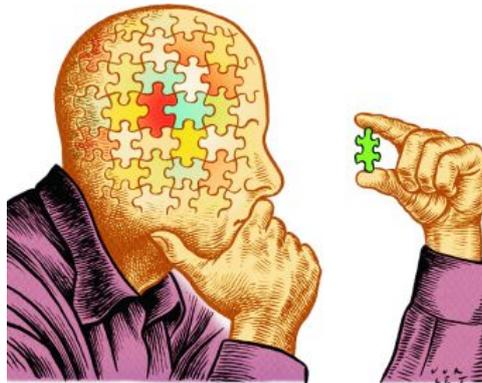


Introducing APTO

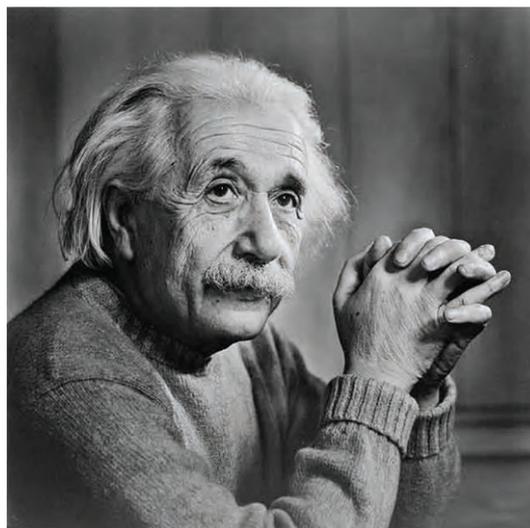
APTO is a Portuguese word meaning 'to be able to do something', 'to be capacitated to do something'. It shares the same root as the English word 'aptitude' from the Latin 'aptus' meaning suitable or fit.



APTO is the name we have given to a movement, a way of thinking about and approaching school improvement, an issue of paramount importance in our world. Our dream is to see school directors and teachers capacitated to improve their schools in a sustainable way that values all contributions. This is not about following a set of rules, but about the development of a way of thinking, and through that a way of acting, to produce responsible citizens, a goal all schools could agree on.

APTO is the name we have given to a movement, a way of thinking about and approaching school improvement

APTO was developed through a partnership between two NGO's, Total Educação e Cultura from Brazil and Aprender from the UK. Although combining experience, understanding and skills across both cultures, we recognise that we have been, and continue to be, influenced by a wide variety of other cultures. We celebrate our cross-cultural roots developed on the ground in Brazil but at the same time understand that all cultures bring value into the sphere of education improvement.



So what is this way of thinking, this approach to school improvement based on? What pedagogy? What philosophy? Our approach is centred on the need for transformation, something much deeper than just change although transformation does involve change. Albert Einstein said “The world that we have created is a process of thinking. We cannot transform the world without transforming our thinking.” The Apostle Paul said “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In fact, he thought that this was such a big deal, such a deeply personal surrender, he linked it to the most fundamental of activities- the holy act of worship.

Be transformed by the renewing
of your mind.



So why the big deal between change and transformation? Let's think about bread. A frozen slice of bread can be defrosted. If too much bread has thawed, you can re-freeze it. This can happen many times. Thawed bread is chemically the same as frozen bread. The only change has been physical. However, now put the bread in a toaster. A few minutes later, voila, you have toast! The question is, can you un-toast the bread? Can you return it to its' former state? You can't. It is forever toast. It has chemically changed. It can never go back. When people change, they can always change back. My change of thinking about diet and exercise at the beginning of January doesn't last. I change back (some years quicker than others!). But if my thinking is transformed, I can never think again like I did before. This transformative thinking is crucial. It means the educators with whom we work are owning the change, it stops being an idea introduced by an outsider and becomes a way of being that they totally 'get' – it's moving from the how to the why, from *compliance* to *covenant* – a relationship solidified through values, passion, mission, purpose and meaning. That gets us excited because a school based on covenant is the kind of place I want my kids to go to.

It's moving from the how to the why, from
compliance to *covenant*

APTO is a way of developing *thinking* in schools. Why did we pick thinking?

Thinking is crucial as it determines behaviour and behaviour determines actions, or lack of them; and it is actions that determine young people's futures. It's about a **transformation of thinking** that's not based on regurgitation of memorized text but

a much deeper, critical, reflective thinking that is owned by the student, not imposed by the system. But is it thinking for thinking sake? If thinking is a means, what is the end?

We feel one of the most critical 'ends' of thinking is how we think of ourselves and others – the 'them' and the 'us' and how we get along with each other. Just think about what happens when this breaks down – in homes, schools, communities and countries. The absolute focus of transformative thinking is about *responsibility*. It's not the most popular or sexy word out there is it? Do you feel that immediate cloud forming over your head? Let's push through.

The absolute focus of transformative thinking is about *responsibility*.

The root of responsibility is response, or to respond. Wherever I am and whatever I'm doing and who I am with involves responsibility. To make the change we all want to see in our schools requires a response; not a 'they are responsible' but a 'I am responsible', 'I am the response'. Taking responsibility begins the transformation process. The end point of this process is citizenship. But communities often face problems when the focus of the citizen is on themselves and their immediate group. Citizenship can generate someone who knows all of their rights and responsibilities but chooses just to be interested in themselves. Transformation has failed. The true goal of the transformation is *responsible citizenship*. The transition of child to adult in the Jewish culture happens at 13 years old for a boy and 12 for a girl. Traditionally at their Bar Mitzvah, the young person becomes responsible and accountable for their own actions and their community. In the West, it feels like we have moved the age of the beginning of adulthood to 30. We live in a world of children, a place of men and women that have never grown up, that refuse to be responsible. We see the consequences of this all around us.



When you have a consensus that focuses responsibility well, meaningful work happens and that produces results - responsible citizens. But what is the principle focus of our responsible citizens? The key is community. The diametric opposite is isolation. The focus here is in those around you, not just the 'us' but the 'them' too. When we ignore this responsibility to our fellow brother or sister, we exploit them, it's easier to ignore or even misuse those around us. The work of transformation happens when we take our responsibility and move in our thinking and actions from

the 'us' to the 'them'. This is what makes our work, our true work, count. It can be represented by a physics equation (don't freak out!):

$$W = Fd$$

Work = Force x Distance moved

Think about the work you want to do as a school director or a teacher, what you are trying to achieve with your students. Increase grades? Improve behaviour? Homework completion? Reducing truancy? The list could go on. As teachers we are very good at the force side of things, the effort, the blood, sweat and tears. Our response when the behaviour doesn't improve? We try harder. We put more energy into schemes to force compliance. If you work and there is no distance moved, or what I call dis-location, you have not worked. Effort with no dis-location is service – in a commercial sense. We are there providing a service, not dis-locating. And that approach will leave you feeling frustrated, fatigued and fed-up. Sound familiar? Responsible citizens want to keep on learning, do their best, fulfil their potential and look out for their community. Exam results, homework, behaviour and attendance become a sign, they don't become the goal. Teachers feel empowered to teach. Students don't feel they are in a factory farm. So what do we mean by dislocation? Dislocation is a disturbance from a proper or usual place or state. It is the distance you are prepared to travel between the 'us' and the 'them', between teacher and student. How do you know you have dislocated? Relationship starts.

Transformation only happens through relationships

Transformation only happens through relationships. Think about your classes. How do classes where you have good relationship feel in relation to those where there is not good relationship? Does it feel harder work? Of course! But, you may be thinking, why is it me that has to dis-locate?! Why doesn't the student have to dis-locate too?! My response is this; who should be more equipped, more mature to make the move? The teacher or the student? You have to make the first move. The greater the depth of that relationship, the less effort or force is needed to accomplish the same work. The same force with more dislocation generates more work output and more responsibility.

APTO's approach is to help school staff close the distance. This is not a warm-fuzzy way of approaching improvement. Far from it. Dislocation doesn't sound pain free does it? The key part of dislocation is *disposition* – the predominant tendency of one's mental and emotional outlook or attitude. Are you disposed to be dislocated? A simple but profound question. The problem is that as normal folk, we are naturally more attracted to our own kind, especially under stress. When we feel attacked or we fall on hard times there is a natural tendency to go into a siege mentality; we turn in on ourselves, hoard what we need and become aggressive to those that want

what we have. Dislocation will feel unnatural, awkward and full of unknowns – after all if they were knowns they would not be in the ‘them’ group. The power is in the movement, and you making the first move. The transfer of content, understanding or skills all involve movement. The greater the movement in pedagogy, the greater the effect. Our role for our school community is to teach people to move, to share, to relate. The disposition of being here for the next person who comes after me begets sustainability, we become responsible for passing on what we have.

The power is in the movement, and you making the first move.

Transformative thinking happens when we move, despite the pain, to reach across the divide between us and them with the goal of relationship. The result is responsible citizens.

Relationship is fundamental. If change is to happen that leads to our final goal, then there needs to be an acknowledgement that things need to change and a desired ‘end state’. But such a journey needs to start with truth – and often the truth is not particularly palatable. There are deep emotions that work against truth – fear of failure, fear of exposure and fear of leaving our comfort zone. How we deal with those fears is heavily influenced by culture. Some cultures embrace failure, others interpret failure as a tremendous shame on themselves and their family. It is culturally illiterate to value one approach over the other, and particularly to value one cultures approach to another. This is a particularly important lesson for Western cultures that so often exude superiority, even unconsciously. To deal with truth you need to trust. Healthy relationships are where trust is built. No relationship, no trust. No trust, no truth and the theatre of pretence continues. Pretence, however, has its charm. With pretence you can actually get a lot done. Organisations are often full of individuals who are pretending and they get results. The problem comes when there is a threat of exposure, particularly when job security is on the line. The change observed can be real, but it is not transformational. Trust should not be underestimated but it also comes at a price. Time. And the cost of choosing positive reactions to truth when it is offered, even in its shallowest form. If I’m going to trust you I’m going to start small and shallow and see what happens.



Let's think about school improvement. Are there certain countries where education standards are improving in a sustained way? Are there aspects of school improvement that are commonly found across those same countries? Is there best practice found in a local setting and culture that can drive school improvement? The answer is yes. Are there certain character strengths that are commonly found in successful people? Is there a list of the most commonly found character strengths in these individuals? If we know these strengths, can they be taught in a true sense? The answer, once again, is yes. Can a school deliberately focus on those aspects of school improvement and grow those character strengths in their staff and students? APTO brings this approach to school leadership in the context of transformative thinking and responsible citizens.

Our aim is to propagate an approach to accelerate the pace of school reform through a blend of adapted international best practice and the school's local culture and context.

Our approach contains:

- School leadership training and coaching
- Teaching and school management practices
- Whole school evaluation principles, and
- Academic content and experience,

that will transform a school's approach, and similarly help those engaged in education outside of school.

We will accomplish this by working with school leaders and educators in the public sector to:

- Aid reflection on current practice
- Stimulate thinking
- Challenge, including cultural norms and spheres of influence
- Grow hope that transformation is possible.