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

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# 7

## Identifying with the old and the new – changing identities of teacher students and trainers

*'To acknowledge the differences that make up teacher identity is to be aware of the potential for enhancement'*
(Walkington, 2005: 54)

### 7.1 Introduction

After the morning classes have ended at the urban teacher training institute Simón Bolívar, groups of students leave their cold classrooms to warm up in the sunny spots of the court yard. Some cross the square to join a quick match of soccer, others buy an early lunch at one of the privately run *comedores*. I sit down in a quiet and sunny corner with Cecilia, aged 37, a student in the English teachers' course. Cecilia previously studied tourism, and has already worked as an untrained teacher in a rural community in the Yungas, the tropical region of the La Paz department. *'When I was in the Yungas, there was a sense of reciprocity. I respected the students, regardless of their age, and they respected me, and they [the community] took care of me as well. We worked to open a bit the vision of these students, to show there is more to do than stay and work in the coca planting sector. I told them they could achieve more. And, thanks to God, some of them even received a scholarship to study in Cuba, and some others left for the cities to study engineering, or to enter the Normal. I am really content they chose these new routes, as at some point, we all return to where we come from. And when they will return one day, I am sure they will bring something, and they will make a change*'. Now, she is in her second year of the Normal and cannot wait to continue teaching as a trained teacher. She also works as a telephone operator in the afternoons, since '*my mother depends on my income*'. When I asked Cecilia to describe her idea of an ideal teacher, she responded '*this is like describing myself, or what I aspire to be like. For me, a teacher needs to be an integral educator, not only focusing on students' knowledge, but also on their habits, their personalities. For me, being a teacher is a huge responsibility. We have the possibility to change someone's mind, someone's decisions in future life. Being a teacher is not something for one day, it is a long term commitment*' (18). Cecilia's story illustrates the multiple aspects and influences that made her decide to become a teacher in the first place, yet also her personal reflections on her identity and role as a teacher.

Part of a teachers' job as a potential change agent is to understand their own identities and positionality in this world. Being a teacher in Bolivia nowadays means being confronted with *change* in all corners of daily life, including a changing socio-political environment that affects families, schools and communities, and with upcoming new policy guidelines and curricula arriving at schools and Normales. Educators at all levels thus, willingly or unwillingly, have to face and position themselves in response to these politics of change. In order to understand

teachers' strategies (in chapter 9), we first need to explore teachers' identities, motivations and beliefs. First, this chapter explores the changing identities of student teachers and teacher trainers, while the next chapter discusses teachers' perceived (educational and societal) roles, perceptions of the 'ideal teacher' and student teachers' motivations. Understanding the identities and motivations of these two groups of actors is essential to comprehend the possibilities for and obstacles to educational change (Robinson and McMillan 2006: 189), and to answer the question whether (future) teachers can be agents of change.

The chapter first discusses and challenges the rather homogenising and passive conceptualisations of Bolivia's teachers in part of the literature so far, and argues for an agency oriented approach to understanding teachers' various strategies – for *or* against change. I argue that there is a need to rethink the traditional roles of teachers as mere 'messengers of the system', particularly because the 'old system' has changed radically since the installation of Morales. Indigenous and non-indigenous, urban and rural, old and young Bolivian (future) teachers' are faced with a changing context of a Latin American 'indigenous awakening' and a continuing unequal society and economy. These changing landscapes – including a new education reform – force teachers of all kinds to re-imagine their identities, roles and even motivations. The chapter shows the specifics of this changing profile of the current group of students based on two important developments. Firstly, I observe an increased age and often wider experiences of students who enter the Normal, such as Cecilia. Secondly, there is a growing recognition of indigenous culture and languages through personal and collective identity formation processes, illustrated by Ramiro's story in chapter 1. I conclude by arguing how I see a largely unused potential in a changing profile of the future teacher force, in a changing and possibly more enabling – yet very tense – societal and institutional context.

### 7.2 Challenging homogenising views on Bolivian teachers' identities and roles

Studies conducted before 2006 (and the presidency of Morales) write about the ambiguous role of teachers and forms of teacher training in reproducing the structures of the hidden curriculum, strengthening instead of withstanding the ongoing homogenisation of Bolivian education. In this view, the teacher often represents an '*alien power and knowledge*' in local communities (Regalsky and Laurie, 2007). In addition, Bolivian teachers are often seen as important figures within rural communities, since they embody 'the way out of poverty'. These teachers sometimes come from the same rural community, but chose the teacher profession and in the words of Canessa, '*are great proponents of the Bolivian Dream whereby through hard work and study one can 'whiten', 'progress' and become mestizos*' (2004: 190). Canessa argued that despite the education policies for intercultural and bilingual education, schoolteachers are in fact still '*a major source of assimilationist cultural ideology and [that they] are principal agents in reproducing hegemonic racism in indian communities*' (2004: 185). This author rejects the 'essentialist' assumption that teachers should share the same cultural and linguistic background as their students (being indigenous). He argues that teachers had to take a decision to become a teacher, and thus to leave 'traditional' (rural) life and to obtain a level of social mobility through formal study. In his point of view, it is very unlikely that those who distanced themselves from 'being indian', would later on valorise and promote this same culture in the classroom (Canessa, 2004: 187-189, 197-199). Children from peasant families who enter

the Normales would then change from *indios* to *mestizos* (Regalsky and Laurie, 2007: 238).[134] Even though Luykx (1999 in Regalsky and Laurie, 2007) demonstrates that student teachers do show resistance against the creation of this dominant *criollo* culture, Regalsky and Laurie remain committed to their statement that teacher education is creating a submission to state authority under which teachers have to work, even in communities where they originally came from (2007: 239). In 2000, Speiser presented a similar view by arguing that '*schooling has always been oriented towards the so-called 'national community', which is ideally white, modern, urban and non-indigenous*' (2000: 228-229). The trained teacher is thus viewed as an ambiguous link between the community (to which they do or do not belong) and the school (D'Emilio, 1996: 9, 21), and between local and regional power networks.

In the current context of Bolivian society, we need to rethink the idea presented in some of the literature up to now, of Bolivian teachers as poor and marginalised peasants that will become '*mestizos*' and work towards a homogenising 'national community'. In addition, it would be inaccurate to state that teachers operate as 'unilateral agents of the state', as teachers operate both as state employed officers, but are also engaged with local communities, parents, social and indigenous movements and teachers' unions. Bolivian schools and Normales alike can be characterised as spaces in which power relations are mediated, potentially challenging the historical exclusionary and essentialist forms of education. This homogenising and reproducing idea of the Bolivian teacher does not hold, even more so when considering Bolivia's current changing socio-political context. When following a Gramscian and critical pedagogical perspective in which education is *not* a mere apparatus of the state and educators are strategic subjects, we should rethink Bolivian teachers' roles in relation to their agency – either for or against the current governmental policies. Careful considerations of what it means to become a 'decolonised' teacher that is perhaps more aware (or even proud of) her/his indigenous background and identity, or reversely feels unrepresented and in resistance to the decolonial reform (chapters 5, 6), needs future attention in research and policy.

### 7.3 Identities in the Normales: a student teachers' and teacher trainers' profile

Relating back to the discussion in the introduction to part IV, both the *internal landscape* as well as the *external landscape* are important when attempting to understand teachers' identities. This section first presents a teacher students' and teacher trainers' profile, based on data from different groups of respondents, representing the *internal landscape*. When constructing these students' and trainers' profiles, I focus on several elements of this complex framework that are particularly relevant for the context of Bolivian teachers, namely their: 1) **age**; 2) **gender**; 3) **class**; 4) **cultural/ethnic self identification**; 5) **language**; 6) **urban/rural descent and preference**; and 7) **educational/work experiences**. Through critical discourse analysis of these aspects, I suggest a new and changing *internal landscape* of the identities of students, based on perceptions of respondents from interview and survey data.

134 See also 'the citizen factory (Luykx 1999).

### *Student Teachers' Profile*

*Age*

One of the elements that illustrates a changing students profile is the increasing age of students that enter the Normales, like Cecilia who started her teacher training at the age of 35, after having worked for some time. The average age of the group of 164 students included in the survey at the urban institute is 25 years-of-age, and for the 158 students at the rural institute the average age is 22.[135] Formerly, as was explained to me by various teacher trainers, most students entered the Normal immediately after their secondary education, around the age of 18. Now we see a rise in age, because a large part of the students have already followed and/or completed another course of study, and some have previously worked for a number of years. Thus, instead of a group of fairly inexperienced youngsters, we now see the Normales inhabited by a mixed group of young school leavers, somewhat older students with a full or partially completed university study and more experienced professionals. In the urban institute, around 40% of the students that took part in the survey entered the Normal after finishing their secondary education. Of those, 7% indicated to also have gained extra job experience (in different sectors) before starting at the Normal. In contrast, 60% of the students have already completed a higher education study before entering the teaching profession. The rural situation is rather different. Here, 92% of the survey participants entered the Normal after finishing secondary education. Of those, 20% have work experience (in different sectors) and only 8% have finished a higher education study. This can be explained, at least partly, by a smaller range of opportunities for rural students to follow a higher education in comparison to their urban colleagues.

*Gender*

A female dominance of the profession also remains.[136] The survey results among 322 students showed how, at both institutes, the majority of respondents were female.[137] In an interview with three female second year students at the urban institute, it was outlined how gender inequalities still exist. They spoke about difficulties to (obtain) work as a woman, about male dominance in higher positions, about male neglect of domestic work and about discrimination and abuse of women, both in the work place as well as in the home or in the community (16:35; 16:70; 22:18). In the rural institute of Warisata, one student firmly argued how '*one day it should be completely normal to have a Cholita as president!*' (69:27). [138] She not only argued for gender equality, but also for equal rights of indigenous women. Both younger teenage-mothers as well as older women with children complained of the difficulties they had with finding good child care. Their stories revealed how in some cases, older family members would take care of their children during class hours. However, single mothers or those living apart from their (extended) families complained of a lack of child care facilities at the Normales. At the urban institute, there is a limited and somewhat irregular child care service. On the other hand, female students also told me that they

135 The government considered introducing an age-limit for subscriptions to the Normales, but protests have so far hindered this (personal communication Education Expert of the Dutch Embassy, La Paz, 17-02-2011). Survey respondents were students in their first and third year of study.

136 UNESCO's Institute for Statistics show that two thirds of all (primary and lower secondary) teachers were female in the period between 2000-2004, and a similar situation continues to exist (http://stats.uis.unesco.org).

137 At the urban institute, 68.3% of the survey respondents are female, with 31.7% male students. In the rural institute, a similar picture arises, with 72.3% female respondents and 28.9% male respondents.

138 Cholita for young girls or Chola for married women in common Bolivian speech refers to a traditionally dressed woman from an indigenous background.

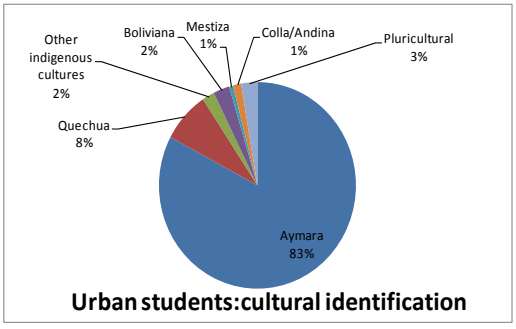
chose a teaching career because of the flexible and limited number of working hours a day that permits them to combine their work as a teacher and their family.

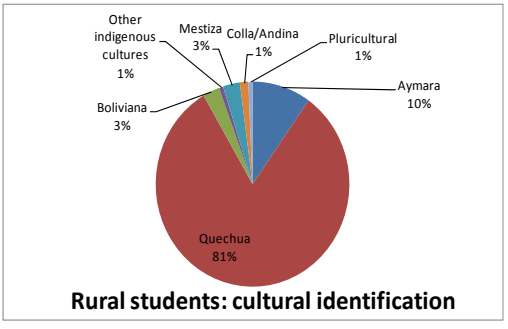
*Class*

Some of the life histories of students reveal their difficult and often marginalised family backgrounds. Most students come from low or low-middle class families (90:5) because, as will be illustrated in chapter 8, becoming a teacher is a possibility for 'upward' social mobilisation. A female rural student told her story: '*I graduated from high school in 1999. But because we are with six brothers and sisters at home, and I am the youngest, I started to work. Our economic situation did not permit me to start studying at the Normal then. But I kept on dreaming about becoming a teacher, I really only wanted to be a teacher. Later on I studied 'auxiliar de educación' [classroom assistant] so I could work with young children. But then there was the opportunity to take part in the entrance exam of the Normal, and I finally succeeded*' (29:32). On another occasion, I was sitting with a young male student in the rural institutes' library, discussing his irregular Normal-trajectory. '*I was in third grade, but I had to stop because of a problem in our family. My mother was ill, and there was nobody to take care of her. My brother wanted to leave high school, but I did not want him to. So I left the Normal in 2006 and sacrificed myself for my brother. But, when I returned here, there was no fourth grade [because for some time students were not admitted for specific subjects]. The only thing I could do is start all over again in first grade, with the new group of students. So I lost 12 years all together. But I do not think about that anymore, for a mother, you do everything.*' (41:14). These stories paint a picture of the often problematic family situations that these future teachers come from and show how becoming a teacher is seen as a way to overcome poor families' material conditions. Thus, particularly for working and middle class women, entering the Normal is an often devised path to social mobility (Robertson 2000; Weiner 2008).

*Cultural and ethnic self identification*

Teachers' understanding of social markers such as gender, class, religion and ethnicity is important for their so called 'positional identity' (Moore, 2008: 593). Recent processes of 're-ethnisation' and 're-identification' – as was explained to me by a former Normal director now working in the MoE (107:11) – stimulate students to have a greater awareness, acceptance and self esteem in relation to their cultural-ethnic background. According to an indigenous educator, Bolivian future teachers find themselves in a historical moment of reconfiguration of identities: '*If I was asked if I was Quechua or Aymara when I studied at the Normal, I would have denied either option.[...] Now, it is important to see how understanding one's own identity has changed*' (107:11).



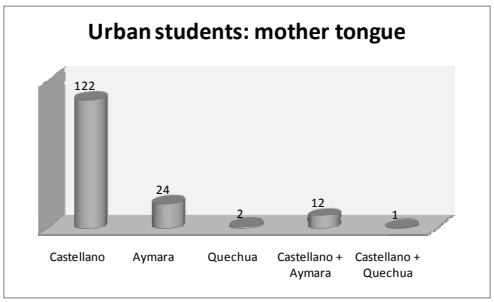

*Figures 2 and 3, students' cultural self identification*

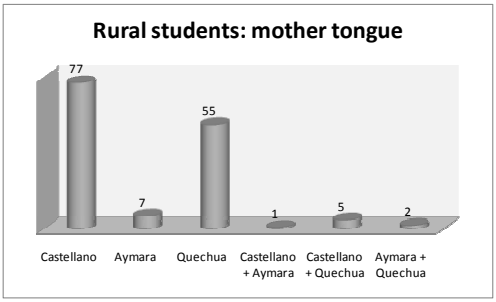
With regards to students' cultural and ethnic self identification, in the surveys for student teachers I included the question '*with what culture do you identify*?'. Figure 2 illustrates how students in the urban institute primarily identify themselves with the Aymara culture and thus with having an indigenous ethnic origin. It is however necessary to take into account that these self identifications might be influenced by the context in which the question was posed: these answers are thus time, place and context dependent, but nevertheless show a (changing) picture of students' growing indigenous awareness/recognition, at least in the institutes included in this research.

Figure 3 on rural students' cultural identifications illustrates how most students in the rural institute identified with the Quechua culture. Taking into account the dominance of the Aymara culture in the urban research location, and Quechua in the rural location, this outcome is not very surprising. However, what *is* interesting is the fact that in both cases, a large majority of students 'dare' to link themselves to an indigenous culture. These data contrast the view of the authors mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, who argued that students in the Normales leave their indigenous identity 'behind' and adopt the 'modern *mestizo*' way of life. What I saw in the Normales of today might be explained as a transition-phase, between this dual 'indian-*mestizo*' switch that students used to make when they decided to become a teacher, to a identity-construction process in which both elements of old and new ways of living, old and new forms of teaching, and old and new socio-political views are combined. For instance, identifying as being indigenous does not preclude the possibility of being a member of a 'western-inspired' music performance group. This is linked to a simultaneous socio-political transition discussed in the chapter 1. We have to take into account that due to the socio-political and cultural diversities of the different geographic regions, this transition-phase might have different natures and implications in different Bolivian contexts.

*Languages*

It is interesting to see how there is a discrepancy between a majority of students choosing Aymara or Quechua when asked about their cultural self identification, while smaller numbers of students indicated that they have an indigenous language as their mother tongue. These results resonate with Canessa's (2006: 256) statement, that language is a very poor indicator of indigenous identity and the fact that until 1994, but in many cases even until today, Spanish is the main (or only) language of instruction in schools. Similarly, Howard (2010: 181) in an analysis of present day Bolivia under Morales, writes how it is not incongruous for Bolivia's president to claim Aymara identity while making little active use of that language. While language might be considered a poor indicator of 'being indigenous', it is nevertheless a relevant characteristic of Bolivia's future teachers' profile, considering ASEP's envisaged plurilingual education system. The two figures below (4 and 5) illustrate how the majority of both urban and rural students indicated to have Spanish (*Castellano*) as their mother tongue, with Aymara being the second largest language in the urban institute and Quechua in the urban one.



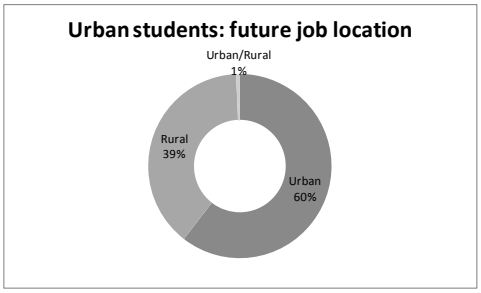



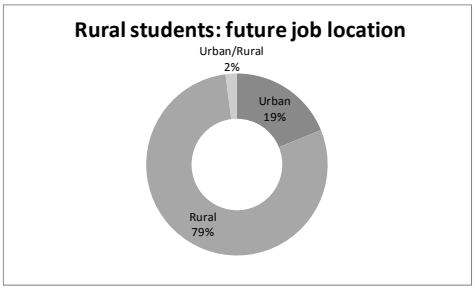

*Figures 4 and 5, students' mother tongue in numbers of student survey participants*

In the urban institute, 122 out of 161 (76%) students indicated to only speak Spanish, while the rest considered themselves bilingual (see Figure 4). In the rural institute a small majority of around 52% (77 out of 147 respondents) have Spanish as their mother tongue, while 38% of the 'rural students' indicated to being raised with either Quechua or Aymara (5%) as their mother tongue. However, being raised bilingually does not mean these students still speak both languages. A female teacher student who was born in a rural area and who is now living in the city explained: '*I have lived for 5 years in the countryside. I remember that when I came here, I spoke Aymara. But because then in the education system they discriminated against you, I forgot to speak it. I understand and speak just a little bit now*' [16:74]. It can be concluded that there lies an enormous challenge for the Normales – and in essence the whole education system – to ensure a teacher force that can genuinely provide bilingual or even trilingual education, as is written down in policy.

*Urban/Rural descent and working location preference*

In terms of students' rural/urban descent, evidence shows how in the urban context 95% of the survey participants were born in an urban area, and continue to live there. In the rural institute 45% of the students were born in an urban area and 55% in a rural context. At this moment, 40% still live in a city and 60% live in the country side. However, the categories 'urban' and 'rural' have no clear boundaries and are interpreted in various ways. Some students from the outskirts of El Alto, an urban area on the highlands close to La Paz, for instance claimed to have a rural descent. This data thus has to be viewed as indicative. Students' choice for a rural or urban Normal is mostly based on proximity of the institute: *'I choose not to go to Warisata [a rural Normal] because my family is poor, and I would have to pay rent for a house there. Here, I have an extra job at five in the morning, and then I go to classes afterwards*' (103:2). This male urban student also explains that economic and family reasons often play a role in one's decision for an institute. In some cases, students fail to enter in one institute and then try another one.




*Figures 6 and 7, students' preferred future job location*

Interestingly, not all urban students prefered to work as a teacher in a city school later on: 39% of urban students stated they wanted to leave the city to work in a rural context (see Figure 6). In terms of gender differences, the urban male students included in the survey evenly preferred an urban or a rural future job location, whereas the majority of female students prefer to stay in the cities. This outcome fits with the reality of a lack of female teachers in Bolivian remote areas. As for the rural students, a large majority (79%) prefer to work in a rural location (see Figure 7). Here, a majority of rural male students and a large majority of female students all state to prefer working in a rural school. How then to explain the existing problem of a lack of teachers, and particularly female teachers, in rural areas? This can be partly explained by the fact that students choose to live in urban areas after their two years 'in the province', because life circumstances are more difficult than expected. Besides, it should be taken into account that the definitions of what counts as urban and what as rural are not always clear; areas in the proximity of cities are still seen as urban areas by some, and as rural by others. Therefore, these answers are only rough indications of students' preferred future working location. Chapter 8 discusses teachers' different (perceived) roles in rural and urban contexts and elaborates further on the reasons behind students' preferred job locations.

*Education and work experience*

I have spoken to and heard from a wide array of professionals entering the Normal to become teachers, including doctors, lawyers, architects, musicians, IT- and financial workers, untrained teachers, NGO-workers, as well as people coming from the tourism sector, like Cecilia. A structural lack of job opportunities in other sectors in the last few years has contributed to a changing profile of the students that study to become teachers. Many of them have already finished another study, failed to get a job and so turn to becoming a teacher as a second career move. Some have already been working as untrained teachers and now follow the Normal courses to be able to subscribe to the *escalafon* and according salary arrangements (see chapter 6). Others are simultaneously pursuing a university career at a teacher training institute to widen their job opportunities in the future: '*I think most of us choose the Normal as a second option'* (female urban student, 16:44c). However, students do not talk about their former studies or career openly in the Normal, as became clear from this group interview with a female and a male urban student: '*A: I think 50% of the students already have a profession. C: Or they have studied somewhere else, or they study at the same time, I think it is even more than 50%. A: But they don't tell. [Why don't they tell?] C: It is not allowed to have a university degree. So they don't tell this, I think in this first parallel class of English teachers about 90% of the students already has another profession'* (19:91a+c).

As explained before, the teaching profession is seen as a way to obtain a secure job position and salary, and welfare arrangements. Perceptions vary on the relationship between this increased age and educational/working experience and students' motivations and/or vocation to enter the job. Some argue that due to the financial reasons to enter the Normal at a later age, motivations are mostly economic and often not vocational (e.g. 89). Yet, others believe that the (life and working) experience brought into the institute by these older students can also be beneficial for their vocation and teaching skills, and in addition a higher educated student population could stimulate trainers to improve their preparation and quality of their classes (122:14). These observations challenge the majority opinion that these older students are 'a problem' or, as perceived by some trainers, that they 'steal away' the opportunities for younger students to enter the Normal. We now turn to understand the main characteristics of the teacher trainers.

### *Teacher Trainers' Profile*

There has been an international lack of attention to research teacher trainers (Robinson and McMillan, 2006). By understanding who the trainers of the students are, we might gain insights into what role models are available to the student teachers and to what effect the profiles of the trainers might have on students. As argued by Clandinin et al (2009), students and trainers develop interwoven identities and there is thus a need to understand identity formation processes of both groups. It is important to create a teacher trainers' profile, similar to the student profile. I will again look into the following aspects of the *internal landscape* of trainers' identities: 1) **age**; 2) **gender**; 3) **class**; 4) **cultural/ethnic self identification**; 5) **language**; 6) **urban/rural descent**; and 7) considering their role as educators of future teachers I specifically elaborate on their educational **and work experiences**.

*Age*

While an older age in itself is not necessarily an indicator of a lower quality of trainers, it was relatively often referred to in interviews as an issue of concern. In the urban Normal, the twenty teacher trainers included in the survey had an average age of 51 years old and an average of 27 years in the teaching profession. Regardless of the benefits of their long term experience, students complained of trainers' relatively old age, relating it to a lack of updated knowledge of innovative teaching methods and techniques. This argument was often related to trainers' age, or to a lack of motivation to innovate because of continuing job security based on political favours for a group of older trainers. Chapter 6 shows how an older generation was indeed still 'kept' inside the institutions, regardless of their qualifications according to some. Younger and middle-aged trainers at the urban institute were also critical of their older colleagues who had little impetus to change (17:8, 17:22, see also chapter 6). A male staff member reflected: '*We have professors who already passed the age of 60 but continue working. So, they are already in the teaching profession for 30 or 35 years. They do not update their knowledge or teaching techniques anymore. We know that these older teachers use traditional teaching methods, and they cannot live up to the needs of the younger students, for instance related to technological skills. It is a huge problem'* (48:8). A foreign NGO-worker, who has been involved in the reform of Normales since the 1990s and is still active in the field of educational politics in Bolivia, argued that when the Normales cut most ties with the universities (and 'university trainers') in 2005 (see chapter 6), *'they have thrown the old people in again, completely outdated*

*['desactualizada'], but with a political 'weight'. They control the Normales. Now, the institutes do not want to innovate, nor improve or change.'*(73:5)

A counter-voice to this pessimistic view is given by a senior rural male teacher and staff member, who has been involved in the teaching profession for almost four decades himself. '*In these 38 years I have seen the reality of changing human resources, changing strengths and weaknesses, and so I have come to realise I have to be a reflexive trainer, in order to train reflexive future teachers. At the same time, my students who will be the future teachers, they have to understand they have to become the new human resources, based on a new ideological system'* (33:6). This teacher thus argues that for a teacher trainer to 'survive' as a human resource – a trainer – in the Normales, you have to be flexible and adapt yourself to changing circumstances.

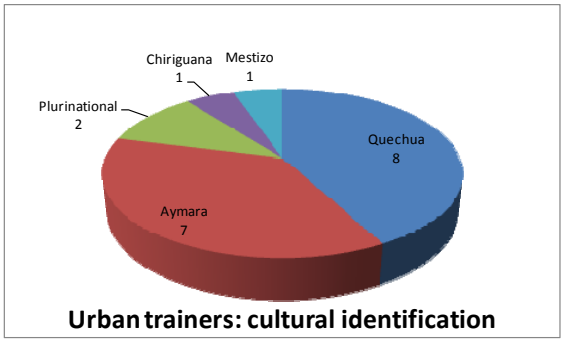
*Gender and class*

*W*hile the majority of students are female, a small majority of teacher trainers are male. This finding is in line with outcomes of earlier studies, such as a MoE evaluation (1999) and Delany-Barmann's study on three EIB Normales (2010), which also show a majority of male trainers. A possible explanation is given by a rural indigenous female teacher who explained the difficulty to make a choice between being a mother and having a career as a teacher trainer. Because she comes from a remote rural indigenous community in the South of Bolivia, she has to live separately from her husband and two children if she wishes to continue her career and she only travels to see her family during the holidays. *'My husband lives with the children; he has the role of being a mother to them. 'I feel bad', I have told him, 'I want to dedicate myself to my children, and to being a house wife'. 'No sweetheart', my husband said, 'you have to continue, also for the sake of our family'. So I have all the support from my husband, and this stimulates me even more. I have to continue the struggle for the indigenous claims'.* Pausing for a moment, she continued: '*When I will be old I can rest and feel peaceful after having done something, that is how I think, that is how I can live with this situation, of the responsibility of being a mother and having sleepless nights of all the work'* (32:22). This quote reveals how female trainers face barriers in terms of gender and at the same time their ethnicity (being indigenous). In addition, this example indicates that, like the majority of students, teacher trainers have a marginalised background. Like their younger future colleagues, the majority of trainers come from lower and middle classes and they often also entered the teaching profession some decades ago as a way to improve their living conditions.

*Cultural/ethnic self identification*

Only one of teacher trainers included in the survey in the urban institute still identified with being *mestizo*. Similar to the characteristics seen in the student population, most trainers also claimed to have an indigenous connection in some way. Figure 8 shows how a large majority of the urban trainers identified themselves with being either Quechua or Aymara.

*Figure 8, urban trainers' self identification (in numbers)*




However, this picture does not mean that 'diversity' or being indigenous is accepted in all institutions. This is shown significantly through the lack of acceptance of traditional/indigenous ways of dressing of teacher trainers. According to Howard (2010: 183), in the Andean region clothing styles are as important as languages with regard to symbolic struggles for power and identity formation. In 2003, Albó and Anaya described how the wearing of the *pollera* – the traditional multilayered skirt worn in various styles by indigenous women – was prohibited in many (urban) Normales (Albó & Anaya 2003: 205). Now, there are no official regulations that prohibit this way of dressing. Nevertheless, I have seen very few trainers dressed in traditional clothes; this was only the case in some of the rural institutes. In an interview, a rural female trainer explained how it is a continuous struggle for her to be accepted when dressed in her 'own way'. *'The director has proposed to all teacher trainers to come 'uniformed' [meaning 'western style' jacket and tie for men and 'western style' clothing for women] on Mondays [when teachers have a weekly meeting after the classes]. But I kept on coming in my traditional clothes, and there was some critique on that. But I am sure of my identity, of who I am, and I do not want to change that. Also, I do not feel comfortable in other clothes. But I think that when this institute is serious about interculturality, we should not homogenise people through wearing uniforms. I want everyone to be treated equal; I want to be treated like that as well. Some teachers complained, that there is a danger we would all show up unclean, unprepared and without jacket and tie. It makes me sad. I am not unhygienic just because I wear traditional clothes. At some point they will have to reflect. I have an academic career as well. And I can communicate from the point of view of the communities'* (32:19). This story illustrates the deep structures of discrimination (see also chapters 3 and 7) that remain to exist, even in the rural institute where a strong inter- and intracultural discourse is introduced by the management staff.

*Language*

With regards to trainers' languages, similar to the picture of the students, there seems to be a divergence in trainers' mother tongue and cultural self identification. For example, identifying oneself with the Aymara culture does not necessarily mean this person also has Aymara as their mother tongue, or even speaks Aymara. From a small group of 20 urban teacher trainers included in the survey, approximately half of them have Spanish as their mother tongue, around 25% Quechua and 25% Aymara. Yet, as my conversations with both students and trainers revealed, the skills to actively use an indigenous language sometimes have vanished. Thus, if indigenous languages are to become part of the obligatory curriculum for all students, extra training for the trainers will be necessary.

*Urban/rural descent*

In the urban institute, there was a balance in teacher trainers coming from urban and rural backgrounds. In the rural institute, a larger part of the teacher force originated from a rural context. Because of migration flows, as well as the nature of the teaching profession in Bolivia,

many teachers have been working in different contexts. Being born or even trained in a rural or urban place does not necessarily mean that trainers have only worked in that same context. A senior male trainer now working in the city, mentioned in his survey that he was raised in a rural and an urban context, because he lived with a miners-family (who often migrated). During his working life he also worked in many different places, *'because I have been travelling a lot, I know many different cultures'* (47:17). Nevertheless, there is also a group of trainers that have been working in a singular context for a long time, which according to the travelling teacher is negatively impacting their attitudes: '*This is what is lacking in our understanding of each other, we don't know each other, not here [in the highlands] or there [in the East]'* (47).

*Educational and working experience*

All trainers included in the survey graduated in a Normal. In the urban Normal, a majority of trainers employed also graduated from that same institute. A majority of the teacher trainers also have a University degree in Educational Sciences (*Licenciatura* – similar to a Bachelors degree) and around half of the trainers have also completed a Masters or PhD. More than half of the trainers are currently involved in a study to obtain an extra degree (*Diplomado, Maestria,* or *Doctorado*). Yet, not all trainers want to be open about their studies and personal development to their colleagues. One urban trainer told me about his almost finished PhD thesis. However, he insisted I kept this information to myself for the time being: '*we can share our work together, but it is a secret to the rest. A surprise it has to be, when it is finished*' (48:29). On why this was a secret, he responded that it was very problematic to make it to the end of the PhD, due to regulations in the University and he did not want to raise false expectations. The director of the institute did tell me later about four trainers who were working on a PhD and this trainer was known to be working on one as well (62:6). The director also mentioned how currently around 80 trainers (including the director himself) were involved in the training (for a *diplomado en educación*) at the Interregional Institute Andres Bello (organised by Cubans).

A female urban trainer shared with me how she initially found it difficult to go to the university again for her next degree and to cooperate (or compete) with younger students. *'The younger students think I do not know more then them, but I say that professors at any age can develop and adapt themselves. Actually, I have adapted so well that now all students want to be in my group when we do assignments'* (5:46). Several female urban trainers spoke to me about their joint efforts for a qualitative research project aimed at 'improving the quality of teacher training'. The academic director explained she wanted the trainers to 'share their knowledge' through publication and dissemination in seminars. Yet, while she mentioned how '*in the 1960s and 1970s, the Ministry of Education provided a service to publish studies'* (17:35), this is not the case anymore, as there is currently a lack of sufficient resources.

Approximately half of the trainers admitted to having another job alongside their duties at the Normal. For example, I have spoken to teachers who are also University lecturers, thesis supervisors (at the University), consultants or lawyers. Even the director of the urban institute is working part time as a university teacher in civil engineering, '*in the afternoons and evenings, so it does not affect my activities here in the Normal*' (62:13). These extra jobs are often considered necessary, but also as negatively influencing the work of teacher trainers. During a group discussion related to these findings with a group of urban teacher trainers (May 2010), some opposing ideas on having

extra jobs were debated. It was mostly the active union members who criticised other trainers for working 'extra jobs', such as lecturing in a university, saying '*they never have time to invest in working together with colleague trainers*'. In contrast to these critiques, it is exactly those trainers who could bridge the existing gap between the Normales and universities. As elaborated in chapter 6, various studies concluded how 'independent' links between universities and Normales could have beneficial effects on the quality of the Normales (Lozada Pereira 2004: 153-154; Concha et al 2002: 62-63). In addition, some of these multi-tasking trainers also argued that because of their wide experiences inside and outside the Normales, they could bring something extra, something valuable to the classrooms of the training institutes. Several trainers told me the stories of their lives, like this very passionate 58 year old male teacher who has been teaching for 41 years. He was born in a rural area and identifies himself with a 'plurinational' cultural identity: *'I have been working as a teacher for a long time. But I have also worked in international projects, with USAID, on mathematics for radio teaching, and with UNICE, on curriculum development for multigrade schools. I also worked for the United Nations on the 'Literacy Plan', and in a programme for distance learning in the highlands [Altiplano]. Then I worked with the European Union as a consultant for an adult education programme in El Alto. We created 12 pedagogical centres, like they exist in Spain and Italy. And finally, I worked in the Cuban literacy programme Yo Si Puedo*' (9:1). Several students confirmed my positive image of this man who stands out in the group of trainers. He works passionately with his students, motivating them, organising thematic working groups and so on. Trainers like this one can be seen as part of the 'exception to the (conservative) rule', as discussed in chapter 7.

### 7.4 Reflecting on student teachers' and teacher trainers' profiles

The information above can help to identify the complexities of the internal landscape of teachers' identities or, in the case of students, of their developing or imagined teacher identities. As a reflection of the complex reality, the heterogeneity of the answers of the respondents mirrors the heterogeneity of these groups of trainers and students, and is inherent to the mostly qualitative methods used in this research. I try to show a varied picture, a picture of the multiplicity of the characteristics of both students and trainers within the institutes, and between the urban and rural institute. I believe that there is a need to rethink the common negative views of students and their trainers, and to accept a more nuanced picture of both students and trainers at the Normales, as there are two main developments that lead to a changed profile of students.

Firstly, we can see how a lack of job opportunities has been an incentive for somewhat older people and professionals to enter the Normal, instead of the former majority of young secondary school leavers. On the one hand, this might lead to higher educated teacher corps. An urban female student argued that she has faith in this new generation of future teachers, because they 'know more', and *'they are going to change something in the education system, they look forward to being a teacher. Part of the students is here to learn, but they already also know, they are the ones that are needed in our society, for instance the mathematics students most of them are 'universitarios' [graduated from or studying in University]. This is what our society now needs, people who know, it is a good thing we have engineers coming here to study to become teachers'* (19:97). On the other hand, it also has a potential impact on the kind of motivations and dedication of teachers, which is discussed below. Somewhat older teachers who begin teaching might receive more respect from parents and the community, but their former career and own family life might also form a barrier to genuinely integrating in a (remote)

community, which is seen by many respondents as a crucial development for an ideal teacher (see the section below).

Teacher trainers see themselves faced with challenges regarding the increased age of their students: '*The problem is that the ones we select to enter the 800 places, out of 20,000 'postulantes', we choose the professionals, because they perform better in the exams. The young people who just left school feel disadvantaged. There is a very strong crisis now in our institute, because sometimes the professional-students know more than our own trainers. [...] Also, the majority is not interested in the quality aspects [of education], they just want to pass the career with as few hours as possible. Around 20 years ago, students were between the ages of 19 and 22 years old, now students are much older, even about 50 years old.'* Although I have not met the 50 year old student, and I am sure this was an exception to the rule, there is indeed a strong tendency of professionals – outside or inside the education sector – with University degrees entering the Normal. Viewed from another perspective, this might also become a trigger for a quality improvement of teacher education, so that trainers still feel competent enough to train all students. Also, as was described in chapter 6, the changed policies for *'postulantes'* to enter the Normal might lead to an increased (academic) level of students in the Normales, now 'those who performed best' will be accepted (La Prensa, 18-03-2010a). Such policies aimed at recruiting 'better candidates' are not exclusive to the Bolivian case, as Tattoo describes how generally better teacher candidates are perceived by policy makers world-wide to have a stronger content knowledge and the ability to gain pedagogical knowledge 'on the job' (Tatto, 2007: 272-273).

Secondly, the *internal* and *external landscapes* of teachers' identities meet each other in the sense that there is a growing recognition of indigenous culture and languages at the societal level which affects the identities of students and to some extent also those of trainers. The data shows how newly trained teachers in both studied institutes seem to be more aware and also more proud of their indigenous backgrounds then was assumed before. One teacher student from El Alto proudly told me he now openly uses his Aymara surname, while his mother told him when he was young that he always had to try to stay away from using it to avoid being discriminated. This changing attitude might promote a more open dialogue about different identities and possibly counteract the reproduction of the historical *castellanisación* of Bolivian education. The other way around a space for dialogue about diverse identities might change teachers' beliefs and attitudes. In relation to these developments, the new education law seems to promote a somewhat more enabling context for teachers to openly announce and discuss their, and their students', multiple identities. The new ASEP reform aims to (re)value indigenous or 'original' knowledge and culture. Chapter 5 explained how this new ASEP law is received in an atmosphere of both receptiveness and resistance to 'reverse forms of discrimination'. Still, some effects of these developments can already be observed. For example, an urban teacher trainer recently started to stimulate his own children to learn Quechua, the language he himself was raised with: '*every Sunday afternoon after lunch until 6pm, we only speak Quechua, and I do not answer my children if they speak in Spanish. My children became very interested, and at school started to discuss what languages their classmates speak*' (117:6).

An important challenge for policy makers and teacher training institutes becomes clear when comparing the policy ideals of a bi- or trilingual system with the reality in the Normales. The majority of students in the urban institute have Spanish as their mother tongue, and most

student teachers' are not bi- (or tri-) lingual. Even in the rural institutes, where they are supposed to mainly train rural future teachers, not all students speak another language besides Spanish. This has major consequences for the aim of genuine bilingual – and intra/intercultural – education. Similarly, many teacher trainers also often lack the skills to speak – let alone teach in – indigenous languages. In a focus group discussion with eight urban trainers, where I presented these outcomes, a female trainer reflected that: '*When most students do not speak Aymara, Quechua or Guaraní, but they do identify themselves with those [cultures], the implementation of their training is what worries me. Maybe I am trying to implement a process of teacher formation that is different to what they actually need. And this is also not mentioned in the ASEP law*' (117:8). At the end of the meeting, she said she enjoyed the conversation with her colleagues. As a result, she proposed to her colleagues to organise such discussions more often. I do not know whether this has actually happened, but the intention to engage in a collective reflection seemed to fit into my earlier discussed 'opportunities for institutional change' in chapter 7.

In chapter 6, I discussed different 'institutional cultures' in the rural institute where everyone (during the week) lives inside the Normal and in the urban institute where people only come during the day. These different institutional cultures affect the relationships between students and teachers, even if it was only related to the time teachers have available when they live at the institute, eat together, walk around during the evening and can have a chat with students. Still, most students in both institutes criticised their trainers for being too authoritarian and often unavailable, with a few exceptions. Often, these complaints related to their trainers being 'too old', 'too traditional' or 'not open for change and innovation'. The majority of teachers are indeed in the last phase of their working career. It is, however, important to stress that these senior educators also carry with them a wealth of experience. In general, 'younger' and 'older' trainers alike, see themselves faced with an enormous pressure, since they have to keep up with continuous policy reforms. Because of changing reform programmes, they have to train future teachers for school environments that are very different from the ones they experienced themselves as students or younger teachers (Robinson and McMillan, 2006). The MoE is still in the process of developing support systems for in-service teachers *and* teacher trainers, but this remains in its early phases.

When students were asked to reflect on the quality of their trainers, it became clear that in their eyes there is only a minority of trainers – in both institutes – that have the genuine dedication, motivation and knowledge required to provide the quality training that students would like to have. However, after a while, when having more informal conversations with the urban students, I found that their opinions also changed over time. Interestingly, in the rural institute various students told me how the 'institutionalisation process' has brought in some good quality new trainers. '*From the first trainers I had, for me about 30% has a vocation, and 70% come here just to complete their working hours. But now they changed the teacher trainers, I think it is almost a 50-50 division.' (*41:8) Another student agreed, and stated how '*the new teachers have some good ideas, they came to this institute after being school directors, so they know.[…] For example the teacher we had for PDI last semester, he had some good ideas, […] he did not base all what he said on theory, he did not just examine us on what is in the books, but on what we understood and learned*' (30:29). A number of students were very positive about certain trainers, while other students commented negatively about those same trainers, which makes it hard to generalise these views and their relative value.

The data thus shows a rather heterogeneous image of the quality of teacher education by trainers, with both positive and negative accounts of both students and trainers themselves. Nevertheless, the negative images from student teachers of their trainers in most of the interviews endorse the dominant societal view on the Normales as low-performing institutes. Moreover, while some of the quotes above do show a genuine initiative together with valuable working experiences of some of the trainers, most respondents were relatively negative of the overall quality of teaching by the staff. So, even with a qualified teacher training force, students (and staff members) still complain of the low quality of teacher training and a lack of enthusiasm for change. This might be explained by the many structural challenges, such as: time constraints; institutional (mis-) management; low status; insufficient training and support for trainers; and a sometimes counterproductive conservative influence of teacher unions. Could this minority of motivated teacher trainers have an effect on the quality of teacher education when structural obstacles are overcome? These issues are further analysed in chapter 9.

### 7.5 In conclusion – A mis(sed) understood opportunity

During one of the focus groups with trainers in which we discussed preliminary outcomes of this study, the issue of changing and complex identities was linked to the idea of diversity. Similar to international debates in the literature, the discussion turned to the dilemma of supporting diversities whilst at the same time trying to overcome segregation. Whenever this issue came to the table, most respondents supported the idea of 'unity in diversity'. In line with the ASEP law, a group of rural trainers argued that in order to create this sense of unity in diversity, teacher education should aim to create 'one type of teacher', without discrimination or distinction between the 'urban' and 'rural' stigmatisations. In addition, they argued the separated union system with an urban and a rural federation should be changed into one representative body for all teachers (121:10). In another feedback conversation on the outcomes of this study a Bolivian researcher and lecturer told me: '*Your research signals something important, and coincidentally I discussed similar issues this morning [in the MoE]. The repertoire of ancestral knowledges, rituals and communitarian learning of all these youngsters with an indigenous background, these are absolutely unknown to the Normales and Universities. So, this potential of a wide diversity of knowledges and experiences is not developed at all*'(114:16). In other words, it is an unused opportunity for change.

The following quote by a Bolivian ex-teacher who now works for UNICEF confirms the importance of dealing with teachers' identities in Normales: '*Unfortunately, I went to a Normal where nobody spoke of identity, no one spoke of my culture – Quechua – either. Many teachers now live with an internal conflict related to their identity. This destabilises teachers psychologically, so that they cannot express their intentions, their desires to the children, and then the teacher becomes an uncritical instrument of knowledge transfer, without a critical vision. […] To me it seems fundamental that as a teacher I know the horizon of my identity, and then also to know what we want with education in our country'* (3:13). Understanding teacher students' and their trainers' complex identities is by no means an easy task. Like Walkington's quote at the beginning of this chapter shows, it is exactly the changing nature of Bolivian teacher students' identities that open up a potential 'for enhancement' of their educational and societal ethical-political agency.

In the case of the two Bolivian Normales I perceived the complex and changing nature of student teachers' and trainers' profiles as a missed and misunderstood opportunity. Teachers'

identities receive a lack of attention and understanding in Bolivian teacher education practices and policy, while the literature show that in order to teach for social justice, teachers need a close understanding of their own 'cultural being', as well as the influence of race, ethnicity, social class and gender on one's 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). Consequently, this chapter aimed to contribute to an understanding of the complex and changing identities of Bolivian teacher students and trainers. The '*internal*' 'stories to live by' and material life conditions of Bolivia's teacher students and trainers – constituting their profiles – are often characterised by marginalisation, discrimination, struggles on identities, insecurity about basic human needs and thus extra jobs. With regard to the *external landscape* of teachers' identities, they are faced with a rapidly changing context of a Latin American 'indigenous awakening', a continuous unequal society and economy and an upcoming new education reform. Considering the rapidly changing contexts of Bolivia, teachers of all kinds (including students and trainers) therefore need 'flexible' identities in order to deal with these changing landscapes (Clandinin et al, 2009: 142; Welmond, 2002: 24-26), while they receive little support in terms of pre-service and in-service training.

This chapter discovered that there is a changing profile of the students that is influenced by two contextual developments: firstly a lack of job opportunities leads to an increased age and, in many cases, wider experiences of students who enter the Normal; and secondly, a growing societal and political recognition of indigenous culture and languages stimulates students to develop a growing awareness and acceptance of their own ethno-cultural and linguistic background. Teacher education institutions seem to miss and misunderstand the opportunity behind these developments. I argue that, on the one hand, there lies a potential benefit with regards to training a group of older, higher skilled and more experienced students. In teacher training institutes, often the detrimental side is emphasised: trainers face a more difficult job training these older and higher educated students, and younger students feel that there is an unfair competition between them (secondary school leavers) and the somewhat older generation of students. When I discussed these findings in April and May 2010, an urban Normal director confirmed the possible positive effects of having to train 'qualified psychologists, pedagogues, lawyers' and so on because it would '*push for more quality of our trainers, so they prepare themselves properly*' (122:14).

On the other hand, due to processes of 're-ethnisation' and 're-identification' students develop a greater awareness, acceptance and self esteem in relation to their formerly, often discriminated, cultural-ethnic background. Whilst the literature describes pre-service training as an ideal starting point to create awareness of the need to develop future teachers' complex and changing identities (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: 176, 186), the Normales do not sufficiently reflect on, and work with, the changing profile and identities of students. The next chapter discusses perceptions of the ideal teacher and future teachers' actual motivations to become teachers, confirming the weight of economic motivations, but also questioning the general assumption that Bolivian students lack the motivation and dedication to become good teachers.