

## Access, equity and socialisation for an alternative future: Educational reform in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

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### Abstract

This paper provides a preliminary analysis of the content and nature of current reforms to mass school education in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Under Hugo Chavez's government Venezuela has institutionalised non-formal "Educational Missions" to address illiteracy, universal access, and retention rates in primary and secondary schooling, underpinned by the explicit goal of preparing citizens for a participatory, social-democratic model of national development. These policies are set in a broader political program advocating a "Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas" that shifts the character of regional relations and trade agreements to promote equity and social inclusion, and Chávez's call for the redefinition and construction of socialism for the twenty-first century.

These radical political and educational goals are considered in terms of three major themes of access, equity and socialisation for an alternative future. The new system of schooling being established is finally considered in terms of world-systems theory as a framework for understanding the expansion and general character of mass education systems globally. It is argued that, at the level of public policy, there are significant indications of such outcomes, with real potential for schooling to break with convention and contribute to politically radical, anti-systemic, political goals.

### Introduction

In January 2005 the President of the re-named Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, closed the 5<sup>th</sup> World Social Forum in Brazil with a call to "transcend capitalism through socialism" and move toward a new model of democracy, justice and equity for the twenty-first century (Chávez, 2005a). Later in the year he spoke of Venezuela's commitment to steer the Bolivarian Revolution, launched following his election in 1998, towards "a new socialism, a socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, based in solidarity, fraternity, love, justice, liberty and equality" (Chávez, 2005b, p. 12). Chávez has been vocal in renewed calls for Latin American unity, linked to the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) which, in contrast to the U.S. promoted Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), promotes international trade based on principles of solidarity, cooperative advantage and more equitable exchange (Ministro de ©

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Estado para la Integración y Comercio Exterior, 2004). His public critique of the United States and President Bush has escalated in the context of the

invasion of Iraq and Washington's support for Israel's attack on Lebanon, alongside his outspoken support for Latin American leaders like Cuba's Fidel Castro and Bolivia's Evo Morales.

As Chávez talks about the Bolivarian revolution underway in Venezuela, the project to redefine socialism for the twenty-first century, and most recently in the General Assembly of the United Nations calls on world leaders to read Chomsky's (2003) analysis of U.S. hegemony (see Chávez, 2006), his public profile grows. Underlying the public pronouncements is a series of significant reforms in Venezuelan society, achieved with democratic support of the majority of the population, that heighten interest in contemporary Venezuela. Such reforms include a series of social "missions", like Mission *Barrio Adentro* which provides free health care for Venezuela's poorest citizens, supported in large part by Cuban doctors in exchange for oil exports to Havana. These missions include others directed at education, addressed below, which target social and economic conditions of the most marginalised sections of society.

Not surprisingly given the nature of these and other reforms, Chávez has faced significant organised opposition to his Bolivarian revolution from within and outside the country (Niemeyer, 2004). Most dramatically, since taking office in 1999 he was ousted by a military coup d'état in April 2002, but returned to power by popular pressure both within the military and civil society, after just two days in detention. This was followed by a ten week strike by oil workers in the State owned PdVSA oil company beginning in December 2002, ongoing public protests for and against Chávez, and then a recall referendum won by Chávez in August 2004 in which almost 60% voted against his recall (see Gott, 2005; Harnecker, 2004). General elections will be held in December 2006, with polls indicating a likely victory for Chávez.

Recent rises in oil prices have played a major role in raising the international profile of Venezuela, and are the foundation for the government's capacity to fund a wide range of social programs, including those in education (Mather, 2006). The country's reliance on oil revenue, as tax or direct income from nationalised oil companies, is a key theme in Venezuela's history, highlighted by Ellner and Hellinger's (2004) volume which notes struggle to move from an "extractive" economic model of oil-export driven growth or decline, to one capable of withstanding changes in international commodity prices. The failure of President Andrés Pérez to achieve this during the oil boom of the 1970s, following the nationalisation of the oil industry under the Caldera government in 1973, contributing to increased levels of foreign debt and cuts in public expenditure in the 1980s as oil prices fell, and the adoption of an orthodox IMF austerity programme under a newly elected Perez government in 1989. The consequent social upheaval and protests set the conditions for the breakdown of the traditional party system, established with the 1958 "pact of punto fijo," and rise of Hugo Chávez (see Gott, 2005, pp.49-56).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ellner and Hellinger (2004) also highlight the extent to which the *puntofijismo* system that began in 1958 effectively removed social class as a defining feature of politics, as the major parties drew on support across classes, and the re-emergence of class polarisation in

Unlike in the 1970s, oil prices appear likely to remain high in the medium to longer term, adding to the Venezuela's potential to institutionalise substantive changes in its political, social and economic organisation. Wilpert (2006) recently concluded that in contrast to other democratic, leftist or social-democratic governments in Latin America, Chávez has become more radical as time has progressed, due in large part to the buffer against capital flight provided by the current oil revenues.

The Bolivarian alternative being articulated by Chávez, however, extends beyond expanded social expenditure to economic policies explicitly directed towards a model of "endogenous development" presented as "an alternative for the country and as a strategy for Latin American economic integration distinct to that of North America's FTAA" (Ministerio de Educación y Deportes (MED), 2004a, p. 29). The concept of "endogenous" development, defined as economic development that originates from within the country by virtue of internal, national conditions and causes, is also prominent in the reconstruction of public education. This is national economic development with a radical political edge, however, evident in Wilpert's (2006) description of three connecting characteristics of the model of development being advanced in Venezuela: 1) changes in ownership through the government's promotion of cooperatives, worker "co-management" in state companies, and low-interest micro credit schemes for private enterprises that "privilege the value of solidarity, cooperation, complementarity, reciprocity, equity, and sustainability, ahead of the value of profitability" (p. 2); 2) Moves away from market principles in international trade, encapsulated in the principles of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) (Ministro de Estado para la Integración y Comercio Exterior, 2004); and 3) shifts in governance towards more direct, participatory models in all spheres of governance.

While debate over the character of Venezuelan politics and Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution continues (see for example Ellner & Hellinger, 2004), they are frequently cited in reference global attempts to construct alternatives to the Washington Consensus and its articulation of 'free trade', and to the dominant model of corporate globalisation. Richard Gott's (2005) historical account of Chávez concludes:

Chávez is a man of the left, a radical searching for new forms of politics, and new structures of economic organisation. He is also seeking different ways of perceiving the future of international relations within Latin America, and between the two Americas. His Bolivarian Revolution represents a possible future for Latin America, a genuine alternative to globalisation and neo-liberalism (p. 273).

In a recent editorial for the New Left Review reviewing the international scene, Tariq Ali (2006) refers to "the Caracas effect", citing an end to

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the political sphere evident in the election of Chávez and the subsequent demonstrations for and against the government, the 2002 military coup, and general climate of destabilisation.

Cuba's isolation, the recent defeat of the Bolivian Oligarchy with the election of Evo Morales, and the "central role" of Venezuela under Chávez "mobilizing popular anti-neoliberal movements in virtually every Latin American country" (p. 5). In a similar vein Chomsky (2006) cites Venezuela's support for countries seeking to free themselves of IMF and World Bank influence, through trade agreements under ALBA and in some cases by buying their debt, as having helped to weaken the U.S economic weapon over the region.

In this sense, Venezuela may arguably be positioned as a central actor in advancing what Wallerstein (2006) describes as a worldwide "movement of movements", in the spirit of the World Social Forum, seeking to develop alternatives to the capitalist world-system. At some levels events in Venezuela fall within Wallerstein's (2003) description of the failed, Old Left movements, following a "two-step, state oriented-strategy" (p. 269) of winning power and transforming the world. However, the impact of the Caracas effect and its content, actively promoting and applying alternative principles for national and international trade and politics, alongside ongoing, open debate about, and the promotion of popular, protagonistic participation in the political project, point towards something qualitatively different about the Venezuelan process.<sup>56</sup> This paper reviews educational reforms under Chávez and then, from a world-systems perspective, considers their potential break with conventional models of schooling in preparing citizens to construct a more democratic, just, equal and participatory alternative to the capitalist world-system.

### Educational Reform in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Three major themes emerge from a review of educational reforms undertaken in Venezuela since the election of Chávez in 1998: 1) reform to universalise access to school (and increasingly to university) education; 2) reforms to greater equity in educational outcomes; and 3) reforms to direct public education to the socialisation of a citizenry that will actively participate in the Bolivarian national and international project. These themes are clearly interconnected, as efforts to universalise access to schooling for children, and for adults to a certain level of schooling, clearly improve equity simply by including those formerly excluded from educational systems. At the same time, initiatives intended to address inequitable outcomes of disadvantaged groups within the system have been put forward, with a particular emphasis on addressing material causes of exclusion, and on curricula and pedagogical reform to include Venezuela's indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged groups. These feed into the third theme as the reforms seek to socialise 'new Republicans' for the 'new Republic', in part through their active and democratic participation in public schools and public life.

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<sup>56</sup> This brief claim hardly settles the ongoing debate within the Left over the strategy of winning state power in seeking to construct "another world". For a recent account of this issue in relation to Latin America, see the first chapter of Raby's (2006) volume.

Like other aspects of the Bolivarian project under Chávez, reforms in education have confronted strong opposition amongst sections of the community. In particular, opposition has centred on the claimed politicisation of education and indoctrination of students, the 'Cubanisation' of public education, and the favouring of public over private education (Losego, 2001; The Economist, 2005). Government responses have acknowledged the inherently political nature of any system of education, before defending the Bolivarian project and associated principles being promoted in all areas of public policy, including public education (see for example comments from Vice President Rangel reported below, p. 117). Like other aspects of the Bolivarian project, educational reforms have accelerated in recent years as the Government's popularity and capacity to achieve substantive reform has strengthened.

### Reforms for Access and Equity

Reforms in education rest on the new Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic, ratified in 2000, following the convening of a Constitutional Assembly, a central plank of Chavez's 1999 election campaign. Fourteen articles of the Constitution, under Chapter 6, deal with "Cultural and educational rights", including Article 102 which states that "Education is a fundamental human right and social obligation which is free, obligatory and democratic" (Gaceta Oficial de la Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2000, p. 103). Article 103 goes on to affirm that "everyone has a right to comprehensive, quality, ongoing education, under equal conditions for equal opportunities, regardless of their abilities, aspirations or vocation" (Gaceta Oficial de la Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2000, p. 103).

A distinctive feature of Venezuela's expansion of school education has been the creation of non-formal social "Missions" to extend school educational levels of adults who, for whatever reason, either prematurely dropped out of or were excluded from the system (see Gott, 2005, pp. 256-59; Sánchez, 2005). Four social missions are directed towards raising levels of adult education:

1. *Mission Robinson I*: A popular literacy and campaign for adults;
2. *Mission Robinson II*: A 2 year concentrated program to achieve 6<sup>th</sup> grade level education for adults;
3. *Mission Ribas*: A program to extend secondary education to Adults;
4. *Mission Sucre*: The expansion of University via the decentralisation and "municipalisation" of tertiary education.

These non-formal programs give substance to the government's Constitutional commitment to expand access to education as a basic human right. Mission Robinson drew heavily on Cuba's successful literacy campaign of 1961, with the materials *Yo Sí Puedo* (Yes I Can) acquired directly from Cuba (MED, 2005b, 2005c). By 2005 approximately 1.4 million Venezuelans had learned to read and write through the *Yo Sí Puedo* campaign (Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, 2006a; Wagner, 2005).

The creation and institutionalisation of these non-formal missions by the Chávez government were, in large part, a response to the failings of the public system of schooling prior to 1999. The MED (2004a) reports that, on taking office, the new government faced dramatic falls in retention rates through the school system, with only around 50% staying on until 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 30% to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and around 15% or less to Year 11 (p. 16). In response to these outcomes, and the historical legacy of the exclusion of sections of society from schooling (the poor and the nation's Indigenous peoples), Chávez abolished the matriculation fee in public schools, initiated a program of providing meals for students in school, and increased public investment in education from below 3% of GDP to 6.1% in 2004 (p. 17).<sup>57</sup> The Ministry of Education and Sport reports that participation rates in schooling increased from 59.14% in 1998 to 67% in 2002 (MED, 2004a, p.17).

By 2004 some 675 new schools had been constructed, a further 2,250 schools had undergone significant renovations, and more than 35,000 additional teachers had been employed (Gomez, 2004). In addition to the provision of new schools, teachers, and complementary social missions to support those formerly excluded, Venezuela began the process of reconstructing the system of public schooling into "Bolivarian Schools". This renovated public system, currently running alongside the old public system, incorporates the provision of meals, health care, and recreation activities to directly address these secondary barriers to universal access and equity.

Directly linked to the expansion of the public school system, Venezuela has pursued special programs to address socio-economic barriers to both access to and opportunities within schooling. The Mission Mercal, for example, provides subsidised food through a network of shops and food kitchens to the most marginalised sections of the community. In addition, Sánchez (2005) cites 400,000 scholarships being created for the poorest students (200,000 in Mission Robinson II and 100,000 each in Mission Ribas and Sucre), amounting to 70% of minimum wage (\$100 / month) (p. 20).

### The Bolivarian Schools System

The Chávez government is well advanced in the creation of the Bolivarian schools system set to eventually replace all existing public schools (see MED, 2004c). Introducing the basic conceptual, philosophical and legal basis of the new system, the Ministry of Education and Sport (MED) (2004c) reports:

*The school must be a space where the social actors that have formerly been excluded are able to intervene in the social life of citizens, in the construction of a nation built on dialogue and the recognition of the political, social, economic and cultural rights of*

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<sup>57</sup> The Ministry of Education and Sport note that this percentage excludes additional monies directed to the "Investment Fund for Decentralisation" and the "Special Allotment" fund, both of which contribute to spending on education.

*all. The forms and languages of the majority and the minorities must also be protagonists in the public sphere ... The process we are undertaking is the movement from representative democracy to an authentic "participatory-protagonistic" democracy; for that it is essential that we talk about action in the recognition and integration of diversity" (p. 10).*

The emphasis here on recognising and meaningfully including diversity within social institutions like schooling, and their reconstruction, emerges as a central feature of the Bolivarian school system being extended across the country.

The new system is to be "democratic, participatory, protagonistic, multiethnic and multicultural, [one] that provides a comprehensive preparation for boys, girls and adolescents without any type of discrimination ... [and] constructs new citizens" (MED, 2004c, p. 20). The official policy is for schooling itself to be democratised, allowing for direct community participation in the school, including curricular reform. In this sense, the new system seeks to go beyond conventional equity measures towards a more authentically democratic approach to curriculum and pedagogy that might address systemic features that produce inequitable outcomes regardless of measures ensuring equal access.

#### Simoncitos

The Bolivarian system begins with a call for the provision of comprehensive, quality education for 0-6 year olds, "under the principles of equity and social justice established in the Constitution and the Law for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, in order to guarantee the social, educative and nutritional conditions required to continue into ones primary education with equitable opportunities" (MED, 2004a, p. 33). This prior to school education is provided by the Simoncitos which offer child-care for 0-3 and pre-school for 3-6 year olds, providing a comprehensive range of associated services to further advance fundamental conditions required for equity goals in education to be met. To this end, the Simoncito project includes: health-care, food, recreation and legal protection; support for pregnant women, including health-care, food and strategies that support the development of their baby pre-birth; and the promotion of a solidarity network in which families and the community are encouraged to participate (MED, 2004a, pp. 33-34). Here again the aim is for universal access to pre-school education, as well as ongoing professional development of educators and curriculum reform, and efforts to promote the concept of "co-responsibility" between family and community and in the process of educating 0-6 year olds.

#### Bolivarian Primary and Secondary Schools

Six basic principles of the Bolivarian system, marking its break with the old public school model, are elaborated by the MED (2004c) which describes Bolivarian schools as schools that:

1. transform society;
2. are democratic and participatory;
3. are of the community;
4. are a model of comprehensive education that promotes social justice;
5. examples of permanent pedagogical renovation; and
6. struggle against educational exclusion to realise quality education for all.

Schools are thus charged to confront external factors that “generate exclusion, like poor nutrition, repeating, extreme poverty”, and to take action “to improve the social protection of students: transport, meals, medical attention, uniforms, scholarships, shoes, pedagogical and vocational orientation” (pp. 15-17).

At the primary and secondary levels, the MED (2004a) reports 3500 Bolivarian Schools nationally, with an enrolment of 850,000 students. They cite high rates of continuing at 91.8%, and low rates of repeating (6.18%) and drop-outs (2.03%) (p. 46). The associated food program is reported as benefiting 618,455 children and adolescents in Primary and Secondary schooling. Here too the equity focus is evident in the expressed goal of the new schools “to bring access and permanence to the marginalised urban and rural population at the school and pre-school level, to bring quality comprehensive education capable of overcoming inequality and generating opportunities for human development” (p. 47).

The expansion of secondary Bolivarian Schools (Liceo Bolivariano) is currently underway, with Education Minister Aristóbulo Istúriz recently announcing that 1,269 Liceos Bolivarianos had been created nationally, with an additional 1,040 schools remaining to be incorporated into the Bolivarian system (Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, 2006b, 2006c).

### Curricular and Pedagogical Reform

On the question of curricular reform the Ministry of Education and Sport refers to a “participatory methodology for the collective construction of curricula, capable of guaranteeing a comprehensive education in all aspects of humanity and the development of social beings” (MED, 2004a, p. 25). Debates over the content of new curricula are said to be shaped by multiple directions and demands, with a major element being a link to the local community, and the specific features of the local region, in accordance with the project of promoting “endogenous” development. At the same time, this localised approach is charged with not losing sight of the national project and the need to include and reflect “multiple points of view, as products of the multiethnic and multicultural nature of society” (MED, 2004a, p. 26).



The curricula reform process is said to transform previous vertical models of curriculum construction and reform, in favour of a model of concentric circles that develop from multiple levels and which continue to intersect across lines of knowledge, action and living together (see MED, 2004d). An expressed goal here is:

*To bring a comprehensive education to students with an open, flexible and constructive (constructivist) pedagogical practice; with knowledge and application of Venezuelan and Latin American pedagogical thought, that respond to local and regional needs within the national and global context..."* (MED, 2004a, p. 37).

A key example of this type of reform can be seen in the "Bilingual, intercultural education project" being institutionalised as part of the new public system. The project is focused on the improving equity outcomes for Venezuela's Indigenous peoples, tied to the national political project of constructing a multiethnic and multicultural society, and involves increased resources for, and the construction and upgrading of, Indigenous schools (MED, 2004a, p. 54). The Ministry of Education and Sport cites Presidential decrees to establish the "National Council of Education, Culture and Indigenous Languages" in 2002, and to make the use of Indigenous languages obligatory in public and private education centres and other institutions located in Indigenous areas (p. 55). Further, they refer to the publication of monolingual and bilingual texts in a number of Indigenous languages ("Bari, Pume, Kariña and Wayuu people"), and the involvement of Indigenous voices in curricular reform.

#### Schooling to Socialise New Republicans for an Alternative, Bolivarian Future

From the Constitution to the Missions and the construction of a child-care to University Bolivarian system, a consistent feature of Venezuela's education policy is the recognition and promotion of the socialising role of schooling, preparing citizens and workers who will actively contribute to and participate in the Bolivarian project. If the political project underway in Venezuela is a significant contributor to a world-wide movement seeking to create another world, in the spirit of the World Social Forum, then the Bolivarian schools are a critical site in Venezuela's formation of citizens for such a movement.

Vice-President José Vicente Rangel clearly articulated this goal in the recent World Education Forum held in Caracas. Responding to criticism that the government had politicised education, he stated:

We are trying to introduce politics, to replace the politics that others have introduced, because we understand that education is not neutral. Education is a commitment: a commitment to reaction and the right, or a commitment to the revolution; a commitment with the empire or with national sovereignty; a commitment to that represented by Bush and Manuel Rosales, or that represented by Hugo Chávez Frías (Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, 2006d)

Similarly, Education Minister Istúriz recently affirmed the policy of socialising citizens for the new Bolivarian Republic, concluding that “we must be conscious of the educational model that will facilitate the formation of this type of republican, and together construct such a model” (cited in Bolognini, 2006).

Such responses are consistent from the Ministry of Education, and quite clearly build on the constitutional basis for educational reform established in 2000. For example, in addition to defining democratic, free and obligatory education as a fundamental human right, and hence its provision a fundamental obligation of the state, Article 102 of the Constitution goes on to enshrine this intended preparatory role:

Education is a public service and is based in the respect for all currents of thought, with the goal of developing the creative potential of every human being and the full exercise of their personality in a democratic society. This is based in the ethical valuing of work and the active, conscious participation, with a sense of solidarity, in the process of substantial social transformation based in the values of national identity and a Latin American and Universal vision (Gaceta Oficial de la Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2000, p. 103).

In reference to Article 102 of the Constitution, the MED (2004a) affirms that schools will promote the formation of citizens based on four major axes: 1) Universal access to quality, comprehensive education; 2) Improvements in social equity; 3) The Political integration of citizens for social development, with schools as a centre of community activity and axis of local development; and 4) People’s direct, democratic, protagonistic participation in schooling and society, such that the education system “contributes to the construction of a social democratic, participatory, protagonistic, multi-ethnic and multicultural model of society” (pp. 5-6). They conclude that, on this platform, “education assumes a social responsibility, based on the principle of equity promoting a State of Justice and democratic humanism” (p. 6).

In reference to Bolivarian Schools the MED (2004c) explicitly notes “To make education is to make the citizen of the new Bolivarian republic. To make democracy is to construct a space for all, that is, to equitably democratise a space as a whole” (p. 11). Bolivarian schools are the institution created to meet such goals. They are the schools that will “transform society” through students practice of democratic participation in the schools and their critical formation, contributing to the “construction of a more just society” and strengthening of both individuals and communities to enable them to lead the transformation of the country (p. 15). The new schools are exhorted to move beyond simply “guaranteeing enrolment in educational centres,” and to themselves become “democratic, participatory, protagonistic, multiethnic and multicultural ... [providing] ... a comprehensive preparation for boys, girls and adolescents without any type of discrimination ... [and one that] constructs new citizens” (MED, 2004c, p. 20).

## World-systems Analysis and Schooling for an Alternative Future

Within the field of comparative education, world-systems analyses have sought to account for the spread and nature of systems of mass education globally. Institutional theorists have elaborated research into the construction and dissemination of a set of world cultural beliefs, or a world polity, spread in part through nations' participation in International Non-Government Organisations and the inter-state system, extending to national governments' policies and principles with respect to education (e.g Boli et al., 1985; Boli & Ramirez, 1986; Meyer & Hannan, 1979; Ramirez & Boli, 1987; Ramirez & Robinson, 1979). A recent example of this is found in Chabbot's (2003) volume tracing the role of a series of international education conferences in national governments' endorsement of the "Declaration of Education for All". With respect to education, a common theme within such a world culture is the notion of mass education to prepare good workers and good citizens for the nation-state.

Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems approach can be similarly applied to education, in that it has argued for a shared ideology of liberalism, or 'geoculture of development', based in nation-states' shared belief in the capacity of the scientific and technological revolutions to deliver ongoing national economic development and growth, and with it increased consumption (Wallerstein, 1992a, 1992b, 1995a, 1995b). Criticism continues to be made of Wallerstein's economic determinism in the last instance, in which the capitalist world-economy, with a single division of labour, accounts for institutional structures within nation-states (see Clayton, 1998). Whether or not primacy is given to economics, the implications for mass education clearly connect with those arrived at through institutional analysis, with world-system level influences promoting systems and policies that deliver good workers and citizens of the nation-state prepared to contribute to projects of national development.

Venezuela's educational reforms hold much in common with those of revolutionary Cuba. They explicitly acknowledge the social and political role of mass schooling, including its formation of good workers and citizens, and then openly advocate the formation of a particular type of citizen for the Bolivarian concept of national and international society being advanced. Like Cuba, Venezuela's reforms have included: a popular literacy campaign; the rapid and massive expansion of public education; substantive programs to address inequity based on gender, race and socioeconomic status; the extension of school and University education to adults; the ongoing focus on public education as a human right, backed by significant public funding; and thorough curricular reform based in the national political project. Further, a central feature of the Bolivarian schools is the idea of education for localised, endogenous development, preparing students who will "incorporate themselves in productive activity of benefit to themselves, their family and the society of which they are a part" (MES, 2004a, p. 10). Similar goals have been a major component of Cuban policy since 1959 (see Griffiths, 1998).

Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Cuba I have argued previously that an emphasis on education as preparation for work there operated to promote values in young people similar to those found in capitalist countries, evident in their expressed desire to achieve high status, well paid careers (Griffiths, 2004).<sup>58</sup> A world-systems approach to such findings helps to account for why, even in the politically radical context of Cuba, with a model of school education designed to form new socialist citizens, students appeared to be motivated by a concern to “be somebody” in society, with the associated financial and social recognition.

At the level of formal policy reviewed in the paper, however, Venezuela’s reforms appear to hold some significant points of departure with implications for world-systems approaches to school education, and for any broader project of advancing an alternative to the current world-system. The good workers and citizens sought in Venezuela are to be prepared for alternative systems of authentic participation and democratic decision making in the workplace and other aspects of social and political life. The expanded participation is firmly linked to improving social equity and equality, while non-conventional principles of solidarity, co-management, equity and sustainability, rather than profitability, are promoted for local businesses and as principles for international trade. Most significantly, the proposed preparation of citizens for an alternative future appears to move beyond uncritical rote learning of the politically correct content, the Bolivarian or Chávez line, to preparation through the practice of meaningful democratic participation in the school / school community.

This initial review of policy reform in The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela highlights the need for further research. With Chávez expected to win another six-year term in the December 2006 elections, further developing the project to transform national and international society, such research efforts are warranted. The Bolivarian schools are central to the process of social transformation, holding real promise in the current context of decisively breaking with conventional models and outcomes that a world-systems approach might predict, and instead through their content and practice socialise citizens prepared to critically contribute to the Bolivarian project of constructing an alternative future. Further study of these schools, the content of curricular reforms, and field work collecting data from members of school communities (teachers, students, parents) about the Bolivarian project and their experience of the new school system in practice, will assist in any evaluation of their success, and provide insights for contemporary educators seeking to advance similar objectives.

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<sup>58</sup> Examples of this type of critique of Cuba’s schools, from within Cuba, can be seen in the work of the high profile Cuban intellectual Juan Antonio Blanco (1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 2003a) and former Dean of Education Juan Marí Lois (1995a).

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