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Venezuela's Bolivarian
Schools Project

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Kingsdale
Secondary School
interior courtyard

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their storage systems as for those that are embarking on extensive refurbishment or new build projects.

School Works has also produced a book, sponsored by Ecophon, outlining policy recommendations arising from the project so far: *Learning Buildings*.

Further information on the project and copies of both books are available from School Works Ltd, tel.: 44 20 7401 5333, www.school-works.org

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Kingsdale Secondary School teaching space

VENEZUELA'S BOLIVARIAN SCHOOLS PROJECT

According to Article 102 of the new Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, "Education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic, free and compulsory. The state shall assume responsibility for education as a function of maximum importance which it cannot decline to perform, at all levels and in all forms."

The Bolivarian Schools Project is intended to respond to problems such as dropping out, educational exclusion, repetition, malnutrition, and loss of local, regional and national identity, and to the search for citizens interested in economic and social transformation. The Bolivarian Schools Project sets four guiding principles for Venezuelan schools:

- promote social transformation and strengthen national identity and democratic participation;
- provide integral educational for social justice;
- contribute to the campaign against educational exclusion;
- participate in community activities.

To put these principles into practice, the government has defined the following means:

- a full school day;
- integrated school meal and health services;
- refurbishment of existing school buildings and construction of new ones;
- appropriate and adequate funding;
- curricular reorganisation within a system of life-long education;
- development of school management techniques;
- integration into the community;
- development of research, evaluation and supervision.

The evolution of school building in Venezuela

The four principles above are guiding the current phase in the evolution of school building in Venezuela, which has reflected official education policy over the course of time.

The first phase began in 1870 with the enactment of free and compulsory public education on the unitary school principle, with one teacher per school. During the period from 1899 to 1908, the grade school concept was introduced, with several classrooms and teachers being grouped together in the same building. Rather than being the rule, this arrangement was the exception up to the fall of the dictatorship in 1935.

In the second phase, lasting from 1936 to 1948, years in which the country was opened up to democracy, schools were designed and built to take into account the concepts of space, function, educational level and matriculation. These schools, designed by important architects of the period, reflected the transformation of the educational system and were instrumental in improving students' mental and physical development.

The democratic period returned in 1958, together with the idea of mass education. Economical building systems that made rational use of easily transportable structural elements were developed to bring education to the remotest parts of the country.

In 1976, during the fourth phase, the Foundation for Educational Buildings and Grants (*Fundación de Edificaciones y Dotaciones Educativas*) or "FEDE" was established to take care of school building requirements. Initially, in order to eliminate the shortage of classroom space, FEDE established a policy of mass school construction under an experimental pilot programme, using prefabricated buildings in order to speed up school production.

The schools built during these phases constitute the main network of state buildings. However, a policy of accelerated decentralisation led to school buildings being built, extended and refurbished to inferior standards. The decentralisation policy was based on financial considerations and lacked a proper process of delegation of authority and transfer of expertise. This was combined with a lack of suitable maintenance arrangements and resulted in the aesthetic, environmental and functional deterioration of the physical plant installed.

Today's reform

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, through FEDE, is now reforming the school system using the Bolivarian Schools Project. FEDE is implementing a "Strategy for an Efficient Education Infrastructure", which establishes a process to cover the various phases of school

building provision, namely: planning, programming, design, construction and maintenance.

This strategy revolves around the concept of risk management. Although it is not always possible to avoid disasters, lives can be saved and damage limited by taking preventive and impact-reducing action. This approach is indispensable in formulating and carrying out plans, programmes and projects for investment in the education sector, since reducing the vulnerability of the educational infrastructure is fundamental for achieving sustainable national development.

Accordingly, FEDE is developing a new policy based on sharing responsibility between the government, schools and communities for maintenance, risk prevention, mitigation and preparedness in the face of disaster situations. The objective is to restore optimum operating conditions for school buildings and ensure their capacity to function through a process of co-management by national, regional and local government and an education community authorised to participate in the processes.

FEDE is also planning and implementing such measures as:

- Developing an educational infrastructure information system in association with a geographical information system, in order to keep abreast of the latest situation, identify what needs to be changed and what needs to be done to change it.
- Reviewing and updating space requirements to establish, quantitatively and qualitatively, the amount and type of space required.
- Reviewing and updating classroom standards and specifications, which include planning, maintenance and risk management processes.
- Designing new model functional and organisational units.
- Building new classrooms and upgrading existing ones.
- Sharing responsibility for the maintenance of the educational infrastructure.

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