The development of inclusive schools
Using a systems lens to support inclusive education

1st Symposium on School Inclusion, OEJQS, Walferdange, 20 June 2024

Annet De Vroey

annet@european-agency.org

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Overview of presentation

- The Agency - European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
- Goals, concepts and language of inclusion
- Ecology of inclusive education
- Inclusive systems development
- Inclusive school development

The Agency (1)

Mission

- Independent organisation that acts as a platform for collaboration for the ministries responsible for education in its 31 member countries

- Active agent of change, helping member countries improve their inclusive education policy and practice for all learners

Agency work

- Is in line with and directly supports international and European Union policy initiatives on education, equity, equal opportunities and rights for all learners

- Is aligned with European Council priorities and objectives for education

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The Agency (2)

Agency work focuses on learners vulnerable to exclusion

- It is directed at all learners, while recognising the need to specifically address the particular needs of some learners vulnerable to exclusion from education;

- It acknowledges that every learner has their own unique experiences of discrimination and/or barriers to learning. It therefore considers everything and anything that can marginalise learners and increase their chances of exclusion

The Agency (3)

Agency work encompasses

- Evidence-based information and recommendations stemming from thematic activities, on-going activities and country system analyses

- A multi-stakeholder approach, combining the perspectives of policy, practice and research

- A collective voice through co-operation of member countries

- A platform for peer learning, facilitating self-review and experience exchange

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
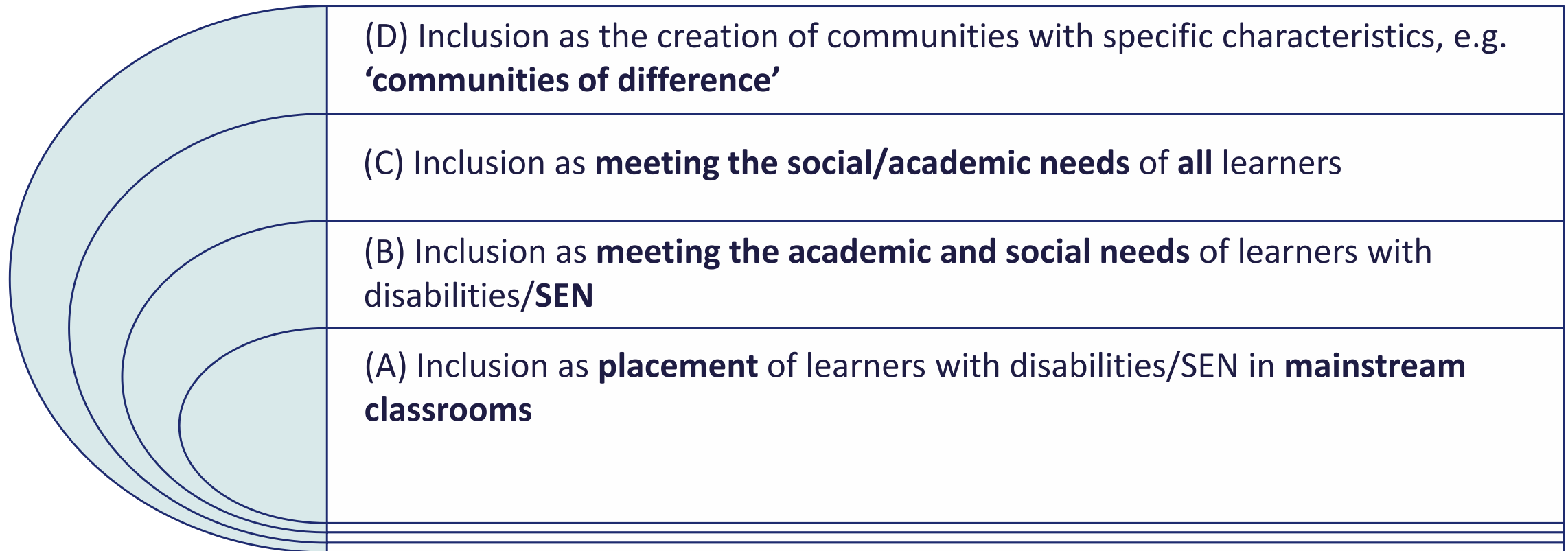
Goals, concepts and language of inclusion (1)

Agency position on **inclusive education systems**:

The Agency member countries' shared ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is that '**all learners of any age** are provided with **meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities** in their **local community, alongside their friends and peers**'

Goals, concepts and language of inclusion (2)

Different views of what school systems, schools and classrooms should accomplish, employing stricter criteria from A to D

(D) Inclusion as the creation of communities with specific characteristics, e.g. **'communities of difference'**
(C) Inclusion as **meeting the social/academic needs** of **all** learners
(B) Inclusion as **meeting the academic and social needs** of learners with disabilities/**SEN**
(A) Inclusion as **placement** of learners with disabilities/SEN in **mainstream classrooms**

(Göransson and Nilholm, 2014)

Goals, concepts and language of inclusion (3)

Overall, inclusive education is seen as

- **a set of principles** that need to be in place in societies that are concerned with rights and equity,

- **a set of practices** the effects of which can be evaluated,

- principles and practices that lead to **quality education**

(Göransson and Nilholm 2014; Dyson 2014; Florian 2017)

Goals, concepts and language of inclusion (4)

- A set of **principles that prioritise equity and quality education** through **inclusive policy** as *'a process that addresses and responds to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education'* (UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education, 2009, in Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, p.5)

- A set of **evidence-informed inclusive practices to establish equity and quality education** underpinned by an **inclusive pedagogy** (Florian, 2017)
  - *basic assumptions on learner diversity, learning and collaboration as guiding principles for practice*
  - *acknowledging the **challenges and dilemmas** in current practice by investigating and developing practice consistent with these principles*

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Goals, concepts and language of inclusion (5)

Developing accessible learning environments to enable individuals to take and assume responsibilities that are associated with their rights (Ebersold, 2015; 2017)

Equal access opportunities
- Inclusive education as a placement, in which there is
- ✓ no segregation
- ✓ participation in local/daily routines
- o little/no impact on social inclusion

Equal learning opportunities
- Inclusive education as a process towards
- ✓ **academic participation**, being seen as a learner, learning
- ✓ **social participation**, a sense of belonging and self-worth

Equal citizenship opportunities
- Inclusive education as a factor that contributes to
- ✓ taking and **assuming responsibilities**
- ✓ social inclusion, peacebuilding, social justice and social cohesion

Equal achievement opportunities
- Inclusive education as a factor that contributes to
- ✓ **academic performance** and outcomes, assuming competence
- ✓ **social inclusion** and equity in education
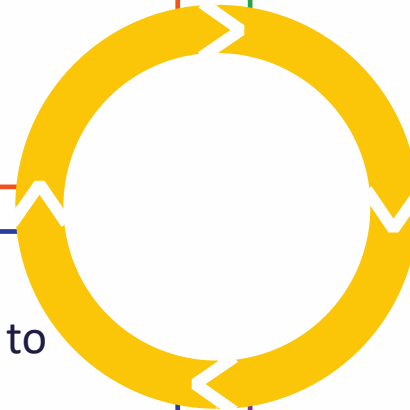
Goals, concepts and language of inclusion (6)

- **Social inclusion** is one of the positive outcomes of **inclusive education** (European Agency 2018)
  - through participation in school and out-of-school activities,
  - through academic performance, being employed, having a social life …
- **Inclusive education** is seen as an essential component of social inclusion, **to combat poverty and to minimise the social exclusion of vulnerable groups** (UN/EU)

Goals, concepts and language of inclusion (7)

- For learners/people with disabilities in particular,
    - Key message of young people with and without disabilities: 'It is essential to be **included in mainstream schools**, in order to be included in society'
    - ANED/EDE 2011: '**Access to education** is a key means to put persons with disabilities on an **equal footing** with non-disabled persons, to **promote diversity** within schools and **to create social bonds** between persons with and without disabilities'

   (EDE = European Disability Expertise EC-contract)

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Goals, concepts and language of inclusion (8)

- **'learners' needs'**: to highlight the need for educational provision and/or support without applying a label based on an external factor that in some way describes or impacts upon an individual or group of learners. This approach reflects a non-categorical, rights-based approach and calls for identifying and removing barriers to learning instead of problematising learners' individual and social characteristics.

- **'learners vulnerable to exclusion'**: to cover the widest range of different groups of learners vulnerable to discrimination and other factors that may negatively affect their learning opportunities. It supports policy development towards a broad vision of inclusion underpinned by a rights-based approach.

Ecology of inclusive education (1)

- Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2007, p.795: 'the use of the **ecological systems theory model** (1976; 1993) has provided far more knowledge about the nature of **developmentally relevant environments**, than about the characteristics of developing individuals'

- Anderson, Boyle and Deppeler 2014: 'the characteristics of the learner should not influence whether or not a student is delivered an effective inclusive education. It is, however, **the environments and factors within these, along with the relationships and interconnections between them**, that influence the success (or not) of inclusive education'.
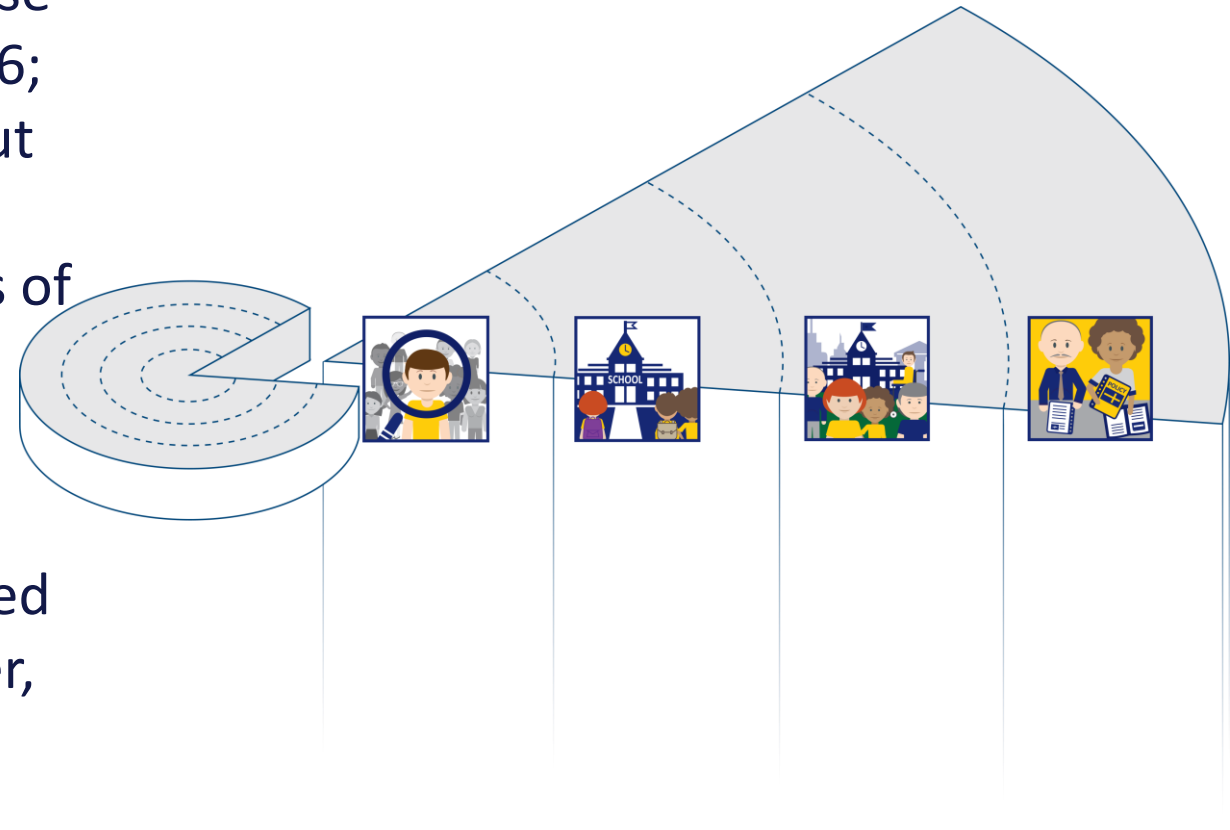
Ecology of inclusive education (2)

- Student achievement can be increased regardless of the school attended or personal and social circumstances of individuals (OECD, 2012)
    - Education systems that deliver exclusionary practices cannot close the gap between the academic achievements of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers
    - Education systems that eliminate exclusionary practices show higher achievement of all learners, encouraging equity and quality education for all
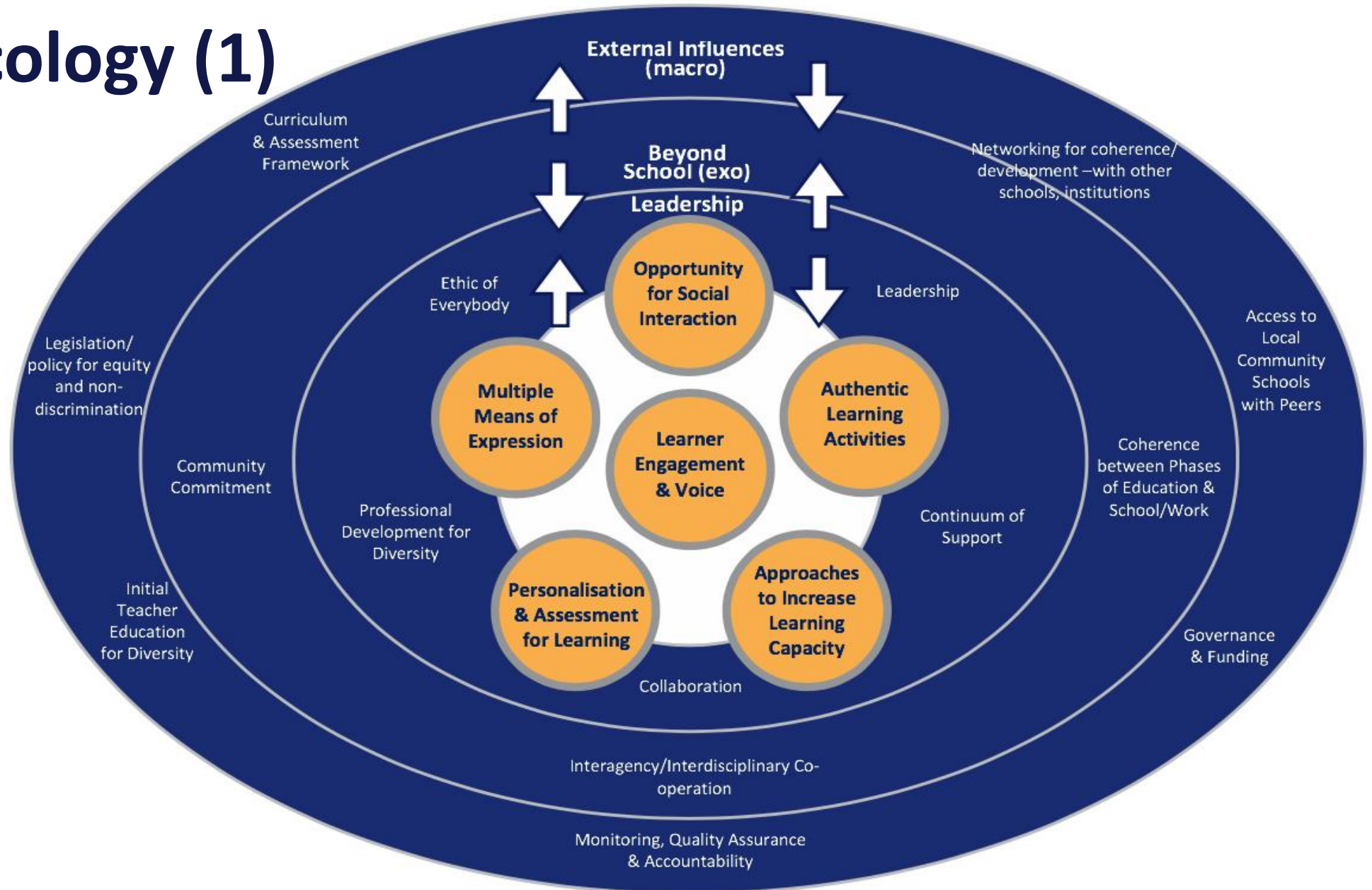
Ecology of inclusive education (3)

- Research must encompass **the relationships between all factors**, beyond the learner, beyond the school, at the system level, to improve the physical, social, cultural and educational arrangements of schooling (Ainscow & Miles, 2011; Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick and West 2012; Slee, 2011)

- Inclusive education needs education authorities with a holistic perspective on education systems (ETUCE 2020)
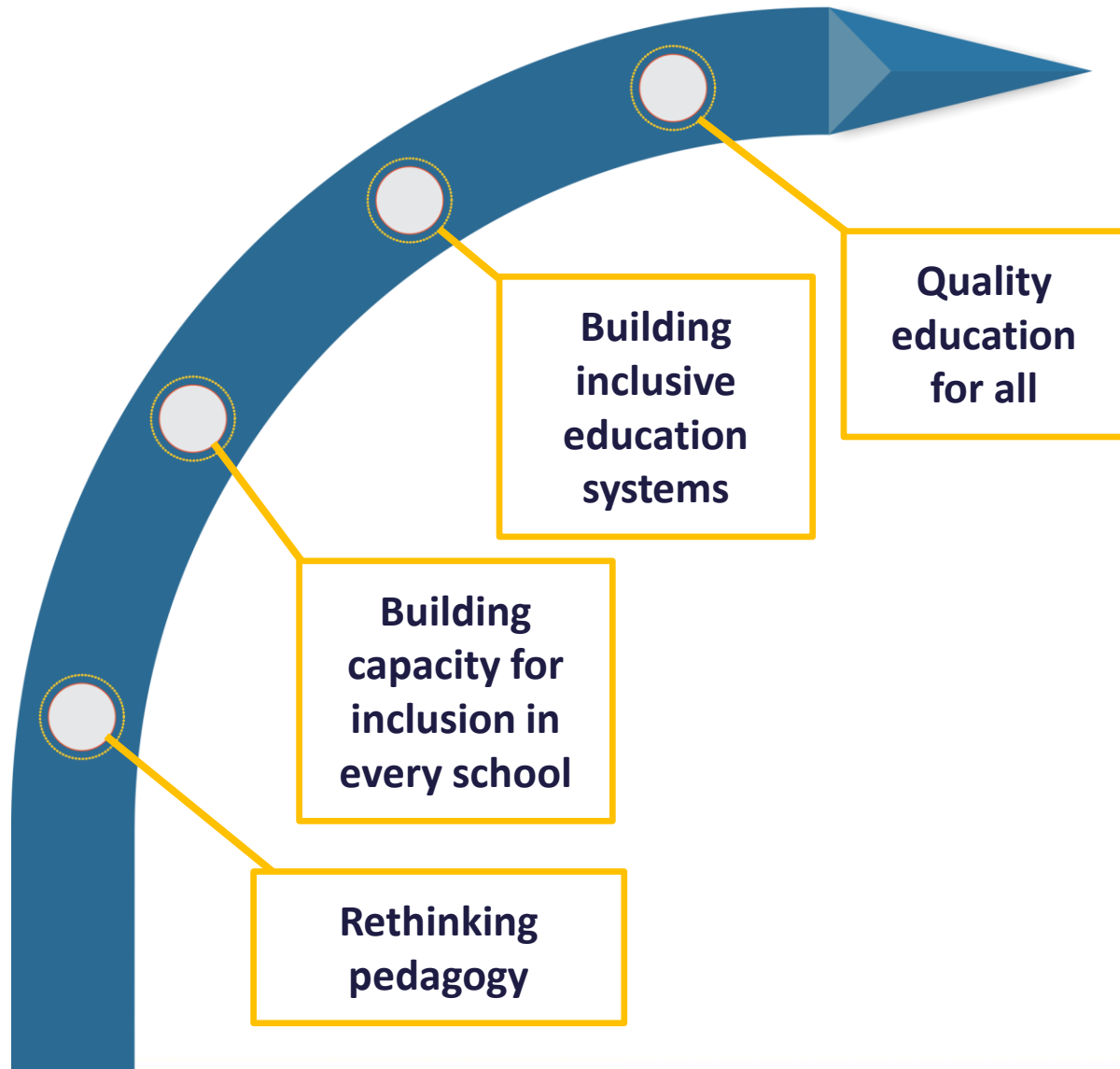
Inclusive ecology (1)

(European Agency, 2017, Inclusive early childhood education and care)

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Inclusive ecology (2)

Agency ecosystems model

- Macro-level systems: e.g. legislation, ITE, governance and funding, monitoring QA and accountability

- Exo-level systems: e.g. transitions, interprofessional cooperation, community commitment

- Meso-level systems: e.g. leadership, CPD, inclusive school ethos, support

- Micro level systems: e.g. authentic learning activities

(European Agency, 2017, Inclusive early childhood education and care)

Inclusive ecology (3)

Quality education for all

Building inclusive education systems

Building capacity for inclusion in every school

Rethinking pedagogy

Goal = quality education for all, addressing **excellence and equity**

'High-quality education is not achieved by raising competition or school choice. Market mechanisms enhance segregation and must be balanced with equity' (OECD 2012)

'Education is a human right and a common good. To achieve quality education, inequities must be 'fixed'' (Sahlberg, 2019)

Inclusive education systems development (1)

**Building inclusive education systems**

Quality education for all
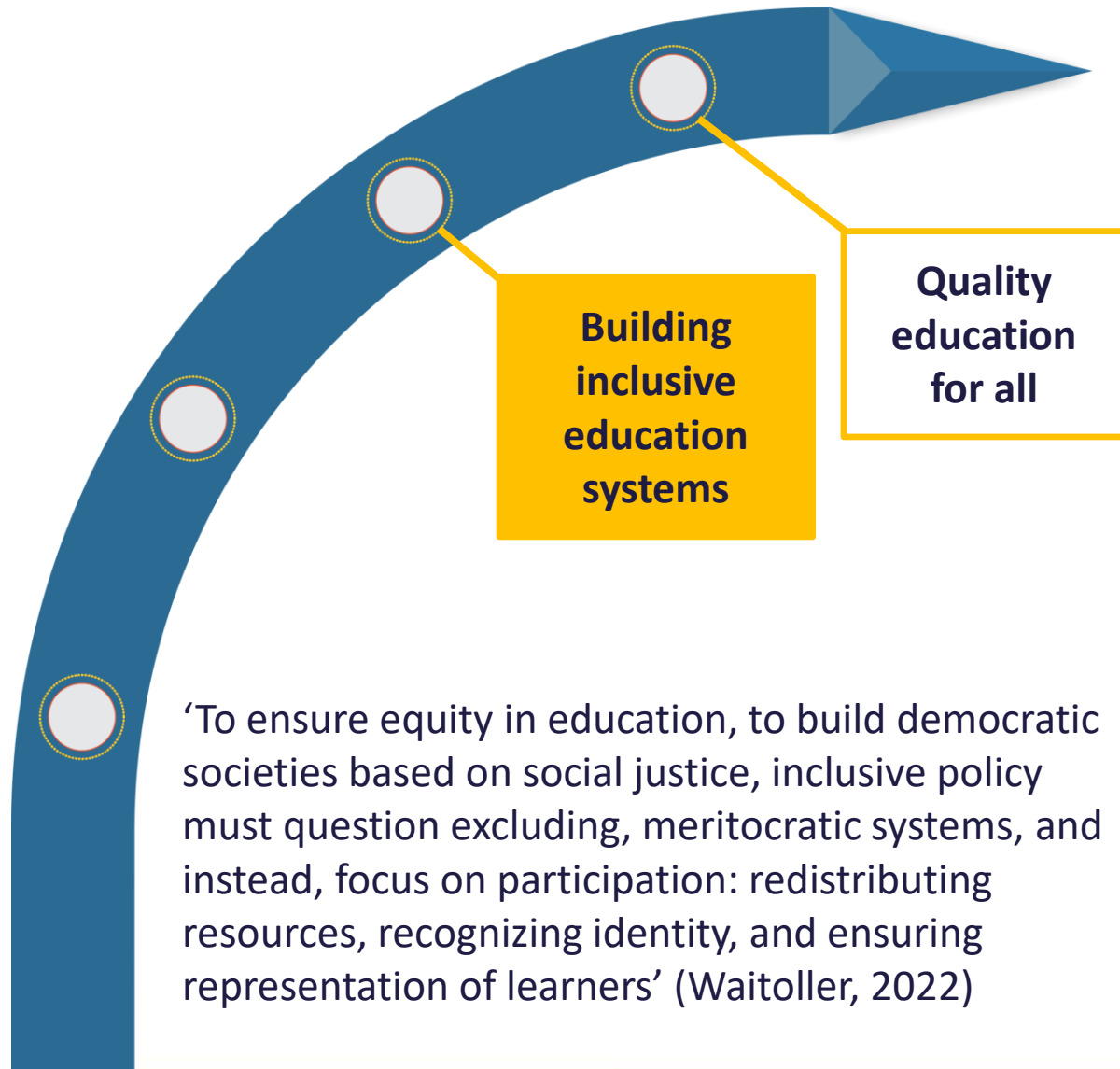
'To ensure equity in education, to build democratic societies based on social justice, inclusive policy must question excluding, meritocratic systems, and instead, focus on participation: redistributing resources, recognizing identity, and ensuring representation of learners' (Waitoller, 2022)

To ensure high quality education - excellence and equity, learning and participation of all – policy must ensure

- **equal access** through access to local schools and anti-discrimination legislation

- **equal learning opportunities** through single legislative education frameworks, governance and flexible funding mechanisms, professional development and curricula for all

- **equal learning outcomes** and social justice through quality assurance and accountability systems

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Inclusive education systems development (2)

Building inclusive education systems

Quality education for all
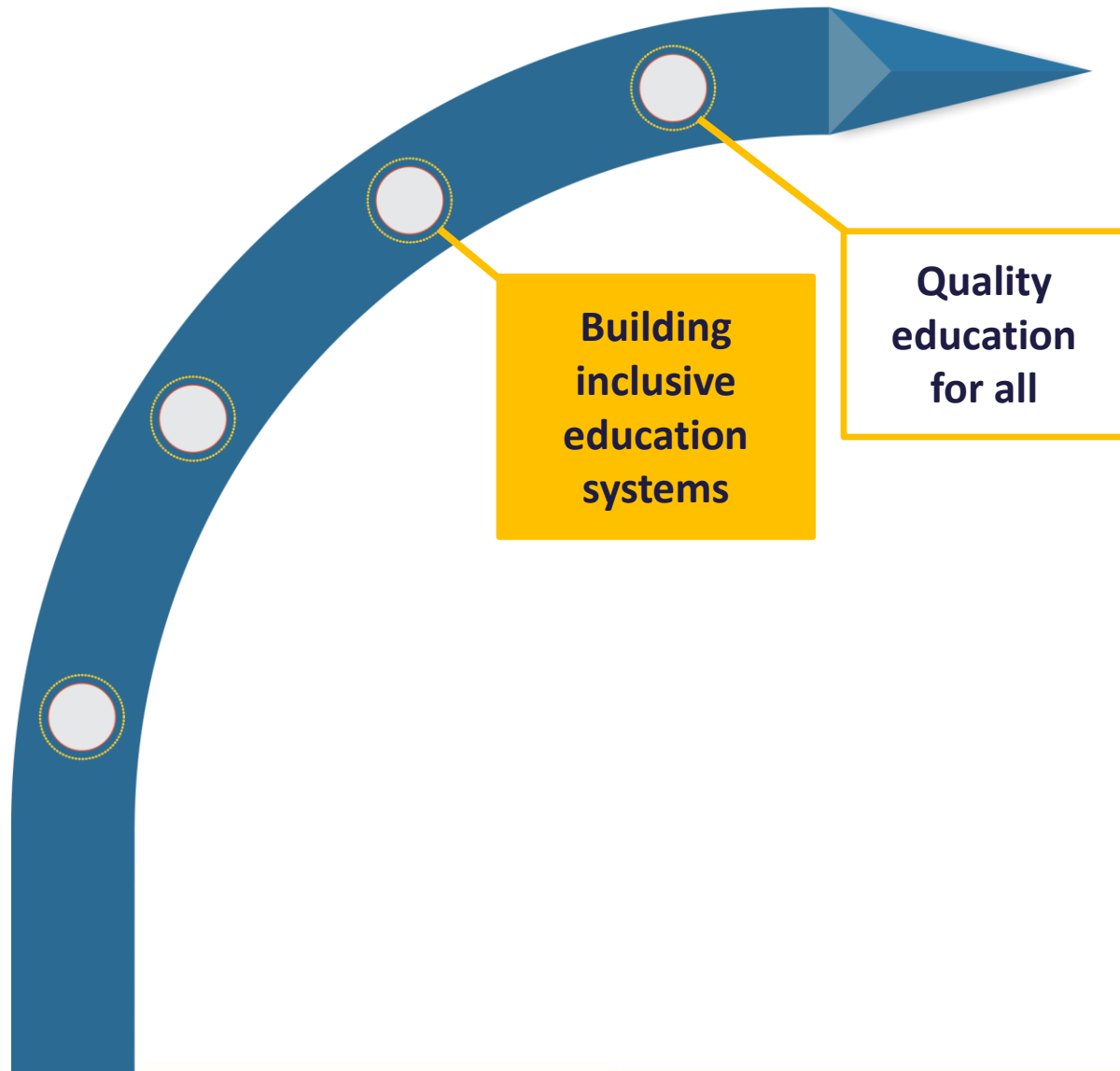
In addition, policy for inclusion must ensure structures and processes that support

- cross-sectoral and interprofessional communication and collaboration, including learners/families, including communities

- coherent, flexible systems of support provision

- early childhood education and care and flexible transition between education levels

- inclusive learning and teaching environments

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Inclusive education systems development (3)

Building inclusive education systems
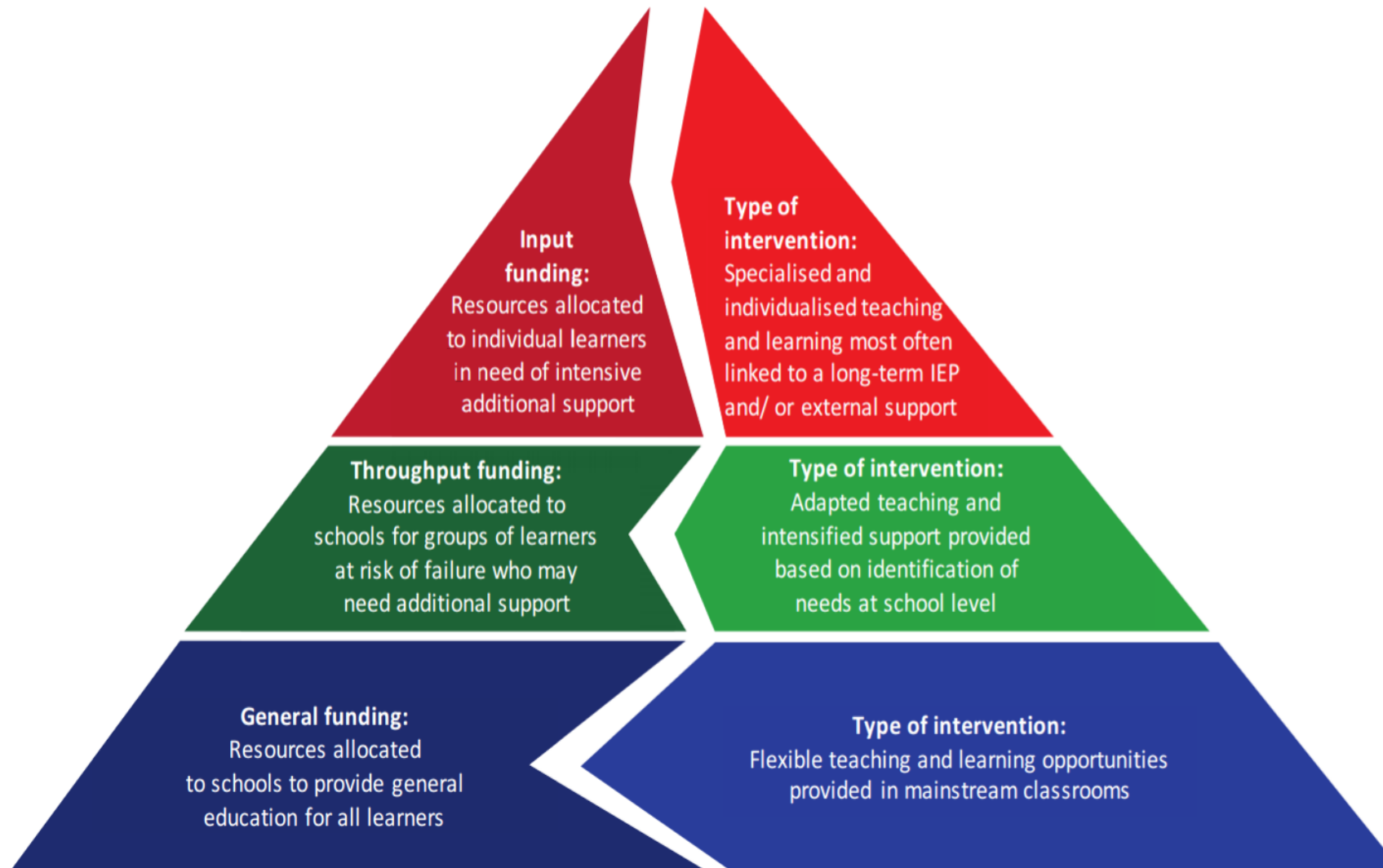
Quality education for all
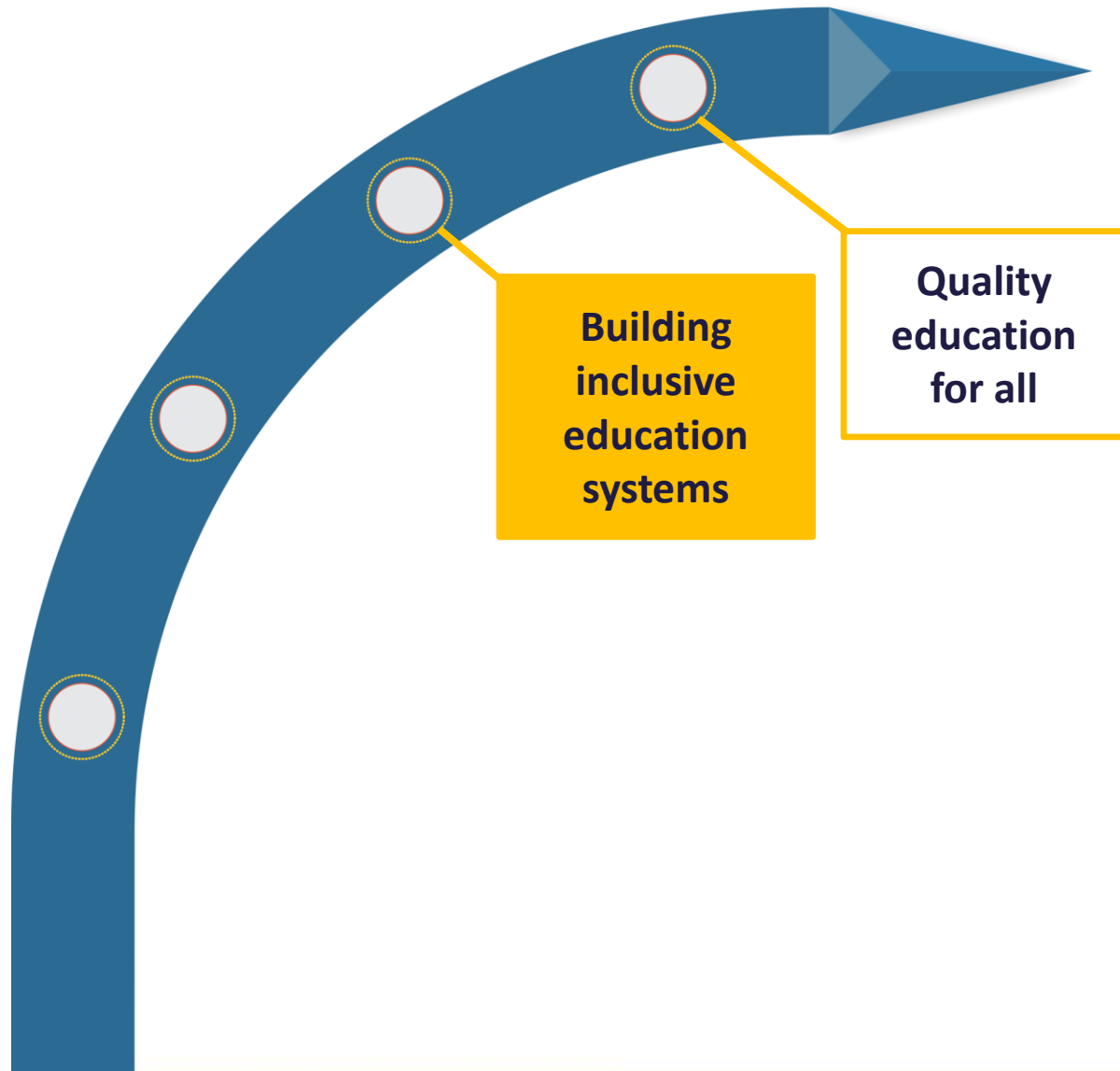
E.g. Flexible funding and dynamic support in mainstream schools

- flexible teaching, universal measures

- flexible support provision and interventions

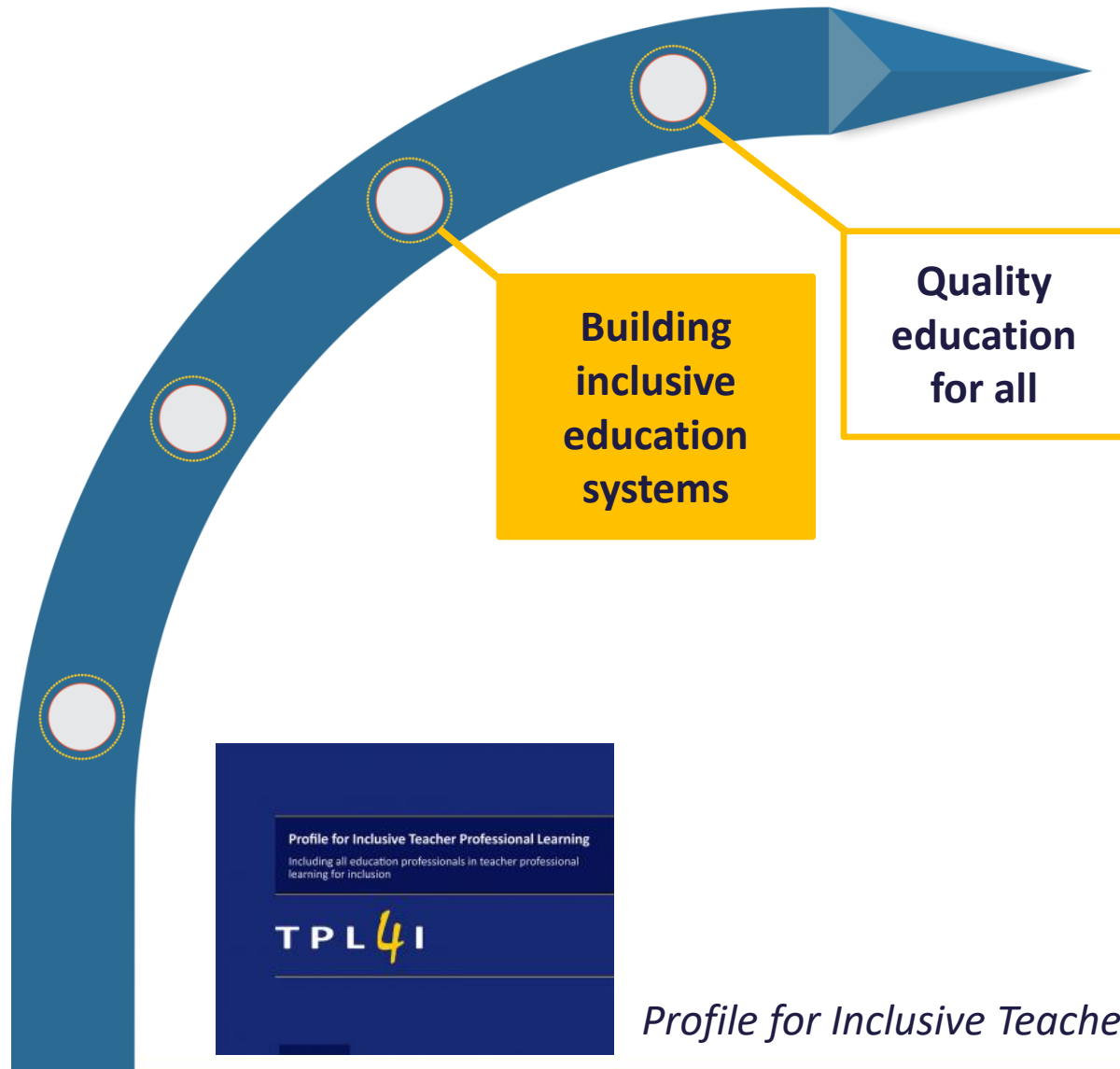- Individualised/personalised support, compensatory measures

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Inclusive education systems development (4)

Input funding: Resources allocated to individual learners in need of intensive additional support

Type of intervention: Specialised and individualised teaching and learning most often linked to a long-term IEP and/ or external support

Throughput funding: Resources allocated to schools for groups of learners at risk of failure who may need additional support

Type of intervention: Adapted teaching and intensified support provided based on identification of needs at school level

General funding: Resources allocated to schools to provide general education for all learners

Type of intervention: Flexible teaching and learning opportunities provided in mainstream classrooms

(European Agency, 2018)

Inclusive education systems development (5)

Building inclusive education systems

Quality education for all

E.g. Promoting and disseminating a competence framework for inclusion based on the core values for inclusion:

- Valuing learner diversity

- Supporting all learners

- Working with others

- Professional and collaborative professional learning

Focusing on collaborative, interprofessional learning

Profile for Inclusive Teacher Professional Learning

Including all education professionals in teacher professional learning for inclusion

TPL4I

Profile for Inclusive Teacher Professional Learning, 2022

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Inclusive education systems development (6)

Building inclusive education systems

Quality education for all
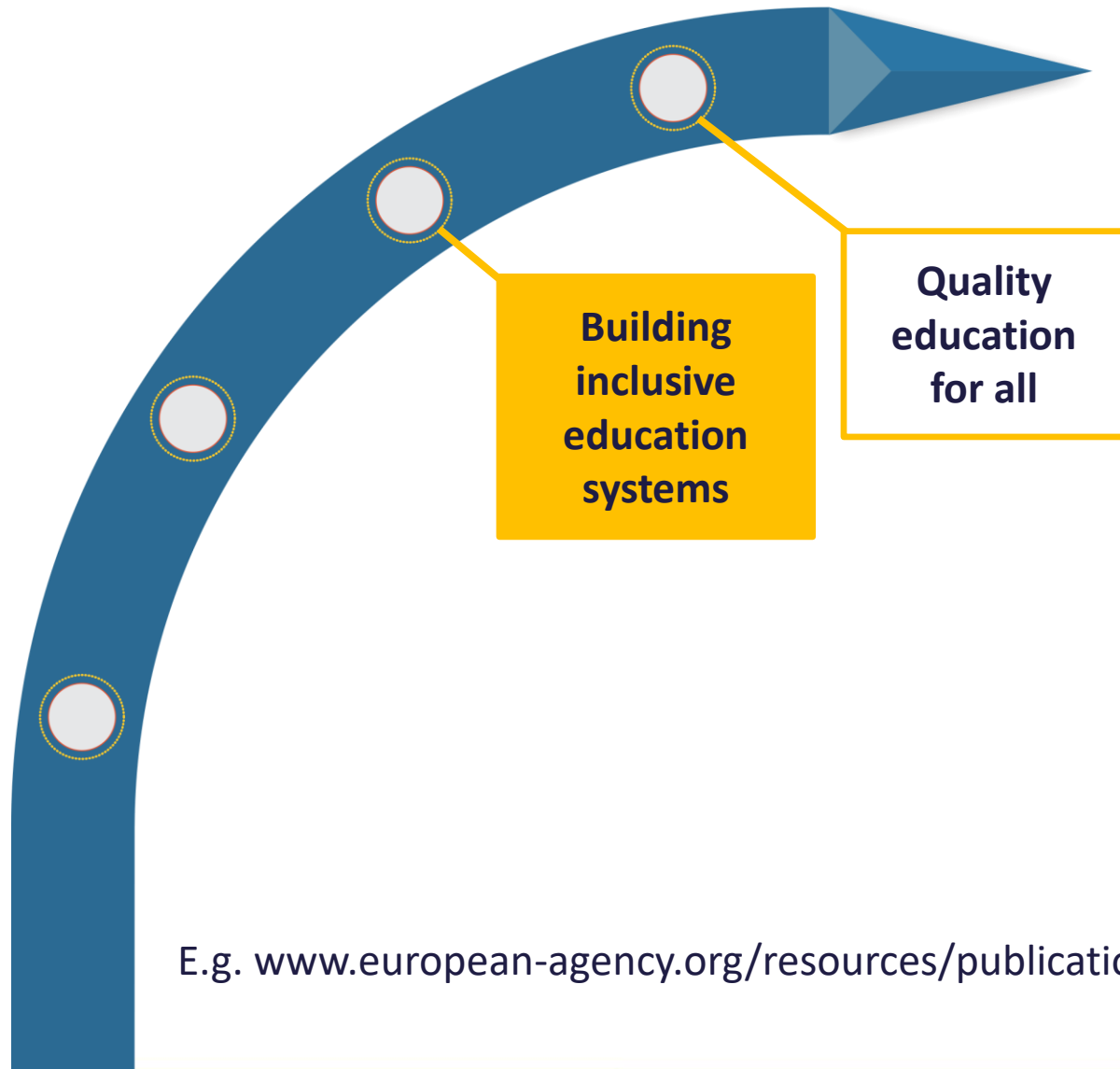
Ensuring **monitoring systems**, quality assurance and accountability,

- monitoring equitable access, learning opportunities, learning outcomes, social outcomes and participation, and setting targets accordingly, e.g. monitoring mainstream school attendance of learners and special school/classes attendance

- monitoring UDL and support for all learners, support for learners vulnerable for exclusion, and support for some

E.g. www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/EASIE-2020-2021-cross-country-report

Inclusive school development (1)

Building capacity for inclusion in every school

Rethinking pedagogy
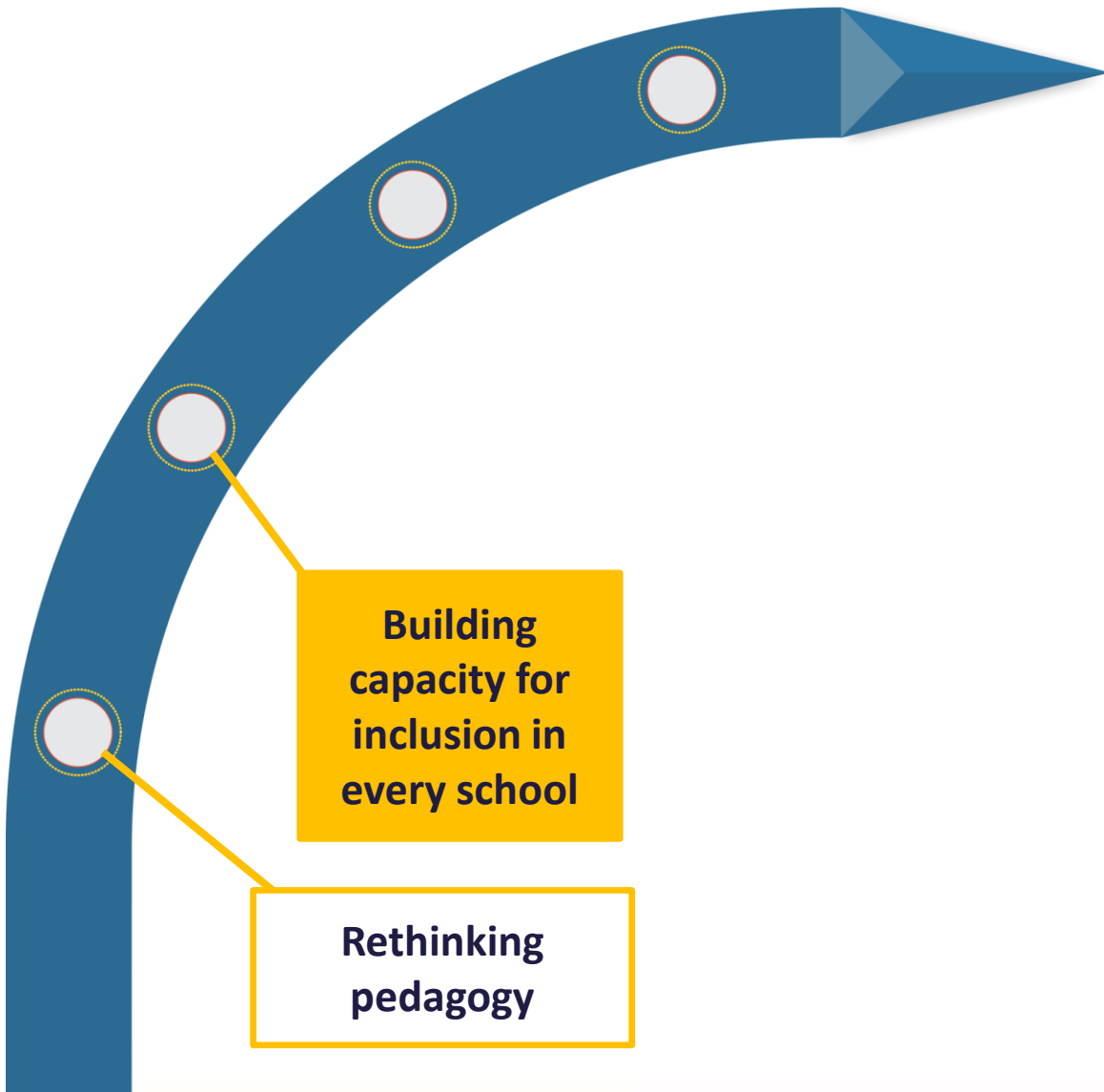
Building capacity for inclusion in schools

- supporting inclusive school leadership and continuing (inter)professional learning

- implementing inclusive pedagogy

- implementing support and a variety of interventions in collaboration with other schools and local services along a continuum of support

- Monitoring what 'works' in a particular context

'Diversity is not a threat, but an asset for education. Evidence shows the potential of inclusive learning environments for the learning of all, as reflected in inclusive pedagogy' (Florian and Rouse, 2011)

Inclusive school development (2)

Building capacity for inclusion in every school

Rethinking pedagogy
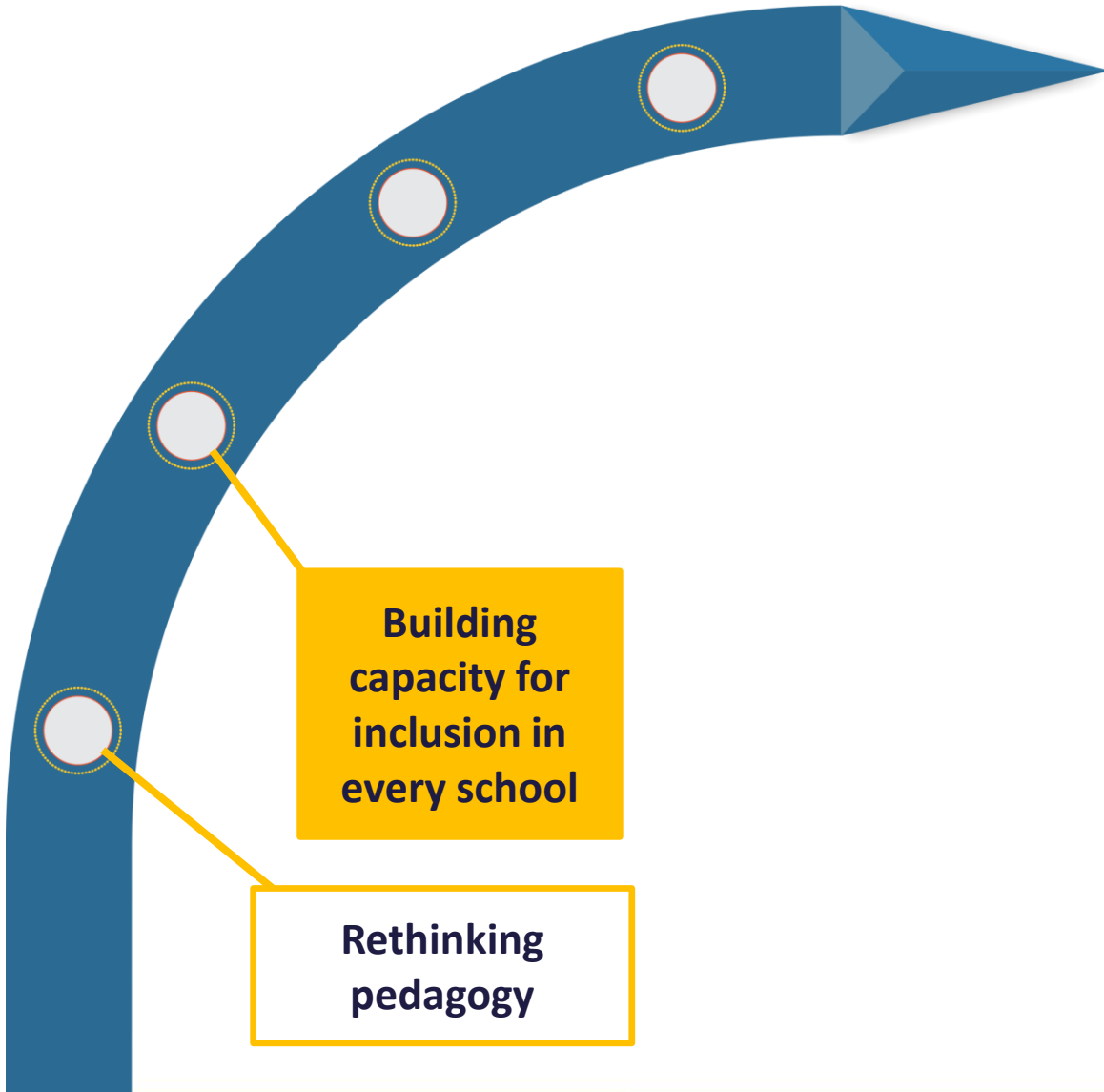
Inclusive school leadership (Eur Agency 2017)

- is collaborative, distributed leadership

- manages change and contributes to system reform through

  • partnerships with support agencies and families

  • consultation and communication at the community and national level

  • research engagement and collaborative professional development with universities

- ensures core functions to develop more inclusive learning environments

  • setting direction

 • organisational development

  • human development

Inclusive school development (3)

Building capacity for inclusion in every school

Rethinking pedagogy
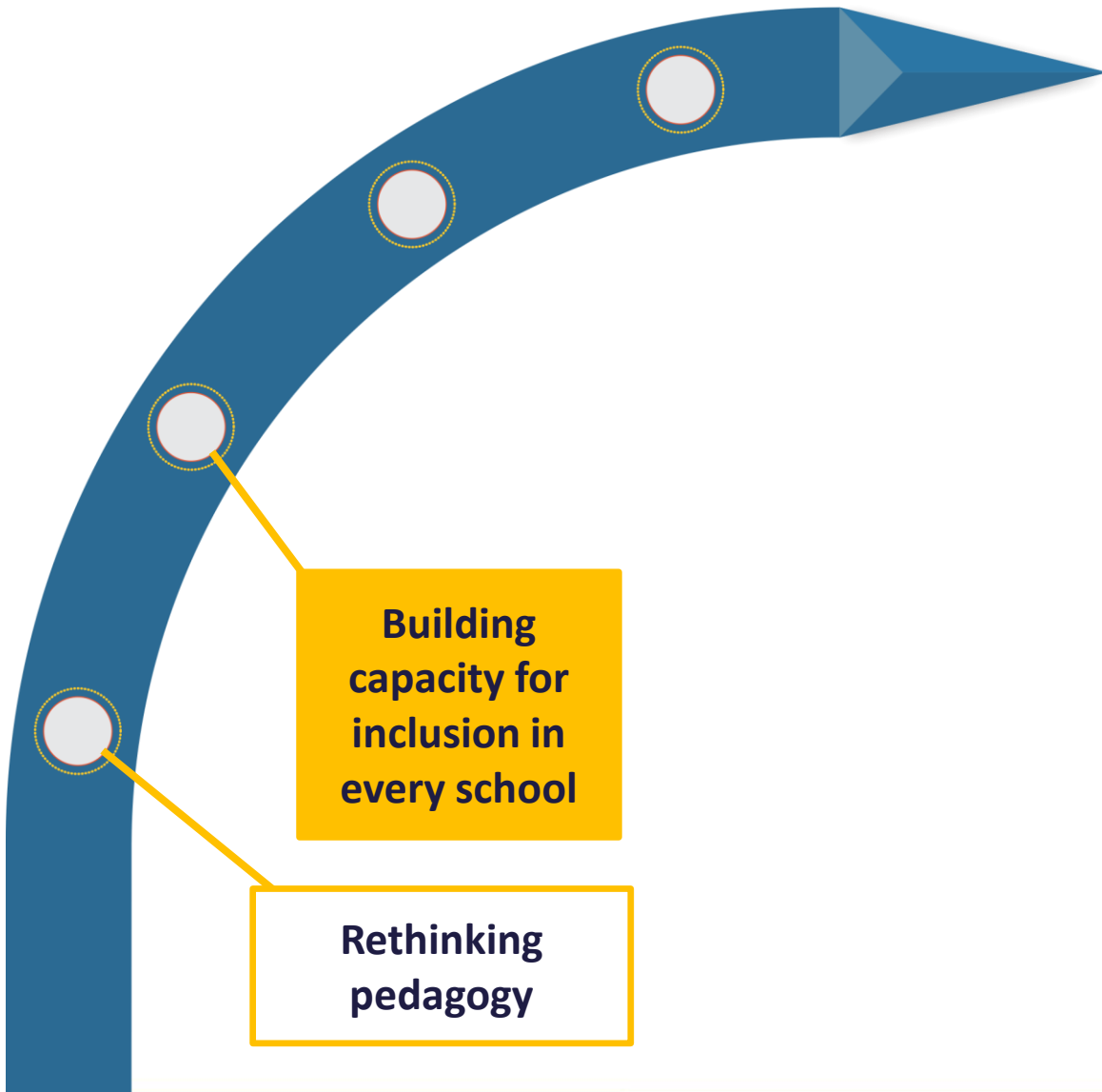
Inclusive school leadership

- *At the classroom and learners' level*:

- ensures teacher responsibility for all learners and personalisation

- supports and monitors innovative and evidence-based pedagogy, and the use of data as a basis for teacher reflection

- *At the school level*:

- Engages the learning community in the ethic of everybody, in self-review and reflection for school improvement, and in a culture of collaboration

- Ensures a continuum of support for all, and curriculum and assessment fit for purpose

Inclusive school development (4)

Building capacity for inclusion in every school
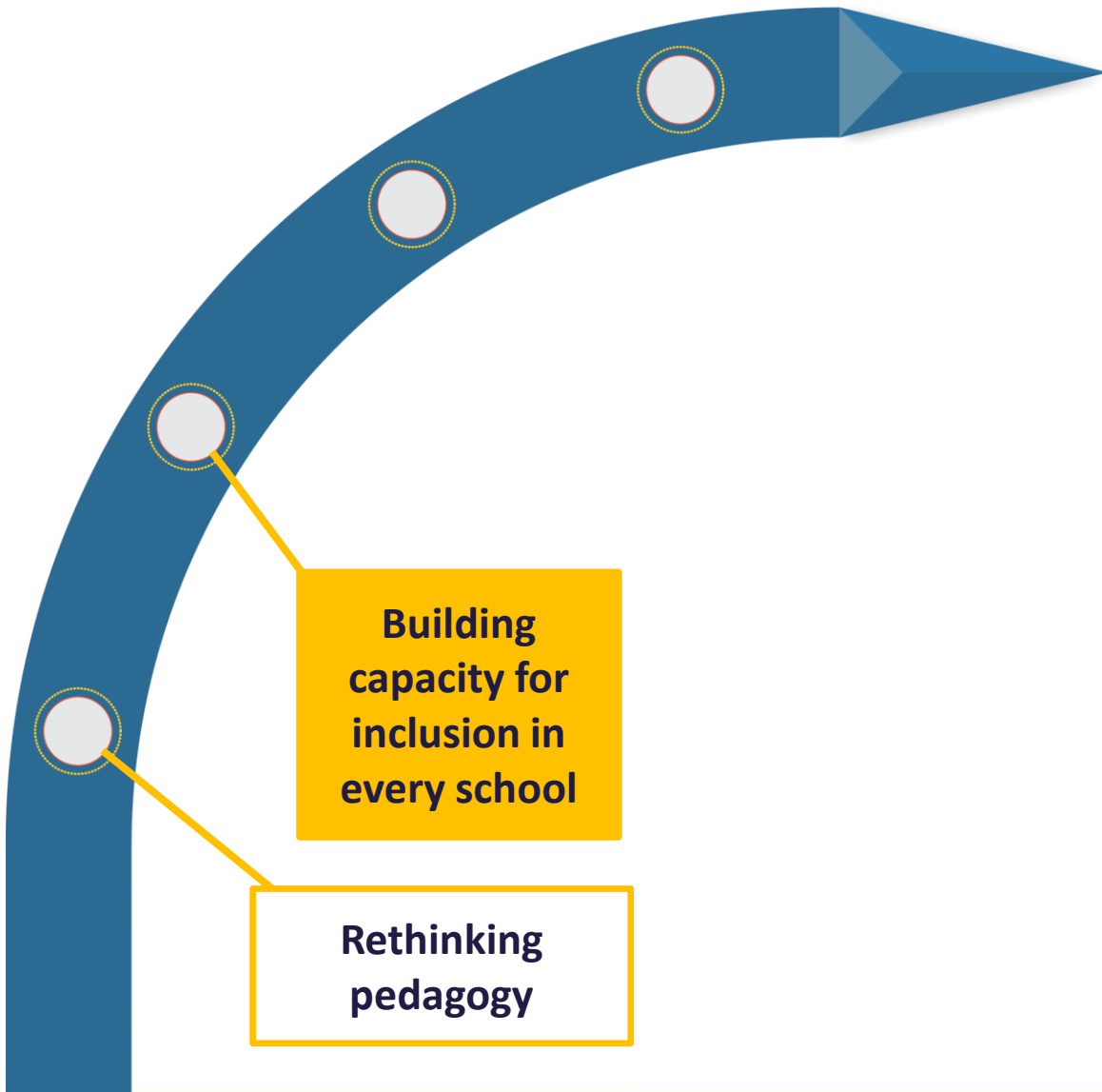
Rethinking pedagogy
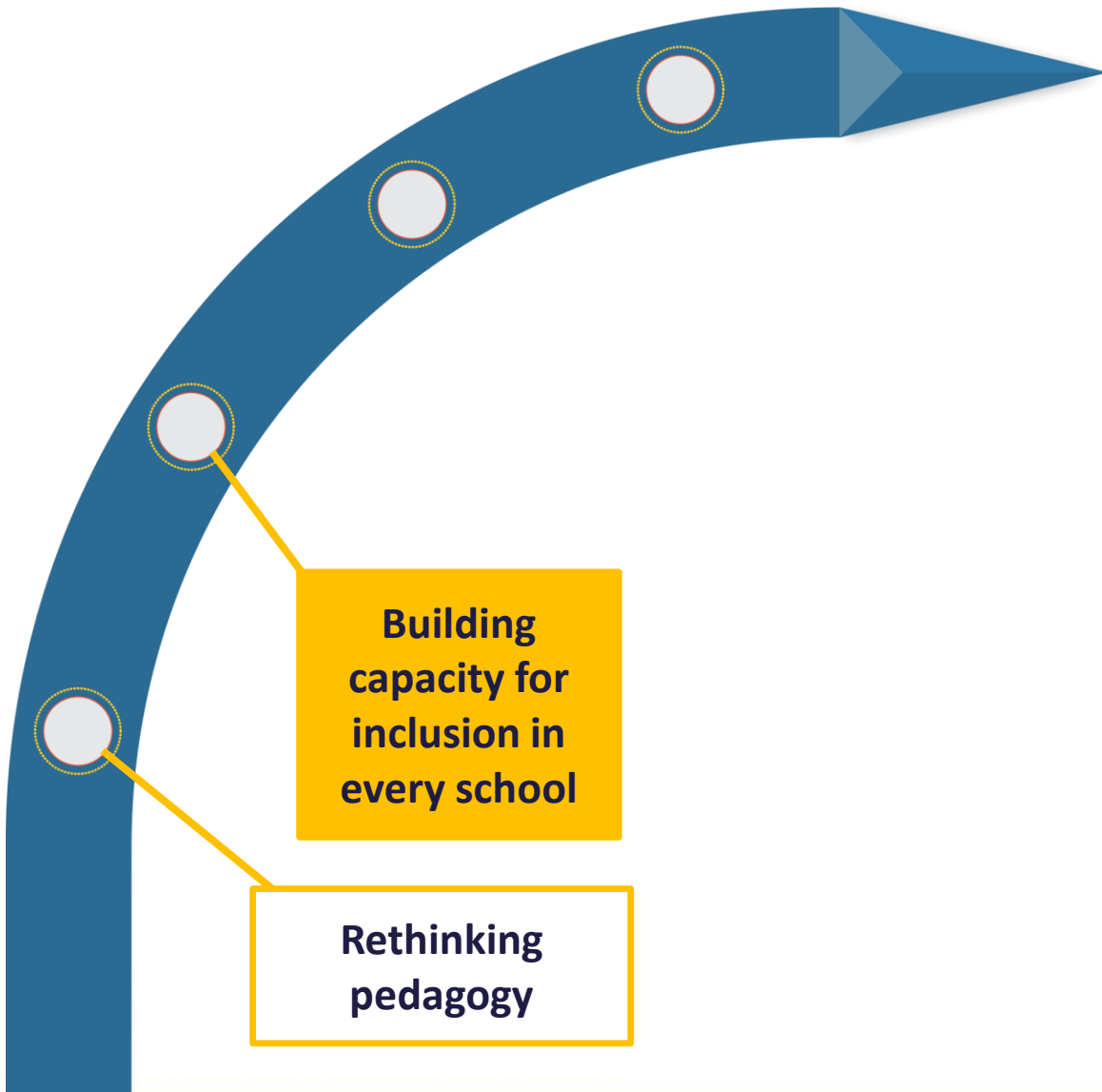
Inclusive school policies and practices need to be underpinned by culturally responsive and/or **inclusive pedagogy** (e.g. Spratt and Florian, 2015; Villegas and Lucas, 2002)

3 basic assumptions

- from labelling learners vulnerable to exclusion and support for some, to understanding **difference as human and diversity as normal**

- from teaching most students, to become **competent to teach each and everyone**

- from working side by side, in separate roles, in fragmented services, to **interprofessional collaborative work**, professional learning and distributed school leadership

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Inclusive school development (5)

Building capacity for inclusion in every school

Rethinking pedagogy

Monitoring 'what works': school level and classroom level strategies are effective when they demonstrate

- *high feasibility,* i.e. academic and/or social learning and participation purposes, effectiveness of the intervention/strategy, and stakeholder satisfaction

- *high readiness of the context,* i.e. fit with the school's values, availability of resources, and building capacity, e.g. for UDL, schoolwide positive behaviour support, peer learning activities, co-teaching and other consultative-collaborative practices, transition planning, leadership and CPD
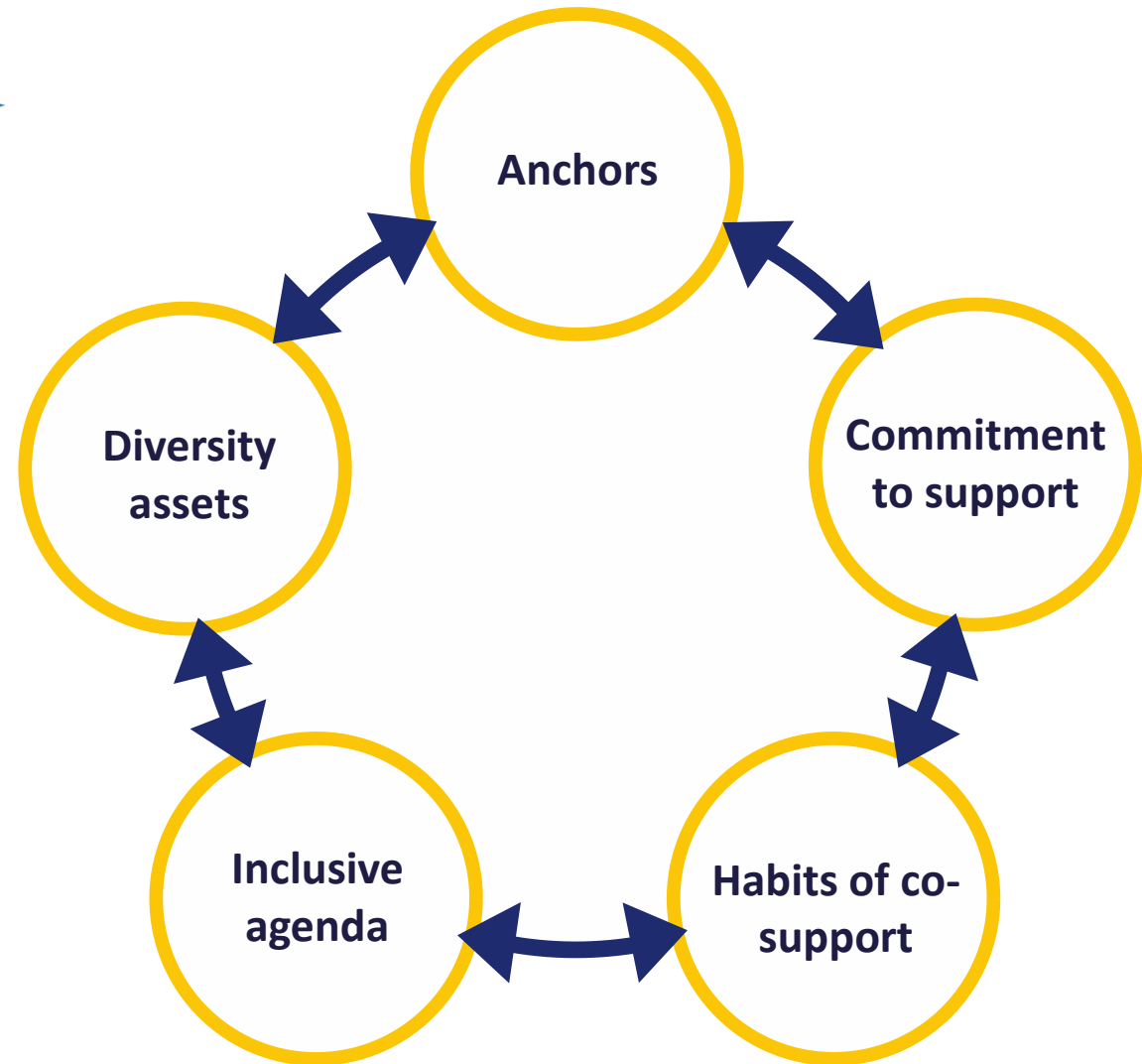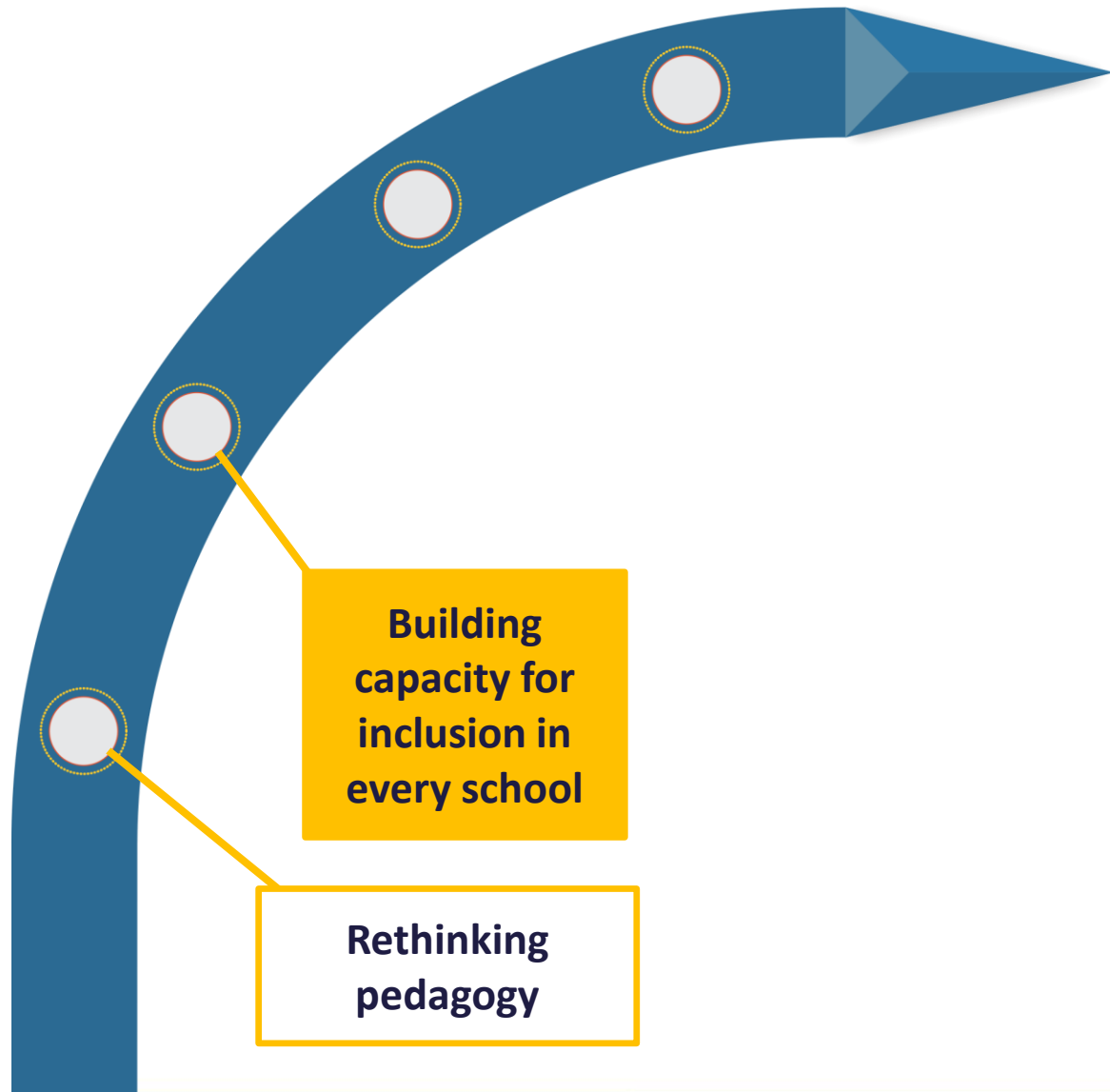
(De Vroey 2016)

Inclusive school development (6)
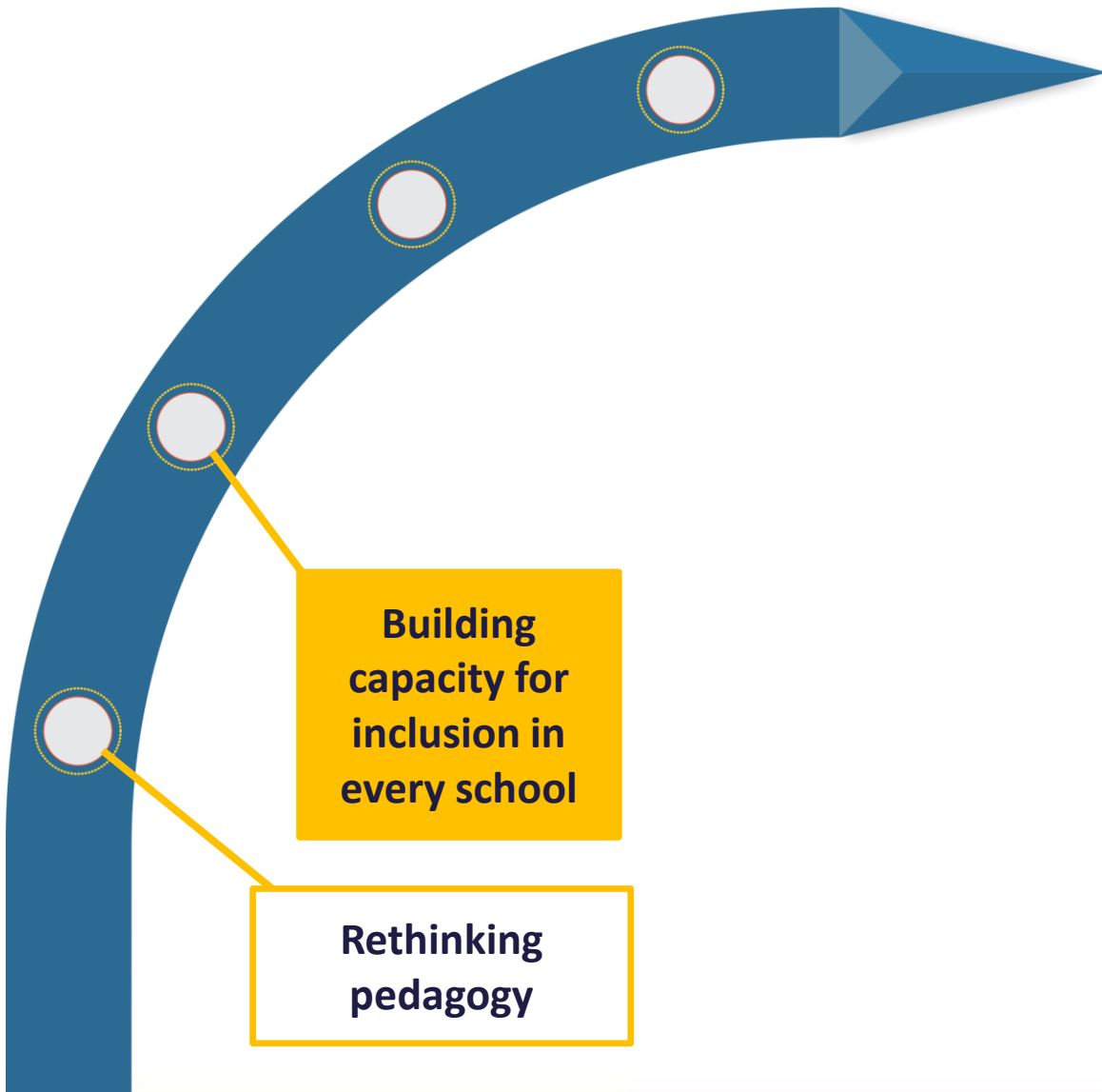
Inclusive school development is a local, long-term, cyclical implementation process disseminating, adopting and monitoring a variety of inclusive practices/strategies focusing on **supportive relationships** and **academic and transition support**

- involving social and professional learning, creating, integrating and **embedding collaborative and coherent support**

- supporting **interprofessional opportunities for dialogue** (values, assumptions, targets and next steps) and inclusive school leadership

(De Vroey 2016)

Building capacity for inclusion in every school

Rethinking pedagogy

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Inclusive school development (7)

Inclusive school development (8)

- **Anchors**. e.g. in-school support network, distributed leadership

- **Commitment to support.** Professional development, e.g. expanding co-teaching or peer support, change of grouping structures, balanced class support

- **Inclusive agenda.** Participation in local policy for inclusion, e.g. in communities of practice, professional learning communities

- **Diversity assets.** e.g. School and classroom climate of supportive relationships. e.g. Coherent inclusion and equity/equal opportunities policy

Inclusive school development (9)

Building capacity for inclusion in every school

Rethinking pedagogy
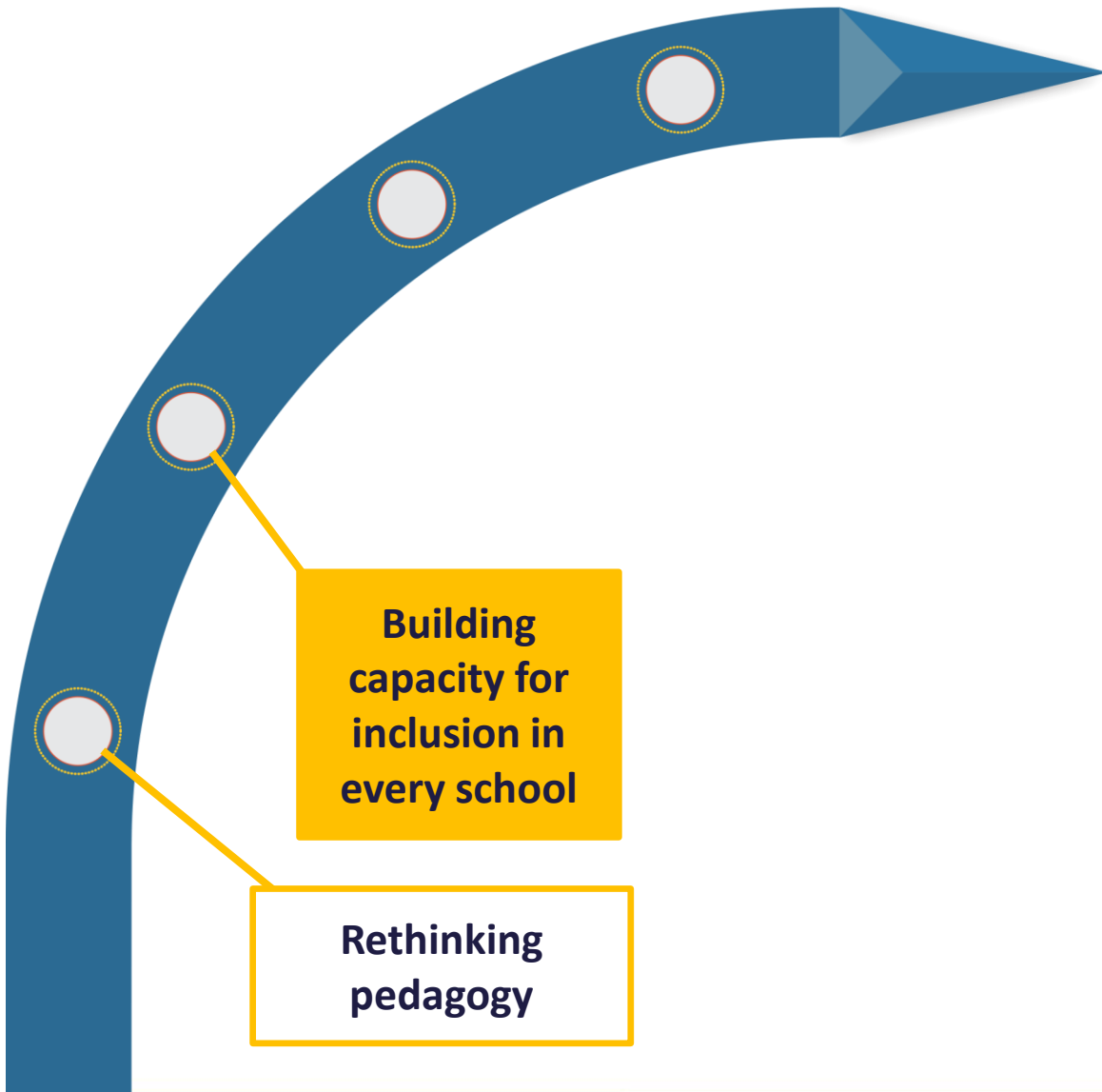
At the classroom level, strategies relate to

- a positive class climate, with sensitivity and responsiveness, informal peer support and social interventions, and explicit positive peer attitude interventions and self-determination;

- accessibility and effective classroom organisation, with classroom routines, effective behaviour support and differentiated lesson format, effective use of accommodations, peer assisted learning and co-teaching, and explicitly activating participation and adapting the curriculum

- high quality of instruction, with focusing, dialogue and individualised support for all, and explicit self-instruction skills

(De Vroey, Roelandts, Struyf and Petry, 2016; Pianta, 2013)

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Inclusive school development (10)

Case studies illustrating long-term processes towards inclusion: strategies at school, class and learner level

|	Diversity assets	Anchors	Staff commitment	Habits of co-support	Inclusive agenda
Small urban middle school	equity values, equal relationships; success for all in a diversity context; learning and behaviour support networks	supportive leadership of student counsellor; teacher expertise; SEN-co as a teacher counsellor	resource development, integration and monitoring; communication flow; positive classroom climate, social interventions; effective routines, behaviour management, differentiation, self-determination/instruction; parent-school partnerships; transition planning	embedded support systems; teacher sensitivity and responsiveness; teacher self-efficacy and balanced class management; positive student engagement; formative assessment	multilevel education; self-steering support teams
Large technical vocational school	equity pedagogical mission; success-for-all in diversity context; behaviour and family support policy	moral leadership, know-how and monitoring; proximity and know-how of special education teacher	resource development, recruitment and integration; communication 'flow'; effective meeting times; positive class climate, social interventions; reasonable accommodations; quality instruction, self-instruction; transition planning	embedded support systems; teacher sensitivity and responsiveness; full membership; positive student engagement; formative assessment	needs specialisation; IEP

Inclusive school development challenges

In order to implement inclusive education practices effectively,

- awareness is needed of the ecology of inclusive education across different levels and interconnected systems

- a clear policy position and policy structures must be established to support schools in building capacity and developing inclusive learning environments

- decentralisation and school autonomy support the implementation of inclusive practices fit for purpose and fit for the school context: through dialogue, professional learning and inclusive school leadership

- monitoring, dissemination and communication of inclusive practices ('expressions of inclusion') are essential for the strengthening of policies for inclusion, with and among all stakeholders, including families and cross-sectoral partners

Thank you!
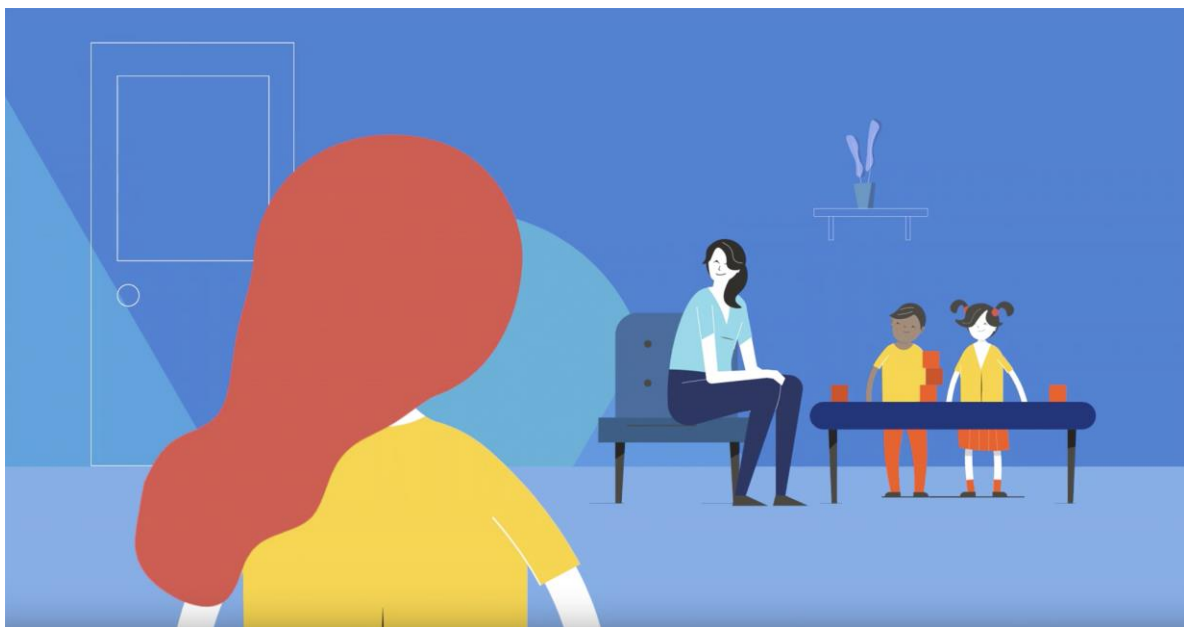
'We learn best when we learn together'

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

Contact

www.european-agency.org

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
Østre Stationsvej 33, DK-5000 Odense C, Denmark

secretariat@european-agency.org

Tel.: +45 64 41 00 20

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

References

Ainscow, M., Dyson, A., Goldrick and West, 2012. Making schools effective for all: rethinking the task. *School Leadership & Management*, 32 (3), 197-213.

Ainscow, M. and Miles, S. Making Education for All inclusive: where next? *Prospects* 38, 15–34 (2008). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-008-9055-0

Anderson, J., Boyle, C., & Deppeler, J. M. (2014). *The ecology of inclusive education. Reconceptualising Bronfenbrenner*. In H. Zhang, P. W. Keung Chan, & C. Boyle (Eds.), Equality in Education: Fairness and Inclusion (pp. 23 - 34). Sense Publishers.

Bronfenbrenner, U. and Morris, P., 2007. The Bioecological Model of Human Development. In: Handbook of Child Psychology. DOI: 10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0114

De Vroey, A., Struyf, E., Roelandts, K and Petry, K. 2016. *Inclusive classroom practices in secondary schools. Towards a universal teaching approach*. In: B. De Wever, R. Vanderlinde, M. Tuytens and A. Aelterman, Professional learning in education. Challenges for teachers, teacher educators and student teachers. Ghent, Academia Press, 179-202.

De Vroey, A. 2016. *Inclusive practices and co-support*. KULeuven. Doctoral dissertation.

Dyson, A. (2014). A response to Göransson and Nilholm. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 29(3), 281-282. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.933542

Ebershold, S. 2019. Paper presentation at Inclusive Education Conference, Porto.

European Agency for Special needs and Inclusive education, 2016. *Inclusive Early Childhood Education: An analysis of 32 European examples.* (P. Bartolo, E. Björck-Åkesson, C. Giné and M. Kyriazopoulou, eds.). Odense, Denmark

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

References

European Agency for Special needs and Inclusive education, 2018. *Financing Policies for Inclusive Education Systems: Policy Guidance Framework*. (A. Watkins, E. Óskarsdóttir and S. Ebersold, eds.). Odense, Denmark

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018. *Evidence of the Link Between Inclusive Education and Social Inclusion: A Review of the Literature.* (S. Symeonidou, ed.). Odense, Denmark

European Agency for Special needs and Inclusive education, 2023. *European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education: 2019/2020 School Year Dataset Cross-Country Report.* (A. Lenárt, A. Lecheval and A. Watkins, eds.). Odense, Denmark

European Agency for Special needs and Inclusive education, 2022. *Profile for Inclusive Teacher Professional Learning: Including all education professionals in teacher professional learning for inclusion*. (A. De Vroey, A. Lecheval and A. Watkins, eds.). Odense, Denmark

Florian, L. (2017). *The concept of inclusive pedagogy*. In G. Hallett, & F. Hallett (Eds.), Transforming the role of the SENCO (2 ed., pp. 61-73). Open University Press.

Göransson, K. and Nilholm, C. 2014. Conceptual diversities and empirical shortcomings – a critical analysis of research on inclusive education, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 29:3, 265-280, DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2014.933545

OECD, 2012. Quality and Equity in Education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools. https://www.oecd.org/education/school/49620025.pdf

Sahlberg, P. 2019. Blog. https://pasisahlberg.com/australia-must-fix-school-inequity-to-create-a-top-education-system/

Sandoval, M. and Waitoller, F. 2022. Broadening the notion of participation in inclusive education: A social justice approach. *Revista Espanola de discapacidad,* 10(2), 21-33

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

References

Slee, Roger, 2011. *The irregular school: Exclusion, schooling and inclusive education*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. 219 pages, ISBN ISBN: 978-0-41547990 (paperback), 978-0-415-47989-9 (hardback).

Spratt, J. and Florian, L. 2015. Inclusive pedagogy: From learning to action. Supporting each individual in the context of 'everybody', *Teaching and teacher education,* (49) 89-96. https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/teaching-and-teacher-education

Villegas, A. and Lucas, T., 2002. Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers: Rethinking the curriculum, Journal of Teacher Education 53-20. DOI:10.1177/0022487102053001003Corpus ID: 145581883

UNESCO, 2015. Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) | SDG4 Education 2030 - Global Education Cooperation Mechanism.

UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education, 2009, in Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiUUFZog4oM

www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/EASIE-2020-2021-cross-country-report

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education