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# Chile's Revolution of the Penguins:

## Potential & Prospects

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## **Introduction**

It has been more than a year since the massive student protests in Chile broke out. In late May 2006, thousands of high-school students organized a series of demonstrations to voice their demands relating to a number of educational issues with a particular focus on equity reform. The students had a set of short-term and long-term demands ranging from free bus passes to replacing key education laws. These demonstrations turned into a movement called the Revolution of the Penguins (La Revolución de los Pingüinos) named for the dark and white uniforms resembling penguins that the Chilean students wear. The movement gained outside support from university students, teacher unions, parents and other groups. The generally peaceful action that students took included marches, strikes, assemblies, negotiations and occupations of school buildings. At the peak of the national strike, the estimations of the number of students who participated were between more than 600,000 and close to one million. It is considered to be the largest Chilean student protest in the past three decades.

In early June, the students decided to end the “tomas”, school takeovers, strikes, and other collective actions to resume classes. This decision was preceded by extensive media coverage and a number of government responses to the protesters and their demands. With a national crisis of this scale, the government was forced to respond to the students’ actions. The President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, as well as other key members of the Cabinet, issued televised speeches, addressing the educational issues and concerns of the protesters. This opened up a series of dialogues and negotiations between the government officials and student leaders.

Since it is too soon to determine the deep and indirect effects of the Revolution of the Penguins, my research addressed some of the immediate effects that have manifested directly from the student movement. I focused on the government's responses and mass media coverage of the student movement, with the aim of understanding the potential of this movement to contribute to long-lasting educational change. Altbach (1989), a North American scholar offers a comparative perspective on student political activism by drawing on examples across the globe. One of Altbach's conclusions is that "effective movements depend on external circumstances for their success---on the media and on acceptance by powerful forces of the influence and legitimacy of the activist movement" (p. 108). My research evaluates the potential of the Revolution of the Penguins to stir long-term educational change, applying Altbach's work as my conceptual framework. My research question is two-part:

- What is the potential of the 2006 Chilean student movement to serve as a catalyst for equitable educational change and reform in Chile?
- How do the students' recommendations for equity reform compare with the government's previous initiatives?

My thesis argues that the potential of the Chilean student movement to lead to significant, equitable educational reform is very high due to extensive coverage by the media and major responses from the government. My research shows that the educational reforms proposed by the students differ from previous educational reforms fundamentally since the student movement has called for drastic, systemic changes that would restructure the entire educational system.

This is a significant topic in educational studies because it examines the relationship between student activism and educational change. More specifically, my research focuses on student protests and its ability to create educational reform by eliciting media and in particular, government responses. Studying the Revolution of the Penguins in Chile and the way it affected government actions, will give insight to the effectiveness of protesting in general, as a means of bringing about educational reform.

In context of Chile, a country that is in the process of re-democratization, this research will shed light on how students can become key political actors and exercise their civic power in a participatory democracy. Furthermore, this research will not only try to project the impact of the student movement on educational reform, but in broader terms will offer a perspective on how citizens (not only students) can participate in the process of re-democratization in Chile (as well as other states that are young democracies or transitioning to democracy).

Examining how the students' recommendations for equity reform differ from previous government initiatives is crucial. In the past, particularly in the 1990's, the Chilean government implemented reforms aimed at improving quality and reducing inequity in schooling, but many were not successful. Past governments and students both expressed their desire for equitable education, but their conceptions on how to achieve this goal vary markedly. Comparing the students' proposals to past government reforms will help gauge the potential of the movement to lead to long-lasting, equitable reform.

There are a few other reasons why this is an important topic that are unique to the context of Chile. The study of the student movement is significant because it generated the biggest national education strike since 1972, thereby also making it the biggest

education strike since the return to democracy in 1990 (Pavez, 2007, May 30). It is particularly interesting to examine the student movement because it was led by high school students, some as young as fourteen years old. These high school students were characterized as apolitical, self-interested, and a consumer generation by society. Yet, these young people clearly disproved this perception. Lastly, this generation is unique since it is the first cohort of students who were raised in a post-Pinochet, democratic Chile. Students have a sense of the rights to which democracy entitles them by not having experienced the authoritarian and repressive years of the dictatorship. Lastly, this subject is timely and relevant as the dialogue of change continues today.

### **Literature Review**

Most of the published work on the student protest movement of 2006 has been from mass media sources. The few scholarly, published articles have been from Chilean scholars and are primarily in Spanish. Gallardo (2006) analyzes how the protest movement both disrupted and influenced the Chilean political scene and its significance as part of social resistance to Chile's neo-liberal model. She asserts that the ability of the student movement to enter the realm of national politics was due to its large size and its highly sophisticated organizational structure. She credits the student movement for developing their larger demand which attacked the overall repressive neo-liberal system and its influence on educational policy.

Gómez Leyton (2006) argues that the massive student mobilizations created a new type of social movement in Chile. Gómez Leyton describes the Chilean educational system in its neo-liberal context and the structural changes that were necessary to fit this

model. He asserts that a new social conflict was generated by the rejection of the presence of neo-liberalism in the educational system.

Similarly, Alarcón-Ferrari (2006) analyzes the student movement through the history of neo-liberal transformations that occurred in Chile, and its effect on the educational system and its social consequences. He explains that under these transformations, education became a commodity in the marketplace which solidified and exacerbated existing socioeconomic inequalities.

There has been significant research conducted on the government's educational reforms in Chile. Delannoy (2000) conducted a thorough evaluation of education reforms in Chile from 1980-1998 for the World Bank. One of Delannoy's findings was that more attention needed to be given to school and classroom processes rather than efficiency and structural reforms to increase equity. Also, she argues that "improving equity requires targeted approaches to protect the vulnerable." ( p.5)

Likewise, García-Huidobro (2000) offers an analysis of key Chilean government reform measures to increase equity in education from 1990-1998. He concludes that the government compensatory programs of the 1990s, which were based on positive discrimination to improve schooling in vulnerable areas (rural and low-performing schools), were generally positive and successful. His study offers two proposals for bettering equity reform measures. One suggestion is to introduce sliding subsidies, in which greater amount of funds would be given to those who are neediest. García-Huidobro's second proposal is "to improve and strengthen regulations governing institutions that work with public funds so as not to ignore the needs of the poorest in society." (p. 175)

Schiefelbein & Schiefelbein (2000) also examined Chilean government policies of the 1990s that were geared toward improving quality and increasing equity in schools. Their evaluation of the reforms is less favorable and focuses on the teaching-learning process. They criticize government reforms for not being extensive and suggest that strategies involving non-traditional pedagogy would benefit students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Arellano (2001), a former Minister of Education in Chile offers an analysis of key educational reforms in Chile. He concludes that most of the government reform efforts have been successful, yet emphasizes that the results of reforms are not realized in short periods of time.

The scholarly research on the Revolution of the Penguins is heavily concentrated on the analysis of the movement through the neo-liberal lens or the implications it has for creating new political actors and new forms of citizenship in Chile. The literature does not examine the potential of it to stimulate equitable educational reform, nor compares it to past reform strategies aimed at reducing inequity directly.

My study also draws on research of student activism among university students. As mentioned earlier, Altbach (1989), a North American scholar argues that student activist movements depend on external factors such as the media and the government for their success. According to Altbach, in order for a movement to be effective, it relies on the media and powerful forces of influence, such as the government to confer legitimacy to the movement and its demands. His work focuses on university student movements across the globe. Altbach's work serves as an analytical framework for understanding the potential of a student movement, but is limited in that it refers to university students. His



viewpoint is also restrictive in that it is not specific to the Latin American or Chilean socio-political context.

### **Methodology**

To investigate the first question, “What is the potential of the Chilean student protest movement to serve as a catalyst for equitable educational change and reform?” I examined the media coverage and the government-issued responses. My primary sources were Chilean newspaper articles and government speeches and documents from the Government of Chile.

The Chilean newspaper articles were drawn from three sources: La Nación (government-owned), El Mercurio (conservative), and La Tercera (conservative) because they are widely distributed and read newspapers. The purpose of examining newspaper articles was to gather information about what was happening on a daily basis, roughly from late April 2006 and early June 2006 and to investigate the nature of the media coverage. I analyzed how the student movement was portrayed (both in descriptions of the student activity and photos). I also made note of the amount and frequency of coverage the students actions received to see how that in itself could have contributed to the legitimacy of the movement. The newspaper articles also were informative as to how the government responded.

To further my understanding of how the government reacted to the student protests, I examined major speeches and comments made by the President and the Minister of Education regarding the student movement. President Bachelet and Minister of Education, Martín Zúñiga were the main officials that represented the government concerning this matter. I analyzed the overall tone, how the events and the students’

actions were interpreted and analyzed, and what was promised to be done. Based on these factors, I was able to determine if the government had legitimized the student movement.

To develop an understanding of recent past educational reforms in Chile, I examined the Chilean Ministry of Education website for documents and statistics on past initiatives aimed at reducing inequity. I also relied heavily on secondary sources that had analyzed past educational reforms that were implemented by the Chilean government of the 1990s. I chose to focus on the educational reforms from the 1990s because during this time, the Chilean government directed its educational policy and reform strategies on improving quality and increasing equity in the system. Therefore, it made sense to compare the government policy during this time, to the students' recommendations for reform since they both were aimed at similar objectives.

### **Historical Context**

In the larger Latin American context, student activism has long been a part of the region's political history (Levy, 1991). In Chile, this is no exception where there is a history of student activism especially among university students. At the Universidad de Chile, the oldest public university in Chile, the student federation has traditionally been a strong political actor in affecting higher education reform, as well as other, national political issues (Bonilla, 1960). Although university students have been the primary leaders of student organizing and movements in Chile, secondary students have also played a role in national politics.

In mid-1980's there was a large secondary student movement against Pinochet and the military regime. Similar to the Revolution of the Penguins, students took over

school buildings and organized demonstrations, held assemblies and marched in the streets. Interestingly, students in the 1980s were protesting against some of the same neo-liberal structures that students in 2006 were. For instance, secondary students made strong objections to the privatization and municipalization of education (Bustos & Leiva, 2004).

The Comité PRO-FESES (Comité Pro- Federación de Estudiantes Secundarios Students) was a key organization in the mass mobilizations in the 1980s, composed of student leaders from various political orientations (Bustos & Leiva, 2004). Similarly, the Revolution of the Penguins was primarily led by the organization ACES (La Asamblea de Coordinadora Estudiantes Secundarios), which was made up of vocal student leaders with strong political affiliations.

Although there are similarities between these secondary student movements, the national political context in the 1980s was completely different. Because it was during the dictatorship, the students were also trying to resist and destabilize the military regime through their mobilizations. They were fighting for the return to democracy in Chile. Another important difference is that during the years of Pinochet, students' lives were threatened and some were not only detained, but disappeared and subsequently murdered.

Since the return of democracy in Chile in 1990, there have been protests and demonstrations that secondary students have participated in and led. However, none of these collective actions can compare to the events that embodied the Revolution of the Penguins of 2006.

## **Revolution of the Penguins**

Before I go into the analysis of the student movement, and its potential to stir lasting educational change, I will briefly describe the major events that marked 2006 Revolution of the Penguins. It is hard to determine exactly when the student movement began. However, in late April there was the first initial demonstration in which students vocalized small demands. After news of an increase to the PSU (la Prueba Selección Universitaria), the test required for admission to a university, and the possibility of a new restriction of student transportation passes (Pase Escolar), a couple thousand students marched en masse to the Ministry of Education in downtown Santiago, protesting against these changes. The demands turned into requesting that the Pase Escolar and PSU be given for free.

Soon after students initial demands were expressed, secondary students continued with new demonstrations and began to incorporate bigger, long-term demands. The major long-term demands were the revision of the Full School Day, Jornada Escolar Completa (JEC) and the repeal of a the law known as “la LOCE” ( Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza). The JEC law affects those in their third year to their eighth year in primary school and all four years of secondary school. A large component of this reform was the extension of the school day.

The law LOCE was passed on March 10, 1990, the last day of the Pinochet and the military dictatorship. This constitutional law basically solidified and ensured that previous market based education legislation passed during the dictatorship would be maintained after the return to democracy. The LOCE is the basic education law that structures the current system. It maintains the decentralized administration of the

Ministry of Education which dramatically reduced the role of the state, and put power into both private and public hands.

In Chile, there are three types of schools, municipal schools, private-subsidized schools and private schools. Both municipal and private subsidized schools receive government funds based on student enrollment numbers. Municipal schools are run by local municipalities and the private-subsidized schools are administered privately. The quality of education received at municipal schools is largely determined by the financial resources of a municipality, and therefore vary greatly. Private-subsidized schools, in addition to the funds passed through the state, can have additional endowments from the private administrator. Some private-subsidized schools charge their students additional tuition to attend schools. Private schools are financed by parents and run privately.

Through the ACES (la Asamblea Coordinadora de Estudiantes Secundarios), secondary students were able to organize collectively and articulate their demands. There were a handful of leaders of ACES who were secondary students from different schools with different political orientations (some were associated with leftist parties and others were center-right). Despite their differences in political ideology, these students were able to lead the student movement and negotiate with government officials. They were the main body that helped organize the national strikes. There were national strikes on May 10, 2006, May 30, 2006 and June 5, 2006. On June 9, the student assembly declared that the students' actions (school take-overs, protests, etc.) would end and on June 12, 2007 students returned to classes (Miranda, 2006). However, student leaders were adamant about continuing the continuing the student movement. One vocal student leader of ACES, Juan Carlos Herrera explained that by returning to classes, "we are not

demobilizing”, but instead, “it’s another way of expressing the mobilization” (La Nación, 2006, June 10).

The students decided to return to classes after major concessions had been made by the government. Not all of the demands were met as the students had wanted, but compromises on each of their primary demands were offered. Regarding the transportation pass, the President promised that only the neediest students (determined by income) would receive the pass for free. However, she announced that there would not be restrictions on the pass, and that all students could use the pass 24 hours 7 days a week during the school year. She also announced that 155 thousand students would be able to take the PSU exam for free (those pertaining to the lowest four quintiles of income). In terms of the larger demands, Bachelet said that she would create a Presidential Advisory Council on Education that would include 6 secondary students, among other representatives (university students, teachers, educational specialists, representatives from the Ministry of Education, etc) to discuss how to improve the quality of education. In addition, she promised that the JEC would be revised and that the law LOCE would be modified through a proposal sent to Congress (Government of Chile, 2006)

### **Analysis and interpretation**

#### *Role of the Media*

The role of the media during the student movement was very complex. The responses from newspapers both legitimized and de-legitimized the efforts of the students. The most significant way in which the newspapers contributed to the de-legitimization of the students demands was through its violent portrayal. This was very clear through the photos that were used to represent the movement negatively and placed

prominently next to the articles. This strategy was used particularly at the beginning of the student movement, before the students demands had developed. Yet, even after the student movement had organized, the media seemed to exaggerate the destructive behavior whenever such incidents occurred. Many of the photos showed students with their faces covered, destructing property, throwing rocks and fighting with the police and essentially were criminalizing them. These images misrepresented the student movement as a whole by highlighting the destructive behavior of a minority of students. (See Appendix A for a sampling of photos taken from Chilean newspapers).

The photos were not the only way in which the newspapers were able to depict the Revolution of the Penguins as violent. Headlines of articles centered on the violent aspects of the student activity. Inflammatory newspaper article titles referring to the number of students who were detained during a protest or rally frequently recurred when possible. For instance, “Student march to Ministry of Education ends with 47 detained.”<sup>1</sup> (La Tercera, 2006, April 26), “More than 600 students detained in student march” (La Nación, Chávez, 2006, May 5) and “The police has detained 34 for disruptions in Santiago” (El Mercurio, 2006, June 5). These types of headlines were detrimental to the students’ mobilizations since they emphasized the negative and violent images of students, which were not representative of the overall student movement. Headlines of this nature appeared throughout May and June, 2006 but were particularly evident in the beginning of the coverage of the student movement and after big demonstrations.

The newspaper articles also contributed to the violent portrayal of the student movement by describing in detail incidents of belligerent behavior. For instance, one

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<sup>1</sup> All of the translations from Spanish to English are my translations.

article entitled, “Student protest ends with more than a thousand detained in the country” has a subheading of “Incidents”, and describes where the major fights occurred. The article describes damage that was done on the day of a national student strike, “In this sector they [the students] generated serious clashes with the police, who used water cannons and tear gas to disperse them. But one or two [students] re-assembled the demonstration. In the middle of this disorder, more than 300 students were arrested and four officials were left with injuries.” (La Nación, 2006, May 10)

The photos featured in newspapers did not only show violent, negative images of the secondary students. In fact, the images of the repressive tactics used by the police to tame and detain these teenage students (ages 14-18) worked in their favor. Such brutal behavior by the police was seen as excessive and generated criticism by society and subsequently the government. Photos also highlighted students engaging in peaceful demonstrations with their messages on banners, particularly as the student movement began to organize more strategically. As the movement advanced to engaging in dialogue and negotiating with top officials, the photos reflected this change. Key members of ACES were photographed giving speeches and attending meetings with government officials. Through extensive media coverage, the main leaders of ACES became national figures. In contrast to the pictures of students vandalizing and damaging property, these photos were able to portray a more accurate documentation of the Revolution of the Penguins. (See Appendix B for a sampling of such photos).

There was a shift in the language of newspaper article headlines as the process of negotiation became more serious. Headlines began to capture the summary of the day’s occurrences more accurately. For example, “Government agrees to engage in dialogue



with mobilizing students and revise LOCE”(La Nación, Pavéz & Concha, 2006, May 26), “Zilic starts to negotiate with mobilized secondary schools” (Vitalic & Agencias, 2006, May 25) and “Students give ultimatum to government” (Aránguiz & Morales, 2006, May 31). When the newspapers started to cover the student activity in more descriptive terms, it helped communicate the petitions of the students.

Similar to the photos and the headlines, the content of newspaper articles shifted from primarily covering violent aspects to addressing the other forms of student activity. Newspapers reported on the progress of the student movement covering daily activities, especially the negotiations between student leaders and Ministry of Education officials. For instance, one article reports, “After almost seven hours of a meeting between the secondary student leaders and the government representatives, the students announced that they did not receive new proposal from the authorities and that they did not reach an agreement.” (La Tercera, 2006, June 1). Most importantly, the newspapers also captured the students’ perspectives through quoting leaders of ACES. In one article, a key member of ACES explains that, “The meetings of the Ministry of Education have been meetings of dialogue in which they have not reached concrete solutions, and based on this, we are proposing to continue with the mobilizations until we arrive at a negotiation that is favorable for us.” (La Tercera, 2006, May 7).

The coverage of the student movement was mixed and can be characterized by its emphasis on violent depictions of the students. However, the significant amount and high frequency of the coverage in a way served as legitimization of the students actions. Newspaper articles were placed prominently in the National and Society sections of the paper and updates on this issue were given daily (during the most intense moments of the

negotiation). Therefore, through its extensive reporting, newspapers indicated that this was an important and worthy subject matter in Chile, thus legitimizing the student movement.

### *The response of the Chilean government*

The government did not have a uniform reaction to the students' actions and their responses changed over time. First, the government did not take the students' demands seriously despite rhetoric which claimed the opposite. In response to the initial protests, the government, represented by Minister of Education Martín Zilic, consistently reiterated the government's willingness to negotiate with the students, yet always noted that it needed to be done without violence. A recurring theme was the emphasis on non-violent approaches to dialogue and negotiation. For instance, on May 8, 2007, he asked that students mobilize, "with calmness, with tranquility and without violence", although recognizing their right to organize (La Nacion, 2006, May 8). Officials of the Ministry of Education began to meet with representatives of the student organization ACES, but they weren't coming to solutions that both parties could agree on. Therefore, the student mobilizations continued to occur.

After the first national mobilization of students on May 10, 2007, the government responded denouncing not only the violence, but of the protests themselves. The Secretary General of Chile commented,

"lo que no nos parece razonable ni maduro, es sentarse a conversar y en medio de la conversación, llamar a protestas. Tampoco parece responsable pretender ejercer un derecho que está reconocido, que es expresarse, y al mismo tiempo eludir la responsabilidad respecto de las consecuencias del llamado a movilizarse." (What does not seem reasonable nor mature, is to sit down to converse and in the middle of the conversation, call for protest. Nor does it seem responsible to try to exercise a right that is recognized,

that is to express oneself, and at the same time to avoid the responsibility concerning the consequences of calling to mobilize)(La Nación, 2006, May 18).

This rhetoric was in contradiction to what the government had previously stated in terms of protesting since it had recognized their right to protest peacefully. Later, as the situation escalated despite negotiations, Martín Zilic announced that he would only engage in dialogue with schools that were not on strike or taken over. He announced, “A todos los dirigentes estudiantiles que no estén en paro, porque no se puede dialogar bajo presiones(To all those student leaders who are not on strike, because one cannot engage in dialogue under pressure.)” (La Nación, 2006, May 24). Organizing protests and demonstrations were recognized as legitimate ways of collective organization, but now the government was threatening this democratic right.

Denouncing of violent student action continued and this was evident in the President’s annual speech to Congress and the nation given on May 21, 2006. In this speech she talks about citizenship and the rights granted to citizens of democracy, but emphasizes that it must be done in a constructive, non-violent way. She alludes to the collective action taken by students, but does not name them or address their demands. Instead, the focus is negative and on the disruption it has caused, which indirectly sent a message to the secondary students that the government was not taking their demands seriously. The President declared,

Porque este es el gobierno **de** los ciudadanos y **para** los ciudadanos. Los próximos años serán decisivos. Se trata de consolidar una sociedad que no sólo reconoce libertades, sino que las defiende y las promueve. Un Estado que no sólo enumera derechos, sino que los garantiza a todos sus ciudadanos. Quiero ciudadanos críticos, conscientes, que planteen sus ideas y sus reivindicaciones. Pero esa crítica debe hacerse con un espíritu constructivo, con propuestas sobre la mesa y, lo más importante, a cara

descubierta y sin violencia. Quiero ser muy clara: lo que hemos visto en semanas recientes es inaceptable. ¡No toleraré el vandalismo, ni los destrozos, ni la intimidación a las personas! Aplicaré todo el rigor de la ley. La democracia la ganamos con la cara descubierta y debemos continuar con la cara descubierta.

(I want critical, conscious citizens that propose their ideas and demands. But the criticism must be made with a constructive spirit, with proposals on the table, and most importantly, with a uncovered face and without violence. I want to be very clear: what we have seen in in recent weeks is unacceptable. I will not tolerate vandalism, nor damage, nor intimidation! I will apply all of the severity of the law. We won democracy with an uncovered face and we must continue with an uncovered face.) (Government of Chile, 2006)

After continued negotiations between the secondary student leaders and government officials, the government offered major concessions and what it called “lo maximo esfuerzo”, the maximum effort. This was expressed by the President who delivered a speech on national television on June 1st. She declared,

Hoy es el momento de la reforma de la calidad en la educación. En estos días, la movilización de los estudiantes secundarios ha puesto la mirada de toda la sociedad en la educación y sus desafíos. Esta es una gran oportunidad para generar nuevos y más amplios consensos. .. El gobierno ha escuchado las peticiones de los escolares, porque éste es un gobierno que dialoga, y después de escuchar y dialogar, decide. He resuelto tomar nuevas medidas para garantizar que nuestros jóvenes estudien tranquilos y en buenas condiciones favorable conditions.

Today is the moment of quality reform in education. In the past days, the mobilization of secondary students has placed the attention of all of society on education and its challenges. This is a big opportunity to generate new and wide consensus. The government has listened to the petitions of the students, because this is a government that engages in dialogue and after listening and conversing, decides. I have decided to take new measures to guarantee that our young people study under tranquil and in favorable conditions. (Government of Chile, 2006)

The rhetoric in this speech was markedly different than in her speech to the nation a week earlier. Unlike her previous speech, she acknowledges the student mobilizations and the

petitions that the students have made. She admits that educational reform needs to be made in Chile and offers major concessions to all of the students' demands.

The President's commitment to the students' demands were sealed and restated in a letter issued by the Minister Zilic addressed to all Chileans. The language and format of the memo was written in very formal Spanish language, which demonstrated respect for the students and their concerns. Echoing the President's words, Zilic expressed,

No podemos ser complacientes con la enorme disparidad que hoy existe en la calidad de la educación que reciben nuestros niños y jóvenes, pues ello compromete las oportunidades de vida...Por ello somos sensibles a los planteamientos que ustedes nos han hecho llegar. En conjunto hemos desarrollado la agenda corta y larga. (We cannot be complacent in the huge disparity that exists today in the quality of education that our children and youth receive, since it compromises the opportunities of life that they will have in life...Por that reason we are sensitive to the approaches that you have made us reach. As a group, we have developed the short-term and long-term agenda) (Government of Chile, 2006)

Like President Bachelet, Minister Zilic acknowledges that there are issues of inequity in the Chilean education system and that action needs to take place. Zilic also credits the students for having brought these issues to the attention of the government.

Ultimately the government legitimized the student demands completely by responding to the students through formal negotiations. The government considered all the demands, and was willing to compromise on many of the issues. After listing all of the promised measures the government would take, Bachelet stated firmly,

“Este es el esfuerzo adicional que hará mi gobierno. Es un esfuerzo macizo, con un aporte cuantioso de recursos públicos, con cientos de miles, y en algunos casos de millones de beneficiados, pero también es un esfuerzo realista, porque yo no hago promesas que después no se puedan cumplir” (This is the additional effort that my government will make. It's a solid effort, with substantial contributions of public resources, with hundreds of thousands, and in some cases millions of

beneficiaries, but it's also a realistic effort, because I do not make promises that after I cannot fulfill. (Government of Chile, 2006)

The fact that the government in response to the student strike made these concessions would lead one to believe that there is a high potential that the success of the Revolution of the Penguins will create lasting educational reform.

### **Comparison to Past Reforms**

During the 1990's the Chilean government placed education as a national priority. In 1990, rates of enrollment for both primary and secondary schools in Chile were relatively high, nearly 100% of children attended primary school and over 75% of the school-aged population attended secondary schools (secondary education was not mandatory at the time) (García-Huidobro, 2000). Therefore, the government's policy was not focused on achieving full coverage of education, but on quality education and particularly equity reform. Arellano (2001) a former Minister of Education from 1996-2000 notes, "The strategy of greater equity in the educational improvement initiatives of the early 1990's and the reforms announced in 1996 always sought to give priority to the students with the greatest needs" (p.89-90). Delannoy (2000) echoes this statement and notes that the government directed its reform for the most vulnerable sector and "took significant steps to target resources toward low-income communities and children" (p.15).

Many of the programs and strategies that were implemented to increase equity in the Chilean educational system were geared towards primary schools. A major reform strategy to improve secondary school education was a program called MECE Media, which was developed after a primary school reform called (Mejoramiento de la Equidad

y de la Calidad de la Educación-Improvement of the Equity and the Quality of Education). This reform was implemented in 1995 and was a joint effort between the World Bank and Government of Chile. The program focused on improving infrastructure and providing material needs to schools. The reasoning behind this type of reform was that “the school system was not immediately ready, technically or psychologically, for pedagogical innovations. Therefore, the MINEDUC strategy concentrated on the schools and classrooms, improving their material conditions and giving them gradual exposure to new processes.” (Delannoy, 2000, p.16). While this strategy provided schools that were lacking in resources with needed materials, the reform did not attack deeper issues.

Part of the MECE campaign another reform program was introduced in 1992 called ENLACES (Interlinks/Linkages). ENLACES was introduced to give access to students and teachers of new forms of information technology and communication at schools. This program is still in existence and has closed the digital gap in schools all over Chile. In 2000, all secondary schools had been equipped with computer laboratories (Arellano, 2000).

The Jornada Escolar Completa (JEC) was another core educational reform introduced in 1996. Its main feature was the extension of the school day for both primary and secondary education. However, there were also changes made concerning the curricular framework of schools and the teacher practices. According to a document on the JEC issued by the Ministry of Education, it states that the objective of the reform is “To contribute to the improvement of the quality of education and to make equal the learning opportunities of boys, girls and adolescence of the whole country, to increase in a significant manner the pedagogical times with the purpose/intention to better develop

the new curricular framework.” (MINEDUC) The objectives for the new curricular framework included critical thinking skills and other higher-order competencies. Concerning teachers’ practices, the government introduced a number of incentives for teachers to pursue non-traditional pedagogical methods (Delannoy, 2000).

The student’s proposals for equity reform were varied and included both simple and large requests. In terms of the short-term demands, students were asking for free transportation passes and for the fee for the PSU university exam to be waived. The students’ bigger demands were the revision of the JEC and the repeal of the law LOCE (an important law that structures the current organization of the educational system). Concerning the law LOCE, students were asking for the end of privatization and the end to municipalization.

The end of privatization would eliminate the whole private-subsidized sector. In 2006, there were 1,699,006 schools administered privately in Chile, out of a total number of 3,645,645 schools. In 2006, approximately 43% of secondary education establishments were private-subsidized schools (MINEDUC Statistics) Needless to say, privatization would dramatically alter the schooling in Chile. Ending the governance of schools through local municipalities would initiate another major change. Such a change would centralize the administration of education and the Ministry of Education would no longer play a subsidiary role in the provision of education. In essence, students were petitioning for the radical restructuring of the entire educational system.

The students’ recommendations for equity reform differ drastically from past government initiatives since the students are calling for systemic, structural changes.



Reforms such as MECE and ENLACES provide material goods (whether it be computers or textbooks) as the solution to improve equity. These approaches may help in reducing the gap in resources across schools to some degree, but are not significant enough to adequately reduce other existing inequalities between schools. Schiefelbein and Schiefelbein agree and assert that, “the government’s education improvement programs are not designed to make substantive changes, and are therefore, not effective” (2000, p. 197). The government’s JEC reform has been the subject of criticism because it has not been worked in application. Despite increases in subsidies, many schools still do not have the resources to fully provide extra classes that the extended day schedule requires. Instead, for many students the number of hours in school has increased but gains in the quality have not been seen. Because the student’s proposals are calling for large structural reforms to the educational system, it is more likely to lead to long-lasting change because the changes will be extensive.

### **Conclusion:**

Based on my analysis of the media and the government’s response to the 2006 Revolution of the Penguin, I conclude that there is great promise for future equitable educational reform in Chile. The strong and extensive coverage of the students’ activity in newspapers helped communicate and publicize the concerns of the student movement to the general public. Furthermore, by intensely reporting the development of the student movement, newspapers contributed to the legitimacy of the students actions. Documenting the student activity meant that the story was newsworthy and deserved attention.

The government's response shifted over time, but in the end added to the legitimacy of the student movement. The government conferred power to the movement by agreeing to negotiate and engage in dialogue with student leaders. This response suggested that the students' positions were important and recognized them as a significant population of society. The most compelling legitimization of the student movement was when the President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet issued nationally televised speech attending to the students' concerns regarding the quality and equity of education. The President promised major concessions to the students' demands and this was the ultimate legitimization of the student movement. The potential of the Revolution of the Penguins to serve as a catalyst for equitable change is great due to the extensive responses it generated from both media and the government.

After an analysis of past Chilean government initiatives aimed at increasing equity, it is clear that the government and the students' recommendations differ fundamentally. In the 1990's, the equity reforms were largely based on providing material resources to schools. In contrast, students' recommendations for equity reform address the issues of unequal resources through drastic structural changes. Large changes would be made to the administration and governance of education by ending privatization and municipalization of schools. Past government reforms have not challenged or altered the basic neo-liberal structures that make up the education system created by Pinochet during the dictatorship. If the students' demands for educational change were implemented, the Chilean educational system would literally be *re-formed*. Since past measures have not achieved desired results, perhaps the students' sweeping

recommendations for equity reform are the answers to the long-lasting educational change in Chile. The results remain to be seen as the dialogue of change continues.

Appendix A  
Images from La Nación



El Mercurio



La Tercera



Appendix B:  
Images from La Nación



El Mercurio



La Tercera





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