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Publication date
2011

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Lopes Cardozo, T. A. (2011). *Future teachers and social change in Bolivia: between decolonisation and demonstration*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam]. Eburon.

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Bolivian Normales as a socio-political battle field – institutional opportunities and obstacles to transformation

'The transformation of Bolivian education has to start with changing the Normales'
Ministry departmental director of Teacher Education (101:7), May 2010

6.1 Introduction

Photo 7. Protesting youngsters and parents in front of the MoE, La Paz

After a morning of meetings in the teacher education department and the financial department of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in May 2010, I walk down the stairs as I see a group of protesters in front of the gate (Photo 7). '*The police have arrived to make sure they do not enter the building*', a staff member assures me, as he sees me taking this picture, *'for weeks in a row these applicants for the Normal are coming here to protest. They were not accepted, and now they even take their mothers to help them shout. But they do not understand we do not need everyone to become a teacher, we will have too many!'* I leave the MoE and convince the guards to let me through the gate. Suddenly, the group starts to move slowly towards a close-by square. As I am interested to hear about the reasons and opinions of these applicants and their mothers to keep on protesting, I decide to follow the crowd. While walking, one of the mothers explains *'these young people got very high marks for their entrance exams, senorita, they are struggling now for three months already*'. Dynamite explodes; we have to stop as we cannot hear each other for a few seconds. A young man continues, *'we are with 430 postulantes (applicants) here, who should have been accepted and allowed a position in the Normales. And it is the same situation at the national level. These demonstrations continue as well in Oruro, in Cochabamba, in Santa Cruz, all over the country*'. The crowd gathers in the square where a young woman starts to address the crowd: *'How long do we have to continue this struggle? When are they going to take us seriously? We were*

standing in front, and they have punched us in the stomach, and many of you did not come to help us. If you come here, you have to fight! We will stay the whole year if we need to!' [123]

Since education is perceived as one of the few options to escape a life of economic insecurity, entering one of the Normales becomes the main driving force behind peoples' strategies of demonstration, protest and hunger strikes. Many of these young protestors are simultaneously in favour of Morales' political project, while they also fiercely protest against the measures taken in the education sector, in this case the limited spaces that are opened up in the teacher training institutes. This dual position is illustrative for the positions of many of Bolivia's educators, who face a very complex political situation in which various stakeholders play powerful roles. This tense socio-political state of affairs and political power plays are also reflected in Bolivia's Normales, constituting a socio-political 'battle field' where political affiliations, union strategies and historically embedded institutional cultures all influence the way new generations of teachers are trained, and the way policy initiatives are mediated and adopted.

Changing Bolivia's teacher training institutes as a first step in transforming and decolonising the education system is by no means an easy undertaking. While research on Bolivian (teacher) education tended to focus on the exclusionary nature of many Normales in terms of linguistic and cultural issues (see for instance Speiser, 2000: 228-229), this chapter tries to take this discussion a step further, by portraying both a detailed list of institutional challenges, yet also a changing political and societal context and possible niches for change at the level of the Normales. This chapter specifically aims to set out the contemporary issues of the institutional governance of teacher education in Bolivia, showing how the Normales constitute a tense socio-political battle field. Building on the historical overview presented in chapter 4, this chapter takes up the more recent and continuing issues and debates on Bolivia's Normales. First, I briefly highlight the picture of 'bad governance' of the Normales that is apparent in the few studies that have been conducted so far. I continue by exploring the micro-scale mechanisms of the institutional cultures of the two case studies. Following up on the demonstration at the beginning of this chapter, I continue to explain the reasons for the continuing struggles to enter the Normales. The following part reveals continuing institutional and beyond-institutional obstacles and opportunities to the transformation of these institutes, as part of Bolivia's wider politics of change. Consequently, the chapter pays specific attention to the most important, yet contested, attempts for change in Bolivian Normales from 2000 onwards, including the struggles around universities' administration of several Normales from 2000-2005, and the recent process of '*institucionalización*', which has been initiated to reorganise the Normales and its staff. The chapter continues to discuss the potential niches for transformation of the ASEP reform. Finally, I use the case of the PDI (*Practica Docente e Investigación* – the internship and research practice) course to analyse in more detail the obstacles and potentials of a discursively, seemingly promising Social Justice Teacher Education (SJTE) device. As argued in the former chapter, on a discursive level many parts of the ASEP reform envision a unified, decolonised, high quality teacher education system that closely links to the international debates on SJTE. Yet, with this chapter I aim to illustrate how there is still a long way to travel to change the continuing old habits of the Normales and to put these new ideals of change into practice.

[123] Audio and video recordings, 4 May 2010.

The fragments below from my fieldwork notes (Box 5) illustrate how amidst a context of continuous institutional challenges, including insufficient buildings and materials, isolation from its surrounding community, forms of corruption, discrimination, traditional teaching styles and generally a rather conservative outlook – which are all discussed below – there are also initiatives that inspire change in the institutional context of the urban Normal, as is exemplified by Ramiro's and his new classmates' experiences in the newly started Aymara course.

Textbox 5. Aptapi in Ramiro's Aymara course

During the first week of my third visit to Bolivia I started to arrange several feedback discussions with students and trainers. In response, I received a text on my cell phone: '*Hola Mieke! Come to our Aymara course this Wednesday. Our 'profe' invites you to a discussion. And me and my 'compañeros' want to welcome you back with an Aptapi. You will let me know? Ramiro'*. We agreed that I would come the following Wednesday for the discussion and I curiously accepted the invitation to the 'Aptapi', a traditional indigenous communal meal.

During the first hour of the Aymara course I observed how the trainer made efforts to engage the students in active forms of participation. Still, he told me during the class, it is hard to have everyone engage at the same level, as some students had a more passive knowledge of the Aymara language than others, and they had to practice their pronunciation to become more confident in the discussion. In order to do so, the trainer demonstrated an Ayamara word, wrote it down on the blackboard and students, all seated in a big circle, would repeat the pronunciation one after the other. I was the last person in the row and with great anticipation the students awaited my turn, which received a good laugh. Ramiro seemed a different person in his new class. Compared to his rather shy attitude in the English classes I had seen him in so far, he had now developed into the class representative and one of the most well spoken Aymara students: '*Aymara is my language, and I am proud of it*'. During the second part of the class the trainer gave me the floor and excused himself, as he was very busy and would take advantage of me taking over the students so he could catch up with other work. During the feedback discussion, Ramiro and his classmates, as well as responding to some of the outcomes of my study, also reflected on the difference between their class and other courses in the Normal: *'We have a very special group, because we have all very consciously chosen to become Aymara teachers. We organise things together, like these Aptapi's, we do them more often. Also, we decorated our classroom, with 'Do not discriminate, we are all the same'* (see Photo 8).

When the sun started to set and the cold Andes wind entered through the thin classroom windows, one student put on some music and others started to unpack their contributions to the Aptapi (see Photo 10). In the middle of the classroom floor, a colourful carpet was filled with different types of yellow, white, pink and black dried potatoes, corn, dried fish from the Titicaca Lake, white cheese and boiled eggs. While we ate, the music varied from Bolivian folk songs to Hip Hop, reflecting the diverse cultural influences these future teachers identify with. However, it was only when *Los Kjarkas* started to play, that the students got up to dance the Bolivian *Tinku* dance.

Afterwards, Ramiro drove some of his colleagues and I back to the centre of the city in his taxi and, while managing the busy traffic effortlessly, he mentioned *'I am really happy I am now with my new colleagues in the Aymara course. It is still not easy, and we still feel isolated within the Normal. Most of our trainers, not the one of today, but many of them they do not even speak Aymara fluently. They do not give us the best trainers. And there is no culture of speaking Aymara in the Normal, so we also continue in Spanish most of the time. So it's hard, but at least we try'*.

Photo 8. Aymara course in Simón Bolívar

Photo 9. Students preparing the Aptapi

6.2 The story so far: bad governance in Normales

In general, and regardless of the huge numbers of candidates waiting to enter, Normales have quite a negative status in Bolivian society (e.g. 56:16) and literature. Interestingly, many of the observed and discussed problems in Normales nowadays are quite similar to the problems already mentioned by the Belgian Rouma, who founded the first Normal in Sucre at the beginning of the twentieth century, including: '*the scarce preparation of the postulantes, a lack of capacity of teacher trainers and a lack of teaching materials*' (Rouma 1931 in Del Granado Cosio, 2006: 5). Nowadays, the list of 'problems' is much longer. In this section I first discuss how these problems are portrayed in studies on Bolivia's teacher education institutes conducted so far.

A study of the quality of teacher education in 1999 showed a rather negative picture. There were cases of rural institutes where only 3% of the students performed 'satisfactory'. The Simón Bolívar came out best, but still with alarming results: the 'best performing' institute according to that report only had 28% of the students performing 'satisfactory' (Medicion de la Calidad 1999 in Lozada Pereira, 2004: 166). With regards to the urban institute Simón Bolívar, the MoE in that same year reported about a lack of maintenance of the buildings and sanitation, a gap between administrative and curricular developments, a lack of participation of students and trainers in institutional policy making or curriculum development, and a general lack of trust in the institute (Ministerio de Educación de Bolivia, 1999: 15-18, 21-22). A lack of institutional efficiency, time wasted by administrative staff because of lengthy reporting procedures and inadequate infrastructure of the Normales were also reported in 2002, in an external evaluation report of the Normales under the administration of Universities (Concha et al, 2002: 22, 27).

The 2004 UNESCO Report on Bolivian teacher education discussed the 'institutional weakness' of the Normales, which '*consists of a vertical and centralised administrative system, the continuation of traditional teaching practices, the lack of monitoring and the impossibility to access information on own resources. Besides, there is no regulated system of information processing, the system of acceptance of new students is not unified and not all trainers indeed have a Masters degree'* (Lozada Pereira, 2004: 122). Besides, as demonstrated by Lozada Pereira, the capacity to manage the institutes well was often

very low. He reports on arbitrary decisions made on time tables and appointments of new (sometimes incompetent) staff. 'Efficiency', 'quality' and innovation are not core concerns in the institutes as per this author. He continues by describing a situation that could be called institutional bad governance: '*the administrative processes are bureaucratic, heavy, vulnerable to corruption and old-fashioned. […] The conflicts in the country, particularly in the cities, result on the one hand in indifference and on the other hand a strong resistance [in the Normales]. As a result, traditionally the necessity of a rational and engaged organisation or the feeling of being part of a wider [national education] project have been ignored […resulting in] strikes, demonstrations and mobilisations'* (Lozada Pereira, 2004: 147).

More recently, a MoE staff member responsible for the teacher education sector wrote how '*Pre-service teacher education is a concern of everyone, considering its impact on society. Despite this societal importance it is not transforming fast enough because of many and complex variables involved. [This includes] for example changes in public education policies of succeeding governments; the difficulty of in-service teachers to change their 'habitus' acquired in their profession into more innovative pedagogical processes; the economic costs; and the lack of synchrony between the urgency of political pressure to obtain short term results and the time needed to implement scientific and technological knowledge. Generally speaking, transformation is a long and arduous process*' (Del Granado, 2011). This last statement, that institutional and educational change takes time is more widely acknowledged in the literature, and is reflected for the case of Bolivian Normales in the overview of institutional obstacles to change discussed below.

6.3 Picturing the institutional culture in two Normales – hierarchical relations

Let me continue by elaborating on the '*micro-scale every day complexities of power relations*' (North, 2006: 524) in the two Normales this research focuses on. The 'institutional culture' of the Normales is defined by the Bolivian MoE (1999) as the '*shared values, beliefs and principles that guide the institution and define the conduct expected from its members, and is expressed in the institutional structure, management and functioning*'. The same 1999 MoE report, that evaluated the urban Normal Simón Bolívar, described a lack of participation of trainers and students in the formulation of the institute's main vision and mission, and in decision making processes. It reports a 'traditional, vertical' management style. The report also demonstrated a general lack of trust within the Normal, while personal interests played a role at the management level (Ministerio de Educación de Bolivia, 1999: 15). The report concludes by stating that Simón Bolívar '*continues to maintain itself in isolation with its internal problems*', and in isolation from its surrounding environment or other actors that could (or should) be involved in teacher education. A continuation of this vertical and non-democratic leadership style, and the institutional problems of mistrust and isolation, were confirmed by teacher trainers and (former) students (e.g. 8:34; 104:2; 108:7). Over the past four years I observed a relatively strong hierarchical system in both the urban and rural Normales, where relations between staff and students can be characterised as rather formal and vertical. However, I did notice some differences between the two institutes.

While people in the urban case come and go to the institute only during working hours, a large group of students and staff live at the rural Normal, at least during the working week. This campus life creates a closer sense of community. However, this is *only* a common feeling for those that live here. Both students and trainers that live elsewhere are excluded from the central eating room (*comedor*) and have to buy their food in local owned shops on the property. The architecture of the rural institute is more open than the urban one and stimulates more contact

between students and staff. The rural institute does not have a fence that separates it from the surrounding farm houses. Neighbouring donkeys and sheep happily graze on the Normal's premises, adding interesting effects to some of my recorded conversations which were normally held outside. Not everyone is happy to have to share the school premises with neighbours and their cattle, as one student mentioned '*the village people use these grounds as if it is a public road, so we should have a wall here*' (30:25). There is one central and single floor building in which all administrative staff are placed. The director's door is only one step removed from the central sports ground in the middle of the premises. Interview data revealed there is indeed more direct communication between staff and students, but this did not mean students felt they were 'heard'. Many students complained about the state and crowdedness of dormitories, a lack of sanitary facilities and very little internet or computer facilities at the campus. Although I spent less time there, it was easier to get an understanding of *who is who* and *what is what* in the rural Normal, because of its size, open architecture and for the reason of the cooperative attitude of the directors at that time (August/September 2008).

The urban Normal, in contrast, is a massive concrete construction that is surrounded by a fence, which separates the premises from the street and the urban neighbourhood. To get in, you have to pass the main gate and the guards' house. Particularly during the period of new inscriptions, it is hard to get in without knowing the guards or having the right papers. Thus, the Normal is only accessible for a select group 'who belong there'. In terms of the architecture of the main building, the higher in the hierarchy the staff is positioned, the higher up they are located in the building. Thus, in order to see the general director one has to climb three flights of stairs and pass through the secretary's office – usually several times before an actual meeting is settled. It takes either a very serious issue or 'good connections' for students to get to speak to the director (103). In a feedback discussion with a class of urban teacher students, one student mentioned how he misses a form of '*civismo'* (a sense of civic responsibility): '*when we walk in the corridors often teacher trainers do not greet us. And then, when you greet them, they sometimes do not respond. This attitude, this energy is poisoning us*' (110: 6). This quote reflects the strong hierarchical relations in the Normal. The majority of students at the urban institute that live in El Alto have to travel for an hour or more in order to reach the Normal in time for the first class (starting at 7.30am). This often means having no breakfast, and students complained of too long and continuous planned classes which give them no time for a proper break to get something to eat (18:30; 19:40).

Perhaps because of this difference in scale, the urban institute seemed to have more troubles with organising the entrance bureaucracies of new students and making new timetables in time for the start of the new semester. In September 2008, students in the rural institute started their regular schedule three weeks earlier compared to the urban case (which by chance gave me the possibility to observe the final presentations of PDI by six-graders in both institutes). Students in the urban Normal complained of the classes they had missed. Coming to the institute and finding out there are no classes, is unfortunately not an exception in the weeks at the beginning and end of each term. This situation does not deter huge numbers of youngsters to enforce their way into the institutes.

6.4 The struggle to get in: rising numbers of applicants

'*Mister Minister, we are students [that] passed [the exam], we want justice!*', a banner says that is held by a group of protesting youngsters in La Paz (Photo 10, La Prensa, 18-03-2010a). The young man in the middle of the picture holds a sleeping-bag, as they are preparing a hunger strike in the residence of the retired teachers' organisation. According to the newspaper, another group of protesters in the week before sewed their lips together as a radical way of protest against not being accepted into the Normales. The number of applicants for the Normales is increasing fast. In 2007, a MoE official told that in 2005, about 17,000 people applied for Simón Bolívar, while there were only 500 positions available (76). In the beginning of March 2010, 56,000 people took the entrance exam, with only 7,500 available posts at the Normales. Through a series of demonstrations and protests students have demanded that everyone who scores 51% or higher should be admitted to a Normal. After a few days, the Minister of Education declared that there will be 1,500 more posts available, totalling 9,000, and that this was the absolute maximum. He also warned that the classrooms of the institutes might become overcrowded (La Prensa, 16-03-2010; La Prensa, 18-03-2010a). In 2011, the situation is growing even more tense, as the MoE brings out alarming figures, of around 20,000 unemployed graduates currently, with 7,000 *normalistas* graduating this year and 24,000 students currently enrolled. Bolivia will be confronted with huge unemployment rates among these new teachers. Still, this situation does not stop young people from taking part in the entrance exam over and over again, and when their scores are high enough but they do net get accepted, with a sense of desperation they take serious measures to enforce their 'right' to teacher education by crucifying themselves, or sewing together their lips (La Razón, 31-03-2011).

Photo 10. Protesting prospective students preparing a hunger strike

An important institutional change – initiated during the former reform and further carried out currently – is made with regard to the entrance regulations to the Normales. First of all, institutes are not allowed to take in students to their full capacity, but according to the demands for new teachers in that region, they ought to limit the number of spaces available for student teachers. Bolivia again makes an exception to the global rule here, since in most places teacher training institutes have to struggle to attract enough interested students. Secondly, Bolivian

prospective students have to pass a (national level) entrance exam, as well as a personal interview at the respective institute in order to be accepted as a *'postulante'* (or 'teacher student candidate').[124]

The entrance exam is criticised by various trainers for not ensuring a better qualified, let alone vocationally motivated, teacher, since it is still based on memorising facts (e.g. 47:10). The names of those who scored high enough in the exams appear on a list that is published in the newspapers and disseminated at Normales a few weeks after the exam. Those with the highest scores are invited to an interview in the respective Normal. These interviews are designed not only to test students' skills, but particularly their motivation and vocation for becoming a teacher. Based on my observations of one afternoon of intake interviews for future English teacher students in the urban Normal, I concluded that the interview questions were both limited in time (sometimes an interview took less than five minutes), and limited in terms of the scope of the questions asked. Based on the interview guide of the institute, a wide range of issues had to be addressed during the interview, including: the *postulantes*' motivation to become a teacher; the reason for wanting to enter this particular Normal/specialisation/education level; knowledge of the education system and reforms; knowledge of the socio-cultural context; the home situation;a capacity to critically analyse and make decisions also under pressure; emotional balance; tolerance and intercultural skills, among others (Instituto Normal Superior Simón Bolívar, 2008). Although this list is not even complete yet, the length of it already shows the over-ambitious aim of an interview that is indicated to take 'about ten minutes' per candidate. During the observed interviews, only a few of these issues were taken up. Besides, the attitude of the interviewers made the candidates feel uncomfortable, while the interview guide states the opposite should be the case. A male candidate told me how he was refused entry to the morning interviews because he was not wearing a suit and how he had to go to the other side of town to borrow one in order to be interviewed. In sum, the entrance interviews I observed were narrow in scope, time and in general a demotivating experience for future candidates.

Up to today, this extended process has not stopped overwhelming numbers of people taking the entrance exams, to the extent that in some places, like La Paz or Paracaya, only about 10% of all exam takers get allowance to enter the Normal (17:42, 22:5, 47:8, 62:8, 76:15, 98:8, 103:1). This had led to serious conflicts and pressures on the MoE as well as the Normales from the sides of the *postulantes* and their families. Despite the fact that numerous people make great efforts to enter the Normales, these institutes are also notorious for a continuing lack of quality of the training they offer, a statement which is mostly confirmed by the data presented in the following section.

6.5 Continuity: an overview of current institutional problems

In this section I present a detailed overview of the main contemporary problems at the two institutes included in this study, based on respondents' perceptions and my own observations and analysis. To some extent, these correspond to the difficulties already observed by the reports of the MoE (1999), Lozada Pereira (2004) and Del Granado (2011), but my analysis also adds novel insights and issues. I discuss the following issues successively: insufficient institutional

[124] Students carry this name from when they take part in the entrance exams until they have completed the first semester of *nivellación*.

infrastructure; the Normales as islands; exclusivity of the profession; corruption; discrimination; traditional teaching styles and an attitude of apathy in the Normales.

Insufficient institutional infrastructure

One of the most often mentioned problems of the Normales, by both staff and students, are the inadequate facilities in both institutes. This includes a lack of maintenance and renovation of the existing buildings, too few adequate classrooms, no climate control inside the classrooms (*very* cold in the highlands in winter and *very* warm in lower regions in summer). A student in the urban Normal alleged that '*the majority of students are thinking more about the cold than paying attention to the class*' (18:25). Sanitation facilities are scarce both in the urban and rural institute (including the boarding school), sometimes not well kept, and in the case of the urban institute privately run, which means students have to pay to use the bathroom. However, students said the bathrooms have become a bit cleaner since this regulation. In some Normales there are day-care nurseries for the children of students. Nonetheless, spaces are limited and several students complained of the quality of the service, which made them decide to place their children elsewhere (in other nurseries or with family when possible). The rural Normal did not have such a service at the time of fieldwork and some students were forced to take their babies into classes. Students also complained about insufficient sporting/play ground facilities, as well as low equipped libraries. The student-trainer ratio fluctuates in both institutes, roughly between 10-35 students per trainer depending on the course.

According to Lozada Pereira (2004: 178) rural Normales need most attention and investment of the state. In the current context and based on the results of this research, I disagree on his point. I think all Normales need a similar investment in order to improve both their facilities, as well as to successfully reform the institutional governance and teaching in accordance with the new law. Considering the engaged attitude of the rural institute, the external support that has focused its investments mostly on rural institutes, and the resistance in parts of the urban case described here it would perhaps seem more valid to invest considerably in support to urban cases. A former Normal director now working in the MoE supported this observation: '*We have certain Normales who have accepted the new policy lines, but there are also some urban institutes that are not as open*' (115:8).

Similar to Lozada Pereira's observations (2004: 177), there is still a general lack of facilities at most Normales, including the boarding school spaces and ICT facilities. Various Normales received small scale external (donor) support to improve their facilities, whilst the MoE similarly aims to invest in improving the infrastructure of several Normales (La Prensa, 16-03-2010). Still, students in most institutes I visited complained of poor libraries, poor classrooms and little or no ICT facilities (including access to internet, but also a lack of projectors and computers in classrooms for power point presentations or video screening). While the urban institute has around 55 new computers (103:17), students did not have access to them. The current Minister, as his predecessors, has promised and made some efforts to improve this situation, as a complete infrastructure is generally accepted as a requirement for good quality (teacher) education. However, according to the director of the teacher education department at the MoE, '*the mere fact that the state cannot provide the basic material to it's teacher students, like text books and libraries, is another form of social injustice because this prevents an equitable access of all people to knowledge*'

(44:5). The insufficient state of infrastructure of Bolivia's Normales thus remains a pressing issue, also for this current government.

Normales as islands

Close cooperation between teacher education institutes and the wider (school) community is a key aspect for good quality teacher education, as perceived both within the ASEP Reform as in the literature on SJTE (see chapter 2). While the new ASEP law is focused on a communitarian and cooperative (teacher) education system, the reality in most Normales is quite different. There is little or no constructive contact between the institutional life inside the Normales and community life outside of that, as was confirmed by various trainers and students in the Normales. Of course we should not generalise about *all* Normales here, with clear exceptions such as the Normal of Warisata that has taken efforts to connect to the surrounding environment historically and is still doing so – for instance through inviting representatives of the community in democratic committees for decision-making at the institutional level. Nevertheless, the two Normales under study were characterised, and criticised, by many respondents as being 'islands'.

In line with earlier studies, there is an evident disassociation between the Normales and their local and departmental environment (Lozada Pereira, 2004: 122-123; Del Granado Cosio, 2006: 47; Von Gleich, 2008: 99). According to a MoE evaluation of the transformation of Normales to INS from 1997-1999, the environment and community to which the institutes belong is the most important variable in the 'institutional life' of a Normal. Various institutions and groups belong to this 'environment', such as the local community and community organisations, schools and school networks (*nucleos*), pedagogical advisors (who were still working at the time), school directors, school boards and parent committees. The report showed that Simón Bolívar did not have an analysis or a strategy to live up to the demands and needs of the local environment. There was a lack of a clear approach for permanent cooperation outside of the institute. Trainers identified that this was due to a lack of support from the MoE and students argued the curriculum did not engage enough with the local environment (Ministerio de Educación de Bolivia, 1999). A similar situation is still continuing today.

As a solution to this state of affairs, an urban teacher trainer proposed to organise more public events such as fairs at the Normal, so that the community members could see what is going on inside the walls of the institute: *'we have to present ourselves to the outside world. The most important thing would be to show we are involved in educational research, and to show how we are training a new type of teacher that corresponds to a new societal model'* (10:31). During two group discussions, various students also commented on the public events that some universities organise, for instance about the AH1N1 flu epidemic or as a public closure of the academic year, and how this would also be good to have in the Normales in order to '*respond to the societal needs and the educating function of the Normal*' (110:1; 120:4). In line with these arguments, ex-Vice Minister of Education and academic Saavedra argued how '*the Normales need to open up to the rest of society, and therefore we could use the new information and communication technologies.*[125] Often, the only contact between Normales and schools is through the contacts made because of students' PDI course. These observations are still relevant for the situation today. The established contacts between schools and Normales in the

[125] These quotes are based on fieldwork notes and the 'Memorandum of the International Seminar', that can be retrieved from http://educationanddevelopment.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/memorandum-del-encuentro-internacional-sobre-descolonizacion-y-educacion.pdf.

context of the PDI course are limited. Again, the urban Normal is an institute that isolates most of its practices on its own 'concrete island'. The contact between the 27 teacher training institutes is limited as well, while every institute '*does as it wants*' (65:3). Contacts are mostly limited to formal meetings between the management staff (the three directors) during national level reunions.

Finally, a MoE official that has been involved closely in the design of the new law, argued how the Normales have a '*military institutional attitude with no links at all with their environment. They are islands, and on the basis of this situation we propose an institutional transformation to an intercultural institutional attitude*' (96:4). Here, it is useful to build on the insights of Talavera (2011), who argues that the Bolivian union culture of resistance had its roots in the period of military dictatorships of the 1970s. Considering the close ties between the Normales and unions, it is not unthinkable that the current conservative attitude of teacher trainers, as well as the enclosed structure of Normales as islands, is also rooted in this same period.

Exclusive or 'fixed' teaching professions

In my view linked to the problem of institutional isolation, is the issue of 'fencing off' both the training positions within Normales, as well as the wider teaching profession, exclusively to Normal graduates. Many Bolivian educators, and especially their unions, strongly defend the *Codigo* and *escalafón*, in which teachers' labour rights and the 'fixed profession' – the teaching profession only being open to *normalistas* – was written down. A MoE official and several trainers (6; 94; 95) claimed that in order to change, teachers need to let go of this fixed profession idea that protects teachers and secures them of a job-for-life. In this regard, Tatto (2007: 14) speaks of 'untouched monopolies' of teacher training institutes in various contexts, while Lozada Pereira (2004: 44-45) refers to a kind of 'endogamy' of the Bolivian teacher training institutes. Lozada Pereira supports the idea that the 'non-removability' of trainers is a negative aspect, and writes about an 'inbreeding' that in the end reduces the quality of the Normales. '*This way, even the academic competencies of the trainers in Normales have become politicised. They lost their focus on quality but rather hire people on the basis of political recommendations. [...] An institute that does not admit any innovation, that rejects everything that is new and foreign, and applauds itself for imitating the old ways, results in an internal degeneration*' (Lozada Pereira, 2004: 70-71, 90).

The *escalafon* is still strongly defended by the teacher unions and the new ASEP law acknowledges the main principles of the document. However, parents have strong complaints against the *escalafon* and the almost automatic promotion to higher scales for teachers, because they think teachers are not evaluated and stimulated to improve their teaching (Gamboa Rocabado, 2009: 60). In line with parents' arguments, Yapu states how '*the 'inamovilidad docente' [fixed teaching profession] is often a factor that obstructs [educational] quality, because low performing teachers cannot be suspended, or taken out*' (2009: 32).

Here is it helpful to look at a study on the case of Mexico, in which Tatto et al (2007b) analyse the horizontal salary promotion system which is called '*Carrera Magistral*'. This *carrera* – a system of in-service training and examination – was designed to overcome the criticism to automatic promotion on the basis of years of experience instead of professional quality, a critique that I have described in the case of Bolivia in terms of its *escalafon*. The study of Tatto el al (2007b: 157-161) discusses how on the positive side, the *carrera* increased Mexican teachers' chances to increase their salary, while teachers were better informed about (a still limited body of)

pedagogical literature and became more knowledgeable then their colleagues who did not follow in-service trainings. On the negative side, however, the authors describe several difficulties, including a lack of adequate measurement mechanisms for the impact on students' learning attainments, a focus on knowledge rather than skills, an urban bias in the access and content of in-service trainings, a negative effect on diminished time for team work and joint efforts to improve the school level, and the fact that the exams are very time consuming, leaving too little time for teachers to accomplish their teaching tasks. Even though these and other difficulties also count for Bolivia's attempts to create a successful in-service training system (chapter 5), I support the view of some of the critical academics mentioned above whom, in line with the concerns of Bolivian parents, argue for the need to rethink Bolivia's *escalafon* system of automatic promotion, and more closely link promotion scales to training opportunities (in urban and rural areas) to in-service teachers, as well as a system of evaluation and guidance.

Corruption

Corruption, or 'political favours', is another institutional problem that was confirmed in former studies and continues today. Lozada Pereira, for example, affirmed the existence of '*old practices of corruption and political and union discretional attitudes*' in the Normales (2004: 168). Besides, Concha et al observed a huge divergence in salaries of different posts in the Normales, not based on the qualifications of staff members but more on 'discretionary estimates' (2002: 60). Another way of presenting the issue is to talk about a lack of trust at the institutional level (Ministerio de Educación de Bolivia, 1999).[126] Currently, critical voices both inside and outside the Normales still complain about ongoing 'friendship politics' (100:16), or the veto power of the unions to keep certain candidate trainers out of the system (107:6). During my fieldwork periods, examples of corruption and political favours were mentioned mostly with respect to the ways in which students and staff obtained a position in the institute. Examples were not just limited to trainers that '*stayed in not because they are capable, but because of their connections*' (16:60). Students also showed how some of their peers had entered for 'political reasons', as they checked the list of students who passed the entrance exams that was published in the newspaper El Diario, and two of their classmates had not appeared on that list. There are always some that enter through the back door, the student explained, '*for one of them, we realised his mother works in the administration*' (19:6).

'Politics' are also influencing the (mal-)functioning of the student federations, according to a teacher student at the urban Normal. '*The Trotskyite teachers created their own political student party, like [trainer x]. [Trainer x] approached some of us, and I got involved. But I just listened and observed, I did not have a say ['ni voz ni voto']. And the director, he was creating another student party. When this party gets elected, the director can expect to have no troubles with them*' (103:18). The idea that student federations have ties with the management staff was also shared by other students during a group discussion at the Normal in the city of Santa Cruz: *'When a student 'front' [party] who is supported by the management staff wins the elections, its obvious that the director tells them what to do, and they do not consult the base*' (123:1). Another student explained this resulted in a low number of students actually voting during elections, or giving in 'neutral' votes, since *'it does not matter who wins. Whoever wins the elections will forget about the rest of us soon. I do not feel represented at all*' (123:1).

[126] Chapter 1 illustrated how a lack of trust in official institutions can be considered part of the fourth dimension of conflict in Bolivian society.

The institutionalisation process is part of a political recognition (48:13) and solution to this situation of 'politicking' in the Normales. In the words of a senior and obviously frustrated trainer at the urban Normal: '*The new constitution states that education is the highest function of the state...but this has not been proven to be true. It is a demagogic slogan, because we continue in this country with no more than politicking, corruption, lies and accusations between the left and the right, but with no concern at all for our education system*'(47:15). When reflecting on these issues with an academic and educational expert in the final fieldwork period, this frustrated view was confirmed again: *'These issues of corruption have to be opened to a public debate at some point. The corruption of the management of positions is totally irrational, it's really dramatic. It has almost become legalised, this system of corruption. Because people are in need of work, they have to follow this example of corruption to get in*' (114:2). While I was unable to gather comprehensive data on the level of corruption in Normales, the opinions of respondents expressed here are still alarming and worth further study and debate.

Discrimination

Another sensitive but incredibly relevant issue that came out of the interviews and observations were various stories of discrimination and exclusion. The 'second dimension of conflict', as this was termed in chapter 3, is a lived reality in the Normales: '*The system of teacher education in Bolivia is vertical, very individualistic, very racist and we want to change this*' (95:16, indigenous movement leader). To some extent, some things are changing slowly in the Normales. Whereas I did not see any student or trainer dressed in traditional 'indigenous' clothing in any of the institutes I visited during the first fieldwork period (2007), some started to openly dress '*the way they would do at home as well*' (32) in the years that followed. Nevertheless, structures of discrimination, exclusion and the tendency to 'homogenise' (73) students are still present. A rural teacher trainer, for instance, expressed how '*there is discrimination for sure, although you might not see or hear it. There is discrimination based on people's surname, their social status*' (31:19). Another trainer reminded how *'the vice-president Victor Hugo Cardenas [during the presidency of Sanchez de Lozada] because of our history he abandoned his Aymara surname and adopted another surname, so he would not be discriminated in university and in wider society*' (107:13, also 117:4). This is, however, in contrast to the more recent story of Ramiro, who changed his surname back to the original indigenous version, because he was proud of it and felt he could openly express this.

Most stories of discrimination and exclusion, either in Normales or in schools, were related to what could be termed ethnic and class discrimination. Female teacher students also complained about discrimination on the basis of gender. It was for instance mentioned how: '*in the [urban] institute we are discriminated as female students, and we also have to deal with all domestic problems because our men do not care'* (16:35). Another student in the same group discussion added that when they enter a new school as a young teacher, '*they discriminate you for being a woman, they might abuse you, and when we want to introduce something like sexual health, the parents will not let us, they do not want us to change anything*' (16:71). This shows both a fear to be treated badly as a young female teacher in a new environment, as well as the expectation not to be able to bring about innovations in their future teaching.

Finally, the divided rural and urban school system sometimes triggers people to think and speak in terms of 'they and us', creating a ground for separation instead of unification, as the new law aims for. The mere fact that there are still two unions, with obvious differing points of view, contributes to this segregated system (68:14). Clearly, I cannot present a complete story about all

forms and levels of discrimination in the Normales, as this would need further study. However, the issue was raised often enough to include it here as a serious challenge that should be overcome, particularly considering the current goal of *vivir bien para todos* (to live well for everyone), without discrimination (Article 1 of the ASEP law, Ministerio de Educación de Bolivia, 2010b).

Traditional teaching styles

Already since the 1994 Reform project, the traditional teaching styles that are still adopted in Normales is an issue of great concern (Lozada Pereira, 2004: 147; Concha et al, 2002: 42). '*Most trainers were trained themselves long ago, with a very old curriculum. The oldest ones even come from the nationalistic and revolutionary tradition of the MNR*' (8:28), explains a teacher trainer. The following quotes from teacher students provide some evidence of the continuation of this situation. In a group interview with three students, one of them commented: '*what we need here is that our trainers are trained and updated, they are very conservative in their teaching and they do not motivate us to learn, which in turn makes us passive*'. Another student continues: *'this trainer is knowledgeable, he knows many things, but he does not know how to get it across, he is very disorganised and has no good teaching methods*' (16:51). A colleague student in an interview added that '*most trainers just complete their class hours and that's all*' (18:20). One of her classmates mentioned how he '*subscribed to learn something about teaching here, but really I have lost a year learning hardly anything*' (19:85). Finally, one of the urban students reflected how *'we need more activities in class, the classes of trainer Y make us fall asleep*' (21:37). Indeed, during various observations of the classes of this trainer, I hardly observed any other teaching technique than questioning and answering (with often the same students replying), and copying material from the blackboard, a situation that in reality made some students fall asleep. One urban student came up with the term '*anti-pedagogical*' (103:18) that helps to summarise these negative views on traditional and ineffective teaching techniques that were shared among most of the student interviewees.

Besides students' critiques, a MoE official confessed that there is '*not enough attention for the training of trainers*, *whose practices are traditional and conductivist*' (76:10). These conductivist teaching techniques had their roots in the times of the Reforms of the military regimes (1968-197). The attitude of resistance to change these 'traditional' practices since the newer reforms of the 1990s and the current one, can therefore be explained by both ideological, political and economic motivations, but certainly also by the working habits that these older generations of educators were trained with themselves (Talavera Simoni, 2011: 187). A teacher trainer, who is also a university teacher, shared his critical point of view on the *'curricular structure of this institute, it is based on the logic that we have to teach them how to teach in one way, we do not see them as planners or facilitators of learning processes. There is too much focus on the theoretical content base, and not enough on teaching strategies. They should be able to apply two, three, four different strategies depending on the social context of students, and their level*' (50:14). Another trainer worried that '*teacher students see the example of very mediocre trainers, and they leave the Normal with this unmotivated stereotype and example in mind* (13:53). An important solution to overcome these traditional and negatively viewed teaching styles is to train and support the trainers. While efforts in this area already took place in the context of the Normales EIB of the 1994 Reform (see also Lozada Pereira, 2004: 140-141), and are planned for under the ASEP law as well, this is still an area of concern. One of the teacher trainers rightly argued that what is needed is a system of support and evaluation, as now '*everyone works the way they like, there is*

no coherence, there is no central evaluation system. As a result, our students have a lot of limitations (13:37).We should, however, avoid a simplistic 'blaming the trainer' argumentation, as there are neither small (economic) incentives nor enough in-service support for the already overburdened trainers to innovate (115, 114).

Apathy and institutional inertia

Finally, in response to the question 'if you would be the director of a Normal, what would you change?', a MoE official replied promptly with *'at this moment there is nothing I could change, because of the union influence and politicking, so I would not have the authority to change anything. [a sigh] Like here, I actually also do not have much authority to change...'* (6:10). This response reflects a sense of apathy or a 'bad attitude' (5:50) among trainers who feel they have little space for manoeuvre to actually change what could be called a form of 'institutional inertia'. This passive and resistant attitude of a group of trainers is further instigated by a lack of communication and engagement of trainers in decision-making matters, due to a centralised (Lozada Pereira, 2004: 147), hierarchical (Concha et al, 2002: 59), top-down and vertical management style of the Normales, in which there is little contact between the management staff and trainers.

One of the directors of the urban institute confirmed that '*the older teachers have not immersed themselves in the new teacher training techniques, so there is a part of us that really does not want to change, they rather stay passive and repeat the past, they are reluctant to learn new didactical methods.*' He continued to argue how all institutes should '*have a permanent system of training. Currently we are organising a programme with Andres Bello. But we also need the willingness of trainers to get involved. Unfortunately, there is nothing we can do about those that are not interested, and we have realised we have this deficit in our personnel*' (17:18; 17:24). As mentioned above, a reason that was mentioned to explain the unwillingness of trainers to change was related to the lack of economic incentives to change: *'nobody wants to work more for free*' (104:5). Another reason brought forward was a lack of trust in the politics both at a national and institutional level: '*I do not trust any of the laws in this country to begin with, because, as you can see, the Normales have always remained as they were*' (10:3). An NGO worker, involved in the Normales EIB in the 1990s, verified this by saying *'there is little creativity, diversity, originality and innovation. Like I said before: they want the status quo, that nobody changes, so that they do not have to change themselves. I do not think everyone in the Normales thinks this way, but certainly among the institutions' management they do*' (73:7). The non-transformatory character of the Normales was explained in various interviews in relation to the influence and often resistant attitude of teachers' unions. Regardless of the changing power relations because of the institutionalisation processes, the unions seem to remain in a relatively powerful position when it comes to (holding back) transformation of the Normales. According to a rural trainer, the federations create a '*barrier*' to change in the Normales and in the schools, as '*it is not in their interest to change the education system*' (39:15). Following from this logic, an urban teacher student thinks that real change in the Normales has to start with changing the attitude of those trainers that are closely linked to the union: '*they organise their marches because they want a higher salary, they do not care about the quality of the education. Some trainers here are better at motivating us to become a 'sindicalista' (unionist), than to become a dedicated teacher*' (20:17). This quote illustrates a more general supported idea of a trade-off between 'unionised educators' (e.g. actively struggling for salarial issues) as opposed to vocationally motivated educators.

Hence, the argumentation that follows from these interviews is that a relatively large part of the trainers have adopted an attitude of inertia for different reasons, including a top-down management style, a lack of incentives, a lack of trust and the influence of unions. From this section, it seems we have to conclude that '*Normales do not contribute to the processes of change* (114:9). This would, however, be far too one-sided, as I also encountered various reform initiatives that aim(ed) to open up potential niches for change, to which I now turn.

6.6 Attempts for change: contested reform initiatives in Bolivian Normales (2000-present)

Over the past decade, two major reform initiatives have attempted to bring transformation to the Bolivian teacher education field. Within the socio-political 'battle field' of Bolivian teacher education, both the external administration by Universities and the institutionalisation process have been met with varying degrees of resistance or ethusiasm, as is now elaborated.

The struggle against university administration of Normales: 2000-2005

Between 2000 and 2005 the monopoly of a number of the Normales was challenged through the administration by both public and private Universities.[127] Linking teacher training institutes with Universities is part of a wider global move, with exceptions such as the United Kingdom and Mexico (Tatto, 2007: 161). In Bolivia, this was something new and these universities had no prior experience with administrating Normales (Contreras and Talavera, 2003: 23). The Ministry envisaged strengthening the quality of these institutes by letting public and private universities manage them. The idea behind the initiative was that diplomas obtained would get a higher prestige, and teacher students would be given the opportunity to continue a university career (Contreras and Talavera, 2003: 22-23), while at the same time more cooperation between the institutes would be stimulated. Because of severe conflicts with unions and teacher trainers alike, the MoE decided to enforce a 'contract by exception' of four years of this external form of administration (Del Granado Cosio, 2006: 78-79). A teacher trainer at Simon Bolívar[128] (86:1) and one in Sucre (97:6) assured me this project was pushed through because it was a condition of the World Bank, one of the main financers of the reform process in the 1990s. Interested universities were asked by the MoE to send in their proposals, and a committee that included experts from GTZ evaluated these proposals (interview 25:4). The MoE did, however, not put in enough effort to ensure the quality, rigour and relevancy of these proposals (Del Granado Cosio, 2006: 80).

It was decided that the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA) was allowed to administer Simón Bolívar, '*not so much because of the presented proposal by the UMSA, but more so because of pressures from the trainers and students at Simón Bolívar that were afraid of being linked to a private university*' (Del Granado Cosio, 2006: 81). As explained by a senior teacher trainer: '*Not only teacher trainers but the whole teacher force fought against this. We could not avoid the administration by Universities, but at least we managed to push for a participation with a public university*' (86:1). He continued his story by telling how internal struggles sustained, particularly within Simón Bolívar: '*In 2005 the university administration entered into a profound crisis. There was an anti-teacher [anti-normalista] attitude in the*

127 While Nucinkis wrote how '*4 public and 5 private universities were contracted to work with 11 Normales, 4 of them EIB, leaving 7 Normales under control of the Ministry*' (2004: 19), Del Granado (2006) mentioned only 10 institutes were administered by Universities.

128 Who is now working at the Ministry of Education, and was a former union leader as well.

university, leading to an anti-university attitude with teacher trainers'. Another teacher trainer (13) told how some school directors closed their doors for the internship students, because they thought students were only prepared theoretically, and they disturbed the teaching process too much because they did not know what to do when they entered a classroom.[129] There was also strong critique on the way the management staff were appointed, and particularly the fact that one of the Normal directors was an architect, '*who knew nothing about educational management'* (10:18, 49:30). An urban union leader concluded by saying that '*the administration of the UMSA was a disaster, nobody understood or cooperated with each other*' (49:7). Lozada Pereira (2004: 166) refered to a Ministry evaluation that showed not one university that administered a teacher training institute had managed to press for genuine transformative changes and to change the vertical and hierarchical character of the institutional governance.

Amidst these mostly negative experiences of a too academically oriented training, there were also positive recounts. According to a national level evaluation report of the respective Normales, '*the presence of Universities has generated an environment of professional development for trainers and the stimulation of educational research*' (Concha et al, 2002: 61). A former teacher student who studied during the University administration at the Simón Bolívar reflected on her studies in comparison to the way students now study at the Normal. In her view, the 'university teachers' brought different teaching styles and different '*personalities that would function as a model to us*' (100). In contrast, this ex-student perceives the current 'normalista-teachers' to '*put the same etiquette on all students, they will all leave the Normal exactly with the same attitude as their trainers and their peers*'. When I asked her about innovations during the University administration, compared to the Normales now, she made it clear there is little space left for innovation nowadays. She continued her argument by explaining that all students during the University administration had to conduct and present their action research oriented PIP (*Proyecto de Innovación Pedagogica* – Pedagogical Innovation Project) in their final semester, whereas now this is no longer obligatory (100:10, 100:11, see also chapter 7). An academic and staff member at Simón Bolívar during the period from 2000-2005 similarly presented a positive view: '*we are very proud of the publication of education research projects during the university administration...we also published numerous reports and an overview of the 5 years of administration'* (25). He continued to tell how the interaction between the University and the Normal became very tense because the urban teachers union thought differently and struggled against this external academic administration.

Thus, the university administration of several Normales between 2000 and 2005 became an increasing trigger for internal institutional tensions and battles. Eventually, in 2005, after a series of strong protests from teacher students and a group of (*normalista*) trainers (5:14, 49:34), the Simon Bolívar – and all other institutes – were placed under the authority of the MoE again. Three other contracts with Universities that administered Normales were already broken in 2003, after disappointing evaluations (Lozada Pereira, 2004: 111). In contrast to these widely supported separations, the class of the ex-student quoted above was fiercely against this closure of the University administration at the Simón Bolívar, since they thought the quality of their teaching was excellent. In order to let these 27 students finish their studies, a group of fired 'university-trainers' continued the last four weeks of classes on a clandestine basis in the university (100:14).

129 In contrast, Lozada Pereira (2004: 167) argued that school teachers were positive about the increased levels of the teacher students who completed their internships.

Thus, in retrospect, there are two rival camps in Bolivia on this issue; those that believe this was the best period for the Normales, and those that were opposed to this administration and in the end demonstrated until the Normales could go on by themselves again. The memories of this radical restructuring of the Simón Bolívar discussed during interviews varied from very positive (for instance two university lecturers who were involved in the process), to devastatingly negative (mostly union members and/or teacher trainers that were involved – or discharged – at that time). This opposition claimed the 'university people' were not at all prepared to teach about the reality in classrooms and about teaching styles and methods, because they lacked 'real teaching experience'. These advocating ideas for more vocational oriented training are also reflected in global debates, where there is a recent tendency to delink teacher training from universities for similar reasons (Tatto, 2007: 14).

Regardless of the major tensions and struggles the University administration of Bolivia's Normales generated, the UNESCO report of Lozada Pereira (2004: 153-154) still concluded this link with the university has been one of the most positive outcomes of recent Reform processes in the teacher education sector. Similarly, the report of Concha et al (2002: 62-63) called for a continuation and deepening of the (administrative) link between Normales and universities. Interestingly, things have changed rather drastically since these reports were published, as the administration of universities was forced down, and a reopening of these contacts seems unlikely in the near future. Considering the positive findings of both of these reports, yet without ignoring the valid arguments brought forward by the *normalistas*, I argue a different form of cooperation – not an administrative but a more independent one – between Normales and universities might be considered in the future, as this could help to create more opportunities for trainers' professional development and joint research projects between Normales and Universities.

Attempts to open a closed system: the process of 'institutionalisation' (2006-2010)

Some of the Normales were 'opened up' during the period of 2000-2005, in the sense that all university graduates could apply for a teacher training function. In this way the government tried to break through the exclusive right to become a trainer in a Normal only for those that graduated from a Normal, by opening these positions to other qualified university graduates as well. The historically established *escalafon* system of a 'fixed profession' was challenged, but only for a little while. It was estimated by a director general of a Normal that between 2000 and 2005, around 80% of all teacher trainers were *universitarios* and not *normalistas*.[130] According to another Bolivian researcher, during the University administration, many union leaders lost their positions in the Normales, yet they quickly returned after the Normales were 'autonomous' (administered by the MoE) again (78:3). Nowadays, again we see a closure of the institutes, exclusively inhabited by *normalista* trainers.

In an attempt to address the criticism of an 'exclusively *normalista*' and low-quality teacher training force, the Bolivian MoE initiated an 'institutionalisation process'. In 2006, when University administration as part of the Normales ended and the MoE took on its centralised role again for all institutes, the first steps towards an institutionalisation process were made (86:1). The ideas behind this 'process of institutionalisation' originated from the teacher education

[130] An AECID (Spanish cooperation) staff member estimated around 60% of the teacher trainers had a University degree only.

reform proposed in the 1990s, when it was established that all teacher trainers minimally had to have a *licenciatura* degree (comparable to a Bachelors degree) and, ideally, knowledge of at least two languages (Lozada Pereira, 2004: 75, 120). When the institutionalisation process began to be implemented in 2007, all management, teaching and administrative staff of the Normales had to go through a requalification process and apply anew for their positions. In contrast to what Lozada Pereira predicted in 2004, the 'taboo' of opening the Normales to non-*normalistas* still exists and the system is 'closed down' again exclusively to *normalistas*: only those graduated at a Normal as well as having a University degree (minimally *licenciado*) were accepted. According to the head of the teacher education sector at the MoE this process intends to appoint the best trainers on the basis of the number of points they have gained over the years (linked to their years of experience in the *escalafon*), and as a continuous evaluation system of the teacher training staff (44:1).

Opinions differ whether the quality of the trainers that have been institutionalised, and can therefore stay for at least three years, has actually improved. According to a Normal director, this process has both improved and worsened the quality of Bolivian teacher education: '*the institutionalisation process has been good, because the best trainers were chosen.[...] However the younger generations of trainers could not enter because they did not have enough qualifications points [based on the years of experience], and so the older generation was favoured. This creates big problems [...], for instance because the older professors cannot manage computer systems well*' (40:9). On the one hand, the fact that trainers are evaluated on the basis of their experience is already an improvement, according to some.

On the other hand, both students and trainers complained that the process of who is (not) appointed is still not transparent. A trainer at the urban Normal for instance, talked about the institutionalisation process as being something '*fictitious*', since '*what counts here is the political affiliation, where friends give each other positions based on their political taste*' (10:17). One final year rural student confirmed this point of view: *'you might know this country is facing a revolution now. There was one good teacher that was sacked, and she was not a member of a certain party. Most teacher trainers here are 'Masistas', of Evo Morales' party, and they came or stayed here because of that'* (41:9). Several other students also criticised the process to be based on political favours, instead of the professional qualifications and quality of trainers (37:28, 103:16, 123:4). Although these claims are hard to 'prove', they seem to be in line with what management staff in both the urban and rural institute called 'invited teachers', a relatively large group of trainers who entered (or stayed within) the system without having to pass the institutionalisation process requirements (36:1, 62:12). While in 2005 and 2006 students were one of the groups that pushed for an institutionalisation process – or at least a process of change – they are now generally quite negative about the effects of this process: '*it has gone from bad to worse, I am afraid*' (111:10) one student explains about the quality of the teaching they received before and after the process. Both trainers and students also complained about the direct effects, often meaning a loss of time or classes, of this institutionalisation process. The process of evaluating and changing the teaching staff and the job uncertainty for existing trainers have often led to days or weeks without classes for some subjects in both institutes (5:27, 36:1, 38:7).

It can be concluded that the institutionalisation process so far has been a far from smooth process. The intended improvement of the transparency of teacher placements as well as a better qualified teacher trainer force have only very partially been met, according to the critical views of

both students, trainers and even management staff and a government official (71:2). Even though I have shown how this process is not always smooth or without politicking, according to some students the quality of a part of the new training staff is indeed better. In my view, the institutionalisation process does provide a potential space for improvement, as it aims to make the appointing of trainers more transparent and based on their years of experience. What seems to be absent in the actual implementation of this initiative is a selection process based on trainers' demonstrable qualifications, rather than political affiliations or the 'automatic' gained qualification points according to trainers' years in the profession.

6.7 ASEP's 'new teacher education' – potential niches for transformation

Although it is still too early to see clear and tangible results of the new teacher education system under the ASEP law, this study shows that the changing socio-political context, including Morales' politics of change and the ASEP reform project, do open up new spaces for change in the Normales, for instance as illustrated by the story of Ramiro's Aymara class (Box 5). An interesting outcome of this study is the difference between the urban and the rural institute in the acceptance and approach towards the ASEP reform plans. The majority of staff in the rural Normal already responded positively to these plans in 2007, and continued their engagement with this project through organising and participating in workshops and meetings both inside and outside the institute. This positive attitude towards an education reform, which is supported by the rural union, is a new and promising development in terms of more successful implementation prospects, as illustrated by the following comments of the director in the Normal of Warisata: '*we are struggling on a daily basis to follow the changes that our 'compañero' Evo is looking for*' (67:20). In contrast, the ASEP plans were received with less enthusiasm, particularly at first in 2007, in the urban Normal. This attitude, however, changed slowly over the past four years, as I encountered less open resistance to the new Reform plans. Critiques in 2010 were not so much directed at the content of the law anymore, but more on the lack of support for the fast introduction of the new teacher education curriculum.

Bearing in mind this more general distinction between the acceptance of the new law in the urban and rural institute, my study also shows how in both institutes there is quite some heterogeneity in the attitudes of individual trainers towards the (new) reform project. As a rural trainer outlined: '*Indeed these politics of change exist, but it depends very much on the commitment and background of each trainer, because each of us has different experiences. For instance, I have worked in indigenous contexts, in mining contexts, in urban and rural regions, with children, youngsters and adults, and parental committees. So I realise we need a new type of teacher that responds to all of this. But other trainers did not have so much experience, or stayed in one place for 15 years, and this will not help them in understanding why we need these politics of change*' (33:6). This interpretation might help to explain why a group of urban trainers with little knowledge of other contexts, and supported by their unions' position, assumes that the new law is made to fit these other contexts and is not suitable for the urban one. An indigenous social movement leader and former trainer argued how '*interculturality has been focused more on the rural areas, while actually we really need to work in urban areas where intolerance and racism are more serious*' (24:15). From his time as a teacher trainer, he remembered how '*the institutional management had a strong influence on us. I remember we would go to staff meetings, and we would all remain silent, I was alone, there was no support*'. In the end, this trainer left the Normal and joined one of the

CEPOs. In response to whether he sees an opportunity for change in the Normales, he argued much work needs to be done to re-train the trainers, to stop the cycles of reproduction. '*In the end, either the new teachers will leave as agents of change, or they will just continue to keep on reproducing all these negative things*' (24:15).

While especially the urban institute can be characterised as a rather conservative 'strategically selective context' (Hay 2002a), it is also subject to change. While in 1999 the MoE (1999: 20) reported on a general lack of willingness of trainers to improve their personal and professional development, over the last few years this situation is slowly changing. While bearing in mind the attitude of apathy of many of the trainers, in conversations with urban trainers and directors, it also became clear how some of the trainers do follow extra courses, or are engaged in collective or individual research projects, being stimulated to do so by the team of directors. The urban academic director hopes that '*the new law will hopefully finally give us the resources to create and generate the knowledge we get from research we undertake. We should publish in a participatory way our new knowledge, students and trainers together*' (17:32, 17:37). The 2002 evaluation of the University-administered-Normales also showed a growing interest of trainers to engage in permanent training activities and exchanges with colleagues (Concha et al, 2002: 81). On the whole, trainers responded positively to the opportunity of the feedback discussions I organised which led to an exchange of ideas and opinions between trainers. Such peer-to-peer events could potentially be a promising way of stimulating engagement of and information sharing between trainers (5:50, 15:4). Another interesting initiative is a journal that has been produced by trainers and staff of the primary teacher education career at the Normal Mariscal Sucre (or 'the Pedagogical University'), in which trainers published articles on innovative developments, organisational issues in the Normal, or reports on activities undertaken.

Finally, in accordance with the studies of Lozada Pereira (2004) and Concha et al (2002), yet without ignoring the *normalista* arguments *against* external administration by Universities, I argue that a closer cooperation between Normales (still as independent institutions) and Universities could be a potential way to improve both teaching and research/evaluation in the Normales. The fact that several trainers are currently involved in further studies and research projects, with either the Universities or other training institutes, is therefore a welcome development and could perhaps open ways to further cooperation, joint research and dissemination between Normales and research institutes or Universities.

There is, in short, still a dire need for change, innovation and '*a more positive, non-violent, but creative and open experience of teacher education*', as nicely put by the sociologist Saavedra (61:32). In the new curriculum, there will be more attention for research and innovation, and not just in the PDI course. The new prevelant teaching technique in the Normales will be focused on research projects, with the aim to develop new knowledge (102:3). From a positive point of view, the new '*curriculum in the hands of a good teacher can be a hotbed for innovation, that will be created and recreated by the teacher-investigators, because the Normales will become research institutes as well*' (Del Granado, 2011). In this sense, the rationale of the PDI course, including the renewed focus on teacher-investigators and the production of knowledges (productive education) in the new ASEP curriculum, are linked to the SJTE criteria of an action research method that stimulates active reflection and critical thinking (and action). I will now turn to analyse if and how these SJTE criteria are met in reality.

6.8 A missed opportunity – the challenges and potentials of the PDI course

As stated in chapter 2, action research as part of a teacher education curriculum can ideally enable future teachers to produce and control knowledge in order to act upon desired educational and societal changes. However, it depends on the quality of the practical experience and the level of support teacher students receive whether these actually help to build a social justice awareness and understanding, or if it will function as a reproduction of the status quo, merely reinforcing rather than challenging negative stereotypes (McDonald and Zeichner, 2009: 604; Sleeter, 2009: 619-620). One of the directors at the rural Normal shared a reflection that links to the critical pedagogical approach to teacher education. He argued that the PDI course within teacher education has three important goals to develop including teaching skills, research and 'cultural dissemination'. PDI should '*create new knowledge to reflect on our practice, and systematise and socialise this new knowledge into real spaces such as the institute and wider society, with the desire to change, to develop, to progress as human beings.'* When I asked whether the PDI course is currently stimulating this, he responded with '*I think PDI now neglects this, as it only includes the first two functions of teaching skills and research. There is no dissemination yet*' (43:22). Actually, his view is still too positive if compared to the experiences of students, which have convinced me that the PDI course is yet another missed opportunity in Bolivian teacher education.

Still, students are generally positive about the fact that they get the opportunity to observe and practice in schools. *'The most incredible thing is to get to know the children, their way of being and thinking, what they want to become. Through PDI I gained more confidence and I learned new things about ethnographic and participatory research and collecting data'* (34:1). Moreover, students' internship periods have the potential to build a bridge between the theoretical preparation and the practical experience. *'One of the best things of the Normal is that we go out to the schools every semester. If we would not have had this experience, we would be 'fried' [fritos]. Because the training here is just basic, and it is in the schools that we really learn and strengthen ourselves'* (123:10). Furthermore, internships can potentially open up the connection between the Normales, schools and the departmental education sections (*SEDUCA's*). From a critical perspective, a teacher trainer in the Normal Mariscal Sucre explained how '*only because of PDI the Normales are forced to create contacts with the SEDUCA's to find schools where students can do their internships. But afterwards, to bring about important transformations in the education system....no. This is one of the biggest challenges that we need to overcome, we have to find more integration*' (107:1). One of the reasons to pay close attention during fieldwork to the PDI courses within the larger teacher education programme was exactly this assumption; that PDI could build a bridge between the isolated Normales and the 'educational mainland'. Regardless of the potential of the action-research methodology of the PDI course (see for instance Liston and Zeichner, 1990; Price, 2001; Zeichner, 2009), I also encountered a number of challenges.

Investigation and internships were already part of Bolivian teacher education for about four decades, but developed into a more systematic and continuous course throughout the training programme since the Reform of the 1990s (5:2). In the first semester the internship period is normally one week, followed by two weeks in the second semester and up to one and a half moths in the sixth semester (yet this will probably change with the new five year system). The placements of all these teacher students in primary and secondary schools each semester is a huge organisational challenge. Especially in the urban institute, this led to some delays and confusion with students as to where they had to go. Students in the rural Normal complained

that because of the institutionalisation process, there was a lack of newly hired PDI staff that would arrange the contact with schools. In both institutes, students expressed their concerns of an insufficient preparation before they set of for their observations and teaching practices at schools (18:32). '*Many of us were confused even though we only had to do the observations; this was still difficult because we had no idea what we had to do. And our trainer did not join us, she left us there inexperienced*', a second semester student told me (19:83). Usually, the PDI mentors from the Normal would visit the school only a few times during the internship period of the fifth and sixth semester teacher students. Moreover, when they were there, in many cases the visit had a more formal character of meeting the principal, checking for troubles and signing off some forms (58:4; 59:10). These trainers, in turn, criticised the institute for giving them too many students to supervise in different schools that take a long time to get to. Often, these visits had to be done on top of other classes.

As a result, students complained that they felt left alone. When lucky, the students would encounter a enthusiastic guiding teacher in the classroom where they were doing their practical work, or a dedicated parental committee or school director, as was the case in one of the 'internship-schools' I got to know. Some guiding teachers I interviewed were genuinely motivated to help the teacher students to develop their teaching skills. Others complained about the extra burden, or did not show up and left the children in the hands of the interns. A former teacher trainer who now works in a social movement argued how in the final defence, the guiding teacher should form part of the committee, which would also help to create closer links and better understanding between school teachers and Normal trainers (72:21).

Another issue that struck me was the fact that urban teacher students *only* have their practice in urban schools, while they are supposed to teach the first two years of their career in a rural school. Similarly, rural teacher students do their internships in rural schools, but a group of them later on ends up working in urban schools. With regard to this difficult situation, a trainer at the rural institute responded, from a rather narrow perspective, how '*some students have never been to the countryside. They come from the city but they, sometimes by mistake, decide to study here to become a rural teacher. So, when they leave this place they have to work in a rural context, out of their vocation to be a teacher, they have to adapt to this* (36:15). It is then no surprise that future teachers' expressed feelings of 'isolation' and feeling unprepared for 'the educational reality' when they entered a new school community for one of their internship periods, which is a more common phenomena globally (Achinstein and Ogawa, 2006).

Following an action research approach, students are asked to subsequently conduct observations, define an educational problem, design and implement a solution to the problem and to report on this process in a final Pedagogical Innovation Project (PIP) paper and final defence.[131] However, there are two ways students can avoid a PIP. On the one hand, students with excellent results throughout their studies can graduate without the final defence. On the other hand, students are given the choice to, instead of a PIP, write a 'monograph' on a theme of their choice which is not linked to the action research approach. At least in the urban Normal, most students ended up writing a monograph. This way, in my view many students do not enter

[131] In the literature, these action-research papers are represented as 'significant snapshot' of the pre-service teachers' study of their teaching (Price, 2001).

the entire process of reflection that occurs when one reports on and writes about their experiences of their internship and PIP. Hatton and Smith (1995: 39), for instance, emphasise the importance of stimulating linkages between 'meta-cognition and critical reflection' in teacher education, since it often fails to do so and reinforces a cultural view of teaching which calls for teacher rationality and individualism, failing to establish the political or problematic nature of schooling. They argue for the development of '*a developmental sequence, starting the beginner with the relatively simplistic or partial technical type [of reflection in TE], then working through different forms of reflection-on-action to the desired end-point of a professional able to undertake reflection-in-action*' (Hatton and Smith, 1995: 45). In this sense, the Normales have been unable to fully use the SJTE potential of the PDI course to '*develop skills as a reflexive practitioner*' (Greenman and Dieckmann, 2004: 240), and '*the goal of action research as a vehicle for educational change*' (Price, 2001: 43).

In addition to the need for good supervision and stimulation during students' internships, the success of PDI as SJTE instrument also depends on teacher students' dedication and motivation. There is an interesting example of one of the students who was involved in the photo-workshop. With the photos he took during his final internship period, he showed me the main educational, and – in his words – also societal problem he encountered and focused his project on: human relationships. In the photos he showed how children were sitting in rows and the teacher was only directing questions at students in the front rows, '*while many children were not participating*' (illustrated in Photo 11). As a solution, during his classes he asked the teacher if he could rearrange the setting of the tables together in small groups. Having done so, he stimulated the children to work in groups and to share their pencils and other materials (which were scarce). He proudly showed pictures of children's drawings he had put on the unpainted walls. The children made these drawings using the letters and numbers he had just practiced with them. '*Then I realised the difference between my class, with children all working with attention, and the class of the teacher when she had to shout all the time, 'sit down!', 'be quiet!', and 'what are you doing? The next week the teacher continued with some of my techniques, and I loved it. Always, human relations are very important; these photos of my project show how we can be partners and work together, not just the students but also we as teachers*' (66).

Photo's 11, 12 and 13, illustrations of the photo workshop with final year teacher students

In line with Bartlett's (2005: 355) point, it remains a challenge to put into practice such 'Freirean' progressive pedagogies of critical reflection-and-action in teacher education colleges. The quality of future teachers' practical and research experience is very dependent on guidance they receive, both within the Normal and in the school, where active forms of reflection (such as diary writing or peer-to-peer observations) need to be actively provoked (Vaillant, 2010: 124). While in some schools and classrooms included in this study, the guiding teachers were open to getting to know new teaching techniques and to support the application of students' solutions to educational problems for their PIPs (55:1), in other cases students ended up copying the rather traditional teaching style of the guiding teacher. Coming back to Yogey and Michaeli's statement (chapter 2), in order to bring about transformations in a difficult socio-political reality such as Bolivia, a teacher training model should indeed be directed at encouraging teachers as 'active intellectuals', who are equipped with social and political awareness, through on the one hand deepening future teachers' understanding of society, while at the same time having them engage in (accredited) '*experiential service learning*' (2011: 317-318), such as the PDI course. In its policy design and discourse the new Bolivian government seems to respond to this transformative approach to teacher education, yet, in reality, the revolutionary curriculum and other reform documents as products of the governments' 'political symbolism' (Jansen 2001b) do not necessarily translate directly into changed practices. In this regard, Yogey and Michaeli observed how turbulent social and political contexts paradoxically lead many teacher education institutes to stick to rather conservative models providing *'an illusion of security*', hindering the necessary processes of *'dynamic, productive pedagogic thinking*' (2011: 315). The earlier discusses institutional inertia in Bolivian Normales seems to reflect this tendency to 'stick to the old', which negatively affects the potentially transformative initiatives such as the PDI course.

6.9 Towards a Bolivian Social Justice Teacher Education?

As was set out in chapter 2, the literature distinguishes three agendas for teacher education: the professionalisation; deregulation; and the social justice agenda (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Sleeter, 2009; Zeichner, 2009). The 1994 Reform primarily fitted the professionalisation agenda, while Bolivia's new policy lines – next to a professionalisation focus – also pursue a social justice and critical inter-/intracultural rationale. Considering the recent installation of a longer and more intensive teacher education programme, Bolivia clearly follows its own and exceptional route that is diametrically opposed to the general global trends of the deregulation and deprofessionalisation of teacher education. Bolivian teacher education as presented in the ASEP law responds to Torres del Castillo's (2007: 9) argument that Latin American teacher education programes should not solely focus on the 'teaching role', based in a singular context – the educational institutions – but include other possible areas in which teachers can develop. This includes training outside the school – in Bolivia through the PDI course – as well as cooperative learning with(in) communities and awareness raising on socio-political issues, which both form part of the new teacher education curriculum-in-development. It therefore aims to respond to a form of SJTE as described by Cochran-Smith (2004: 205), being '*an expanded view that includes teachers' roles as members of school communities, as activists, school leaders and theorizers of practice*'; it also aligns with Sleeters' interpretation in which teacher education *'should build collaborative relationships with historically underserved communities*' (Sleeter 2009: 611). Nevertheless, Bolivia's revolutionary goals of training

the new and existing teaching force as creative, reflective and critical agents of change, that are in line with the way SJTE is interpreted in critical literature, is anything but a simple undertaking.

I apply Sleeter's (2009) framework to analyse if and in how far Bolivian teacher education policy and practices live up to some of the features of SJTE. Briefly recalling this categorisation mentioned in chapter 2, Sleeter discusses three key strands of SJTE, including: 1) equitable access to high-quality, intellectually rich & culturally affirming teaching; 2) prepare teachers to foster democratic engagement and dialogue; and 3) prepare teachers as equity advocates for children and youth, challenging a dominant 'culture of power'. Sleeter explains how in the first strand, teachers must be able to teach all children effectively so that the historically subordinated groups can also gain access to the dominant 'culture of power'. What is interesting in the case of Bolivia, which is obviously very different from the US context where Sleeter's work is focused, is that there are various ideas on what this 'culture of power' nowadays entails. While the new government and its sympathisers aim to install an new hegemonic 'decolonial culture of power', on the other hand antagonist groups, and even MAS-voting parents, are not entirely convinced of the benefits of changing the 'old', Spanish-oriented and 'modern' culture of power, particularly considering the global context of intensifying worldwide connections and tendencies of homogenising cultures.

This is where the other two 'strands' of SJTE described by Sleeter come into play, as they aim to foster democratic engagement and dialogue (the second strand) and stimulate a critical attitude towards the dominant culture (the third strand). Chapter 5 showed us how, with regard to democratic organisation of institutions (strand 2), most Normales do have some system of representation of students, but these are often not functioning well and exist more on paper than in reality. Furthermore, various trainers complained of vertical and exclusionary decision-making procedures in the Normales. The third strand, to prepare future teachers as 'equity advocates' for children and youth, can perhaps be best connected to ASEP's attempts to, through schooling, revalue the historically marginalised socio-political and cultural position of the many indigenous students.[132] Sleeter continues to present three key areas of action of SJTE, including recruitment, professional coursework and guided fieldwork, and Table 6 accordingly shows a list including both 'contributing' (+) factors of Bolivian teacher education to Sleeters' SJTE, as well as Bolivian teacher education practices that do not promote SJTE (-).

In relation to the recruitment of future teachers, Cochran-Smith et al (2009: 630) discuss (and counter-speak) the 'ideology critique' of more conservative studies, arguing students should not be screened on their disposition for social justice, as this is a misuse of gate-keeping powers. In contrast, the authors claim that we should not only recognise that education is inherently political, but also that knowledge transmission is never a neutral job and recruitment on the basis of one's values and beliefs is therefore not necessarily illegitimate. From a social justice perspective, and in contrast to a market driven and deregulated interpretation of democracy, freedom couples individual rights with social responsibility for the public good and equal opportunities (Cochran-Smith et al, 2009: 637). In Bolivia we can observe two developments in this regard. Firstly, *postulantes* who pass the entry exam are interviewed by the Normal they

[132] Chapter 7 elaborates on the current changing identity formation processes of (future) teachers themselves, which potentially also affects their functioning as 'equity advocates' and facilitators of critical engagements with dominant and alternative 'cultures of power'.

applied for, in which they should be asked about their motivations to enter the teaching profession, however, these interviews are quite limited in their length and depth. Secondly, the standardised entry exams are – according to the students who passed them – very much focused on the memorisation of facts. This results in the better performing – and often older, more experienced and second-career – students passing these exams.

	THREE SJTE STRANDS		
Sleeters' Social Justice Teacher Education framework applied to Bolivia	**1. Equitable access to high-quality, intellectually rich & culturally affirming teaching**	**2. Prepare teachers to foster democratic engagement and dialogue**	**3. Prepare teachers as equity advocates, challenging dominant 'cultures of power'**
AREAS OF ACTION **Recruitment**	+ Older and second-career professionals entering + Majority of students of indigenous background (see chapter 7) - Standardised entry exams testing memorisation	+ Legal framework for inclusion of all citizens	+ Entry interviews including questions on vocation - Entry interviews in reality limited in time and scope
Professional coursework	+ Socio-political focus in subject matters of new curriculum design - Little attention for identity-reflection	+ Inter-intracultural education (But only partly implemented) + Multilingual education (But only partly implemented) - Hierarchical institutional relations, political 'favourism' - Little 'democratic decision-making' at institutional/classroom levels in Normales	+ ASEP Reform stimulates engagement with 'alternative' and indigenous knowledges - Research on 1994 Reform shows simplistic/folkloristic interpretation of intercultural education (chapter 4)
Guided fieldwork	+ PDI course provides promising framework for continuous guided fieldwork experiences in local school communities - Little *guidance* in PDI course, leading to little critical reflection - Teacher students are not obliged to engage in an action research final project	- Although PDI provides a niche for cooperation between Normales and the wider (school) community, there is little actual collaboration	+ Feedback meetings organised for students to share and reflect on teaching experiences - Reflections mostly focused on practical and pedagogical issues, not so much on students' future socio-political role/responsibilities

Table 6, Sleeters' SJTE Framework applied to Bolivia, adapted from Sleeter 2009: 617

6.10 Concluding reflections: old habits meet new ideals

The Morales government aims for a radical restructuring in terms of the governance mechanisms for the teacher education sector, as well as a socio-political redirection of its curriculum. This new political direction seems to mirror a growing acknowledgement and pressure for a genuine transformation of the teacher education system. A teacher trainer for instance mentioned how he thinks this 'new teacher education' should ensure that '*young teachers that will leave the institute are going to identify themselves with their context, they are going to participate, to integrate in the communities problems. They will not only leave this institute as ordinary teachers, but as active teachers, who are concerned with the social and political problems of the community*'(5:16). An indigenous movement leader similarly sees an important role for the 'new' teacher education in '*strengthening the intra-, intercultural and plurilingual education through the Normales, we will change the way of thinking. What we as indigenous could not do before, now we can change, through the Normales. […] Because those future teachers will eventually really change the reality in schools. If we do not change teacher education, we will keep on sliding'* (14:7). Some initial changes in this direction – such as the newly-started Aymara course of Ramiro – are already visible.

However, this chapter has shown how historically embedded institutional cultures and political strategies of the different stakeholders involved are not necessarily creating an enabling environment for these political transformations to take place. The Normales, as '*complex and emergent sites of struggle and contestation*' (Jessop, 2005: 28), consequently mediate these sometimes opposing power relations, as the institutes are positioned on the verge of ASEP's transformation from a ideological policy into an educational reality. What has become clear, is that similar to the 'jammed' or 'broken' government mechanisms that the Morales government encountered at the national level, the same thing could be said for the Normales: they have inherited some of the continuing mechanisms of corruption and lethargy, forming potential barriers for processes of transformation (e.g. decolonisation, liberation, innovation) to take place.

Drawing from Fairclough's theoretical consideration on institutional change through the lens of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2005: 935), this hierarchical and top-down management style, together with centralised authority and a powerful interference of the teachers unions in Bolivian Normales, is part of a historically developed 'fix' for Bolivia's teacher education arena. The 'neoliberal' and 'intercultural-bilingual'-fix of the (teacher) education system, originating from the 1994 reform narrative, is no longer seen as viable by various groups, particularly since Morales came to office. Bolivia faces real changes, both in the political arena as well as developing changes in the socio-cultural realm, where being indigenous is no longer un-done. These wider socio-cultural and political changes affect the teacher training 'fix'. According to Fairclough (2005: 935), '*the implementation of a successful strategy is a matter of the operationalisation of new representations and imaginaries – new discourses and narratives – in new ways of acting and being and new material arrangements'*. A niche for change has opened up through the willingness of the rural teachers unions, and linked to that the rural Normal included in this study, to open dialogue and to contribute to the new plans for a decolonised education system. The relative rural 'open' versus the urban 'closed' attitude towards the new ASEP reform are congruent with the architectural style of both institutes: the rural Normal having an open and more or less public terrain and building structure, while the urban Normal is a concrete bunker surrounded by a

guarded fence. Yet, recalling Tatto's (2007) assertion, we cannot view Normales as homogenous nor passive agents. It is therefore important to acknowledge the internal diversity of opinions both within and around the urban and the rural institute, as well as the management staff's supportive (in the rural case) or critical attitude (in the case of the urban Normal) towards the ASEP reform project. Hence, a new ASEP *hegemonic* fix has not emerged and has certainly not been institutionalised yet. It is still too early to observe deep transforming effects in the organisational structures of the Normal and the inertia of many Normales is a serious obstacle.

The main institutional challenges I distinguished include: an insufficient institutional infrastructure; the Normales as islands; an exclusive profession; discrimination; corruption; traditional teaching styles; and an attitude of apathy in the Normales. Regardless of this troublesome institutional environment, for many youngsters the struggle to enter the Normales – and thus a life long system of relative security – continues and has even intensified. At the same time, trainers and staff members fiercely defend their positions to stay as they are. Once inside, students are often disappointed by the quality of the education they receive. Over the past decade, several reform initiatives targeted this lack of quality, with temporary administration of several Normales by universities in the period between 2000-2005, which was followed up by the recent process of '*institucionalización*' to reorganise the Normales and its staff. Bearing in mind the tensions around these projects, I also see possible niches for change in them, as both national and institutional politics have (re)focused their attention to opening opportunities and stimulation for trainers to upgrade their knowledge and techniques. I also identified ASEP's stronger emphasis on research as a transversal training element as beneficial development, which could potentially open up opportunities for new forms of collaboration between Normales and Universities or research institutes.

In order to improve the quality and alignment with the new reform, the current system of teacher education requires a system of continuous evaluation, dialogue *and* support. Potentially, the PDI course – but so far mostly on paper – carries elements of a SJTE instrument, that could stimulate students understanding, critical reflection and creative practical responses to educational and societal problems, provided that they receive a proper support from the Normal and the school, and are guided in critical reflection processes throughout their training programme.

In short, this chapter has shown how 'old habits' – or barriers to institutional change – are being challenged with 'new ideals' that open up possible niches for transformation. Since the strategically selective context of Normales is influenced by, and in turn influences, the people involved, we now turn to understand the perspectives and characteristics of these agents.