems thinkers and ready to exercise their agency to enact change. They need opportunities to engage as researchers to examine underlying challenges and identify needed areas of improvement, as well as to collaborate with other services and experts to address issues and support all students.

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #91: *Teachers should be provided time necessary for taking part in in-service programmes.*

- Time for professional and peer learning is an important component in a sustainable inclusive school community. Time for teachers to collaborate with peers and others in the community should be included in their contract time and supported through financial compensation or the reduction of teaching time.

Suggestions from this report **build on and extend** the following ILO/UNESCO recommendations:

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #10.k: *There should be close co-operation between the competent authorities, organizations of teachers, of employers and workers, and of parents as well as cultural organizations and institutions of learning and research, for the purpose of defining educational policy and its precise objectives.*

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #75: *In order that teachers may discharge their responsibilities, authorities should establish and regularly use recognized means of consultation with teachers' organizations on such matters as educational policy, school organization, and new developments in the education service.*

- While these recommendations recognize the need for structured democratic voice for teachers, we extend this recommendation by noting the importance of national discourse and recognizing that agency can be expressed individually as well as collectively through teacher organizations. Teachers need to be trusted as professionals and valued as systems thinkers. In many countries this requires a change in discourse away from teachers as mere human capital inputs. Working with multiple stakeholder groups, structured opportunities also need to be made available for teachers to feed into, help shape and work towards both design and implementation of relevant education policy and objectives.

UNESCO/ILO Recommendation #78: *Administrative and other staff who are responsible for aspects of the education service should seek to establish good relations with teachers and this approach should be equally reciprocated.*

- This recommendation rightfully recognizes the relational aspect of teaching, with both teachers and other members of the community working toward building collaborative relationships. This report extends this slightly by emphasizing that collaborative relationships should not be transactional and respect should be clearly demonstrated in the public, as well as private, sphere to recognize teachers as equal partners in education.

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #67: *Every possible effort should be made to promote close co-operation between teachers and parents in the interests of pupils, but teachers should be protected against unfair or unwarranted interference by parents in matters which are essentially the teacher's professional responsibility.*

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #90: *In fixing hours of teaching account should be taken of all factors which are relevant to the teacher's work load, such as: ... (d) the demands upon the time of the teacher imposed by participation in research, in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, in supervisory duties and in counselling of pupils; (e) the desirability of providing time in which teachers may report to and consult with parents regarding pupil progress.*

- These recommendations provide a limited understanding of collaboration, even as they acknowledge education as a shared responsibility. Collaboration is not equivalent with non-interference by parents, but suggests a partnership between teachers, parents and other members of the school community, to ensure that the needs of all learners are met. Time should be provided in teachers' workload to permit such engagement.

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #61: *The teaching profession should enjoy academic freedom in the discharge of professional duties. Since teachers are particularly qualified to judge the teaching aids and methods most suitable for their pupils, they should be given the essential role in the choice and the adaptation of teaching material, the selection of textbooks and the application of teaching methods, within the framework of approved programmes, and with the assistance of the educational authorities.*

- This recommendation focuses on the most common type of autonomy recorded in education literature, curricular autonomy. The ability to adapt curriculum to meet the needs of all students is increasingly important in a dynamic and changing education context. However, additional areas of autonomy are critical in fully recognizing how teachers enact their agency. This includes general autonomy, whereby teachers decide which pedagogical approach to use and how much time to dedicate to a topic, and autonomy in deciding when and how to engage collaboratively with others in the community.

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #21.2: *The content of teacher-preparation programmes may reasonably vary according to the tasks the teachers are required to perform in different types of schools, such as establishments for handicapped children or technical and vocational schools. In the latter case, the programmes might include some practical experience to be acquired in industry, commerce or agriculture.*

- This recommendation suggests practical experiences may be needed in some teacher preparation, with emphasis on technical and vocational education. This report extends this recommendation, suggesting that practical experience is essential for all future teachers. Practical experience can help teachers develop collegial skills, learn how to navigate within a community and practise collaborative inquiries that explore educational challenges and identify potential appropriate practices.

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #26: *Research and experimentation in education and in the teaching of particular subjects should be promoted through the provision of research facilities in teacher-preparation institutions and research work by their staff and students. All staff concerned with teacher education should be aware of the findings of research in the field with which they are concerned and endeavour to pass on its results to students.*

ILO/UNESCO Recommendation #35: *School authorities should make every endeavour to ensure that schools can apply relevant research findings both in the subjects of study and in teaching methods.*

- These recommendations rightly recognize the importance of research in teacher preparation and practice. However, rather than seeing (student) teachers as mere consumers of research, current literature promotes diverse ways of teacher engagement with and in research and professional inquiry that extends beyond subject matter and methods of instruction to

include wider understanding of the impact of social, economic and cultural factors on educational outcomes and processes.

The following recommendations are **new**, with no clear overlap with ILO/UNESCO recommendations.

New Recommendation: Teacher education, through training in multiple pedagogical approaches and delivery mechanisms, needs to prepare teachers to rapidly respond to diverse learning environments. Knowledge of when and how to adapt practice can be bolstered through collaborative communities, where peer learning can enable sharing best practices and collective efforts can quickly refine approaches to meet the needs of all learners.

New Recommendation: Diversity should be modelled and appreciated through teacher recruitment practices. This should focus on targeting underrepresented groups through recruitment, including with the use of practices such as local sponsorship to increase rural uptake in teaching or preferencing admissions for underrepresented groups.