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## Instituto Inspirare

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## Instituto Inspirare

### Abstract

The primary purpose of information technology case studies is to illuminate specific applications of technology for actors in a given situation or setting – in this case, family philanthropy seeking to address significant issues of access, quality, and support in Brazil's public schools. Founded by the Gradin family in 2011, Instituto Inspirare recognizes that education is fundamentally unequal among Brazilian students, a state of affairs that has served to reproduce inequities intergenerationally. In order to address the disparities that exist in education quality between Brazil's public schools and their private, wealthy counterparts, Instituto Inspirare tackles the fundamental issue of access to innovation through a series of online platforms for constructive dialogue between the Brazilian public education system's most direct stakeholders – teachers and students – and supports building effective, impactful curricula. The ease of distribution of Internet-based platforms enables an increasing number of Brazilians to engage in conversations and collaborate on ways to improve the country's public education system. The purpose of this case study is to provide in-depth understanding of Instituto Inspirare's most impactful strategies to inform mission, policy, program development, professional practice, and community action. The study utilizes a computer science principle – the scalability of software – to demonstrate how adopting basic internet presence can spark innovation. Instituto Inspirare's online-centered strategy applies the theory of digital scalability to successfully engage key stakeholders in education reform. By connecting ideators and idea-seekers in a range of digital formats, Inspirare yields positive innovations to diffuse throughout Brazil's education system and is making a much-needed contribution to the field.

### Keywords

frontier Philanthropy, Global South Philanthropy, Instituto Inspirare, Brazil Foundation, Impact Philanthropy, NGO, Foundations, Education reform

## **Instituto Inspirare**

*“Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transfers of information.”*

-- Paulo Freire

This case study is built on strategically selected methods of data collection and analysis and is evidence-based and evidence-generating--both to Instituto Inspirare and to the field of philanthropic development as a whole. This case is based on textual analysis of archival and online documents, artifacts, and social media along with interviews and focus groups with key members of the family philanthropy. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth insights and contextualized understandings of Instituto Inspirare and its most impactful strategies in ways that can inform mission, policy, program development, professional practice, and community action within and beyond Instituto Inspirare --as a pioneering frontier market philanthropy.

This case study is situated as a direct and substantive response to the urgent need for in-depth, high-quality case studies with rigorous cross-case analysis of private philanthropy work in frontier markets (Harvard, 2018). Family philanthropies, like Instituto Inspirare , that are leading in this realm need access to solid, descriptive, vertically contextualized case studies that rigorously attend to context, and that critically look beyond context for generative solutions that can be applied in contextualized ways across global philanthropy efforts (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2017). Leaders and givers alike need substantive insight into these often invisible, inaccessible, or opaque-to-the-outside philanthropic projects like Inspirare in order to be able to understand their strategic development in context, to learn from their intentional growth

processes in order to replicate their most effective strategies and best practices in terms of program development and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation.

The United Nations Development Program's 2019 report on family philanthropies makes the persuasive argument that the role of frontier philanthropies is far too robust and pivotal to be ignored, under-theorized, or under-supported as it currently is, stating that,

The world is at a pivotal moment for global development cooperation. While many stakeholders are brought increasingly into international development processes, philanthropy stands apart, despite the scale, ambition, and potential of philanthropy's contributions to international development....[C]rucially, philanthropy brings a complementary and beneficial set of new actors, approaches, and types of funding. Most philanthropy is directed to supporting individual and collective human initiative and ingenuity, an expression of belief that the answers to societies' toughest challenges lie not in one institution or set of actors, but in the vast array of individuals and institutions who make up those societies, who represent different beliefs and perspectives, and approach the same problems with different solutions. The value of a philanthropic portfolio is that it enables one institution, even with modest resources, to simultaneously, and over time, test and support disparate organizations and interventions. This is an essential contribution to the immense undertaking of development.

As ERFIPs work and vision for the sector has evinced, the time has come to create an active, data-based, responsive local-national development framework that can guide frontier

market philanthropy writ large but in ways that offer bespoke, participatory frameworks for development, enactment, and evaluation (Ravitch & Kumar, 2018). Grounded in the leading-edge work of Institute Inspirare and Empower Families for Innovative Philanthropy (ERFIP), which is founded by the Edmond de Rothschild Foundations, this case study offers a critical examination of how this the Institute began in context, how it has changed over time in response to local need and resource, how it enacts participatory mechanisms to respond to local needs and resources in real time, strategically, so that Inspirare's work can be sustainable in those settings.

ERFIP's intensive work with family philanthropies in frontier markets of the Global South has generated cutting-edge, invaluable case examples of locally driven development practice that pushes the envelope on what sustainable local development can mean and look like both in situ and at scale. Institute Inspirare is a central development actor in Brazil, and, more specifically, a critical development gap filler in the area of improving education. As such it is vital to understand how the Institute Inspirare has positioned itself to be optimally impactful as an agent of enduring change. Institute Inspirare is actively moving the dial on development in Brazil, which provides a unique terrain for envisaging innovative approaches to local and national development as well as new methods for building and evaluating sustainable bottom-up strategic partnerships and collaborations that are based in and responsive to the ways that family foundations work with and in the service of local communities' perspectives, concerns, resources, and ideas (Chilisa, 2020).

Importantly, there is a dearth of data-based literature broadly and case studies specifically, on private philanthropies in non-Western and emerging markets, and specifically in

frontier philanthropy (Harvard, 2018). Relatedly, there is limited information available on giving practices, creative models, donor motivations, and impact among other areas of family philanthropic giving. One of ERFIP's primary objectives is to gather and disseminate generative data on family philanthropies from non-Western and emerging markets. Sharing and disseminating philanthropy strategies and approaches from non-Western markets is a critical complement to what remains globally a Western outlook on economic development, philanthropy, and sustainable development. ERFIP encourages exchange and cooperation among philanthropists from emerging and non-Western markets to help catalyze a more cogent voice and make a tangible impact both on the ground and in international policy-making. By fomenting and supporting an innovative stance on what philanthropy is, who does what, and what social change means in different contexts, ERFIP helps to shape a future in which families, businesses, and institutions can cross-fertilize their vision and expertise.

This case study of Institute Inspirare was designed for maximum validity with a methodological focus on rigor and a data-based fidelity to the lived complexities of the members of each philanthropy as described below. This approach evinces a textured portrait of Institute Inspirare philanthropic work in the Brazilian development arena. This case tells a contextualized story to diverse audiences (e.g., philanthropies, policymakers, practitioners, thought leaders, public intellectuals, academics). Further, the case focuses on donor motivations, the ecosystemic origins of their motivations, as well as the evolutions in motivation, priorities, and emerging strategy set. The case also highlights thematic aspects of innovative philanthropy and key take-aways within the milieu (e.g., culture, power, impact,

norms around giving). The case is structured as an in-depth exploration of the trajectory of growth, change, and development that highlights practical approaches to their philanthropic activities.

### Case Study Methodology

The research team, supervised by the University of Pennsylvania, employed a triangulated case study research design for maximum data reliability and case validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). While some organizational cases rely on just one data source (usually the interview method), to contextualize the work, it is vital to validity to identify and analyze a differentiated data set by employing sequential data collection and analysis methods.

Strategically collecting and analyzing multiple data sources in an iterative and critical dialogic fashion with institutional leadership at Institute Inspirare enables the validity measure of triangulation, wherein data sources converge to corroborate and validate the findings that emerge from other data sources, generating critical contextualized information and insights within the data set that otherwise might be missed or misunderstood (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

The theoretical and methodological framework that informs how the case study researchers approached this case study is drawn from theories of decolonizing methodology (Smith, 2012) critical rhetoric (Mckerrow, 1989), intersectional post-colonial theory (Crenshaw, 1992, Loomba, 2005)[1], and affective economies (Ahmed, 2004). ERFIP's<sup>[2]</sup> mission is to re/assess the context of global development and more actively engage private philanthropy and family business across Frontier Economies and the Global South in ways that are data-based and generative. The platform is rooted in the notion that development through innovation, cross-sector collaboration and private-public partnership should not begin and end

in the offices of international development agencies. Rather, it requires building closer financial and technical cooperation with local philanthropy, well positioned to advise on and implement sustainable solutions (Ladak, Interview, 2014). The cases were supervised by international methodological expert, Dr. Sharon Ravitch, Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Fulbright Specialist, and GIAN Scholar of the Government of India. Dr. Ravitch's applied methods work emphasizes intersectional multilateral strategic partnerships for sustainable development and a diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2013).

In critical case study design, a tradition that situates case studies to effect social transformation, the primary goal is to examine audio and visual texts as concrete philanthropic activity and practice that is anchored in its own contextual and institutional specificity (e.g., religious, cultural, values-based) and not as adjacent objects to the milieu of Western development initiatives in which they exist (Chilisa, 2020). This case includes first-person accounts of Inspirare's leaders, who leverage their intimate contextual knowledge of realities on the ground to address social challenges and implement sustainable solutions. In addition—because of the material-discursive intersections of this project—the theoretical and methodological tools we draw on are interdisciplinary and cross-contextual so as to do justice to the complexities of Inspirare's embedded ideological frames (Chilisa, 2020; Foucault, 1995).

This case study focuses on the strategies used by Instituto Inspirare to benefit Brazil's public education system.

The primary purpose of this case is to generate in-depth understandings of Instituto Inspirare and its most impactful strategies to inform mission, policy, program development, professional practice, and community action.

This case study utilizes a computer science principle, the scalability of software, to demonstrate how adopting basic Internet presence can spark innovation.<sup>[3]</sup> Instituto Inspirare operates a series of online platforms that provide a forum for constructive dialogue between the Brazilian public education system's most direct stakeholders, teachers and students.

The primary purpose of information technology case studies is to illuminate specific applications of technology to actors in a particular situation or setting, in this case to a family philanthropy. Inspirare tackles the fundamental issue of access to innovations by centering its efforts around digital platforms.

### **Background and Context**

The Gradin family founded Instituto Inspirare in 2011 to address and mitigate the disparity in education quality between students in Brazil's public schools and their counterparts in wealthy private schools. Instituto Inspirare recognizes that education among Brazilian students is fundamentally unequal and that it has served to reproduce inequities intergenerationally. To this day, significant issues of access, quality, and support persist in Brazil's public schools. In response to these multifaceted and complex issues, Instituto Inspirare supports students and teachers to build effective and impactful curricula via online platforms, a much-needed contribution to the field at this time. The ease of distribution of Internet-based platforms enables an increased number of Brazilians to engage in conversation and collaboration in ways that can serve to improve the Country's public education system. The purpose of this case study is to demonstrate how Instituto Inspirare's online-centric strategy applies the theory of digital scalability to successfully engage key stakeholders in Brazilian public education reform. By connecting ideators and idea-seekers in a range of digital forums

and formats, Inspirare yields positive innovation, and a diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2013), in Brazil's education system.

Instituto Inspirare was founded to identify and inspire innovation in Brazil's public education system. Inspirare advocates *Integral Innovative Education*, which promotes the holistic development — intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and cultural — of students while respecting their unique characteristics, interests, resources, and needs so that they can create the conditions to thrive amidst the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Inspirare believes that students should be the focus of all teaching and learning processes. Thus, it is essential to retool educational opportunities to engage students, making them critically reflect on what and how they are learning as a way to deepen meaning and purpose.

Instituto Inspirare was created in September 2011 by members of the Gradin family to combat inequality in Brazil by improving education for those disadvantaged by an inequitable public education system. The Gradin family's own rags-to-riches story includes hard work, agility, and grit that together lead to community civic engagement in social responsibility.

Victor Gradin, the patriarch of the family, was born in Brazil to Spanish parents. He was the only child of a family that had very little to claim in their new country. Like many immigrant families, what they did have was a strong belief in education as a way to upward mobility. Victor studied and eventually earned a Ph.D. and became a professor of economics. He started his own import-export business and had three children – Bernardo, Miguel, and Anna.

Victor's big opportunity came in the 1970s when he partnered with Norberto Odebrecht to scale a construction company with national ambitions. The company grew to become the Odebrecht Group, a conglomerate of 12 companies with over 79,000 employees working in 25

countries and revenues of more than R\$80 billion Brazilian reais (€13 billion/\$15 billion USD).<sup>[4]</sup>

It is the seventh-largest private group in Brazil. Victor Gradin became vice president, responsible for finances. Over the course of his career, Gradin acquired 20.9% of the company. His sons, Bernardo and Miguel, became presidents of two of the largest companies in the group's portfolio. All three left the Odebrecht group in 2011 to start new endeavors, mainly in renewable energy, but also to develop a family philanthropic institute – Instituto Inspirare.

The Gradin family realized the power that education had given them to improve their opportunities in life. “Our basic opinion is that the main challenge in Brazil is for equality—for access to good education,” said Anna Penido, Inspirare’s Director, “Brazil is one of most unequal countries in the world, and this is reflected in our education system” (Anna Penido, 2018, Interview). While Brazil had many private schools that could provide a world-class education, Brazil’s public schools struggled and more than 80% of primary to upper secondary students went to public institutions.<sup>[5]</sup> The disparity between public and private schools in Brazil is frequently a matter of social class, with poor students attending free and often under-served public schools, and families with the financial means sending their children to the highest quality private school they can afford.

Instituto Inspirare perceived improving public education as a key pathway to addressing issues of equality and opportunity in Brazil. Better education for those at the base of Brazil’s socio-economic pyramid has the “power to change people and society” (Penido, 2018).

## **Brazilian education**

Compulsory education in Brazil covers services for all children from four to 17 years old.<sup>[6]</sup> Public schools educate 70% of Brazilian children.<sup>[7]</sup> The Brazilian national government divides its public education service among three entities: state governments, local governments, and the federal capital. Municipal governments offer preschool education (enrollment for children 0 to three years old is not mandatory and enrollment for children four to five years old is mandatory) and primary education (enrollment is mandatory for children from six to 14 years old). On the other hand, while state governments support municipalities in providing primary education, mostly states provide mandatory secondary education for children 15 to 17 years old.<sup>[8]</sup>

Though public education is compulsory, nearly 12% of students dropout of school before graduating.<sup>[9]</sup> Education reformers are quick to advocate for increased federal spending on students. However, increasing government expenditure on public education is not the panacea to Brazil's current educational challenges. A study examining Brazil's spending on public primary schools from 2003 to 2009 shows that increasing spending on public primary schools' results in better education quality, but that change is marginal.<sup>[10]</sup> Therefore, improving educational outcomes in Brazil must go beyond education expenses and policy development. To this end, the World Bank identifies four challenges for Brazilian education between 2011 and 2021:<sup>[11]</sup>

1. *Raising Teacher Quality* – Due to the perceived low-status image of the profession, high academic performers veer away from teaching. The World Bank points out that there is a need to recruit higher capacity people, support continuous improvement in practice, and reward performance.

2. *Protecting Early Childhood Development (ECD)* – While there have been strides in increasing enrollment in ECD programs, Brazil still needs to prioritize the improvement of targeted services of quality to vulnerable low-income children. In addition, there are recommendations to introduce curricula tailored to each educational level, intensify training and supervision of caretakers and educators, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation of ongoing programs.

3. *Building World-Class Secondary Education* – Brazil faces extreme challenges in its secondary education sector. A significant number of secondary school students are enrolled in night shifts that deliver only four hours of instruction a day (compared with seven hours or more in most OECD countries). Schools lack libraries, science laboratories, computer and language facilities. Curricular materials are too dense and focused on rote memorization rather than critical thinking. Finally, there is a severe shortage of qualified math and science teachers.

4. *Maximizing the Federal Impact and Capitalizing on the Education Action Lab* – The analysis of progressive and effective education policies in the past two decades reveals additional policies that could substantially speed Brazil's progress toward world-class basic education. First, the government must stay the course on core policies like funding equalization, results measurement, and conditional cash transfers. Second, a focus on spending efficiency rather than targets for higher spending. Third, create incentives for statewide improvement like closer integration of state and municipal school systems. Finally, capitalize on education action labs by

supporting systematic and rigorous impact evaluations of innovative state and municipal programs.

In light of these challenges, Instituto Inspirare's focus on education is well aligned with the UN Sustainable development Goals and the country's needs.

### **Perspective and purpose of Instituto Inspirare**

Bernardo Gradin, president of Instituto Inspirare, explained that one of the Institute's challenges is the fact that Brazil's educational landscape perpetually changes with each newly elected government (Bernardo Gradin, 2018, Interview). Inspirare must learn and adapt to new ideas and practices that guide federal leadership, including the development and discontinuation of new policies and practices. Bernardo emphasizes that education in Brazil has also been "a matter of the government rather than the state." By this he means that education policy is often used as a "platform for campaigns" (Gradin, Interview). This is an important part of their operating ecosystem.

Bernardo Gradin saw that Brazil's education system functioned according to short-term political needs and pressures on a political cycle, rather than existing as an independently operating administration. Each new election brought new actors who instituted "new policies and practices" that were based on their "personal concepts and ideas, ideologies sometimes" (Gradin,2018). Bernardo knew that a key challenge for the Institute was to "make education in Brazil... managed by technicians and experts – not with government mandates, but in a multi-fashioned, long-term orientation committed to the country and to the welfare of students." Gradin avers that this way "you would get away from this trap of every new government..."

coming with a new team, changing everything, and not having a long-term, clear plan.” (Gradin, 2018).

While education policies shift as leadership changes, the pace of technological innovation and the culturally based learning mindset within which teachers operate in the classroom often shift rather slowly, they are sedimented in the system. Gradin has identified that the way students are taught in Brazil is “very old-fashioned” (Gradin, 2018). To illustrate, the Foundation referenced teachers who are used to teaching almost exclusively with classroom lectures as the primary mode of instruction, using curricula that fail to relate lessons to the students’ lives outside of school, and which had not been updated in years, if not decades. These were not contextually or culturally relevant and not delivered in ways that would resonate or pique student interest. Students are expected to learn by quietly listening and taking notes to lectures (rote learning), marching through their work at the pace of the class (rather than engaging critically), regardless of whether students found the pace too fast or slow (Gradin, Interview). Related to this, Bernardo explicitly identifies the Brazilian education as fundamentally unequal and inequitable. Educational access, quality, and support are directly determined by the neighborhood in which students live.

Implementing 21<sup>st</sup>-century innovations to Brazilian education often requires teachers to change how they do things, to work harder to learn and incorporate new ideas and tools, and to give up some of their stability, authority, and control. Innovation can foment backlashes and resistance. According to Bernardo, “if [innovators] are not able to communicate that what’s new doesn't conflict with what’s traditional, [then] naturally the teachers and school administrators will react by seeing innovation as a threat to the status quo.”

## **Solutions at scale**

Educational inequity is a national issue in Brazil, meaning it requires considerable effort and coordinated planning to be nationally scaled in a way that best serves all students. When approaching the issue of scale, Airbnb chief executive Brian Chesky advises innovators to “stop thinking big and start thinking small.”<sup>[12]</sup> By this, Chesky means that rapid growth or change does not come overnight. The point is, as Gradin takes it up, that global multi-billion-dollar businesses are not built in a day or two. Scale takes time (Gradin, 2018). This is wisdom of strategy, steeped in a well-grounded vision of the future.

Since the creation and proliferation of the Internet, scale is easier to achieve. Software can be copied millions of times for mere fractions of what books or conventions cost businesses.<sup>[13]</sup> With lower cost structures, Internet-based approaches allow for the relatively easy building, deployment, and management of offerings. In information technology, user feedback is not only nice to have, but necessary to scale and enhance offerings. Without dialogue between innovators and users, innovators cannot continue to retool their offerings. This is important to the strategy of Instituto Inspirare.

Whether posting new ideas or user feedback, when useful pieces of communication are placed on the open Internet, constructive dialogue has the capacity to generate and offer new, even integrated insights to learners old and new. Since the Internet -- at least in terms of software -- can be infinitely scaled, in theory this means that all of those insights can be infinitely accessed. This is dialogue in open source forums, which is reminiscent of a more niche Facebook or YouTube (Gradin, 2018).

Instituto Inspirare's biggest tool to support innovation in education is digital communication, delivered through multiple online platforms. A byproduct of communication, Inspirare fosters community in the education space by engaging key stakeholders across Brazil to engage in and support the education process. This sense of community often extends beyond the web and into in-person workshops and panels.<sup>[14]</sup> Inspirare's ability to access a wide audience in education reform stems from its multiple niche platforms that rally members around a common cause -- innovating education to reinvigorate Brazilians' socio-economic statuses.

No matter how efficiently or effectively Instituto Inspirare operates on its own, sustainable reform to Brazilian public education will necessarily happen over time, as innovators adapt to changes in their many forms. The stakeholders most directly impacted by shifts in education policy are teachers and students, the people on the frontlines of day-to-day public education. Moreover, these reforms cannot be achieved alone. Constructive dialogue and collaboration are critical for open-source, online communications to generate positive innovations and improve students' educational experiences across Brazil. Therefore, Inspirare's approach to education innovation is driven by frontline communication between stakeholders, collaboration in the name of progress, and the effective integration of new ideas. The scaled open-source model for dialogue, in information technology speak, is the core identity of Github, which was acquired by Microsoft in 2018 for \$7.5 billion USD.<sup>[15]</sup> Much like Microsoft, Instituto Inspirare understands the value of open-source access now and for building into the future.

### **Strategies for success**

Instituto Inspirare has developed multiple tested and proven tools for stakeholder engagement in an ever-changing public education system. First, to accelerate collaborations that lead to positive innovations, Inspirare created a bespoke digital platform. The digital platform, called Porvir ([porvir.org](http://porvir.org)), expands the thinking and pedagogical culture to which teachers and elected/aspiring officials are exposed. Through Porvir, people in Brazil can get to see “the innovative practices being tried all over the world.”<sup>[16]</sup> Porvir sets the stage for social mobility by promoting, disseminating, and exchanging generative and timely education resources.

The two key areas of the platform are “Innovations in Education” and “How to Innovate.” The first area of the Porvir website introduces innovations in teaching: new educational models and curricula, new ways to take students out of the classroom to learn in urban and natural environments, and new online learning games and platforms. The second area offers guidance and support for those interested in implementing new innovations: labs for teachers to learn new technologies, pedagogical approaches and materials for new models of teaching, and ways to connect to entrepreneurs and nonprofits working in education. Bernardo calls this “innovation through linking dots,” and discusses how, by creating a “platform for connecting key dots,” (Gradin, Interview), Porvir not only connects innovators to foster a range collaborations, it has also become a resource for teachers who want to try new teaching approaches and for government officials looking for innovative ideas as they develop new government policies.

To further support the Porvir digital platform, Instituto Inspirare has begun organizing an annual national conference called Transformar (<http://transformareducacao.org.br>). They

invite 1,000+ students, educators, companies, and government officials to connect a range of experiences and develop new means of learning through creating a critical mass and allowing different organizations to combine their efforts. Porvir also diffuses news, highlights, and key lessons learned from the conference meetings and interactions to the public.

A focal issue for Instituto Inspirare was figuring out how to connect education innovators to individual schools. Anna Penido, executive director of Instituto Inspirare, had observed over time that education start-ups frequently design their offerings before they fully understood the reality on the ground for teachers and students. To be successful, Inspirare has worked to teach social entrepreneurs and IT developers to “really listen to those who are in schools – students, teachers, principals – to try and understand what their main pains and challenges are before coming up with unrealistic solutions that would not be relevant nor work in educational settings.” On the other hand, many exciting innovations also developed too slowly due to lack of funding and support. To help educators and innovators improve their collaborations, the Institute organized workshops to “bring start-ups to the class floor.” Anna explained: “we try to connect entrepreneurs with those that are in the schools to create some sort of collaboration. When they really connect, it is like a new horizon opens to them both.” (Penido, Interview, 2018).

Inspirare has also created the website Apreender ([www.apreender.org.br](http://www.apreender.org.br)) that provides resources to support innovators. This includes information, guidance, and even peer mentoring to ensure that educational collaborations succeed. These services help social enterprises improve their innovation processes, develop business skills and acumen, and negotiate Brazil’s onerous bureaucratic and financial compliance requirements for small businesses. Anna

mentions this last part is particularly important in countries like Brazil, where governments are working to fight corruption: “The mechanisms to prevent corruption, they trap honest people – they can't overcome the bureaucracy” (Penido, 2018). So far, Instituto Inspirare has helped over 40 start-ups implement new ideas.

The third main strategic area for Instituto Inspirare was mobilizing forces to demand innovation. Inspirare’s leaders realized that persuading others to implement an innovation requires not only a push from the innovators, but also the pull of demand by those who would benefit. This meant that Instituto Inspirare could not propel innovations to be accepted on their own. The Foundation needed to mobilize others to desire and demand the change for themselves. Instituto Inspirare strategically divided their efforts into both top-down and bottom-up outreach approaches, with the bottom-up being viewed as the more important. Bernardo affirmed that “if we don’t have change coming from the bottom, from the school level, from students, it will be difficult to convince the top.” Bernardo continues, “our goal is for students to learn to want to learn, to want to stay in school, and to understand that by staying in school and learning they have a better future. It’s the only way for us to have an equal society.” (Gradin, Interview, 2018).

Instituto Inspirare discovered early on that “students can be the main actors for change,” (Penido, 2018, Interview). In fact, one of the things she has been most proud of is Instituto Inspirare’s work to empower and organize student engagement:

We have a youth board on our website, and they are becoming celebrities almost because they are going everywhere to talk about what needs to be changed. They are being empowered and occupy a relevant position in important discussions. We are the ones doing this – you can't find other organizations doing this.” Bernardo agrees, “. . . every transformation should be done by this core value of the student as the protagonist (Penido, Interview).

Showing students how to engage in democracy is also particularly important in Brazil, where many of the parents of schoolchildren grew up under the authoritarian military dictatorship that took control in 1964, and only began to improve in the mid-1980s. Along with the students, grassroots outreach to their parents and the community is also crucial for the positive changes to be sustainable and shared. On the other hand, Instituto Inspirare hopes to slow down the discontinuity in governmental education policies and practices that come with each election by enlisting the help of those at the top of Brazilian society. This has involved outreach to both the government and the teacher.

Instituto Inspirare has worked hard to gain legitimacy among governmental boards and panels that create education policy in Brazil. They have gained this status by positioning themselves as a politically neutral knowledge expert that can advise individuals across the full political spectrum. Part of their success has been in their realization and resulting approach to the reality that governments are made up of individuals with different beliefs and ideas. Gradin says: “Because we do not have a state-oriented education system, people who occupy government roles feel free to take personal concepts and ideas, ideologies sometimes, to the new policies and practice” (Gradin, 2018).

The key to lasting success and impact is to inspire individuals within government, as Gradin explains in this reflection on the lesson:

Initially, I tended to simplify government by thinking of government as an entity - if you think of government as an entity, you accomplish absolutely nothing. So, we look for how to individualize the relationship with the government....Everything we deal with depends on the individual. (Gradin, 2018)

On a day-to-day level, there “are the three areas in which we really interact with the government: technical support, the development of innovative solutions, and advocacy to help them design better public policies to really tackle the challenges they have to face.” Anna explains that the key is “to find sensitive people in these groups to engage in dialogue and make them ambassadors for our cause” (Penido, 2018).

Instituto Inspirare also collaborates on major mobilization efforts with other educational organizations, sharing resources in order to strategically pressure different elements in the government to act together. An example of this collective effort is a years-long campaign to create new national curricular guidelines within Brazil. Instead of emphasizing content related to traditional academic subjects, the new curriculum is competency-based and highlights the skills students need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as flexibility, empathy, critical thinking, creativity, digital literacy, social awareness, and citizenship. To lead this campaign, Instituto Inspirare had to constantly communicate with a range of different stakeholders and partner organizations, which could become overwhelming for such a small institute. The secret was to create core messages that “can go through different groups with small modifications,” said Anna (Penido, 2018).

When educational changes develop so quickly, as they can, that they risk creating backlash and/or resistance, Inspirare works with teachers to help them feel supported through the learning and changes that innovation brings. To do this, Inspirare found that developing digital tools that provide long-distance education support and resources were essential given the social topography of Brazil. Anna describes how many teachers work in remote areas where they cannot access teaching training or support. Brazil has areas where teachers must travel for

7 days by boat to reach the communities in which they will teach (Penido, 2018). In this milieu, remote and peer-to-peer learning is essential.

Instituto Inspirare has supported Escola Digital, a project that provides teachers, managers, and education networks a free search platform for more than 30 thousand digital learning resources about interactive, dynamic, and innovative pedagogical practices. Currently, 21 out of 27 states' departments of education have supported the initiative and are using the platform as their main strategy as leverage to the use of technology in education. Thus, Inspirare has aggressively supported new technological innovations that allow adaptive learning based on a child's current level. Of course, "in the middle of the Amazon, people do not have access to the Internet, so infrastructure is also one of the main concerns in our attempts to connect with the government" (Penido, 2018).

According to a 2017 survey conducted by the non-profit Brazilian Network Information Center, internet usage, connection speeds, teacher training, student readiness and service penetration remain unequal between the types of schools in the country.<sup>[17]</sup> While all Brazilian urban schools are connected to the internet, only 36% in rural areas are online, the study found. Of those, 88% of private institutions have internet access, compared to 35% of public schools (of federal, state or municipal administration). Though the digital divide still clearly exists in Brazil, the gap between those with internet access and those without internet closes at an average rate of 6% growth per year. Currently, more than 70% of Brazilians can access the internet.<sup>[18]</sup>

Another project that Instituto Inspirare supports is Faz Sentido. This is a project that aims to support teachers, teacher networks, and schools in developing education systems that

are more agile in their responsiveness to the context, needs, characteristics, and interests of 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Since 2014, those involved in Faz Sentido have worked with education specialists and education networks to map the main obstacles in Brazilian education. They conducted studies to further understand the context of students, organize diverse and customizable recommendations and practices to address education challenges, and build platforms for education networks, schools, and teachers to promote collaborative context-based changes in education.

Further, Bairro-Escola Rio Vermelho (in English, Red River Neighborhood School) is another project that Instituto Inspirare is involved with. Bairro-Escola Rio Vermelho promotes collaborative learning among schools, communities, social organizations, business and public authorities. The main goal of the project is to promote and support the conditions needed for integral development of individuals, especially the youth. By promoting broad community articulation, the program intends to develop a comprehensive education model in the neighborhood of Rio Vermelho and inspire educational renewal in the city of Salvador.

Today, Instituto Inspirare operates with a budget of a little over R\$5 million Brazilian reais (~€1.2 million euros/\$1.4 million US dollars) per year. The majority of this funding comes from the personal resources of the Gradin family, but they also count on the contributions of partners and supporters, who co-invest approximately R\$2 million Brazilian reais (~€460,000 euros/\$540,000 million US dollars) in shared initiatives. The Foundation hopes to continue growing their projects for the future, to ultimately see the “transformation of education as a requisite and a lever for the transformation of the country.” (Gradin,2018).

For Instituto Inspirare, creating a long-lasting impact requires paying attention to not only creating change, but to the rate of change. True progress means speeding up positive changes in education policy and practice, while ceasing the discontinuity that destabilize the improvements that have come before, induce resistance, or don't allow for long-term impact to happen.

Getting educational change right means creating grassroots demand to shift education toward a long-term orientation, where innovations are focused on careful insights, the welfare of students, and providing support to all who need it. Anna provides a key takeaway on how Inspirare has been successful and its strategy for the future:

We do a lot of communication initiatives to really mobilize Brazilians as a source to put pressure on governments and schools for them to change. We don't do anything by ourselves. This is a principle from the beginning. Education is very challenging, we cannot solve it alone. We have had to figure out how to collaborate with others and to create synergy to have more impact. It is important to bring the right people who are truly committed and who are there because they believe in the cause and the principles, because they are co-authors. [Our work] is not designed by ourselves or by the [Gradin] family, it is created in a very collaborative way. (Penido, 2018)

## **Conclusion**

Inspirare's embrace of and commitment to maintaining a digital presence enables the Foundation to spark innovation. The Foundation's portfolio of platforms is essential to connecting key stakeholders in Brazil's education system. Inspirare's portfolio allows students and teachers to access each other's insights and make more informed choices as to how education ought to be reformed and enacted in Brazil. These examples of true stakeholder collaboration make Instituto Inspirare a socially impactful institution that fulfills the vision and

mission of the Gradin family: “To inspire innovations that expand the equity, quality and relevance of education for Brazilian students.”

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<sup>[1]</sup> Research has been a cite of colonization. The location of the researchers is a push back and decolonization of case study research that has been done on frontier philanthropy by Eurocentric, White researchers (Chilisa, 2020).

<sup>[2]</sup> ERFIP (Empower Families for Innovative Philanthropy) is a unique platform for Frontier Philanthropists and business people. It gathers principals, professionals and practitioners in an intimate and thoughtfully structured environment to build and share knowledge to address some of the most pressing social and economic challenges of our time.

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