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Future teachers and social change in Bolivia: between decolonisation and demonstration

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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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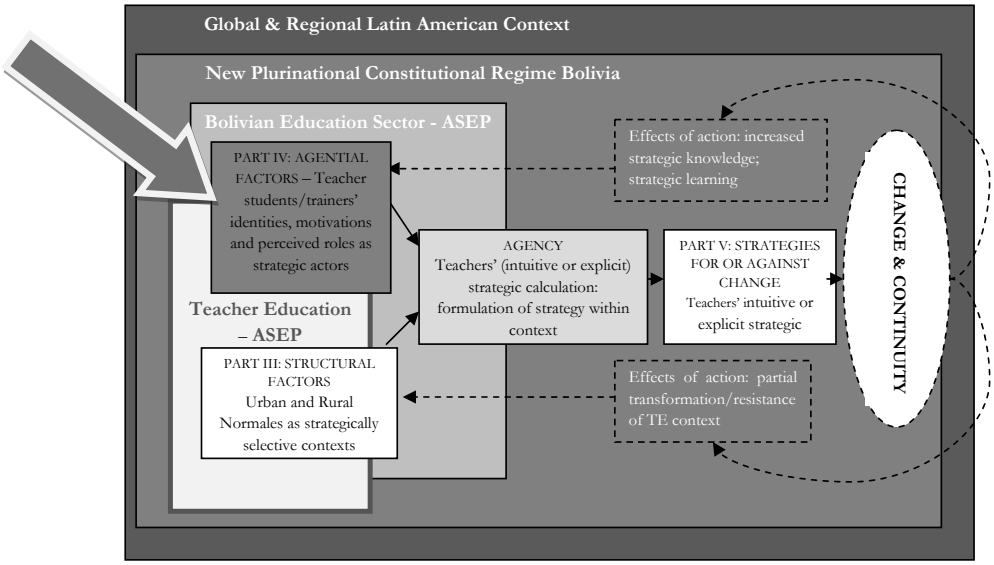
PART IV

AGENTIAL FACTORS:

TEACHER IDENTITIES, MOTIVATIONS & ROLES



Conceptual scheme, adapted from Hay 2002a: 131

As illustrated in the conceptual scheme above, this fourth part of the book analyses the so-called 'agential factors', defined here as teachers' identities, perceived roles and motivations in relation to the contemporary socio-political discursive context of change. From a SJTE perspective (see chapter 2), in order to teach for social justice, teachers need a 'positional identity' (Moore, 2008: 593), meaning a close understanding of their own 'cultural being' as well as the influence of race, ethnicity, social class and gender on their worldview (McDonald and Zeichner, 2009: 604). Reflexive processes of identity construction, which are linked to teachers' critical social awareness and agency, should therefore be a key element of teacher education programmes (Clarke, 2009: 191, 195; Price, 2001: 48; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: 182).

While Mayer (1999 in Walkington, 2005: 54) argues for an explicit focus on teacher identity (as something 'personal') as distinct from teachers' functional roles, this thesis aligns with insights that see the concepts of teachers' identities, motivations, roles and agency as interlinked and influenced by various internal and external aspects (Moore, 2008: 590; Clarke 2009; Walkington 2005). The international journal on Teachers and Teacher Education identified teachers' identities as one of the key focus areas that help to understand this field (Hamilton and Clandinin, 2011).[133] Jansen rightly warns for theoretical considerations on teacher identity that are not connected to 'developing contexts' (2001a: 243-244). In order to understand teachers' 'agenctial factors', I therefore draw from studies that either focus on the Global South, or that are particularly relevant to the case of Bolivia and the purposes of this study. Teacher identity is both dynamic and contested, and differs across countries, regions and communities. Torres del Castillo rightly argues that '*teachers are not just teachers*' (2007: 9), they are also men and women, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, ex-students, workers, community members, voters and neighbours. Instead of a viewing identity as something teachers *have*, MacLure states it is rather something teachers *use*, to justify, explain and make sense of themselves in relation to the wider context (MacLure, 1993: 312). Clarke talks about the '*unfinalizability*' of teacher identity. Without claiming to define the concept, he discusses it as '*a paradoxical complex matter of the social and the individual, of discourse and practice, of reification and participation, of similarity and difference, of agency and structure, of fixity and transgression, of the singular and the multiple*' (Clarke, 2009). Ideally, teachers critically reflect upon all of their multiple identities and in a process of continuous reflection they form new kinds of 'hybrid identities' out of these. This is needed in order to discuss and work with different aspects of diversity and change in their classrooms (Davies, 2006a; Davies, 2008).

The work of Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) brings together the various debates on teacher identity. Although there is no clear and comprehensive definition of what a teacher identity is, there is consensus in the literature on the importance of both internal and external influences (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: 177). Teacher identity relates to personal perceptions and experiences, the role of teachers in a given society and the way others view them, which is often linked to or fuelled by competing interests and ideologies, as well as changing circumstances (Welmond, 2002: 42). Following this line of argument, I have developed the analytical concepts of the *internal* and *external landscapes* that help to understand the changing contextual, structural, external and internal factors – including discursive as well as material dimensions – that influence teachers' identities, beliefs and strategies.

The personal dimension of teachers' identities – or the *internal landscape* – has been studied through biographies, life histories and narratives and has gained more attention in research since the 1990s (MacLure, 1993: 311; Palmer, 1997; Clandinin et al, 2009). The *internal landscape* includes both the 'self' or 'personal identities' of teachers, together with their 'professional identities' (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: 179). The professional identity of teachers is constituted by their educational experiences and beliefs on the one hand, and career experiences on the other. In chapter 7, the *internal landscape* is further analysed through a number of teacher students' and

[133] For studies (including this one) that analyse the identities of teacher students, who often have only limited experiences of what it means to be a teacher yet, it is useful to think of students' 'developing identities' (Moore, 2008: 590; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009).

trainers' 'profile-indicators' including: age; gender; class; cultural/ethnic self identification; language; urban/rural descent and preference; and educational/work experiences.

With regard to the *external landscapes*, due to the complexities of social changes, the life and work of teachers is situated in constantly *shifting past and present landscapes*. Particularly in rapidly changing contexts such as Bolivia, teachers need 'flexible' identities in order to deal with these changing landscapes (Welmond, 2002: 24-26; Clandinin et al, 2009: 141-142). Building on the work of Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) on external contextual factors of teachers' identities in the education sphere – the school environment, the nature of the learner population, the impact of colleagues and school administrators – for this thesis I add the wider socio-political and economic factors at the local, national, regional and global scales that influence the present changing identities and beliefs of Bolivian teacher students.

The notion of 'the ideal teacher' relates to both the *external* and *internal landscapes* of teachers' identities – or the external and personal perceptions of 'the ideal teacher'. Teachers have to somehow merge their own aspirations and wishes with claims coming from the state and other levels (Welmond: 2002: 24-26, 43, 55), including wider society. (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: 181; Clarke, 2009: 185). The 'policy images' of an ideal teacher can conflict with teachers' own (personal and professional) identities. This 'identity conflict' lies at the heart of the implementation problem of educational reform in most developing countries' (Jansen, 2001a: 242). Teachers' personal perceptions of '**the ideal teacher**' relate to **professional**, **socio-political** and **ethical-emotional dimensions** of their identity. I am inspired here by Jansen's (2001a: 242-243) three-fold conceptualisation of teacher identity in the context of developing countries. Firstly, Jansen's *professional basis* includes ways in which teachers understand their capacity to teach as a result of their subject matter competence; their levels of training and performance and former qualifications. Secondly, the *political basis* contains ways in which teachers understand and act on their value commitments, personal backgrounds, political views and professional interests in the context of changing demands and how teachers understand their authority to act or withhold action (for instance in response to reforms). Thirdly, the *emotional basis* consists of ways in which teachers understand their capacity to handle the emotional demands of a new policy in the context of existing stress and pressures (being demands from parents, large numbers of students, lacking facilities, traumas and conflict). I also draw from Palmer's (1997) work, who writes about the need to better understand the '*inner landscape of teachers' life*' through their intellectual, emotional and spiritual characteristics, relating to teachers' identity and integrity. My professional category can be linked to Jansen's professional and Palmer's intellectual dimensions; the socio-political category relates to Jansen's political basis; and the ethical and emotional category can be associated to Jansen's emotional and Palmer's emotional and spiritual dimensions. These analytical categories are applied in chapter 8.

Internal and external perceptions of *who an ideal teacher should be* and *what her/his roles are* are intrinsically linked to teachers' **motivations**. Welmond (2002: 28-30, 43), inspired by Woods, elucidates three different forms of motivations of teachers. Firstly, teachers are defined as individuals who choose teaching out of the absence of viable alternatives, '*or in order to decide not to decide what to do with their lives (career continuance)*'; secondly, teachers can have a professional commitment, being subject specialists with an interest in a career within the education system; and thirdly, teachers can have a vocational commitment to teaching, '*when they care for pupils and*

encourage growth and learning'. For the analysis of Bolivian students' motivations, I slightly adapted Welmond's categorisation and constructed a tripartite typology of teacher motivations that are particularly relevant to the Bolivian context, including: 1) **economic**; 2) **pedagogical-vocational**; and 3) **socio-political motivations**. My first and second categories correspond with Welmond's first and second-plus-third categories, and I added the socio-political category because of its relevance when analysing Bolivia's current envisaged role for teachers as agents of change. The specifics of this typology and its application to the data are taken up in chapter 8.