

EXPLORING PARTICIPATION: A STUDY OF VENEZUELAN BOLIVARIAN SCHOOLS

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B.A. Goshen College, 1998

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The School of Education in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Pittsburgh

2007

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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This thesis examines different ways the process of participation is manifested in Venezuelan Bolivarian primary schools. I argue that the notion of participation in development is contested and has been oversimplified by both advocates and detractors. Using the Venezuelan study as an example, I show that in the same project of participatory development both problematic and positive elements of participation will exist. Problematic elements of participation address inadequate understandings of ‘community’, question the process of consensus building, and highlight the role of proximity to power centers. Promising developments in the Venezuelan case include incorporation of social programs into the schools, new educational quality indicators, and the establishment of a relationship between school curriculum and local development efforts. As these problematic and promising elements simultaneously occur, I suggest that a different approach to evaluating participation in a development context is necessary. This approach, theorized by social geographers, suggests that analysis of how the space of participation emerges would be more beneficial for assessing the merits of participation. From this perspective, continued study of participatory processes might move beyond the current oversimplification.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

According to the National Development Plan (2001), a major sociopolitical restructuring process is underway in Venezuela. As its stated objectives, the Development Plan states a progression towards social transformation through comprehensive changes to economic, political, social, territorial, and international relations spheres of life.

Located within the above heading of social reforms, is the recently established Bolivarian educational system. Initiated in 1999, this system begins with primary schools and continues through the tertiary sector, operating parallel to the traditional system. In addition to providing education, these schools- particularly the Bolivarian primary schools- are mandated to contribute to the national development project within their respective locale. Along with development such as building and road construction, development in this case also addresses certain values and ideologies. According to education documents (Ministerio de Comunicación, 2007) the Bolivarian education system aims to “replace the old values of individualism and capitalism” and replace them with an ethic of solidarity and socialism (p. 4). This community development via the school relies on a participatory development model whereby local populations generate locally specific development projects and address the broader ideological concerns during open forums held in school spaces.

Participatory development has reached high levels of acclaim in recent years and is endorsed from seemingly disparate actors. Macro level development institutions such as the World Bank encourage increased local participation as a way to facilitate decentralization and improve accountability. Other organizations such as UNESCO and smaller-scale development

non-governmental organizations (NGO) advocate participatory methodologies on the grounds that local autonomy is increased and marginalized actors are empowered (see Chambers, 1983, 1994; Schaeffer, 1994). These claims, however, are contested.

More recently, several post-colonial theorists have critiqued participatory development methodologies as unlikely to ever result in empowered populations. Instead, they convincingly argue participation in development has been effectively depoliticized and functions only to usher in neo-liberal agendas (Apffel-Marglin, 1998; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Kothari, 2001)

Currently, participation theorists have combined with human geographers to incorporate development analysis with space theory. These researchers (Cornwall, 2002; Kesby, 2005; Mohan, 2007; Williams, 2004) examine more closely the nature of the participatory spaces created during participatory development projects. Their research suggests varying outcomes of political inclusion, empowerment and project success depend upon the way in which the participatory space is created.

Presently in Venezuela, the participatory process is seen as integral to generating relevant local development projects, improving the Bolivarian schools, and ultimately leading toward improved economic and social quality of life for local residents. This study will use Venezuela as a case study to specifically examine the participatory aspects of the education reforms.

1.1. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Venezuelan government rhetoric speaks of a revolutionary project of social transformation fueled by disparate, small scale participatory development. The Bolivarian schools are identified as a nucleus for this national project. However, as evidenced by the numerous perspectives on

participation, the notion is contested. In addition, the present educational reforms underway in Venezuela have not been researched fully to this point. Indeed, Venezuela's development project as a whole has been under-researched. It is presently unclear how the process of participatory development in the schools is expected to result in social transformation such that traditionally marginalized populations are more equitably included and benefit from the national development project. Most importantly, the participatory projects developed within schools have not been analyzed in any way.

1.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There are numerous case studies which undertake an analysis of participatory development projects. However, the literature on participatory development tends toward dichotomies, with advocates lauding the improvements inherent in bottom-up project generation and detractors lamenting participatory methodology's inescapable and unjust power dynamics.

This study will contribute to the literature base of participatory development projects in several ways. From a theoretical perspective, an examination of this Venezuelan case will offer another context with which to continue refining frameworks for understanding participation and attendant development outcomes. At a practical level, this study can inform development practitioners of the tensions and complexities surrounding participation. Possibly, an improved understanding of the contested nature of participation will encourage more thoughtful and pragmatic approaches to community development projects.

I intend the term contestation in several ways. A weaker implication is simply that there are differing opinions about whether participation is a worthwhile or even possible goal. A

stronger understanding, and the one I intend here, is that participation will result in multiple and contradictory outcomes. This understanding makes a binary approach to participation rather simplistic. Since participatory projects have many different outcomes depending on the level of analysis-- state, school or individual child-- it becomes difficult to clearly assess the negatives or positives of any participatory initiative.

1.3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study has several purposes. In the most practical sense this study will offer an account of Venezuela's current primary education reforms and locate these reforms within the larger national development context of endogenous development. With this framework established, the fundamental purpose will be to examine the participatory projects developed within the schools for the schools and for surrounding communities. The central thesis of the study is that the projects both reveal positive improvements and uncover problematic assumptions related to participatory development projects. The purpose then is to offer this case study of Venezuela's educational reforms through the lens of participatory development. In doing so, I want to complicate simple understandings of participatory development as either beneficial or detrimental. Using the Venezuelan case as an example, I will conclude suggesting the perspective of human geographers as an improved framework within which to assess participation for future research

Briefly, from this geographical perspective Cornwall (2002) suggests that studies "locate spaces for participation in the places in which they occur, framing their possibilities with reference to actual political, social, cultural and historical particularities" (p. iii). This entails

exploring the nature of the participatory space as invited or claimed, evaluating the degree of institutionalization, and examining the political possibilities of the space.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The guiding assertion will be that the participatory outcomes in Venezuela will exhibit examples of both problematic assumptions as well as promising avenues of improvement. To approach this hypothesis, this study will be organized around the central concern of evaluating the development projects originating in the schools. Drawing from Mohan (2007) and Williams (2004) key questions will be:

- How is participation defined in the various contexts of state level and school level operations and by what process does participation happen?
- To what degree is the participatory development within individual schools promoted as part of a larger political project?
- What is the relationship between localized development projects to broader processes of development?
- In what ways have schools changed as a result of participation and what are the educational indicators that enable early assessments of the Bolivarian education sector?

1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing from Crotty's (1998) organization of epistemologies, I accept the constructionist epistemology. I consider notions of truth to be confounded and contested by individual sociopolitical values, gender and ethnic perspectives and economic locations. I assume reality is socially constructed and dependent upon innumerable contextual interpretations. As there are multiple interpretations of truth and reality, my task as a researcher is to attempt an account of the interpretations of reality offered by the individuals interviewed for this study.

Theoretically, I draw primarily from the assumptions of theorists who consider that truth is intimately tied to notions of power and knowledge. (Freire, 1970; Kothari, 2001). My motivation is to examine ways in which inequitable structures are perpetuated, and also to uncover possibilities for challenge and resistance. In the context of this case study of participation in the Venezuelan education reforms, I will try to uncover certain assumptions of participation that mask power in certain ways. But, also drawing from humanist elements of the critical theorists, I will attempt to identify potentially positive developments resulting from the participatory process.

Based on the above described epistemological orientation and considering the specific task of this particular study, I chose qualitative methodology as the primary means for data collection. These qualitative methods included both open-ended and semi-structured interviews, observation, and governmental document analysis. I also use basic demographic and attendance quantitative data collected from the schools.

1.6. THESIS ORGANIZATION

The thesis will be divided into the following five sections:

Chapter 1 will introduce and provide a rationale for the study. This will include a description of the research problem, a explanation for the significance of the problem and a statement of the study's purpose.

Chapter 2 will present a literature review of participatory development. This review will begin with an overview of the origins and rationale for participation in development. This review will then identify critiques of participation originating from within the academic and practitioner communities that are sympathetic to participatory methodologies. Following will be an overview of critiques from individuals who, from critical and post-colonial perspectives, question participatory development claims. Lastly, the review will identify recent analyses of participation via the lens of space theory and human geography. The gap in the literature is identified at this theoretical meeting point of critical theory and human geography.

Chapter 3 will present the description of the research project, including the specifics of the study. In this section I will draw primarily Holliday (2007) and Neuman (1997) to explain the theoretical background, explicate a conceptual framework and provide a rationale for the research methodology consisting of a combination of school observations, interview data and Venezuelan government document analysis. This section will conclude with a disclosure of limitations to both the study and the research methodology.

Chapter 4 will provide the relevant background of the Venezuelan case, including brief overviews of endogenous development, the Bolivarian educational system, and the legal basis for participation. This chapter will also present basic descriptions of the four schools visited.

Chapter 5 will offer the research findings and will be organized around the themes which emerge in relation to the research questions. This chapter will be organized around a section on problematic assumptions of participation as evidenced in the schools. A second section will highlight promising developments observed in the schools resultant from the participatory process. This chapter will conclude with an exploration of participation in the Venezuelan case from the theoretical perspective of human geography.

Chapter 6 will offer a summary of the research findings and conclusions. This section will also identify remaining questions and address several areas of concern specifically related to current development indicators in Venezuela.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW: PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPATION

In this review of the literature I want to examine understandings of participation in development. The first sections of the review will offer a brief history of participation in development and identify *internal*, largely logistical critiques of participation. The second half of the review will examine recently evolving theoretical critiques originating primarily from critical, post-structuralist, post-colonialist and feminist theorists. These theorists mount an *external* challenge to the conceptualization of participation in development. In this case internal critiques are offered by practitioners of participatory development who believe the flaws of participatory methodology can be rectified. External critiques, by contrast, are made by those authors who find the larger project of development and, by implication participation, a project with little to no potential for bettering participants' lives. Finally, human geographers have proposed a different perspective through which to view participation. The third section of this review offers an overview of their perspective and highlights the need to move beyond dichotomous thinking in relation to participation.

2.1. ORIGINS OF PARTICIPATION

The opening paragraph in Seligson and Booth's (1979) edited volume of essays on political participation in Latin America revisits an idea from Samuel Huntington's 1968 book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, which posits that increased participation on the part of the poor and socially marginalized will increase the likelihood of social unrest. This assumption rested on the

belief that participation increases demand for resources less developed nations will ultimately be unable to provide, thus leading to conflict. Since that time, the notion of participation in development has changed significantly.

Initially, community participation was advocated by left leaning activists in the United States and by scholars from developing nations, notably Orlando Fals Borda (196, 1972) and Paulo Freire (1970). These efforts and ideas focused on identifying popular or local knowledge as a strategy to resist state domination. Pursuing development was not an explicit concern, but rather identifying just methods to flatten social hierarchies.

2.2. EARLY UNDERSTANDINGS OF PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT

In 1969, Arnstein published a seminal paper on participation in community development. The motivation for her article was to explore the process of participation via cases of urban reform efforts. Drawing from these domestic urban development examples she devised an early, yet often still cited, typology of participation. She envisioned stages of participation as rungs on a ladder with each rung representing increasingly stronger forms of participation. The lowest rung, *manipulation*, is followed by *therapy* and both are considered basically non participatory. The middle rungs of the ladder--*informing*, *consultation*, and *placation*--are identified as token participation. The final three rungs *partnership*, *delegated power*, and *citizen control* are labeled citizen power. Her understanding of participation is that it ideally leads to citizen power and involves a redistribution of power from the most powerful citizens to the least well off. Participation as policy, then, affords “have-not citizens” a voice in determining future

development efforts. She acknowledges a weak history of participation in community development with most efforts reaching token levels of participation only.

Soon after Arnstein's (1969) article the concept of participation quickly entered mainstream development conversations. Midgley (1986) cites two United Nations (UN) papers published in 1971 and 1975 which initiated the notion of community participation on a global level and which formally developed strategies surrounding community participation in international development projects. In 1983, Robert Chambers authored another widely cited book aimed specifically at reducing poverty in developing nation rural areas via an understanding of local concerns and, importantly, local knowledge. Soon bottom-up planning and participatory development were widely employed concepts in development ranging from small NGOs to the United Nations the World Bank.

Midgley (1986) cites a 1981 UN definition of participation as the "creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community and the larger society to actively contribute to and influence the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development" (p. 24). Midgley goes on to provide a rationale for why participation is development is desirable. If the poorest members of a society have a voice in selecting the types of development projects pursued in their community, the projects will be valued by those individuals and thus be more sustainable. Secondly, encouraging participation facilitates more democratic decision making processes. Others further expound on this idea suggesting good local governance results from increased participation in development. This notion sees increased citizen involvement as likely to improve service delivery and decision making beyond centralized state capacity (Taylor, 2006). Participation is also seen as way to modify and adapt development projects to more appropriately reflect local cultures and contexts (Mantilla, 2002). Perhaps most clearly, Shaeffer

(1994) lists principal benefits of participatory development as facilitating decentralization, improving accountability, increasing autonomy and empowering the poor. He acknowledges the contested nature of each of these terms-- decentralization, accountability, autonomy, empowerment-- but suggests that in a decentralized decisions making environment, participation improves the possibility of social development.

2.3. REPRESENTATIVE STUDIES OF PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT

The current body of literature exploring participation in development at this point is enormous. Research on participatory development examines a wide variety of settings and contexts. Buchy and Race (2001) evaluate local participation in Australian natural resource management programs. Pryor (2005) questions whether community participation in Ghanaian school development can increase individual and community social capital. In Malawi, Rose (2003) examines the nature of participation when locals, states, and international agencies compete for educational policy directive. The UN (2004) details a national policy environment in which participatory development approaches are most effective. Gershberg (1999) and Shaeffer (1992) both look specifically at parental participation in school governance in an education development context and question whether this participation improves educational outcomes. These examples are few, but representative, of the existing literature.

2.4. INTERNAL CRITIQUES AND RESPONSES

In each of the articles from the preceding paragraph, the authors conclude that participatory development is necessary to achieve positive outcomes, but each mentions specific drawbacks as well. Buchy and Race (2001) cite the requisite compromise to reach policy consensus saying this means “stakeholders must be prepared to accept less than perfect outcomes” (p. 305). They also question whether participation is primarily instrumental and used for project implementation, or transformative and intended to transform existing structures. Similarly, Rose (2003) cautions that participation in the Malawi case is primarily “extractive” rather than empowering in the sense that locals participate via monetary, material and voluntary labor provision, but structures of project ownership relations do not change. Shaeffer (1992) and Hayward et al. (2004) differentiate between participation as a means to development and as an end of development. Participation as a means echoes Buchy and Rose’s instrumental participation whereas participation as an end addresses more theoretical questions of democracy and state citizen relations. The UN (2004) study, exploring both participation as means and as a desired end concludes that political, fiscal and institutional decentralization are necessary for participatory development to be successful stating “the poor are discouraged from participating in the development process if the political will is absent or some basic institutional prerequisites are not in place” (p. 12).

The majority of critiques of participatory development tend to remain with the techniques of facilitating participation or with processes within the participatory approach. Midgley (1986) describes advocates of participation as being “staunch advocates of local self-reliance, independence and autonomy and...stern critics of paternalism in all its guises” yet do not realize “their own approach is riddled with paternalism” (p. 35). Midgley goes on to describe how both

the left and the right articulate their critique of participation. The left applauds the collectivist rhetoric of participation, but questions whether small, grassroots efforts will ever change wider, unequal social structures. The right, while skeptical of the collectivist language and radical activist origins, supports the self reliance and individual effort inherent to participatory development.

Responding to these critiques, advocates of participatory development have continued modifying methodology and intent. Bray (2003) acknowledges the diverse range of contexts within which development projects are carried out and stresses the need for a comparative approach to understanding what type of participation functions best in what circumstances. He notes contested definitions of “community”, varying levels of state capacity to reach marginalized populations, and differing historical contexts as factors to consider when evaluating development projects. He importantly accounts for differing knowledge bases between communities and governments. These knowledge bases can explain dissimilar motives for encouraging and participating in development projects.

Robert Chambers is widely noted for his contributions to the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methodology which specifically accounts for differing knowledge bases and worldview perspectives. Researchers and advocates of PRA have developed what are called participatory methodologies whereby locals map their communities focusing on spatial relationships and uncovering informal community networks. Various types of community calendars are developed to better understand local agricultural cycles, and questionnaires developed and distributed by locals are used to assess feasibility and sustainability of development projects. Chambers (1994) explains the universal applicability of the PRA methodology. Much of PRA methodology is flexible and, after a short workshop, community led. He suggests this process reflects recent

pluralistic turns in the social sciences and development in general: “Postmodern theory, post-Newtonian social science, and the experience of PRA are mutually reinforcing on common ground: for all affirm and celebrate multiple realities and local diversity” (p. 1149). Reimers (1996), speaking specifically of educational development, stresses the need for participatory development strategies to promote dialogue between various stakeholders on the grounds that inclusion of multiple perspectives improves development outcomes. No single research methodology can provide the answer to education problems as answers are shaped by methodology. “The infinite complexity of even simple systems...shifts our understanding of science as ‘truth’ to understanding science as a process of discovery of patterns and probabilities” (p. 22). Participation, then, is a process of listening to one another and “learning by discovery” (p. 23). Chambers echoes this sentiment that methodological pluralism is necessary in an unpredictable and unknowable world. In a development context, participation is an important component of this methodological pluralism for advocates of participation who suggest insight can be gained only with ongoing reflection and adaptability, “all elements in the practice of PRA” (p. 1149).

Perhaps Bray (2001) summarizes best the current perspective of participation in development. He distinguishes between the terminology of participation and partnership by examining Arnstein’s (1969) ladder typology. He notes that her top two categories, “delegated power” and “citizen control” essentially reverse the balance of power between states and citizens. As this is unlikely and perhaps even undesirable, he focuses on her third rung from the top, “partnership”, and explores this area more fully. He conceives of partnership as the favored mode of participation. To account for the widely recognized fact of contextual variance with regard to culture, history, and knowledge bases across the developing world, he offers guidelines

for establishing effective partnerships. His list is composed of principles with potential for wide interpretation, but within them he addresses the primary concerns that have arisen within recent development literature and accounts for the flexibility required by the practice of PRA.

His seven principles for establishing true partnerships can be summarized in the following way. 1) There must be trust between primary stakeholders such as governments, communities, and NGOs. The trust is that all parties genuinely have mutually beneficial intentions in mind throughout project planning and implementation. 2) All stakeholders must exhibit long-term commitment that can sustain willingness to continue through development setbacks or initial failures. 3) Clear and mutually accepted roles must be defined where each stakeholder knows and accepts what the other is doing. Roles will vary depending on specific context and will need to be mutually determined at the outset. 4) There must be both macro and micro level focus whereby the community level and local government recognizes the state's larger national level concerns and where the state can appreciate the smaller scale interests of the community. 5) The state must recognize cultural and linguistic diversity, and appreciate varying capacity for labor and financial commitment across locales. 6) It is important to develop positive relationships between individuals and institutions. These relationships included both stakeholder institutions along with the persons within those institutions. 7) There must be involvement beyond financial contributions from either the state or the community. Community members should be asked to contribute at the decision making level. This means the state does not just provide money for state determined projects or that community members are expected to finance ill conceived projects.

Certainly this list would be an exemplary model in which to generate and conduct development projects. Bray highlights numerous examples where stakeholders developed

successful partnerships which resulted in positive development outcomes. This list does not specify actions but, in the spirit of inclusive participatory language, accounts for a wide diversity of setting and culture as well as promotes a tolerance for that diversity.

Bray's (2001) preceding guidelines represent a current conceptualization of what participation in development means. These guidelines attempt a response to many of the critiques raised against participatory development from within the field. The critiques and methodologies addressed thus far constitute an overview of academics and researchers still committed to the overall project of development and who believe participatory engagement is a way to flatten hierarchical decision making and improve project relevancy and sustainability. However, there is a growing body of literature of individuals who reject the basic tenets of both development and participation. Drawing from post-structural, post-colonial and feminist theory, these writers critique participation on a more theoretical level and consider the relationship between knowledge and power, seriously questioning whether participation could ever contribute positively to a project of human betterment.

Midgley (1986) acknowledges this marginalized group of scholars as "Marxists...who do not participate in the debate between proponents of centralism and community participation claiming that a discussion of possible reforms within the prevailing mode of production is a meaningless exercise" (p. 37). He also considers "manipulative" participation whereby a state espouses participatory development as a way to lower the costs of social service provision, or to maintain political power. Current theoretical categorizations would not label these critiques as Marxist but these authors do question the validity of participating in the participation dialogue.

2.5. EXTERNAL CRITIQUES

Kothari (2006) critiques fundamental assumptions upon which the entire development project rests, suggesting development is a continuation of colonialism packaged in liberal economic language: “The development machinery clearly builds upon relationships, perceptions, and attitudes, as well as policies and practices, devised for an imperial era” (p. 97). Rahnema (1992) considers current development efforts a “Trojan horse” through which enters an ideology that economizes life. In perhaps the most classically Marxist analysis, Taylor (2001) says development goals, whether stated or not, are to incorporate individuals into capitalist modes of production. Participation in this context is the delivery vehicle through which dominant, neo liberal ideology is disseminated. As development institutions modify technique and methodology they do not challenge existing power relations and “thus, whatever kind of post-something they are, they are not post-capitalist” (p. 131). Hailey (2001) describes how participatory development gained support within mainstream development by shifting focus from social restructuring to resource provision. Participation, coopted from its original, radical roots by mainstream development now does not threaten long standing social hierarchies and is unable to institute any real redistributive change (Rahnema, 1992). Indeed, as Kothari (2005) states, the World Bank and other development institutions have incorporated and modified participatory techniques to better synch with neo liberal economic demands of decentralization and efficient resource allocation.¹

Cooke and Kothari (2001) contest whether participatory methodology and technique can ever be corrected and instead examine the discourse of development to uncover its normative

¹ See Shaeffer (1994) who, writing for Unesco, lists decentralization, improving accountability, increasing autonomy and empowering the poor as rationales for participation. These are strikingly similar to the desires echoed by neo-liberal policy makers.

politics. Authors critical of participation in development note how this discourse rests on a series of false binaries and inaccurate dichotomies (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001; Kothari, 2001) evidenced in such terms as “top” and “bottom”, “expert” and “local”, “North” and “South”, and “haves” and “have-nots”. This discourse defines terms like “underdeveloped” in contrast to “developed” as well as identifies the “problems” that exist in these underdeveloped nations. As Peet (1999) writes, “The development discourse defined what could be thought, practiced, even imagined, in considering the future of Third World societies” (p. 147). Sibley (1998) uncovers two discourses of development. One is the discourse of modernity which sees material deprivation and under-education as the primary barriers to development. Fulfillment of this narrative requires that individuals participate in the development project as a way to integrate into the global economy. The second body of discourse is that of postmodernity which celebrates diversity but does not deeply address inequality and profound differences in worldview. Participation in this account is professedly for the inclusion of and value of local knowledge and culture into development projects. Concurring, Mohan (2001) describes how the postmodern discourse of participation privileges the cultural realm over the material realm. Cultural explanations are then given to explain poverty and social inequity which diverts critique from Western capitalist ideology.

The discourse of participation in this context clouds power relations and enables development workers to shift responsibility to the locals. The development ‘experts’ within this construction of bottom-up development become ‘facilitators’ only, and are never to blame for development failure (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001).

The construction of experts within participation is also widely critiqued. Kothari (2005), using a Foucaultian understanding of power, says participatory development redistributes power but does not validate non western ways of knowing. Instead local actors, trained in participatory

methodology, adapt to and adopt Western ideologies. Because the participatory methodologies are not conceptualized in ways that allow for the inclusion of non Western ideas, local actors accommodate, or capitulate to the methodology rather than the other way around. This process of normalization, then, precludes the possibility of true transformation and reinforces, on the local level, dominant power. Apffel-Marglin (1998) makes the argument that expert knowledge, in western terms, is fragmented and disembodied knowledge. According to her, participation is not possible under such dispassionate circumstances. The researcher can, at best, only appear to authentically participate because of their other, more defining, role as ‘professional’ within institutional or academic realities which stand in contradiction to the supposed empowerment principles professed by participatory development. She argues the participatory methodologies advocated in PRA, for example, exist best to serve institutional timeframe and finance constraints by enabling efficient community appraisals. Truly learning local knowledge, a dubious end in itself, is never the real intent. The West is the self appointed paradigm and participation, advocated by the West, will never serve to fundamentally transform power structures.

Another criticism leveled at participatory development is of the techniques and methodologies used by participation advocates to ensure authentic participation. Rahnema (1992) says the methodology is inherently unparticipatory because one party already believes they possess the solutions to underdevelopment and empowerment. Participation is just a means of reaching those predetermined solutions and can be considered a process of normalizing the other, as described above. Peet (1999) addresses Foucault’s notion of controlling space according to principles of modernity via hierarchical lists, grids, and charts with values assigned categories. Mohan (2001) says while we all can see the diagrams, charts and maps used for the

PRA methodology, we do not interpret them in the same way. From the outset this creates a bias away from local knowledge and towards the opinions of those locals “conversant in such media (p. 161). Kothari (2001) goes further, labeling this process one of space and knowledge purification.

The methodological tools and techniques of participatory development, such as seasonal calendars and wealth ranking, similarly require a purification...of knowledge and experience: a tidying up of people’s lives through the exclusion of anything that is messy or does not fit the structured representations implied by participatory tools. (p. 147)

Furthermore, within this process the development expert determines and surveys the ways in which locals represent themselves. This constitutes one-way surveillance as the locals cannot observe or comment on the action of the expert. Mosse (2001) describes the process as a methodological sleight of hand which “represents external interests *as* local need and dominant interests *as* community concerns” (p. 22). Local knowledge does not modify or inform development assessment techniques but is instead structured by them. The discourse of participation demarcates knowledge realms as either modern and familiar or local, multiple and strange with the stated goal of uncovering the strange (Mohan, 2001). Within the process though, Mosse suggests planners do not learn people’s knowledge but instead the people learn the planner’s knowledge. Needs are not defined by communities according to their cultural knowledge bases, but are limited and shaped by what the people believe the agency can provide. Sibley (1998) and Mohan state the local knowledge that is uncovered is less likely to be used for benevolent development purposes, but for social control. Simply claiming to value local knowledge ignores the manner in which knowledge can be appropriated and used to manipulate populations.

The fundamental premise upon which these critiques rest is that the West always enjoys power based on ascribed status (Kothari, 2006). Participatory development never uncovers the

process which produces these power imbalances and never questions the knowledge generated via participatory methodology as knowledge that reflects social power relations (Kothari, 2001). At best, participation can only achieve isolated micro scale success because the state and global power relations that determine resource allocation remain unchallenged (Mohan, 2001). In light of these assertions, Henkel and Stirrat (2001) contest the notion of empowerment through participation. “The question that arises...is not so much ‘how much’ people are empowered but rather ‘for what’ are they empowered” (p. 182). Since the power given via participatory development is useful only for the narrative of modernity, they argue ‘empowerment’ becomes indistinguishable from Foucault’s ‘subjection’.

As is clear from the preceding perspectives, two broadly conceived schools of thought constitute the bulk of literature on development. Advocates of participatory development within the mainstream development literature discussed at the beginning of this chapter continue struggling to improve participatory techniques. Meanwhile, the post-colonialist scholars question whether participation and development are legitimate pursuits at all. Operating within these two perspectives, however, seems inadequate. One is left feeling that participation is either “good” or unequivocally “bad”. Clearly, concerns from the latter camp are legitimate but I remain unconvinced participation should be considered completely useless.

2.6. A GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

It seems that the challenge of a viewpoint aiming to transverse the preceding perspective must acknowledge the very real concerns of power and reproduction of social inequity articulated by

participation's detractors. It also must manage to retain use for the benefits of participation as articulated by the proponents of participation.

Kesby (2005) articulates this position well stating, "Because I take seriously the claim that power cannot be avoided, I suggest that it must be worked with." "...resisting agents must draw on technologies such as participation in order to outmaneuver more domineering forms of power" (p. 2038). In this statement he acknowledges the omnipresence of power while suggesting participation as a way for the less powerful to assert their will within the constraints of the more powerful.

Kesby (2005), specifically addressing both the post-colonialist authors cited above as well as advocates of participatory development, suggests analysis of participation has focused too exclusively on temporal understandings of participation. Participation either does or does not break *chains* of disempowerment and success or failure is determined by the notion of *project cycles*. These types of metaphors, he suggests ignore the spatial component of participation. This 'space' is not an abstract space, however. Kesby stresses that he is not advocating "abstract, metaphorical geographies" but that "participation...must be conceived as embedded in material space" (p. 2054). Cornwall (2002) echoes a similar sentiment calling for "approaches that locate spaces for participation in the places in which they occur..." (p. 29). Clearly, the actual physical space is not the concern. It is the historically, socially and politically grounded context out of which that physical space for participation emerges that is of interest.

Participation in this context is still concerned with the notion of empowerment in some way. However, this geographical perspective is not naively advocating for the possibility of an abstract notion of 'empowerment' in the future. Nor does this perspective conclude at a depressing point of inescapable power and the futility of empowerment. Instead these authors

analyze the foundations from which the actual participatory space emerges and further unpack the meaning of empowerment.

Cornwall (2002) first makes the distinction between invited spaces and claimed spaces of participation. Invited spaces are spaces where individuals are invited by an entity afforded some official legitimacy- such as the state or an NGO- to participate in some participatory process. Claimed spaces on the other hand are non formalized spaces which no official body has publically sanctioned. Of course, invited or claimed spaces will offer the possibility of more or less power depending on group aspiration. This raises the question of empowerment for what purpose. A movement trying to overthrow the state will likely never congregate in invited spaces. Suffice it to say, for the purposes here the concern is not state overthrow, but just the opposite. For most of the cited authors above, one of the ways empowerment is defined is as the increased acquisition of institutionalized political rights.

Williams (2004) suggests this notion of political rights is the crucial question. He finds that to speak of abstract concepts such as 'empowerment' or 'social transformation' is unhelpful. He employs the term 'political capability' defined as the "set of navigational skills needed to move through political space, and the tools to re-shape these spaces where this is possible" (p. 567). Increased political capability, he suggests is a meaningful goal for participation. Participatory development should address the ways in which people access power and are able to get their policy concerns onto the agendas of the political elite. Participation, as an end in itself, will not accomplish this. Mohan (2007) concurs stating that participation conceived only as a space for individuals to voice concerns is a flawed path toward development. Participation and the space in which it occurs must in some way be linked to the state's institutionalized political process.

In this context, an invited space is more likely to approach an attainment of political rights. Beyond analyzing the participatory space as invited or claimed, Cornwall (2002) addresses the basic question of whether people want to be there or not. The degree to which participation is obligatory will affect the nature of the participation. It is common for foreign NGOs to insist on a participatory project development. Apffel-Marglin (1988) mentions that many individuals, long overexposed to 'development', are no longer interested in participating in projects which ultimately do little to affect their social standing. While Cornwall's notion of a desired space seems trivial, it is significant in light of what has historically passed for 'participation'.

A final notion discussed in the human geography literature is that the participatory space must be conceived in relation to citizenship. This follows from the notion of political capabilities. The act of participation cannot be disaggregated from larger political processes. Williams (2004) notes, "These opportunities will not be isolated moments of liberation...nor do they require a post-developmental retreat to idealized local spaces...Rather they will be found within longer-term political struggles and reshaped political networks that link themselves to a discourse of rights and a fuller sense of citizenship" (p. 573). Cornwall (2002) locates the political within the notion of citizen, calling for participation to be an act of politicized citizens. When the participatory space is officially supported and connected to an understanding of citizen duty, the prospects for participation to influence local governance policy becomes greater. Mohan (2007) says these are the conditions under which participation is most likely result in some form of social transformation: When participation is promoted as part of an explicitly political project that is radical, when participation is connected to broader notions of

development rather than specific projects, and when the focus of participation is framed as an act of citizenship.

Although brief, this introduction to a geographical perspective on participation seems useful. These authors have managed to address contexts in which participation can be used as a method to improve social standing. They avoid the totalizing perspectives of the post-colonialists, yet also remain clear of the naïve perspective advocated by the proponents of participation. They analyze participation not from the perspective of the techniques used or from the contested definitions of territory, but from an analysis of how the space emerges. This assumes a realist perspective that political gains from participation must in some way be endorsed by the state, unless of course state segregation is part of the goal. This geographer perspective asserts that if the space where participation happens is conceived separately from established channels of policy influence, the outcomes will be less than desired. The act of participation itself cannot promise anything. Rather, considering where it is happening and under what circumstances might lead to a more accurate assessment of participatory development and its outcomes.

3.0. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the complexities surrounding the participatory development education reforms currently underway in Venezuela. In doing this, I wanted to address several things. One question was to understand how participation happened, as described by my informants. In other words, how was the participatory process initiated and conducted? Another research goal was to identify tangible outcomes of the participatory development process. Thirdly, I wanted to uncover informant assumptions of the participatory process and link these to those identified in the literature.

The Venezuelan reforms are quite recently enacted and still in process to a large degree. Therefore, my knowledge prior to entering the field was rather limited. My research interest was quite broadly defined as trying to understand how participation is happening within the reforms. I was not sure what I would find, nor did I have much knowledge about what was happening politically in Venezuela. This research was intended partially as a pilot study of the Venezuelan educational reforms and partially as a case study in participation. As a result of this context I felt a qualitative methodology was most appropriate.

3.1. INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

This study is interpretive, seeking to understand stakeholder perceptions of how participation occurs, how effective participation is, and what outcomes resulted from the participatory process. As Holliday (2007) describes, the interpretive process is guided by a belief that “the realities of

the research setting and people in it...can only be superficially touched by research” and must be interpreted (p. 6). I also locate this study under a broader theoretical framework of constructivism. Participants in this study constructed their reality, and offered their perceptions, beliefs and explanations of that reality. From this constructed data, I attempted to construct an interpretation.

Patton (2002) notes the challenges involved in any interpretive process. In a context of trying to make sense of large amounts of raw data where no straightforward tests for reliability and validity exist he offers as the only rule: “Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study” (p. 433). Neuman (1997) describes the interpretive process as a series of three stages: first order interpretation involves the researcher trying to uncover the meanings informants give for their experiences. The second-order interpretation occurs as the researcher reconstructs and attempts to organize the data. This is a two step interpretive process as because the second order interpretation is of the initial interpretation. Neuman’s third-order interpretation occurs as the researcher moves beyond the immediate context and offers theoretical significance to the interpreted data.

The description of the interpretive research process according to these three stages resonates with me. In the first stage I got the data of informants’ descriptions of the participatory process. In the second order I offered my own interpretation of what they said, reconstructing the data coherently. Finally, I extrapolated beyond the immediate Venezuelan context and located my interpretation of the data within broader theoretical understandings of participatory development.

3.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Here I want to explicate my own underlying framework guiding the data interpretation. As Holliday (2007) explains, “a major function of the conceptual framework is to position the researcher in relationship to the research. It is also a place where the issue of ideology inherent in qualitative research can be addressed” (p. 47). Holliday’s point is that a researcher must examine their personal ideology with respect to the questions at hand, and more importantly, reflect on how that impacts the research setting and data interpretation. I do not want to extensively discuss all of the many existing ideologies inherent in any one research context. Perhaps most significant in this Venezuelan case, though, was that I entered the field anticipating evidence of positive examples of reform via participation. The little prior knowledge I had of Venezuela was split between highly polarized, politically charged sources. My own theoretical assumptions led me to be skeptical of both sources, but at the same time sympathetic to early attempts of a leftist government.

This positioning affects the research setting in numerous ways. Most significantly, I likely overlooked questions oriented toward uncovering more clearly how broader political forces operated through channels of participation. In some cases, I accepted examples of micro-scale participatory successes as successes, without delving further. In some respects the entire organization of this thesis is influenced by a deeper desire to uncover positive elements within Venezuela’s larger political reform effort which is increasingly showing signs of falling into the same dictatorial traps that history might predict. My ideology contains a humanist element eager to discover innovative ways of organizing social institutions in ways that demonstrated explicit recognition of individuals as human beings. In Venezuela, when I observed instances that could be interpreted that way, I was likely to accept that interpretation.

3.3. SOURCES OF DATA

To approach a case study, Holliday (2007) notes that the culture in question is delimited by an institutional context and by the individuals in that context. In this case the institutional context is the Bolivarian primary education systems. The key actors were school directors and employees of a regional ministry of education. These actors comprised the “bounded social group” from which to elicit case study data.

For this case study, I employed three sources of data. My primary data was gathered using informal and semi-structured interviews. My second set of data was my field notes taken during periods of observation. Finally, I used official government documents to better inform my interpretations and to more accurately understand the laws governing the participatory process in Venezuela.

Using these three sources enabled a degree of data triangulation. As Mertens (2005) describes, this “involves checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data. For example, multiple methods such as interview, observation, and document review can be used” (p. 225). Triangulation in this case was not necessarily to confirm a factual reality, but rather to uncover points of data divergence or incoherence for further exploration.

3.4. RESEARCH SETTING AND STUDY SAMPLE

The primary data collection took place inside different Bolivarian primary schools. Interviews occurred either in offices of the directors or, as was more often the case, while walking and touring the schools. I had not thought much about the logistics of the interviewing before

entering the field. Based on my previous experiences with interviewing in the United States, I was imagining a setting where individuals would sit and progress through interview questions from beginning to end. I realized that even while I had imagined the school setting fairly accurately, I imposed a culturally biased notion of an interview into that setting. Interviews for this study rarely occurred with only one person responding to the questions. If the interview took place in a director's office, for example, the doors were open and passersby often dropped in to listen and add comments of their own. The most common interview setting was of walking around the school, in and out of classrooms, talking to teachers, custodians, cooks and whoever else the directors introduced us to. Even to label these interviews as open-ended implies more structure than what existed in actuality. However, this feature of the interviews greatly enhanced the observation data I was able to experience. There was a feeling in several of the schools that we were witnessing a fairly normal day, not modified to accommodate our presence. We were visiting schools in the middle of the week and students were surprised to see strangers in the buildings. I had the impression that directors had not made special or advanced notification to students and teachers to prepare differently for the day.

The research team originally hoped and planned for numerous school visits encompassing various regions of the country, in rural and urban areas, and among both indigenous and non indigenous populations. We were practically limited, however, in terms of access to schools. We knew individuals in the capital city of Caracas who were able to provide us with a contact in the state of Sucre, just north of Caracas. In the capital of Sucre, Cumaná, our contact was able to get us an interview with the director of Sucre's Ministry of Education. This director was essentially our gatekeeper who could have declined our requests to visit schools, but fortunately did grant permission to visit schools in Sucre with several conditions. We offered

our demographic wish-list (urban and rural, indigenous, etc.) but instead he chose the four schools we could visit. The director also gave us a driver to escort and accompany us during each of our visits. Our study sample, then, was chosen for us by the regional director. The experience of meeting the director was quite interesting. He asked each of us to speak a bit about why we were interested in the Bolivarian schools and then proceeded to give a summary of the entire system. We were then ushered out of his office while, presumably, he decided with the others in the room what schools we would visit and how. One interpretation is that out of friendliness or cultural appropriateness he offered us a chauffeur. Another interpretation is that he wanted to know where we went and what we actually did at the schools. Or possibly a bit of both. Because of the cognitive load that comes with being in a new place in a new country, I was doing little interpretation and I assumed the former explanation. It was not until later that I began to imagine other interpretations.

Within the selected schools, access to individuals within the schools was quite open. My informants were primarily the school directors. Although as stated earlier, informal conversations occurred with numerous actors, including school cooks, cleaning staff, medical personnel and teachers. Even though I anticipated and at times wished for more structured interview environments, I realized there was possibly a cross cultural issue with the idea of closed door one-on-one interviews. In the Bosque Negro school I asked for this with the director and, although she agreed, it was not without making several statements wondering what “Matt wants all by himself in a closed room.” Even in this specific situation, several people came in the office and participated in the interview. In subsequent schools, I did not ask for individual interviews.

In total we had semi-formal, semi-structured interviews with ten different individuals across the four schools and the regional office. In the case of three of these individuals, I later interviewed them again during the afternoon specifically regarding participation. The data from other interviewees was gathered informally using open ended questions.

I used the data gathered from observation to further my comprehension of the participatory process. At each school we spent one full day, and I was able to observe all functions of the schools going on during that particular day. These observations took the form of field notes and photographs of different school projects or of individuals in the schools. I found data gathered via observation to be most helpful as we moved from one school into the other. For example, at the first school we observed mothers cooking lunch for the children which was a program I was not aware of. However, at the second school I could then inquire about the lunch program as a question in the interviews rather than as an unexpected discovery.

My third source of data was the government documents I obtained in front of the Education Ministry in Caracas. As part of the endogenous development process (described later), new laws are written by the government in response to innovations emerging from grassroots initiatives. The situation is one in which numerous laws are published in small pamphlets and sold near the corresponding government office. In the case of education and participation, for example, there were several pamphlets detailing points of new curricular emphases, procedures for community organization, and processes for formalizing cooperatives. These documents detailed the institutionalized frameworks which guided the participatory process. In addition, they helped me better interpret the data gathered in the interviews.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This process proved to be a rather difficult task. Elements of participation appear in the data in numerous ways. There is a primary understanding of participatory development in which communities participate in initiating development projects. This participatory process occurred in the schools. Then there is a second dimension of participation in the school, which is the incorporation of local individuals into school functioning. This took the form of mothers being employed as cooks, classroom aides, or janitorial staff. This can be construed as participatory development generating projects which call for some degree of participation.

As this was a pilot study of the Venezuelan case, I was less concerned with uncovering interpretations of and reactions to participation as a concept. Instead, I was primarily interested in what was labeled, or termed, participation by the interviewees and to interpret the processes that comprised the participation that interviewees addressed. I wanted to know how this participatory process occurred and to identify possible outcomes of that process. However, as Patton (2002) makes clear, as a qualitative researcher in this context I was looking not for causal relationships but rather attempting to offer a picture of participation in this particular context. There were other data beyond interviews to interpret as well. I considered simply being present in the school a form of observation data and an impossible source to fully capture. Interpretation then was not about interpreting a statement or comment but instead interpreting many other types of information. This was sometimes interpreting who was in the school and why; or interpreting the presentation of a document or the document itself; or interpreting things such as why we were granted access to certain places and not to others. Other times I expected certain types of responses and had to interpret why an individual said what they said or why they did not say something I expected. This element of interpretation relates to Neuman's (1997) second order of

interpretation; I focused on what I considered meaningful data and then offer an interpretation of that data. What I did not consider data, though, also involved an interpretation whether consciously or unconsciously. I should also state the obvious by saying that conducting the entire research process in my second language introduced a cultural and linguistic feature of interpretation that is nearly impossible to fully understand.

Thankfully, I was specifically researching participation rather than any number of less approachable concepts. Initially then, I entered my data simply by highlighting any mention of participation. This meant any utterance of the word participation or usage of the word participation within the government documents. Not every usage was meaningful and making this choice was one level of interpretation. My second step was to sort these uses of participation according to where in the overall education system they referred: macro-level, meso-level or micro-level instances. If the particular participatory process related to state sponsored initiatives or policy definitions, I considered this macro-level. When directors referred to networks across school districts or across institutions within a locale, I considered this meso-level participation. Finally, I categorized intra-school participation and personalized understandings of participation as micro-level participation. These are imperfect categories, such as when state sponsored directives were realized only at the micro level, for example, or as I began to discover the densely overlapped relationships between individual schools and other surrounding institutions. However, even as imperfect categories, they helped organize the data into a meaningful way that allowed me to offer an interpretation of how the larger participatory development project was functioning. My observation data of people and school documents supplemented the textual data. In most cases observation data led to new questions about who was participating and in what ways.

As I began to establish this systemic understanding, I could begin to link my data back to the literature on participation. In this way, I was able to identify common, potentially problematic assumptions of participatory development reflected in the Venezuelan context. Similarly, I was able to uncover those developments I consider as promising.

4.0. BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIONS: ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT AND BOLIVARIAN SCHOOLS

This chapter is intended to provide a brief overview of relevant information regarding two processes in Venezuela. One of these is the notion of endogenous development. Although the scope of this paper does not warrant a full description of this theory, I think an introduction is helpful. The second focus of the first part of this chapter is the Bolivarian school system. I believe that a sketch of how this system is implemented is useful to contextualize the participatory processes that I discuss later. In the second section of this chapter I give a description of the four schools that make up the research sample.

4.1. ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT

Literally, endogenous development means development “from within.” According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (Harper, 2001), endogenous means “growing from within.” This differs from traditional understandings of top-down and bottom-up development. The basic premise of endogenous development is that a state can provide incentives for a population to initiate locally relevant development projects. The assumption is that these projects will reflect not just local need, but incorporate local culture as well. This is different from grassroots development where the local level receives little, if any, state support. This also differs from top-down development where an outside agency introduces development projects to a locale. The incorporation of

culture in the endogenous model is another way the model differs from grassroots or top-down development.

Vázquez-Barquero (2002) describes endogenous development as a strategy to increase local innovation as well as to preserve natural resources and to maintain historical cultural heritage. Development in this context is not just concerned with improving a community's production, but also social well-being. This socio-cultural dimension is another point of difference from understandings of development that focus exclusively on economic development leaving cultural effects either unmentioned or treated as byproducts improved by development. According to Vázquez-Barquero, local identity will influence development initiatives and he considers this a key feature of endogenous development.

Ray (1999) considers endogenous development a process of “animating indigenous capacities” (p. 521). Like Vázquez-Barquero (2002) and Boisier (2005), he explores the notion of “territorial agency” .² Since endogenous development theory attaches great significance to the idea that socio-cultural dimensions affect the development process, the territory from which development initiatives emerge is important. Vázquez-Barquero elaborates an understanding of territory as resultant from long historical processes which shape the territory's organizations, institutions and inhabitants. Territory, then, is more than just space. It is a place to build upon already developed, existing relationships. Boisier provides a rationale for the motivation individuals have in their respective territory and partly addresses the construction of territory:

The vast majority of people live their lives in a geographical space with a radius of not more than 500 kilometers. Within that space they live, form a family, work, obtain education and health, pass their spare time, and generally end up being buried there, in

² These authors use the term “territory” to avoid contested understandings of “community” and “state” as both inaccurately imply a degree of internal homogeneity. According to Ray (1999), the term ‘territorial components’ is used here to focus the discussion onto the variety of geographical scales that are smaller than the nation-state and in which socio-economic, cultural and even politico-administrative action is increasingly taking place: at the very least, globalization has made the role and status of the state ambiguous and in need of reformulation” (p. 523).

this space where everyday life goes on. For any given individual...realizing his own life project depends to a crucial extent on what happens over time in his everyday environment. (p. 48)

Via this process of overlapping individuals operating territorially, Ray (1999) suggests individuals form networks from which emerge a “development repertoire” of regularly employed resources and techniques individuals can use depending on their situation. The two elements of resource ownership and choice are also integral to the notion of endogenous development (p. 525). Vázquez-Barquero (2002) similarly states that as regional communities deal with the economic challenges from global competition, they can draw on previously existing development potential. Endogenous development can be thought of as a process of uncovering or enabling a development path to emerge out of existing social networks and territorial culture. This primarily economic focus builds upon, strengthens and expands those local relationships. Endogenous develop theory predicts unpredictable chains of overlapping social and economies will emerge that contribute to overall territorial betterment. This process happens within a state, of course, and promoting this model of development can present several tensions for a central government.

A central concern for state governments is how to manage a heterogeneous national development process, while simultaneously creating a unified political base and maintaining national identity. Ray (1999) suggests integration of territory and economies may be compromised by high tolerance and promotion of internal diversity. Endogenous development models encourage the development and expansion of small, territorial economies channeled through various social networks. There is no guarantee that all territories will manage this process with the same success or in similar timeframes. Vázquez-Barquero (2002) points out that endogenous development models do not assume convergence of the various territorial

economies. This is a concern, then, for endogenous development as a national model. The endogenous model reliance on social network creation requires a level of harmony among the actors in this network. Within a culturally homogenous territorial framework, formation of these networks seems less problematic as there can be an assumption of relatively low conflict. However, on a national level, especially within highly ethnically and culturally heterogeneous states, maintaining low conflict levels among the various social groups is challenging. Another feature of endogenous development is that, as Ray describes, it is bottom up initiated but top down sponsored. The state in some way must provide a supportive institutional context for fostering and maintaining emerging social and economic networks. This often means a degree of central funding supporting local innovations. The endogenous path, though, is determined by what Ray terms 'deliberative democracy'. At the local level this process contains the potential to pursue radical development proposals which would counter a state's larger political consolidation project. Lebowitz (2004) points out the danger for the state if a territory's endogenous path begins to infringe upon the system benefiting the powerful. The issues for the state here are essentially how to manage a potentially diverse national development project in a way that does not repress local innovation and potential, but at the same time does not threaten basic national integration.

4.1.1. Endogenous Policy in Venezuela

Venezuela, since the inception of the Chávez era in 1998, has pursued a stated development path of endogenous development. According to the national development plan the strategy of endogenous development in Venezuela focuses on several specific areas (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 2001). These areas are the eradication of poverty, the decentralization of

overcrowded urban areas, and inclusion of traditionally excluded or isolated demographics (Petroleo de Venezuela, 2005). Venezuela's method of endogenous development is via highly decentralized development project initiation, whereby communities define the nature of the development projects pursued. Financial, material, and administrative support is granted by numerous municipal, state and federal institutions. Fiscally, endogenous development remains highly centralized, with funds originating in the federal government.

4.1.2. Venezuela's National Development Plan

As described by the Venezuelan federal government, the national development plan is a strategy of endogenous development. Literally development from within, this strategy centers on community participation and community organization as a means to generate locally conceptualized, sustainable development projects.

In addition to individual economic capacity building and traditional notions of development, Venezuela's endogenous development strategy involves a strong ideological component as well. The Bolivarian Revolution is the name given by president Chávez to the macro-scale social restructuring program which his government began in Venezuela. Understanding what it means to say a "Bolivarian" revolution is useful for explaining the reforms enacted by the Chávez government. Simón Bolívar was the man who liberated what is now Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela from Spanish rule in the 1800's (Gott, 2005). Bolívar espoused a nationalist ideology which sought to join the territories divided by Spain into a unified 'Gran Colombia' (Gott, 2005). This idea is of particular interest to Chávez. He has stated his wishes to unite Latin America and consolidate sufficient economic power within Latin America to counter the economic power of the United States. In this sense, he

envisioning a multi-polar world with respective economic poles holding in check economic and military actions of the other poles. In addition to overtly addressing questions of nationalism, education in this context requires increased access to fulfill endogenous development's participatory requirements, and quality to facilitate economic capacity building.

4.2. BOLIVARIAN SYSTEM

Fostering this public participation has been central to the political and institutional reforms initiated by Chávez (Gibbs, 2006). As part of a larger Venezuelan state project to address sociocultural and economic development, Bolivarian Schools (*Escuelas Bolivarianas*-EBs) began in 1999 with the intention of addressing educational inequities at the primary level. These schools targeted marginalized and low income areas where traditional schools were not coping effectively with the extra-school challenges local communities faced. With an initial effort of 559 schools, EBs have now grown in number to over 3,500 and can be found in every state in Venezuela (Ministerio de Educación y Deportes, 2004).

An EB is a school that claims a philosophy of education that is holistic, child centered and integrated with the local community. A holistic approach covers the entire child-school-community context, and understands these to be intimately related and interdependent. Child-centered speaks to comprehensively addressing a child's basic needs, such as nutrition and healthcare. Community integration encompasses a wide understanding of community participation in the school.

Some EBs are newly built structures but many were formerly traditional schools which transitioned to the EB system. EBs operate under several broad, state-mandated guidelines such as being "schools of the community" in addition to implementing several specific requirements

such as feeding children lunch. Before the transition from a traditional school to an EB can occur the community must vote in favor of implementing the EB.

4.2.1. EBs Legal Foundations

Read at face value, the statement “a school of the community” does not necessarily explicate concrete meaning. Decontextualized, this statement could be easily found in development literature derived from any number of possible agencies.

Venezuelan educational policy offers clear insight into what is meant by the concept of community participation. One first encounters political support for community participation in the *Ley Orgánica de Educación* (2006). Article 13 states, “The educative process promotes the participation of the family, the community and all institutions.” In various national EB documents the community participation concept is further elaborated. In order to become an EB there are eight specific components a school must incorporate. These components are described in detail in several state documents, including the *Principios de las Escuelas Bolivarianas* (Ministerio de Educación y Deportes, 2003). One of these components is community integration and another is new forms of school management. These are the two components that most specifically speak to the notion of participation. Together the eight components form another scaffolding of support for community and school participation. Finally, the Basic National Curriculum further details the community integration process. “Pedagogy... should develop to redefine the role of teaching and of participation to resolve community problems and create community action with classrooms that addresses human liberation and social justice” (Goncalves & Cepeda, 2006).

In order to attain this incorporation of local community issues, the National Curriculum document describes Pedagogical School Projects (PPP) which each school must generate with its respective local community. Essentially these projects are to be community defined themes or focal points for the school to incorporate into its curriculum. In this case ‘community’ implies teachers, students, administrators, community members and local institutions. There are several intended effects of these PPPs. One is that school management becomes decentralized to the members of the community. A second intention is that the school becomes a focal point for local socio-economic development. Thirdly, the PPPs are expected to contextualize the educative experience of the student. In the sense that local concerns are addressed in the curriculum it facilitates students integrating school, community, knowledge, and development. School is not experienced as compartmentalized from life outside of school.

Together the *Ley Orgánica*, the *Principios* document and the national curriculum form the legal foundation for EBs. The national curriculum used in EB schools is the same as that used for traditional schools. Transitioning to an EB school does not entail an entirely new curriculum. These legal foundations establish the legitimacy for the shift in political emphasis toward increasing community participation with and integration into the schools.

4.2.2. Integration and Participation

Before a community can consider supporting an EB, the community must be organized.

“Organized” here carries certain political connotations, indicating a community is responding to social programs offered through the Bolivarian Revolution. Becoming organized entails the creation of various Community Councils. The Community Council law (*Ley de los Consejos Comunes*, 2006) document establishes definitions for a “community” and delineates the myriad

possible community organizations which together would comprise various councils. For example, community members could form a health committee related to delivering food to the elderly in the community. Together, with other health oriented committees, they would comprise the community's health council. Community councils could also form in response to community water concerns. There are numerous topics around which a community council could be formed. Resultantly, an organized community might have any number of councils in operation. To establish an EB a community must have a general Neighborhood Association. This Association acts as a community's representation to outside institutions and is the body that formally brings the suggestion of an EB to the community for a vote.

Once legally established, the preliminary step for each EB school is to solidify community support beyond the initial community vote. Community support is formally addressed at the beginning of the school year with an Community Assembly. Held at the school, this meeting is open to anyone from the community to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to address any local concern that any individual may have. Concerns are discussed as a group and together certain concerns are chosen for school focus. Out of these meetings, then, the Community Diagnostic Matrix is developed. As evidenced by the matrices I observed, community concerns reflect economic, health and social development challenges in respective communities. In each school I examined their matrix along with their attendant plan for dealing with community concerns. For example, typical community concerns were issues such as potable water, drug use, and teenage pregnancy. The alleviation of identified concerns are then formally planned in terms of who will address each issue, how each issue will be addressed, and the time frame for rectifying each issue. While many challenges were similar between schools, each school possessed the autonomy to conceptualize differently the incorporation of the matrix

items and community members into school functions. The idea behind this is that school curriculum is localized to reinforce ongoing community development efforts.

The diagnostic matrix becomes the key document for encouraging community participation and establishing a school community relationship. The contents of the matrix are derived from collaborative input which then formally guides the manner by which each school interacts with community groups to pursue parallel agendas. Figure 1 below depicts the process described above.

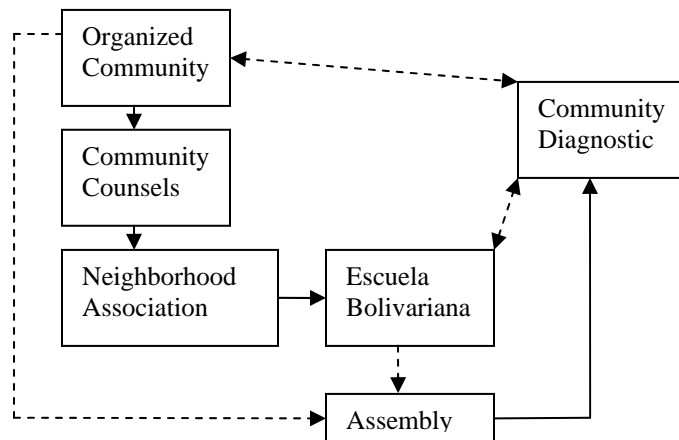


Figure 1: Diagram of Bolivarian School Emergence

In addition to a simple graphic explaining rudimentary EB processes, to fully capture the existing series of networks Figure 1 would have to demonstrate inter-community network relationships. As stated earlier, a community might have numerous community councils in operation. These councils may interact with similar councils across different communities. There is a network of EB schools operating in the Cumaná region of Sucre which meets monthly to collaborate on projects, share innovations, and generate curriculum. One can begin to develop the sense to which an EB is but one part of a densely overlapping, highly intertwined series of

networks operating in any particular community. In a sense, this diagram unnaturally isolates the school from this network to provide a picture of the manner in which schools enter this series of networks. At this point is also where a consideration of community context becomes essential for successful school-community integration.

There are numerous potential community organizations and modes of integration beyond the ones mentioned above which all have the potential for being linked to the school in some way. The personnel in school must find their own ways of navigating these possibilities to discover how the school will link with the local community.

4.2.3. Bolivarian Education Sector Overview

The Bolivarian education sector is currently comprised of five subsectors. The sector begins at the preschool level with Simoncito schools which serves children between the ages of 4 to 6 years old. This is followed by the EBs at the primary level for children ages 6 to 12 years. Following the EB primary school is the Liceo Bolivariano, or secondary school. The Liceo is for youth aged 12-19. This secondary level was not yet operating in any of the towns we visited. The Bolivarian University, for anyone aged 19 and above, completes the Bolivarian education sector. Finally, in parallel to the formal Bolivarian sector is the informal adult education subsector. While a discussion of this entire sector is relevant to the larger endogenous development project in Venezuela, it falls outside the scope of this paper. Figure 2 below depicts the sequence of the entire Bolivarian education system. The primary level subsector is the focus of this study.

| Bolivarian Education System | Sector | Age |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Simoncito | Pre-school | 4 to 6 |
| Bolivarian School | Primary | 6 to 12 |
| Bolivarian Liceo | Secondary | 12 to 19 |
| Bolivarian University | Tertiary | 19 and above |

Figure 2: Bolivarian Education Sector

4.3. SCHOOL DESCRIPTIONS

4.3.1. Paso Piedras (school 1)

This school is a rural school located approximately ten kilometers to the west of Cumaná in the state of Sucre. This school serves preschool through sixth grade, with a total of 229 students.

The physical school was in the best condition of any of the other schools we saw, having recently undergone renovation and restoration. There were nine classrooms not including two special rooms used for computer class and music class. This school had a large concrete recreation area with soccer goals and basketball hoops. There was also a covered, outdoor cement patio in the center of the school. All the schools brick walls seemed recently painted and the green metal roof was new.

The atmosphere of this school felt very positive. Children were in their classes, sitting in their seats and studying. An interesting feature of the classrooms in this school was that few classrooms had doors and windows. Instead, the construction style just left open spaces. The director said this was so anyone could see what was going on in any classroom at anytime. My impression, interpreting and observing, was that this was less for supervision than for facilitating an open atmosphere. The school grounds were clean and different types of art- mosaic tile patio,

large plaster flowers and trees, murals, and ceramic dolls- were visible throughout the school. Teachers all seemed energetic and happy to be where they were. All were eager to show us their rooms. The walls of the rooms were also decorated with many different types of art and project posters.

Part of this school's integration with the community includes a ceramic doll project. Students learned how to make and paint the figurine dolls, which were then sold by community members. The school had a small kiosk where the dolls can be sold on the school grounds, but most of the dolls are sold in small shops or roadside stands in the community. This doll project is one of this school's pedagogical innovations.

Women from the community comprise the kitchen staff and make lunch for the children in the school kitchen. Members of the community also volunteer as cleaning staff for the school. The school is used for several of the missions. At this school, these include *Barrio Adentro* (medical care), *Vuelvan Caras* (microcredit), Robinson (literacy), and *Ribas* (secondary school equivalency). These classes take place in the evenings but are not officially connected with the school. The school's building space is shared between the school and the missions.

4.3.2. Bosque Negro (school 2)

This was an urban school located on the periphery of Cumaná. This school has students from 1st grade through 6th grade for a total of 606 students. Compared to the other schools, the physical conditions of this school were slightly more run down. The paint on some of the walls was peeling and the building itself was older than schools 1 and 4.

A key descriptor of this school was that it was located in an area of high drug traffick and, according to the director, situated directly between two rival gangs. The school had

experienced high levels of violence in the past both in the school and directly outside school grounds. In response to this a large chain link fence had been erected as a barrier, with a guard watching over the entryway. The neighborhood surrounding the school was spoken of by directors and teachers as being poor and somewhat dangerous.

The atmosphere inside the school however felt positive. The school was two levels and built in an open square around a large cement soccer court in the center where students were playing when we arrived. Teachers seemed eager to show us their classrooms, encouraging us to take pictures of the student art and posters hanging all over classroom walls. As we walked around the school, the director encouraged us to speak with any employee that we wanted. Reflecting the school's anti-drug program, a student in one class spontaneously recited a previously memorized poem warning of the dangers of drugs.

This school had a women's cooking cooperative and had recently upgraded the school kitchen to a large room with a counter where several women could prepare student meals in an assembly line. The school was also in the process of initiating a plumbing project that would bring potable water into the school.

Like we saw in other schools, parents of the students were employed as custodial workers and were sweeping and mopping walkways and bathrooms while we were there. Unlike in other schools we saw, mothers were employed as classroom aides. In each classroom we visited a mother, in addition to the teacher, was present.

4.3.3. Jardin Sian Ka'an (school 3)

This school was a rural school located approximately 20 kilometers to the northeast of Cumaná. This school serves preschool through sixth grade, with a total of 158 students. The physical

location of the school is literally 50 meters from the coast. Of the schools we saw, the condition of this school was most challenging. The classrooms were located in different buildings all closely spaced together. The school had five classrooms, one for each grade from 1st to 5th. The 6th grade met on a small, covered cement patio outside. For the first hour of our visit a gym class, consisting of chanting and marching, was taking place outside directly beside the 6th grade class.

Although I never understood why, one of this school's points of emphasis was a focus on chess. This was evidenced by several chess related drawings and posters in different classrooms. Outside the 1st grade class a chessboard was drawn on the cement and the first graders sang a song about chess for us. The school directors also spoke frequently of their AIDS program. In an effort to combat teen pregnancy and to educate about AIDS, the school had many posters demonstrating a focus on puberty, safe sex, and needle danger.

This school seemed to be operating on a smaller budget and had established fewer ties with the local community. The director said community integration had been very difficult. Unlike in the other schools, this school was not located near any visible grouping of residential houses. The nearest buildings were shoreline weekend homes for individuals from outside the area. This school did have a music teacher, but there were not instruments for the students. There was a dance teacher as well. The music teacher seemed to work well with the students and they had several songs well prepared. The dance teacher was quite dynamic and was working on dances with the teachers as well as the students. The school environment was positive, but a difficult place for me to maintain steady focus. The ground space was fairly small and noise from anywhere traveled everywhere. At times it was unclear whether school was in session or not as well, based on students seemingly wandering around in and out of different classrooms.

The school did have a kitchen on-site which was staffed by women from the community and were in the process of becoming a cooperative. The school also had a maintenance man from the community. Despite some of the challenges visible and stated in this school, the staff seemed quite dedicated to the school and to making the experience positive for students.

4.3.4. Belinda Verde (school 4)

This school was located nearly one hour south of Cumaná in a small town. Second only to Paso Piedras in terms of recent construction, Belinda Verde had several newly built areas of the school, including a covered, outdoor patio and a raised stage for drama and music recitals. The principal building of this school was basically one hallway with classroom doors opening inward along the hall. The main building of this school differed from the other three schools in that it was mostly an indoor school with the only outside space being the patio out the back door. An interesting feature of this school was that it had three spaces physically located in spaces other than the main school building. One space was located next door in a large warehouse where the three sections of 5th grade met. Another space housed two 4th grade sections and one 6th grade class and was held in a small building located several blocks away from the main building. This building was dimly lit with only single bulbs in each of the rooms which seemed small for the numbers of students in each class. The final space was in a private residence and also housed a section of 4th grade and two sections of 6th. In total this school served 571 students from kindergarten through 6th grade.

The atmosphere of the school was upbeat and positive, in part because of the dance and music presentation they had planned for our visit. The directors were eager to show us all

through the school and to highlight individual student talent. Twice during interviews students came into the office to recite poems, sing songs and do a short skit.

Several construction projects were planned for this school. The most noticeable was a computer room located off the hallway of the main building. The room already had several computers, brand new computer desks and telephone connection wires coming out of the walls. In the middle of the room was a large pallet of cement bags. These were for the kitchen which was not yet built. The school still did not have a stove, and cooks prepared meals in nearby private homes. Another unique element of this school's environment was the homemade clothing table set up directly inside the main entrance to the school. This was staffed by women participating in the Vuelvan Caras (micro credit) mission. They made school uniforms, underwear, pajamas and t-shirts from new and recycled cloth to sell at the school.

Like the other schools we saw, classrooms and the hallway were fully covered with student projects. I did not notice the custodial staff as in the other schools, but the main hallway and classrooms of this school appeared swept and recently mopped.

5.0. FINDINGS IN PARTICIPTION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will present my findings related to participation. As stated earlier, a guiding principle was that the literature on participation contains numerous contested ideas. Some scholars find the idea irreconcilably problematic while others laud its potential. My stated belief is that both camps of opinions have merit. Participation and the mechanisms by which it occurs are complicated and possess competing elements within any participatory process.

My findings then are organized in a way that I hope demonstrates this tension. When gathering the data, I realized there were many potential ways to thematically organize what I was hearing, reading and observing. I am attempting, as a final goal, to show that indeed the process of participation contains many contradictions and that a different perspective with which to theorize participation is warranted. To that end, data is presented according to broadly conceived themes of problematic elements and promising developments.

Problematic elements are those processes and ways of engendering participation that highlight contradictions, challenging issues, or faulty suppositions within understandings of participation. These problematic elements can occur at the state level as participatory laws are formed. They also occur on the micro level within individual interaction.

The category of promising developments are those outcomes of the participatory process that are difficult to challenge as not being positive on a micro level. These promising

developments can again originate from the state level, reveal themselves in local structures, or exit at the individual school level.

5.2. PROBLEMATIC ELEMENTS

The critical and post colonial theorists cited in the literature review addressed each of the following assumptions as problematic for various reasons. Some critique occurs at the analytical level such as definitions of community. Other assumptions are those that potentially mask power relationships, such as the notion of consensus. Other problematic elements involve unjust expectations on individuals, such as the idea of the charismatic leader. And finally, simple geography- where groups are physically located in relation to centers of power- speaks to another problematic element of participatory development. Each of these examples arose from my discussions and observations of the participatory process underway in Venezuela.

5.2.1. Definitions of Community

In the *Ley de los Consejos Comunales* (2006) document the Venezuelan government defines what a community must do to be considered organized. As part of this description, the government also establishes a definition of community A community is

the social conglomerate of families and citizens that inhabit a determined geographic area, have a history of shared interests, interact with each other, use the same public services, and share similar social and economic needs (p. 2).³

Beyond this definition, communities can define their own geographic boundaries. “The geographic area will be decided by the Community Assemblies...according to the particularities of each community” (p. 2). The most specific component of the definition concerns numbers of

³ All Spanish to English translations throughout this document are mine.

people. For urban areas a community must have between 200 to 400 families. In rural areas this number drops to 20 families and in indigenous areas 10 families is the minimum. As evidenced by this definition, deciding upon what constitutes community is largely determined by local populations, and this is problematic. Midgley (1986) addresses this issue saying that participation literature speaks of ‘communities’ as if this is a tangible entity. He notes that authority often uses community only to refer to “socio-spatial entities” (p. 24), much like the above definition offered by the Venezuelan government. This is problematic because across contexts such as urban and rural especially, demarcations of community differ widely. As an entity in which to ground participation ‘community’ is a concept that ignores internal divisions as well as those individuals on the boundaries, whether economic, racial, or geographic. Almost immediately, when discussing the neighborhoods surrounding the school, the director of Bosque Negro had this to say:

The school is a neutral space between enemies. The community is divided in sectors and among those sectors there is rivalry...a dangerous rivalry in which death has occurred. We are in the middle of a hurricane. When we have meetings at the school the representatives that come from each sector come fearing those from the other sector (June 12).

Cleaver (2001) also speaks to this problematically constructed notion of community found in much participation literature. Most evident in the data from Venezuela was what Cleaver considers a “solidarity” model of community, where locals are seen as being united in some common struggle. Each of the individuals interviewed expressed solidarity sentiments when discussing the community. In perhaps the clearest example of this, the director of Paso Piedras defined the community as “everyone”. The director then elaborated a list of school stakeholders as well as locals who participated in the Community Counsel gatherings. Community, then, was defined as those who participate but not those who do not. This solidarity

model ignores those who do not participate and, more importantly, does not consider the reasons why they do not participate.

A second reason this notion of community is problematic is that the Bolivarian schools are public and thus open to any child from any surrounding location. In the case of Paso Piedras, the director stated that the student population represented several surrounding communities. This has implications for the public community meeting in the schools where community and school issues are discussed and actions decided upon (the Consejo Comunal). If students and parents are coming from different locales, each with potentially differing concerns, the community participation process cannot easily incorporate those geographically disparate concerns. Bear in mind that the school is initially part of a single community network of organizations, ostensibly all working together for change in that community. If differing communities are represented in one school, the single community network structure cannot well attend to the concerns of those from different communities however those may be defined. The participatory process is then complicated by this problem. This difficulty with defining 'community' leads well into a second problematic assumption with participatory development. That is the assumed consensual outcome of the participatory process.

5.2.2. Consensus and Compromise

As can be inferred from the above problem of having multiple locales (communities) represented in one school, some voice or voices will be silenced in order to come to agreement. In the above example from Bosque Negro it would likely be the voices of those individuals from outside the community, as their development concerns may differ from those concerns of the school and its surrounding population. Mosse (2001) asserts two key qualities typical of participatory

methodologies that can be problematic. One is specifically the public nature of participatory planning that renders the process vulnerable to political plays of power. The second is the open ended nature of participatory planning processes. As Mosse asserts, “When definitions of need, programme activity and ‘target group’ are open, much is at stake in controlling these” (p. 19). Individuals able to exercise power over others in order to determine community needs will do so such that their interests are preserved.

As an outsider in Venezuela only present for a short amount of time, I was unable to observe and analyze the participatory process. I was, however, given access to the documents that resulted from the participatory sessions called the diagnostic matrix as discussed previously. In the case of each school the document addressed several localized concerns and specified the steps the school and other community actors would take to alleviate those concerns. This list attended to different issues in each case. Implicit, though, was that some consensus had been reached. Also implicit is that someone or some group of individuals organized and facilitated the session. Mosse says these events which take place with some local authority present are “subject to the effects of dominance and muting” (p.19). Those individuals with concerns that differ from those with more authority are likely to either be unheard or to not speak. Kothari (2005) says this is the paradox whereby the “more participatory the enquiry the more its outcome will mask the power structure of the community” (p. 146).

Another concern raised by Mosse (2005) related to the repertoires of proposed projects. The theory of participation maintains that this process will uncover local knowledge invisible to outsiders. Projects and development efforts arising from a participatory planning session are expected to better reflect local desire and be more sensitive to local capacity. Mosse asserts that this is not the case at all. Instead he says local desires are shaped by what locals believe

development agencies can deliver and by what the locals believe development agencies will find acceptable. The range of proposed projects then is not subject to local initiative, need or creativity but instead to what people believe is expected of them by the development agency. In Venezuela the 'outside development agency' is the state. However, the state has made clear a limited set of state funded institutions and what those institutions can do. Moreover, no school is guaranteed funding for any project from any institution. The pressure, therefore, is twofold. One is to tailor project proposals according to what schools and communities believe has a good chance of being funded. Secondly, to increase the likelihood of receiving funding for at least one of the projects, schools have to apply to many different organizations. This means generating a list of projects which all need to be perceived by the community and schools as acceptable to the state agencies. Many of the school directors addressed these pressures. They spoke of seeing what projects were likely to get funded in other schools, such as school building or classroom repairs, and initially focusing on those types of projects. As the state is essentially overseeing project proposal and implementation, albeit not in an obviously imposing way, projects must meet tacit state approval. What Mosse suggests, then, appears valid. The participatory process is not about communities and schools generating completely autonomous development paths and school curricula. Rather, it is learning what types of development the state is encouraging and pursuing projects and school plans of study which mirror those state desires.

To acquire any funding, a school director must continuously apply for development assistance from any number of agencies. Even to initiate the process of becoming a Bolivarian school requires a tremendous amount of individual effort and innovation. This leads to a third problem of participatory methodologies.

5.2.3. The Question of Leadership

Cleaver (2001) notes the participatory development myth that “communities are capable of anything, that all that is required is sufficient mobilization and the latent capacities of the community will be unleashed in the interests of development” (p. 47). This is the participatory set-up in Venezuela as well. The government provides the institutional framework and community organization rules. Individuals in the community must do the rest. This type of arrangement locates the act of development on the individuals in the community. Where charismatic, politically astute, or tireless individuals exist, communities have more likelihood of securing favor from development institutions. For communities, or schools in this case, that do not have these types of individuals on staff, development projects might suffer.

Buchy and Race (2001) note the gap in participatory literature concerning charismatic leaders and catalytic facilitators. They state that this is a question of individual personality together with sociopolitical status that makes an individual more or less likely to effectively mobilize community members. Participatory literature has not focused on the critical role these individuals play. In Venezuela, simply listening to directors tell their stories of the transition process to a Bolivarian school demonstrates the tremendous effort required of them. The first step was to convince the community to vote in favor of the school. The director of Bosque Negro said how this community confidence was won only with “*lots of work, great effort and dedication...it has been very difficult to achieve what we have achieved and we still have not achieved what we want but it is better than before*” (June 12). This statement was then validated with anecdotes of early days gathering their own firewood for the stoves, cooking all the food in one neighborhood kitchen and carrying it down the road to the school. These tasks were in addition to being the principal. The director of Belinda Verde said the transition process was “a

very difficult learning process.” These schools operate “*on a different trajectory than what I was doing before...and to adapt what I was doing before to this project, to what we’re doing now, was for me, very hard and traumatic*” (June 15). This director, too, provided anecdotal evidence to support the claim of having worked very hard to pursue the school reforms.

Murphy (2005), addressing qualities of transformative leaders, writes “these managers must constantly familiarize themselves with legislative and policy documents that impact upon...delivery to ensure that they assume realistic and attainable goals” (p. 132). This too was a task of Bolivarian school directors in Venezuela. They had to take it upon themselves to remain aware of governmental guidelines and frequently amended legal documents governing school development processes. The likelihood of school success, then, was not just a matter of community participation understood as some over generalized process of consensus building and shared effort. The picture painted for us by the school directors and other stakeholders such as parents and teachers, was one of tremendous individual effort during the early days to even make feasible the possibility of a Bolivarian school.

Although often unstated in the literature, participatory development requires these individual efforts. Because these types of development projects are almost universally implemented in poor or marginalized communities, there is an extra burden on the poor to acquire what other groups do not have to work for, such as decent schools with potable water and food for the children, to specifically take this Bolivarian example.

There is a final problematic element of participation that emerged from the data in Venezuela. This is related to the question of leadership and effort. The schools we visited were all located within at least a one hour drive of the state capital of Cumaná. Several of the directors mentioned going to the state Ministry of Education office to obtain documents or to

have meetings. Directors also mentioned going to state development institutions, also located in Cumaná, to inquire about the status of grant application or work schedule timeframes. This raises a troubling question about those communities located far from any center of power.

5.2.4. Geographical Isolation

There are several ways in which geographical location affects participatory development. In this case one of these ways bears on the perception of development and is what Chambers (1981) calls a spatial bias. This is the tendency to focus development efforts near urban centers and along well traveled roads. Chambers suggests as infrastructure and services improve in any location wealthier individuals will buy this property while poorer populations shift to different, out of sight places. This affects development agencies who may not accurately perceive the development concerns in any one area unless agency employees are actively seeking ways to journey beyond well-traveled roads. Chambers describes the marginalization as an unintended consequence, based on factors like accessibility and distance. Another, more critical perspective holds that this spatial bias functions somewhat intentionally to keep marginalized populations out of sight. Sibley (1995) suggests this marginalization serves the purpose of purifying space and of keeping undesirable elements (the poor, the indigenous) out of the public eye. In the case of participatory development, the concerns of marginalized groups of people located literally on community peripheries, or socially in terms of minority status, might have basic development concerns that get overlooked or ignored while development efforts focus on groups of community members and institutions not comprised of minority status populations.

This spatial bias affects the research process, as well. When we approached the state minister for permission to visit schools, we listed a range of school characteristics we were

interested in visiting. We were not given permission to visit the indigenous schools on our list. The rationale given was the distance from Cumaná and the poor condition of the road. It of course may have been accurate that the road was in poor condition but the implications of the statement are problematic. On the most cynical level, I can imagine that the ministry only granted us permission to visit several of the best functioning schools and that a poor, indigenous community was not in this category. From a more pragmatic perspective, I can imagine the simple logistics of travelling to a distant school over substandard roads was not something our drivers were willing to do. If, however, distance and road condition are such prohibitive factors in visiting, they are certainly detriments to development efforts as it limits a community's access to power.

Midgley (1986) writes that poor communities are frequently most isolated from development efforts because of their infrequent contact with official institutions. Each of the school directors we interview mentioned having gone to the Ministry of Education to obtain new legal documents or to attend workshops. The director of Paso Piedras told of going to the state development agencies to lobby for assistance and ensure quality work. Also, this director considered the act of participating in the inter-community network of schools as invaluable for sharing ideas and strategies, and fostering a sense of solidarity. Participatory development places the development onus onto the community population but geographically isolated populations cannot participate and interact within supportive these networks. They literally have severely restricted access to the doors of power. All but one of the schools in our sample could reach development agencies or the education ministry in person within 30 minutes. Using the phone was also an immediate option. The distant indigenous school had no phone option and required at least 4 hours to get to Cumaná. The geographical location plays a large role in terms

of making voices heard and of establishing necessary human and institutional connections. Geographical isolation also “purifies” (Sibley, 1995) public space and hides the marginalized and their concerns from public view. In Venezuela’s case especially, the Bolivarian schools are mandated (philosophically and practically) to function in relation to broader processes of Venezuelan participatory development efforts. Isolation from these processes would impinge significantly on a school’s ability to manage its development path.

5.3. PROMISING DEVELOPMENTS

The preceding discussion identified themes of problematic elements from the participatory development process observed and interpreted in Venezuela’s Bolivarian schools. From a generalized perspective these problematic elements seem to condemn the entire project of participatory development. There exist, though, developments at the micro level which complicate sweeping denouncement of participatory development. These promising developments are developments that arise from an interplay between the state level governing guidelines and innovations at the micro-level. My assertion here is not that these promising developments necessarily will result in permanent positive results in the long run. What I mean is that these innovations at this point are facilitating positive development results in the short term. Even as the framework for many of these promising developments are formulated at the state level, communities modify the framework through the participatory process in order to incorporate these developments into their locale. These promising developments are not interpreted based on salient themes from the literature, as the problematic elements were, but are instead visible projects with tangible components.

5.3.1. Missions

The missions are social programs targeted at various types of community development issues. These programs are designed and funded by the state but can only operate with state funding in a community which has self-organized. The scope of the missions ranges from micro scale economic programs to education to medical care. Any organized community is able to incorporate any of the missions. Community members vote on which missions they feel are most necessary for the community. They must also address how they will support the workers that come with any particular mission.

For example, according to the Ministry of Education (2003), the most missions with the largest numbers of individuals enrolled are the education missions Robinson I and II, and Ribas. These missions are adult education oriented programs with Robinson I focusing on literacy, Robinson II focusing on primary school equivalency and Ribas offering secondary school equivalency. If a community decides to begin these missions they must secure a space for the mission and find an individual willing to teach the materials which the government provides. What our research team discovered is that the Bolivarian school becomes the meeting space for many of these missions. Through the participatory process, community members selected which missions they deemed most appropriate for their community and created the means for integrating the missions into their community.

The missions evident in the study sample schools include the above mentioned education missions along with graduates from a third education mission, Sucre, which was a mission that trained teachers in specialized areas such as dance, art or music. Also included in the schools was mission Barrio Adentro which addressed community health care, and mission Vuelvan Caras, a micro-credit project. A full description of these missions is offered below in Figure 3.

All of the schools had Robinson I operating after primary school hours in the school space. Since the missions are not part of the school, school directors did not keep literacy data. However, data published both by the Venezuelan government (Ministerio de Educación y Deportes, 2005) and by UNESCO (2004) show climbing literacy rates, with numbers approaching 97%.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Barrio Adentro | A program which sends primarily Cuban doctors into the poorest areas of Venezuela to provide basic medical care. Often, the EBs serve as the space where medical visits occur. In some cases the doctors live at the school as well. |
| Identidad | A project to formally register individuals who do not have birth certificates, voting cards, or other identification documents. |
| Ribas | Secondary education equivalent for adults older than 16. |
| Robinson | Basic literacy and primary school equivalent for any individual older than primary school age |
| Sucre | An initiative to increase access at the post-secondary level of education. Bolivarian Universities (also possess a strong community and cultural focus) are being opened and this program enables individuals to attend a Bolivarian university. Graduates in teacher then are employed in the EB primary schools. |
| Vuelvan Caras | Micro credit assistance to help individuals form cooperatives in order to generate income. Typically this involved women organizing around selling food, clothes or some other handmade item. |

Source: <http://www.misionesbolivarianas.gob.ve>

Figure 3: Descriptions of the Missions

The participatory element of these missions was visible when school directors described the different ways in which the local populations decided to adapt the missions to fit their needs; especially Barrio Adentro, Sucre, and Vuelvan Caras.

5.3.1.1. Barrio Adentro Only two of the schools had the medical Barrio Adentro recently functioning in the community. Personnel at Bosque Negro suggested they did not need the medical service because they were located within an urban area where several other clinics were functioning. The same was the case with Belinda Verde. In Paso Piedras two medical practitioners lived near the school. I was able to conduct an interview with these individuals to hear their description of the mission in that particular community. They were given a place to live and kept open clinic hours. Community members could solicit medical advice when necessary. In addition to community members, the school scheduled visits for the doctors to conduct check-ups with each student. Also, as evidenced by Paso Piedras' matrix, the community had identified water habits (wash hands after using the bathroom, don't waste water, boil water before drinking) as specific community and school concern. The Barrio Adentro doctors then incorporated this concern into their community educational program.

The second school which had had Barrio Adentro, Jardin Sian Ka'an, actually housed the doctor in the school. After school hours, then, the school space functioned as the medical clinic. Similar to the community surrounding School1, the community around Jardin Sian Ka'an identified specific community and school concerns. In this case, AIDS and safe sexual practices, and drug use were of primary importance. The school had numerous student drawings in addition to more formal posters addressing these issues.

5.3.1.2. Sucre The aspect of this mission that we witnessed was of those Sucre graduates now employed in the Bolivarian primary schools as the *especialista* or "specialist" teachers. One component of the Bolivarian school is that the school day be extended from a half day to a full day, as opposed to the traditional half day. During these newly added time periods schools were expected to add music and art into the curriculum which were not subjects offered in the non-

Bolivarian schools. To help facilitate the inclusion of this curriculum, graduates of the Sucre mission who possessed musical or artistic talent were trained as specialist teachers. Each of the schools we visited had some type of specialist teacher. The directors of Jardín Sian Ka'an explained that not every school can get any specialist, but instead must adapt curriculum to the specialist assigned to their school. This reflects the aim of local identity incorporation and valorization into endogenous development discussed by Vázquez-Barquero (2002). Schools are expected to choose music, art or dance instruction which reflects their local regions historically. The specialist teachers, then, teach the students those traditional crafts. In the case of Paso Piedras they had a music teacher who specialized in the traditional Venezuelan four string guitar. Bosque Negro was also provided a music teacher. In Jardín Sian Ka'an they had a dance specialist and a music specialist. The dance instructor focused on the traditional *Joropo* dance traditionally typical of that region in Venezuela. Together with the music teacher, the students at Jardín Sian Ka'an developed a traditional song and *Joropo* dance skit which they performed at local school competitions. It is important to remember that inclusion of music and arts as curriculum is something new for traditional Venezuelan public schools. It is also impossible to offer an assessment, at this early stage, what the effect of local identity and cultural revalorization will be.

5.3.1.3. Vuelvan Caras This micro-credit mission is intended primarily for women to innovate small scale business cooperatives. In the sample schools this mission operated several ways. Another component of the Bolivarian school is that each student must be given lunch each day. The 'development repertoire' (Ray, 1999) which emerged from the initial Bolivarian schools was to employ a group of students' mothers as school cooks. In all the schools, mothers were the school cooks. Quickly, the women realized they could make food to sell as well. The

Vuelvan Caras mission offered this capability. The cooks could form a cooperative via the appropriate, state-determined legal channels, and acquire the right to sell food for a profit outside the school. This example offers another vision of endogenous development. When initially forming the Bolivarian school component of school lunches, the government did not anticipate the cooks' desire to eventually form cooperatives. As the desire from below increased, the government responded by establishing the legal process for forming a cooperative. This is evidence of the bottom-up initiated and top-down sponsored process described by Ray. Not all the women cooks in our sample school had formed cooperatives, but all were in the process of doing so. The women at Paso Piedras had recently successfully done so and were selling bread in a nearby town which they prepared in addition to the food for the school.

In Jardin Sian Ka'an a group of women in the *Vuelvan Caras* mission had decided to make and sell clothes. They had a small table in the hallway of the school where they sold children's clothes that they had made. Again, this reflected the school's autonomy to innovate ways of integrating into the community.

I consider these missions as promising developments for several reasons. The most clear to me was that they blurred the boundaries between the school institution and lived-life in the community. Noddings (1998) addresses the problematic notion of school being conceived of as somehow unrelated to life outside the institutional walls. She finds it undesirable that school be understood as simply a locale for compartmentalized knowledge acquisition, divorced from the concerns and complexities of daily life. The policy of the missions is specifically designed to counteract a tendency for institutional disaggregation. *Barrio Adentro* in the school and community links health to education in practical ways. The purpose of this mission is more than just education about safe water use, for example, but to establish that the health of the student is

an important factor to consider in a child's education. At its most practical understanding, the Sucre mission helps fill teaching personnel shortages. Beyond that, the music and dance curriculum adds a new element to the schools and carries with it previously unavailable resources, such as musical instruments for students. The potential for economic assistance provided by *Vuelvan Caras* is clear. Mothers cooking in schools have a two-fold effect. One is that the mothers now have jobs with the option to develop a business. Secondly, the quality of the food served at the school is high. As one director said, "*we know when mothers cook for their own children, they will cook with love*" (Jardin Sian Ka'an, June 14).

5.3.2. New Indicators of Quality

A second promising development was the standards by which school quality was evaluated. The notion of quality is a hotly contested concept. There are numerous questions surrounding quality and many varying typologies have emerged in an effort to capture essential components of quality. Guttman (2005) distills the efforts of quality definition to two basic principles. One component of quality is concerned with learners' cognitive development: what tangible skills learners actually acquire in the classroom. The second notion of quality centers on the purpose of education: defining the social goals of education and designing a system that will meet those goals. Guttman lists objectives such as responsible citizenship, negotiating shared values and emotional development as possible purposes for education that any notion of quality must address. As of this research study, no formalized school evaluation, academic or otherwise, existed for the Bolivarian schools. However, throughout the interviews, it became clear that understandings of quality centered on Guttman's second principle. As evidenced in Venezuelan government documents, the discourse used to describe the purpose of education focus primarily

on desired social outcomes. “Education not only has to do with studying determined materials...it is much more than that. It has to do with value, culture and solidarity” (President Chavez as quoted in Ministerio del Poder Popular, 2007, p. 3). According to the same document the purpose of education is to instill “socialist values” (p.1). Without entering into a discussion of what constitutes socialist values, it is sufficient to suggest the educational emphasis will include elements that would fall outside the concerns of an academic-only understanding of quality.

A teacher at Jardín Sian Ka’an had this to say: *“when we went from a traditional school to a Bolivarian school, the work and methodology had to change. We had to focus on local knowledge. We needed knowledge of the community that the children brought...I am first concerned fundamentally with the integrated development of the child”* (June 14). An aspect of child development important to this school was child weight. The director of this school kept weights of all the children, taken at the beginning and end of each school year. One point of quality evaluation, then, was whether each child lost, maintained or gained weight throughout the year.

In the absence of standardized tests and formal evaluation procedures, quality indicators could not be defined in these ways. Directors repeatedly stated that community perception was a crucial indicator of quality. Staff at Jardín Sian Ka’an visited various individuals in the community every 15 days to solicit feedback of ways the school could better address community concerns. The director of Paso Piedras was in the process of developing his own quality indicators based on community member evaluation of the school. Essentially, this notion of quality assurance rests on school transparency. At each school, directors said parents are allowed to visit the school whenever they want. In Bosque Negro, parents were employed as

classroom aides. In both Bosque Negro and Jardin Sian Ka'an, parents were also employed as custodial staff. Parents in these positions have access to the inner workings of the schools each day, and are involved in many of its processes. Belinda Verde, borrowing a transparency strategy from Escuelas Nuevas in Colombia (Schiefelbein, 1993) and citizen schools in Brazil (Gandin and Apple, 2002) instituted participatory budgeting. Items for budget inclusion were prioritized in an open forum, with the result posted publically on the front exterior wall of the school.

Other elements of school quality, as stated by Blanco et al (2007), are mechanisms to ensure equity. One of the ways Bolivarian schools specifically address equity was from the standpoint of access. School directors and government documents (Ministerio de Educación y Deportes, 2004) claim that more children have access to school because of the Bolivarian schools. Data do show an increasing number of Bolivarian schools across the country, increasing from 559 schools to now more than 3,500 (MED, 2004). Each school except Paso Piedras showed an increase in enrollment from previous years. The reason given for the drop at Paso Piedras was the nearby opening of a new Bolivarian school which retained local students which had previously commuted to Paso Piedras. The most frequent reason given for increased attendance was the food program at the school. As stated by the director of Jardin Sian Ka'an, *"The most important factor in of the Bolivarian schools is, of course, the school food program"* (June 14). This sentiment was backed up by the director of Bosque Negro, who said many of the children in her school came from homes where mothers could not provide enough food for everyone. Now that the school offers food there is an increased incentive for parents to ensure their children attend and for the children themselves to go to school. A second element that increases access is the full-day schedule. Access can be understood as the increased likelihood

of attendance. The full day is a policy mechanism that functions to facilitate access in two ways. One is that a parent who could not work because of having to care for children can now seek or create employment because the children are in school all day. Secondly, children who might have had to work to support family food budgets now can attend school because their primary meal is provided by the school.

Without aggregate state-wide data, and comparative data between the traditional public and Bolivarian schools the assertion of increased access is difficult to unequivocally determine. However, when talking into account the Robinson and Ribas educational missions, adult access to education has clearly risen. According to government statistics of the Robinson mission alone, more than 1,500,000 adults have participated in one or both of the Robinson I and II phases (Ministerio de Educación y Deportes, 2005).

Quality indicators, then, are defined less quantitatively according to test or academic achievement scores, but more qualitatively in terms of community and parental perceptions, policy and decision-making transparency, and increased access. The inclusion of child weight is especially indicative of the broadly stated goals of the Bolivarian primary school, and one of the clearest examples of quality defined according to socially relevant, humanistic concerns.

Even as questions remain and critiques exist, I consider all of these as promising developments because they represent community-defined approaches to dealing with locally relevant development issues. Even given the critiques of participation mentioned above, these promising developments cannot be so easily discounted by theoretical critiques. They represent micro level approaches to remediating local level concerns within the framework of the Bolivarian primary school. This is significant in that it demonstrates method by which local

concerns can be defined by community members in ways that are practical and meaningful to these communities.

5.3.3. Education Linked to Development

The final promising development that emerged during this study is the explicit connection of the Bolivarian education curriculum with the locally determined development concerns. This linking of education to development derives both from the institutional infrastructure of the Bolivarian education system and from its educational philosophy. The legal and institutional foundations upon which the Bolivarian schools are derived oblige the schools to interact with the community in various ways, such as when state money for the school is allocated via a community organization. The money for the food program, for example, is given to the cooks through a community council organization until the cooks become a cooperative.

Philosophically, the schools are framed as “schools of the community” (Avance Qualitativo, 2004) and are expected to incorporate issues from the surrounding locale into the school. The child centered focus of the schools is intended in part to recognize the child more holistically than as only a student. All the school directors mentioned the fact their students brought extra-school issues into the classroom. Not that this idea is novel or in some way radical. The point is the school foundations and the directors explicitly conceptualized the school, the community and the students as integrated, mutually influential elements.

The clearest way by which the school and community development link was established was through the school matrix as already mentioned. After the yearly community meeting where attending community members generate a list of community concerns, the school incorporates those concerns into school curriculum through the school matrix. The matrix essentially is the

document that guides the school and community in the sense that it maps the community's development focus, the school's curricular focus, and creates a relationship between the two. In each of the schools I was able to view the matrix document. This document lists specific concerns, how they will be addressed, who will address them and what the time frame will be for rectifying the issue. In Paso Piedras, for example, the depiction of their matrix, reproduced in Figure 4 below, was posted on a bulletin board in the school's outdoor assembly space. Looking at the matrix it is clear the areas of principal concern arising from the community assembly are drug use and unemployment, school infrastructure, community health, improving reading and writing skills, and water and electricity. The four principles to which this school remains vigilant are production diversity, community participation, community incorporation, and management decentralization. Responding to each of the concerns are the specific actions the school and community will take. The missions listed here are government initiatives directed toward diverse social development concerns.

| | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------|--------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Drugs and Unemployment | Infrastructure | Health | Reading and Writing | Water and Electricity |
|------------------------|----------------|--------|---------------------|-----------------------|

| Diversify Production | Participation | Incorporation | Decentralization |
|---|--|--|---|
| Earth, Fire and Ceramics (making and selling pottery) | Construction: Workshop, Fences, pavement | Campaigns: Dengue, AIDS, contagious infections, cleanliness habits | Cuba-Venezuela meeting: discuss mother tongue education |
| Missions: Robinson, Ribas, Vuelvan Caras, Sucre, Cultura | Restoration: Basketball court | Water Table Committee, Community Counsels Missions: Barrio Adentro | Workshops: Theater, Story Telling, Strategy sharing |

Figure 4: Diagnostic Matrix of Paso Piedras

Also evident in the above matrix is the incorporation of both infrastructural development concerns as well as sociocultural issues. The school, then, is a place where larger social issues are discussed by the students as part of the educative process. The director of Jardín Sian Ka'an explained the function of the matrix-building process this way:

We have these problems. Now what are the causes of these problems, how can these problems be resolved, how can we resolve them, and how can the school be counted on to help with these problems....So we develop strategies around strengths of the school....We ask where the school is located in relation to the problems and in relation to other places outside the school that the school can work with. The basic objective is to see how we will pursue specific goals in relation to the problems we have identified, and to lay out a plan of action for the school (June 14).

In Bosque Negro their matrix, seen below in Figure 5, was organized according to linearly diagrammed depiction of specific problems and specific solutions.

| Problem | Cause | Action | Raise money | Strengths | What will we do | Who's in charge | When |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|---|--|--|------------------------------|
| No potable water | Blocked pipes | Water conservation campaign | Raffles | Parent Association Neighborhood Association HidroCaribe | Fix pipes Fix bathrooms Hire maintenance man | Second grade Neighborhood Association | Between November and January |

Figure 5: Diagnostic Matrix of Bosque Negro

Shown here is only their approach to the issue of potable water. The full version of the above table addressed other concerns in addition to potable water and water related hygiene. Water is chosen as an example of how the matrix is used to contribute to the regular school curriculum in a way that situates community concerns as school learning projects.

In this case, the entire community plan specified the process of digging the trench and laying the pipe to connect to a main water source. This process was to be carried out in part by the members of the parents association and the water council over the next 6 months. The school was in charge of organizing several workshops related to water usage and conservation. In tandem with these community and school concerns, in several classrooms the school curriculum incorporated thematic units around water related issues such as hand washing and boiling drinking water. In this way the school, the school curriculum and the community development concerns are linked and mutually reinforce one another.

It is also worth noting how the missions assist with both the school and community needs. In Paso Piedras' matrix the Barrio Adentro mission helped facilitate the educative portion of water hygiene and offers treatment care for any of the water borne illnesses prevalent in the community.

There is an additional practical way in which the school facilitates the community development process. The full day schedule allows caretakers to leave the house to seek employment during the day. The director of Bosque Negro pointed out that mothers were limited to a set of less-than-ideal choices. They could stay home to take care of the children, or seek only part-time work, or take the children with them to places of employment, or leave children alone in the house. This director suggested that economic necessity often left a mother with little choice but the final one. *"You have to calculate the significance of the school hours. Before, there was a half day of classes and the mothers weren't even in the house and the kids didn't know where they were. Now the school has the children until 3:30 in the afternoon. It's much better for everyone"* (June 12).

5.4. BEYOND THE DICHOTOMY

As I have tried to show in the preceding arguments, participation and the development outcomes contain contradictory processes. There are certainly conceptual and theoretical flaws of participation which gloss over questions of power and which potentially ignore questions of social inequalities. These concerns were addressed as problematic elements of the participatory process. However, at the same time, and within the same processes, an examination of the Venezuelan model of participatory development within the school reveals outcomes that have led to positive results for the community, the school and the students. Conversely, a challenge for those advocates of participatory development is to grapple with questions regarding the longer term sustainability of these participatory outcomes evidenced in Venezuela. To assume the perspective that short term success necessarily leads to longer term empowerment, as many of those advocates do, seems unwarranted. There are contextual factors within the Venezuelan model that render problematic both positions.

The assumption of the post-colonialist critiques of participatory development rests on the notion of outsider (as in different country) development agency. In this sense, Venezuela's endogenous development efforts differ significantly from the notion of a Western development worker or academic consultant arriving to a location, quickly assessing the problems and offering a limited set of specific solutions friendly to the development agency. Aside from several AIDS awareness posters from UNESCO, I saw no foreign development agency operating with the sample schools and communities. In Venezuela, the development potential is located within individuals and their abilities to generate ideas and form networks to share those ideas. This

model of participation appears quite different to the participation discussed in participatory development literature. The latter speaks to the obligatory participation demanded by development agencies and the reproduction of power that results from that relationship. In contrast, the former represents a participation that includes a notion of participation as citizen duty.

This notion of citizenship uncovers shortcomings in the position of the development advocates. The apparent goals for those advocates of participation fall short of this question of citizenship. Their focus seems limited to isolated, short-term project evaluation. We see then that a fundamental disagreement between advocates and critics revolves around what constitutes success in development. Advocates claim participation makes projects more relevant and thus more likely to succeed. The post-colonialists reply that participation represents cooptation and that success within this frame still represents failure. Neither approach addresses how assessing participation might move beyond this contested definition of success. The endogenous model in Venezuela contains processes which confound both approaches to assessing participation.

Both critiques, which represent the overwhelming majority of the literature related to participatory development, are in need of a different theoretical framework. I offer here, in an effort to move beyond the dichotomy of participation in which we have been stuck, a brief analysis of the Bolivarian schools from the perspective of human geographers.

5.5. VENEZUELA'S PARTICIPATORY SPACE

What I suggest here is that applying a geographical theoretical framework to the Venezuelan education reforms will lead to a different perspective from which to assess the participatory

development in the schools. This effort is an attempt to find a theoretical perspective that moves beyond the results discussed above. This section will necessarily remain short for several reasons. One reason is that the reforms are new, so I can do little but apply the theory absent conclusions. From the standard vantage points with which to assess participation, theoretically predicted themes emerge without having to know the outcome of the overall Bolivarian reforms. The geographical perspective however offers only conditions under which participatory efforts are more likely to lead to positive results.

Revisiting Cornwall's (2002) notion of invited and claimed spaces we can clearly categorize the participatory space, located in the Bolivarian school, as invited. From the central state level through the grassroots level this space is legally defined. It is officially legitimized and institutionally connected to state ministries of education, state development agencies, and district level mayor offices. The state has created the legal framework and political opportunity for this space to exist. Individuals at the community level are invited to participate in creating that space. At the grassroots level the school is connected horizontally, as evidenced above, to numerous organizations and programs. Importantly the space is also a desired space from the perspective of the participants. No community may implement a Bolivarian school or become organized on their own. Rather communities are invited to create the space if they subsequently choose.

To the notion of invited spaces, Mohan (2007) adds the concept of a politicized space connected to a notion of citizenship where citizenship is seen "as something that is an active engagement rather than simply a legal status" (p. 791). Reflecting on the nature of the invitation offered by the Venezuelan state, we can consider the invitation as active rather than passive. People are not invited simply to attend a forum; they need to create the space themselves.

Secondly, the ideological project in Venezuela is expressly political with regard to the notion of citizenship. It is an officially labeled Bolivarian revolution. Part of this revolution entails reworking what constitutes citizenship. There are numerous examples evidenced in Venezuela attesting to this citizenship re-formation which fall outside the scope of this study. Within the schools, though, the underlying ideological educational goal is constructing new citizens. The director of Jardín Sian Ka'an indicates this shift saying:

we always are looking to incorporate knowledge from the community in which we are immersed....For what? To look into that local knowledge, and in books from outside the community, to help us know our children and to teach them to learn about being that new citizen that our Venezuelan education laws ask us to be. So we take advantage of the strength we have to plan our classrooms to construct and develop the abilities and skills so [the children] become those citizens we want (June 14).

The Bolivarian philosophy is explicit in its demands that Venezuelans rethink the notion of what it means to be a citizen. According to the principles of endogenous development, and as evidenced in the four case study schools, a goal is to create individuals who value the culture of their locale but who also situate themselves under the larger frame of being “Venezuelan”. The school functions as what Cornwall (2002) calls a new way in old spaces. She also cites the importance of the language with which participants are constructed. In this new space to participate is not to be a *beneficiary* or a *client*, but to be a *citizen*.

The Venezuelan Bolivarian education reforms exhibit many of the characteristics geographers cite as being important for participatory development to enact social change. The participatory space emerges in a manner which offers increased capability. Political channels are opened to various state and district level agencies. The act of participating is framed as one of the duties of a new Venezuelan citizen. From the geographical perspective explored here, the Venezuelan project conforms to the spatial characteristics needed for meaningful participation.

As the reforms continue to unfold, continued analysis of the larger development project emanating from the Bolivarian schools will be compelling.

5.6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

While no uncontested statements can be made regarding the participatory development emerging from the Bolivarian schools, this study has offered several perspectives. The intention was first to explore the notion of participation from two primary perspectives in the literature. Advocates of participation in development cite increased project relevancy and the likelihood of project sustainability as two key factors improved in a participatory context. Critiques of participation range widely, but center on unchallenged power relations between the ‘developed’ countries and ‘developing’ countries. Other areas of concern focus on techniques of participation which reproduce colonial relations in that outsider knowledge and will is imposed onto local populations.

My assertion was that both perspectives have validity. Participation in development can facilitate more useful projects, but it is also vulnerable to ignoring complex questions of power. In any participatory process then, there will be simultaneous forces in operation. Some of the results of participation will be promising while others will reflect problematic assumptions.

Using the Bolivarian reforms in Venezuela as a case study I attempted to locate emergent themes according to problematic elements and promising developments. As expected, themes of both types materialized. Problematic elements were definitions of community, assumptions of consensus, reliance on charismatic leaders, and geographical isolation. On the other hand, promising developments included broadly reconceptualized relationships between the school and

the local community. This took the form of Venezuela's missions which address various local issues in innovative ways. Schools developed new quality standards that indicated a more holistic view of the child and which incorporated notions of accountability beyond academic achievement. Finally, schools linked curriculum to local development concerns. In this way school learning was integrated with broader social issues within the local context. From the perspective of participatory development, these integrated understandings of education and development are, in the short-term at least, positive.

Finally, in an effort to move beyond this dichotomy wherein contradictory processes simultaneously occur, I offered a perspective of participatory development as theorized by human geographers. The challenge, as I understood, was to account for the power dynamics raised by post-colonial theory but also acknowledge the potential benefits of participation. The geographical perspective focused on the way in which the participatory space emerges and the degree of official legitimacy afforded the space. Finally, these authors focus on the level of political capability offered by the act of participation and the degree to which this politicization is linked to a notion of citizenship. Briefly analyzing Venezuela through this lens reveals a theoretically promising framework. As the situation is still unfolding, however, continued analysis is warranted. As a general perspective from which to analyze participation in development, however, the contributions made by geography offer a new perspective that is worth pursuing.

5.7. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There are several types of speculations one can make from this study. Regarding the Bolivarian reform project as a whole, one cannot make rushed judgments of the Venezuelan reform efforts based on political persuasion. There is a large population being systematically incorporated into the broader political process and into the system of education in particular. Based on recent events and based on my experience in Caracas especially, the political climate is quite tense. As Chávez moves forward with the reforms of this revolution, I can imagine large demonstrations that get increasingly violent. It will be crucial to observe how the state manages these oppositional movements.

Specifically regarding the notion of participation, NGOs and other development agencies need to assess conditions under which participation occurs. I think too often the term “participatory” development is applied uncritically to development projects. I think this study highlights some of the common problems with participation. There is no reason for organizations to tout participation alone as a means to successful development. It seems, based on the perspectives of the geographers, that meaningful participation needs some institutionalized support. At the same time, it is shortsighted to denounce participation as a whole. Individuals and development institutions must gauge their willingness to be political or to formally connect to the established political system. In most cases, NGOs are either operating in place of the state without real political incorporation, are promoting development initiatives with no real state recognition, or are operating in concert with the state and thus limited in the degree to which they can empower populations without upsetting the political

establishment. Venezuela's case is unique because the project is deemed by the state as revolutionary. To continue exploring the relationship between political inclusion and meaningful participation will be intriguing.

Thinking directly about the education reforms, I imagine possible tensions arising within the Bolivarian education system. One of the concerns I have relates to the increased access to education without complementary opportunities, both for continued education and for employment. Hopper (1981) discusses the concern of a state trying to reconcile access to education with student expectations. He predicts problems for a state if too many individuals acquire levels of education for which there is not sufficient reward. In his language, Venezuela is in a period where a population is getting too "warmed up." There are practical questions that Venezuela must solve, such as how to accommodate previously excluded children and adults into the space of already existing schools. Other policy issues, such as linking education to meaningful employment, will also be a challenge.

There is one additional concern that would be interesting to observe. The geographers do not diminish power relationships and proximity to power. Cornwall (2002) asks a series of questions related to spatial boundaries and how power can flow into those participatory spaces. In Venezuela, one of the clear ways this could happen is by placing political ideologues as school directors. At the time of this study, every director in our sample Bolivarian schools was the same director from the school's pre-Bolivarian existence. However, at the mayoral level and ministerial level employee ideology appeared sympathetic to the government as indicated by posters on walls and color of dress (red) in these offices. In the school this was not the case, indicating a spatial boundary on political power for the time being.

APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENTATION

A1: Interview Script for School Directors

As stated in the methodology section, the interview format for the majority of the interviews was open-ended and unstructured. Usually the question “Tell us about the process of becoming a Bolivarian School?” opened the conversation. From that point, interviews diverged significantly from each other in terms of content covered and questions asked. The script below represents those semi-structured interviews I conducted with directors specifically addressing school and community participation.

1. How would you describe the relationship between the school and the community?
2. Could you describe the process of trying to integrate with the community?
3. What are ways the school and community interact with each other?
4. Can anyone from the community participate in school assemblies or are there certain restrictions?
5. What types of support do you get from people or institutions in the community?
6. What do you think is the most important element of this school for the community?

APPENDIX B

IRB DOCUMENTATION

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