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Decolonizing Bolivian Education: A Critical Look at the Plurinational State's Vision



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List of Abbreviations

ALBA – *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America* (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America)

ANDECOP – *Asociación Nacional de Colegios Privados* (National Association of Private Schools)

ASEP – *Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez* (the proposed education reform)

CONMERB – *Confederación Nacional de Maestros de Educación Rural de Bolivia* (National Union of Rural Teachers in Bolivia)

CTEUB – *Confederación de Trabajadores de Educación Urbano de Bolivia* (National Union of Urban Education Workers in Bolivia)

ECM – Extended Case Method

MNR – *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, political party of Bolivia's 1952 revolution)

PAR – Participatory Action Research

SEDUCA – *Servicio Departamental de Educación* (Regional Education Department)

Chapter 1. Introduction

Having benefitted from the privilege of US global grabs for power, whether economic, military or ideological, and learning a US-centered discourse on race and class, entering Bolivia, for me, was like walking into a different world. As I stepped off the plane and out of the airport, this difference began to materialize. The mini-bus which brought me from the airport to Bolivia's capital city first cruised through El Alto, a new city largely made up of indigenous peoples who had recently migrated from rural areas, where we passed graffiti scrawled on most walls, often relating to Bolivia's new governmental processes. The graffiti said things like "*Gracias Evo por Apoyarme*" and "*Sí a la Nueva Constitución*" ("Thank you Evo [Morales] for Supporting Me", "Yes to the New Constitution"). As we left El Alto and continued down the mountain, a mini-bus passenger, an older local woman, tried to teach me a few words of Aymara, her mother tongue. While it was a lot to take in after fifteen hours of travel, the experience was not a surprise, as I had read of Bolivia's widespread support of its new government and its orientation toward the population's diversity. Rather, what caught me off-guard was the transition from El Alto to La Paz: As the mini-bus hurtled down the mountainside, I saw for the first time the dramatic shift where buildings get bigger and bigger, manicured street-centered gardens appear, walls get cleaner, and people on the streets get whiter. Given Bolivia's radical discourse since the 2006 inauguration of Evo Morales, the country's first indigenous president, I was somehow expecting the capital to be an 'indigenous' city. While leaving the airport emphasized the country's diversity, the transition from El Alto to La Paz emphasized the cultural hierarchies that make up Bolivia. As a plurality of cultural identities exist in the country, historical inequalities are part of the everyday present.



Illustration 1: Billboard: "Yes to the New Constitution"; Graffiti: "A New Bolivia is Born"; El Alto.

Bolivia, along with other ‘New Left’ countries in Latin America, is working to build a new society based around recognition of that history. The research undertaken in this thesis engages this process, fundamentally exploring what I might call a clash of logics (or ways of thinking). From the Bolivian government’s point of view, this clash is about a historical and cultural recognition which has been largely absent from the country’s dominant discourses until Morales’ election, which has more recently been followed by a constitutional overhaul inaugurated in February 2009. More concretely, Bolivia is working to understand the role colonization has played (whether politically, economically, or racially, etc.) in the formation of present-day society, using that knowledge to build its future through an education reform embedded in the new Constitution. Considering an education system as any state’s current locus of a future society, this reform fundamentally defines Bolivia’s long term vision of development.

The proposed education reform is based on the umbrella term ‘decolonization’, which covers the ideas of inter- and intra-culturalism, plurilingualism, productive education, and communitarian education. As part of this ambitious constitutional process, it reconstructs subjectivity and re-values local forms of thinking to facilitate the future world. As part of this process, the reform places direct value on systems of thought which have been historically marginalized by dominant development processes. This is the vision of the ‘coloniality’ theory, which is used in the education reform as well as in the Constitution. Additionally, it recognizes the deeply formative role that education systems play—whether the society is constructive, collective and builds positive relationships or whether it is structured around social exclusion, pessimism, and outright hatred. In whatever way, education systems create much of our approach to the world around us as well as worlds further away. I speak now of metaphorical worlds, of worlds of knowledges and differing logics of understanding.

I came to Bolivia excited about the possibilities for this new approach toward worlds of knowledge. My interest stems from watching a broken education system in my home country work for the benefit of a few while leaving many others with a personal sense of failure. Because of this, I had been ready and waiting to see a reform with widespread support, and the discourse of ‘decolonization’ and the ‘educational revolution’ heightened my excitement. For me, that excitement stemmed from possibilities presented by Paolo Freire’s ideas of education for liberation (Freire 1986), which is what first engaged me in counter-hegemonic educational struggles.

Through the research process I spoke with teachers, academics and government officials who were fully dedicated to the reform. However, I also spoke with educational stakeholders who felt differently. While there are many arguments against the government’s new direction, as always there is an apparent monopolization of discourse—evidenced by a lack of criticism in the information I had access to

until I spoke with critics themselves. Therefore, going into ‘the field’ and speaking with people whose lives will be directly affected by the proposed changes was an important and humbling experience.

In describing these criticisms, though, I have to be careful. A local researcher was rather direct with me about this. He said, “*You have this handicap that you are a foreigner... and from my perspective this makes it a little more complicated. How will you speak in opposition to the educational revolution? How will you criticize it? Because we don’t want to damage it*” (14¹). While I hope not to damage the reform process, this paper does critique it. However, the intention of this critique is to widen debate rather than hurt the educational processes. This and similar issues brought up by people with whom I spoke in Bolivia are personally important and I attempted to honor them in this writing.

This thesis is an in-depth exploration of the issues mentioned above as a response to the following guiding research question:

- What are the prospects for implementing decolonial education in Bolivia, as described by various educational stakeholders?

The following sub-questions each correspond to Chapters Five through Eight, respectively, and fit into the general framework provided by the main research question.

- Is there a unified definition of decolonization (as an umbrella term) relating to Bolivia’s new education reform? If not, how is the concept defined differently?
- What changes will be needed to see classroom change from teachers?
- What is the conceptual validity of decolonization in Bolivia within the framework of neoliberal capitalist globalization?
- Will the reform be implemented? If so, when? And, will there be a ‘policy gap’ (the gap between policy instructions and actual implementation; Sayed 2005)?

Informed by three months of field research in La Paz, Cochabamba and Vinto, from July through September 2009, which included interviewing over fifty educational stakeholders, this thesis explores Bolivia’s operationalization of the coloniality theory in its proposed constitutional education reform. Thus, it offers insight into the society envisioned by the country’s new Constitution.

Chapter 2 offers an overview of the ‘coloniality’ theory. This exploration is useful because Bolivia’s Constitution takes on a coloniality-based vision based around a historically-bound dialogue. This chapter also theoretically explores the important role of education in the creation of future society through ideas of ‘strategic public pedagogy’ and ‘hidden curriculum’. It also gives an overview of some concepts being engaged in the reform process. **Chapter 3** is a run-down of the methodology used in this

¹ These numbers refer to interviews numbered in the Interview List at the end of this thesis.

thesis' research process along with my related ethical concerns. Also relating to the coloniality theory, the research methodology is reflexive, understanding the information received in interviews as interpreted by each participant based on their own interactions with the subject matter. **Chapter 4** gives important contextual information in terms of both Bolivia's political economic development since the Spanish conquest and its educational history. This chapter offers a focus on the previous education reform of 1994 which has been strongly critiqued by parts of the new government, and much of the new education reform is built from this critique.

Chapter 5 is the first to be primarily based on my research in Bolivia. It introduces the education reform, 'Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez' (ASEP), first exploring the government's discourse on the law itself followed by a breakdown of its four pillars. There is certainly no consensus on the definitions of each of these ideas; therefore this chapter explores varying interpretations encountered in this research. It also briefly explores the process of the law's creation, which is supplemented in the following chapter. **Chapter 6** explores some of the practical issues related to prospects for the implementation of ASEP, first in terms of the need to re-train in-service teachers, then with the issue of teacher motivation for their profession, and finally the importance of a deep sense of ownership in the law based around participation in its creation. **Chapter 7** conceptually questions the goals of ASEP in its broader social and political landscape. It first explores whether students themselves want to be 'decolonized' or rather participate as they had in modern development. The next issue is based in a critique by La Paz's urban teachers' union which rejects ASEP because while it allows for a new kind of dialogue, it does not change the economic structures which have created historical inequalities. Following this is an exploration of the meaning of state-level decolonization in a neoliberal globalized context. Finally, this chapter questions the role of 'decolonization' within the context of the school as a colonial structure. **Chapter 8**, the final body chapter, explores issues regarding implementation of the law in terms of current processes of change in Bolivia as well as a discussion of whether the law is ready to be implemented. The chapter ends with a view shared by many teachers that while change may occur discursively, putting it into practice on a classroom level will be a great challenge.

Chapter 9, the Conclusion, serves to summarize both the content and issues brought up in this thesis. As the education reform will be put into action in the near future, it still leaves many questions unanswered. In forming the future of a society around schooling experiences, many of these questions remain; thus, **Chapter 10** provides a personal reflection to close off this thesis, exploring some unresolved theoretical issues, much of it relating to the validity of the 'coloniality' theory in a state-level policy framework.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

Look, Occidental brother, you have ways of producing knowledge, of generating knowledge, of circulating knowledge... I have a way of my own—dialoging, interchanging...Don't tell me that there is only one valid form of knowledge. My ways of producing knowledge are just as valid as yours. This is what we want. Thus it isn't about negating, but rather about dialoging, interchanging... that we enrich mutually. — Jose Luis Saavedra, Academic (2)

This chapter is an overview of relevant theoretical discussions to debates in the proposed education reform and its surrounding discursive climate. As the discourse is living, breathing and changing in Bolivia's daily life, there is not quite a conclusion or solution posed by the theory. However, the reform, *Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Perez* (ASEP), is deeply rooted in much of this theory, so an understanding of the law requires that of the theories behind it. With that said, the discourses that I encountered in Bolivia, whether from teachers, their unions, academics or government officials, regularly referred to the below theories and theoreticians. For this reason, this chapter is an academic overview, whereas following chapters will ground the theory and give general references to the ideas presented here.

a. Coloniality/Modernity

We have to differentiate historical processes from the Bolivian idea of decolonization. This idea makes us need to distinguish three different ideas: what is coloniality? What is colonialism? And what is decolonization? — Giovanni Samanamut, Office of the Vice President (32)

As Bolivia is working towards a national education system to reinterpret societal relationships, ASEP is primarily based on one theory: 'coloniality'. Whereas modernity focuses on the expansion of development from the 17th century European Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution to the Industrial Revolution (Escobar 2007:181), the coloniality framework is based around the colonization of the Americas and 16th century systematization of European slavery in the Western hemisphere (Mignolo 2007:164).² Coloniality's framework explores how modern development over the last five centuries has maintained and created unequal colonial relationships. Walter Mignolo describes the inseparable relationship between modernity and coloniality by offering that the former "*places the accent on Europe*" (2002:60) while coloniality grows out of the "*darker side of modernity*" (2007:159). Whereas modernity sees history through a Eurocentric lens and focuses on the reality in the West, coloniality engages the discussion of development *from* the geographical locations which have not had discursive, political or economic power within the framework of modernity. Importantly, it focuses on the costs which much of the world has paid to contribute to Western development.

² From a coloniality perspective, Grosfoguel cynically describes modernity's past 500 years, "*from the 16th Century 'christianize or I shoot you,' to the 19th Century 'civilize or I shoot you', to the 20th Century 'develop or I shoot you', to the late 20th Century 'neoliberalize or I shoot you', and to the early 21st Century 'democratize or I shoot you'*" (2008:35).

As the colonization of the Americas was organized through both economic exploitation and the creation of the social concept of ‘race’ in Latin America (Quispe 2007:19), the focus of the theory is on the interaction between the two. For this reason, coloniality centers its analysis through race and class inequalities (and usefully for the purposes of this paper) is theorized from a Latin American perspective (Mignolo 2007:164; Quijano 2007:171). Furthermore, Ramon Grosfoguel characterizes coloniality as a meeting between World-Systems Analysis (WSA; developed by Immanuel Wallerstein) and post-colonialism due to a strong recognition of WSA’s structural analysis of political economy and capital accumulation and post-colonialism’s analysis of identity politics and personal and collective agency (2008:9-12).

b. Coloniality of Knowledge

Mignolo offers a metaphor to explain modernity’s process of domination: a room with many doors. While only one door is unlocked, the others hold communities behind them (2002:65). Consequently, those inside the room are limited from a diverse conversation. Colonial domination of thought processes has done just that—called “*coloniality of knowledge*” by Anibal Quijano (2007). While the logic presented by modernity is valid, Other logics have been invalidated or limited by the process of modern development and domination.³

Rarely acknowledged in literature on coloniality, the founding of these ideas should be identified closely with Edward Said (1978). By describing the role of colonialism in creating a Euro-centric identity as ‘normal’ and therefore creating the concept of an ‘Other’, Said created the foundation of de Sousa Santos’ more recent “*sociology of absences*”. This concept recognizes the role of colonial domination in *producing* absences in Other knowledges (2006:18). De Sousa Santos calls this process “*epistemicide*”, as it often occurred “*concomitantly with genocide*” (2006:14). In this way, coloniality of knowledge is part of the brutality of conquest, and should therefore be considered discursive violence (Vasquez 2009:1).

While the “*coloniality of knowledge*” was created by conquest, resistance to colonialism has historically focused on political independence, whether in the 19th Century in Latin America or the mid-20th Century in much of Africa and Asia. In a personal interview, Bolivian academic Jose Luis Saavedra described this discrepancy: “*We now know that socialism, Marxism and liberalism are legitimizers of European modernity. They appeared to be contradictory but in reality they share common parts of epistemic systems of liberalism and socialism*” (2). Adding, academic Javier Sanjinés explored those processes as “*intellectual borrowing from Europe*” rather than thought produced independently by

³ It is for this reason that Escobar wrote a seminal article on coloniality entitled ‘Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise’ (2007) which has more recently inspired an academic journal of the same title, produced by Mignolo.

decolonial nations (2007:300). While questioning the roots of these alternative systems did occur, the ‘post-colonial’ states were restricted to development within a Western framework of logic, as the only door available into Mignolo’s meeting room came from the West.⁴

c. Otherization and the Creation of Race

Revisiting the creation of the ‘Other’ (Said 1978), it is important to recognize the furthering of the coloniality of knowledge with the West’s “*imposition of norms*” (Escobar 2004:214). These norms are what have come to shape civil society and ways that people perceive others. Therefore, extending Said’s critique, it is important to locate the ‘norm’. This process, based on understandings embedded in coloniality, locate normalcy as the source of domination itself. Therefore, as the driving force of conquest was economic exploitation, the norm should be defined as the “*subject that capitalism needed (white, male, owner, worker, heterosexual, etc.)*”⁵ [which] necessarily required the image of an ‘other’ located in the exteriority of European space” (Castro-Gomez 2007:429). As the process of the coloniality of knowledge has validated its own logic, it is difficult for those thinking within it to identify outside the ‘norm’.

On a more concrete level, this creation of the norm and concept of the Other through the process of colonialism is the origin of Western racial systems. While European colonizers entered the land wearing guns and light skins proudly, they homogenized the native populations into a single group through processes of Otherization. Quijano describes this Otherization process through his definition of race:

‘Race’—a modern mental construct bearing no relation to previous reality, generated in order to normalize the social relations of domination created by the conquest—becomes the foundation stone of the new system of domination, as previous forms of domination (e.g. between the sexes and between age groups) are redefined around the hegemony of ‘race’ (2005:56).

This normalization of the concept of race as difference is a social discourse which emphasizes the importance of exploring racial systems in Latin America’s context. Quijano continues to describe the social creation of race as a polarized structure:

The original antagonistic poles in this new system of domination are, on the one hand, the ‘Indians’—a colonial term embodying the numerous historical identities which inhabited this continent before the Iberian conquest—and, on the other, the colonizers, who, since the 18th century, identified themselves, in relation to the ‘Indians,’ ‘negros’ and ‘Mestizos,’ as ‘whites’ and ‘Europeans’ (2005:56-57).

⁴ This questioning occurred often in the Non-Aligned Movement as well as the Tricontinental organization. For a strong exploration of these movements see Prashad 2007.

⁵ These categories are overly simplified, as there is not only one subject that capitalism needs. Rather they should give a basis to a generalized Euro-centered norm.

While Quijano clearly articulates the norm/Other argument, he also critiques the term ‘Indian’. This critique is vital to understanding race as a social creation in Latin America, as ‘Indian’ has no real structure. The term represents an enormous plurality of native cultures and identities.⁶ More importantly for this paper, the ‘Mestizo’ (whose direct translation is *mixed*) was a political project. It was an identity created for the purpose of integrating native peoples into “*a national Mestizo Spanish-speaking culture*” imposed by the colonizers (Canessa 2006:245).

d. Strategic Public Pedagogy and Knowledge Embedded in Civil Society

The problem for me is not only that colonialism imposed Eurocentrism, but that colonized communities recognized that knowledge as valid, and also as the only valid form of knowledge. — Jose Luis Saavedra, Academic (2)

The process, then, of how we learn normalcy comes into question. Seemingly, it is a task modernity has thus far conquered. In considering the growth of public sources of knowledge, Henry Giroux offers the phrase “*public pedagogy*”, meaning the intersectional “*relationship between culture, power, and politics*” from which people learn (2004:499). For our purposes, it should be considered as ways civil society defines norms and social participation. Additionally, Mario Novelli offers “*strategic pedagogy*” to engage the idea that sources of learning are designed with specific intent to influence “*consciousness, identity and desire*” (unpublished:471-472). Therefore, the two together, ‘strategic public pedagogy’, should be understood as aspects of civil society which enforce a specific hierarchy of power and knowledge. Just as Castro-Gomez did, Novelli recognizes that this hierarchy is necessarily “*related to particular modes of production and divisions of labour within societies*” (unpublished:472). This direct connection between the current norm of capitalist production and strategic public pedagogy is no mistake.

In Bolivia’s context, Regalsky and Laurie discuss strategic public pedagogy through the concept of “*hidden curriculum*”, emphasizing that while many discuss the concept as “*the reproduction of a system of meanings and values*”, those meanings and values are deeply linked with “*materially rooted power structures*” (2007:234). In this case, an examination of social and cultural reproduction through schooling must be related to larger structures of social and cultural control and validation. Relating to education, they cite Torres’ exploration of education systems as legitimizing “*the knowledge system of authority, in relation to an ideological attempt to consolidate and defend the hegemonic order and system of discipline and control*” which also relates to the labor market (2007:231). This argument explores the colonality of knowledge reinforcing the colonality of power, again referring to the creation of the concepts of norm and Other within and outside schools. As this cultural reproduction has historically been

⁶ At the same time, Quijano places ‘Indians,’ ‘negros’ and ‘Mestizos’ in the ‘Other’ category with colonizers as the norm. While this may be true within this dichotomous discussion, the three terms describe very different populations.

concentrated into few centers of power, it has reinforced racial systems and other identity-based hierarchies, especially in Latin America.

e. Resisting Coloniality of Knowledge: Decolonizing the Mind

We have to recover what is ours, to launch a hegemonic project of the future, which would really overcome modernity; and this is beyond capitalism, this is beyond Eurocentrism. — Enrique Dussel, Academic (1)

Understanding the hidden curriculum of capitalism and neoliberalism as dominating the creation of global norms in 2009 begs an exploration of the possible extent of resistance to such a norm. In our context of neoliberal globalization and governance structures which have grown larger than countries, how could a strategic public pedagogy of resistance be created? This concept directly challenges the principles of modernity and systems of social, political and economic organization useful to it.

The goal of decoloniality, according to coloniality theorists, is not to revert to pre-colonial knowledge, but rather to support Other knowledges through dialogical exploration. Therefore, a diverse or heterogeneous continuum of knowledge is the goal (Quijano 2007:177), which would create in-depth dialogue and resist totality of any “*monoculture*” of knowledge (Santos 2006:20). Castro-Gomez embraces the call for dialogical decoloniality as an “*epistemic democracy*” with an emphasis on class analysis. He envisions a world “*in which science stops being a slave to capitalism and the diverse forms of producing and transmitting knowledge can coexist and complement each other*” (2007:444). Escobar adds his description of decoloniality as “*unfreezing the potential for thinking from difference and towards the constitution of alternative worlds*” (2004:217). Decoloniality thus envisions a world simultaneously engaged in epistemic dialogue while deconstructing hierarchical power relations, centrally delinking public pedagogy from specific forms of production (especially that of capitalist imperialism which assisted in colonial processes). This is where epistemological diversity and dialogue present a future: While there is no single utopist vision in an epistemic democracy, the purpose of dialogue should be to engage critical thinking about how the world can change and how people can use agency to affect that change.⁷ For this reason, the goal of decoloniality is to *not* have a goal—it is a means without an end for a society that embraces a permanent state of dialogue.

While this epistemic democracy may sound utopist, coloniality has a mechanism for its approach, thinking from *outside* the epistemological paradigm of modernity. However, as charged by Said (1978), thought based in completely alternative knowledge from the modern framework of development is

⁷ It is on these grounds that the World Social Forum is built—in order to engage global dialogue with the idea that “*another world is possible*” (de Sousa Santos 2006).

impossible.⁸ This model, therefore, “*does not entail an ontological outside; [rather] it refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by a hegemonic discourse*” (Escobar 2007:186). Thought emerging from this exteriority has been coined by Mignolo as “*critical border thinking*”, which embraces thought produced from the understanding of the effects of modernity (2007:186). Critical border thinking is not a call for destroying thought processes enabled by modernity, but rather for thinking outside dominant norms—“*[built] on the ground of the silence of history*” (Mignolo 2002:67). In reference to the meeting room example, critical border thinking opens all the doors, creating an equal space of dialogue.

Approaches toward this equality, however, should be considered realistically. Much of public pedagogy is not equal. While neoliberal public pedagogy has set up an international (rather than state-based) economic structure offering wealthier people more access, and social interactions are decentralized, state-level action must be key as an equal and practical approach. Education systems, then, are central in universalizing critical border thinking.

f. Operationalizing (de)Coloniality in Education

Education, by its own definition, can be two things: it can be a front for liberation as it can also be a front for colonization, which it is. In these terms, it seems to me that there needs to be a lot more care taken when speaking of education and decolonization. — Mario Yapu, Academic (46)

In this case, we should examine strategies for creating critical border education. Essentially, this is the purpose of this thesis—to explore Bolivia’s decolonial educational experiment. Thus, this section offers a theoretical discussion of some of the concepts addressed in Bolivia’s context later on. Keeping in mind that the creation of norms and Others as well as the sociology of absences is part of colonial relationships of discursive and restrictive violence, decolonial education should respond with the opposite goal, that of peace. Peace education in the context of coloniality should be focused precisely on the absences created by violent strategic public pedagogies and epistemicide. More directly, it should focus on dialogical interactions about the roles of knowledge and power. On the other hand, however, responding to social inequalities through the discourse of peace education has meant anything from physical and psychological safety measures to an integrationist or assimilationist approach. Historically, the latter has been true. Yusuf Sayed *et al* explain that the idea of ‘peace education’ has often been flawed, in that it “*operates on the principle of ‘normalization’*” (2004:22). Thus, rather than serving as a tool of liberation, peace education has served to enforce assimilation of Others into ‘normal’ roles, “*undermining identity, culture, history, [and] traditional knowledge*” (Choque 2007:70). Just as education systems have contributed to ‘Mestizo’ as an integrationist racial category, instead of creating a dialogical

⁸ In fact, this is the major critique of the coloniality theory—that many of its theorists advocate thinking outside the modern framework while their own thought processes as well as education are based in it.

and critical education around the violence of the past, peace education has pushed people toward an artificial sense of belonging (Sleeter 1996:240).

Margaret Sutton proposes ‘inter-cultural education’ to legitimize culturally diverse identities and engage a pedagogical practice which values that diversity (2005:108). Inter-culturalism recognizes the interactions between multiple cultures, focusing on exchange, communication and dialogue between them. This proposal is considered ‘peace education’ and it seems smoother and less assimilationist than others, as inter-culturalism recognizes that cultures are forever changing. In this sense, culture itself is a process and inter-culturalism concurrently recognizes and respects each culture as individual while interacting with others.

Novelli *et al* add that past education systems which have contributed to cultural violence “*should not just be rebuilt, but transformed*” (2008:482). While this transformation has been interpreted in many ways and could take any shape, it is important that it breaks from violent education of the past. These interpretations have been wide ranging. One that stands out, which many Bolivian academics referred to during my field research, was the practice developed during the 1960’s of ‘popular education’ which was powerfully described by Paulo Freire. Freire’s ideas are quite important in this conceptual discussion of decolonial education reform. While he emphasized engaging community knowledge, whether in a school context or not, the Bolivian reform seems to involve only in-school learning. Freire emphasized the dialogical learning experience reiterated by decoloniality, as “*dialogue authenticates both the act of knowing and the role of the knowing Subject in the midst of the act*” (1978:39). Thus, a truly dialogical education in this interpretation (along with that of many Bolivians) rejects objectivity created by previous colonial or violent schooling and values the importance of subjectivity.

On a practical level, Freire worked with the revolutionary and decolonial nation of Guinea-Bissau to engage radical critical pedagogy in a nationwide education reform. Perhaps this is where we can bring in strong lessons from Freire’s process, as it was his most school system-based application of his educational theories. In that context, he emphasized that decolonial schooling needs to offer learners “*a constant dialectical relation with the needs of the country*” and everyday life (1978:42), therefore engaging students as intrinsically motivated subjects who could use their school-based learning to engage in their country’s development. Because of this, Freire emphasizes that the schooling process “*requires a political decision coherent with the plan for the society to be created, and must be based on certain material conditions that also offer incentives for change*” (1978:14). Applied to Bolivia’s context, it will need to connect educational goals with its larger political stances, which should be oriented around problematic ‘material conditions’. In Bolivia’s case, these material conditions range from a history of

invalidation of indigenous cultures to economic poverty. This politicized contextual engagement deeply relates to the future vision of Bolivia by its government.

Finally, Freire explains, in order to gain the relationship between schooling and society described above, teachers must be “*authentically [politically] militant*” (1978:12). While his choice of words is strong, it emphasizes the role of teachers as activists in the community they work in, as they play a large role in shaping their students’ perceptions of the world around them. Moreover, if teachers do not directly play this militant role, Freire asserts that they simply become “*bureaucratized... technicians*” (1978:12). Christine Sleeter adds, in a discussion on teachers-as-activists, that they potentially play an important role “*between the constituent base and the power holders*” (1996:241). Bolivia’s proposed reform does not directly address this, and it should. Otherwise, teachers may end up simply not implementing new curriculum, thus deepening the policy gap (see Chapter 6, section C).

As Bolivia has a history with de Sousa Santos’ *mono-culturalism* as well as Sutton’s *inter-culturalism*, the proposed education reform addresses each one in its transformational vision. It rejects the former and re-visions the latter for that of inter- and intra-culturalism, and engages the classroom as a dialogical space for engaging subjectivity. The meaning of intra-culturalism is to strengthen the value of one’s own culture, which comes in the context of an inter-cultural state. To understand the present push for new reform it is important to draw lessons from Bolivia’s history and educational experiences. This historical recognition will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.



Illustration 2: Math Class in Cochabamba

Chapter 3. Methods/Methodology

a. Intentions

Before doing this research I described my intended methods and methodology in a research proposal. While many of my intentions were valid on an academic and methodological level and related to my theoretical framework, some were also naïve in the sense that I had never performed extensive field research of any kind. This chapter describes the methods and methodology used, although it references as well as differentiates the process from my original intentions. Additionally, while the entire research process is guided by an epistemological lens (that of constructivism and subjectivism), this chapter intentionally focuses on the research methodology and the important relationship between it and the theoretical perspective of coloniality. This is important, given that the research was an exploration of a current process rather than an evaluation of something which had already existed.

b. Reflexivity

I used a methodology adapted mostly from the Extended Case Method (ECM) as described by Burawoy (1998) as well as a few aspects from participatory research as described by Stoecker (1999). ECM is focused around ‘reflexive science’, a process in constant reflection of the interactions of social, historical, political, and interpersonal experiences in responses to research methods (interviews, etc.). According to Burawoy, reflexive science requires recognition of the following four aspects in research:

- (1) *Intervention*: the interview itself is an intervention into the life of the interviewee (Burawoy 1998:14). This recognizes that the process of research effects reality. For this reason, reflexive science is fundamentally opposed to positivist approaches.
- (2) *Process*: interviewees will interpret questions in their own way, depending on their previous interactions with the subject matter and the context of the interview. “*One can standardize a question, but not the respondent’s interpretation of the question*” (Burawoy 1998:14). In my context, interviewees interpreted questions based on previous experience dealing with decolonization, the top-down political process, the Morales government, and *estadounidenses* (people from the US—me).
- (3) *Structuration*: research occurs within social structures.
- (4) *Reconstruction*: similar to (2), the researcher (me) interprets responses in the context of their previous interactions with the subject matter at hand in compiling their report (Burawoy 1998:16).

The ECM is a theoretically applied alternative to positive science, rejecting the notion that objectivity is achievable and opposing objectivity because it hides its very “*particular point of view*” in order to present

itself as lacking a point of view (Grosfoguel 2008:7-8; Quijano 2007:173). This is deeply related to the argument about “*hidden curriculum*” (as described in Chapter 2). Instead of positivism and objectivity, the ECM focuses on contextualizing research (Burawoy 1998:5).

What reflexivity meant for me in Bolivia was a constant reflection and processing of socio-historical contexts to inform my personal interests, approaches and questions in interviews. In concrete terms, this meant keeping a research journal, writing biweekly reflections, being transparent about my intentions to those with whom I spoke, as well as being open to criticism of my own research project and its process. At the same time I discussed my reflections with my local supervisor and UvA supervisor as well as friends and family who supported me along the way. Most importantly, reflexivity allowed me to adapt my interview questions throughout the research process as my own analysis of the subject matter advanced.

Additionally, I intended to draw from Participatory Action Research (PAR): to support the researched community’s process of empowerment to engage on a deeper level with the themes at hand (ASEP; Stoecker 1999). The goal of research was therefore not to extract information for my own benefit, but rather to support the reflection and agency of those with whom I spoke. I did not use the methods from PAR, but rather its intentions. This becomes more complicated because I have a personal stake in receiving this Masters degree. Therefore it was a constant struggle to balance my own needs and interests with the perceived needs and interests of the people I was speaking with. However, I believe that I was successful in terms of my intentions with PAR—in bringing up topics that would have not been under discussion for some interviewees, prompting their own reflection of the meaning of those topics.

In summary, by using the principles of ‘reflexivity’ to inform this research and reflection process while engaging PAR’s support of personal subjectivity, I built a structure which facilitated a deep sense of reflection. Finally, as my research was an exploration of perceptions and understandings of the proposed education reform, my intention was never to come to a conclusion about Bolivia’s educational future, but rather to gain a strong understanding of the related conflicts, interests, debates and challenges foreseen by the people with whom I spoke.

i. Methods

In my own belief, generalizing responses for the purposes of giving an accurate representation of a larger population is irresponsible as each person has individual ideas and understandings of the subject matter. Along with ECM’s rejection of positivism and objectivism, my research was done completely qualitatively. My qualitative methods were through semi-structured and informal interviews, discussions and informal conversations. I intentionally did not do a comparative study but rather synthesized input

from multiple sources. Alternatively, semi-structured interviews and reflexivity allow for recognition of the interaction between those involved through an open and honest discussion of my intentions, the research process, the way people would like to be represented, etc. The field research for this thesis occurred over a three month period of field research from July through September 2009. While primarily based in La Paz (the capital) I visited a few other cities and towns—namely Cochabamba, Vinto and Warisata.

All teachers in Bolivia are members of a union. The unions are separated between urban and rural areas and also have national separated (urban/rural) *Confederaciones* which represent the local unions. Because of this union formation, I spoke with teachers both active and inactive in the urban unions of La Paz and Cochabamba as well as some in Vinto—a town outside Cochabamba which is part of the local (and national) rural union. Additionally, I also talked to leaders of the local rural and urban unions of La Paz and Cochabamba as well as leaders from the national unions. I also interviewed many intellectuals who do or have done research in fields related to coloniality and education reform in Bolivia. Finally, I met with a few officials working with the Ministry of Education and SEDUCA (*Servicio Departamental de Educación*; Regional Education Service) as well as attended various events supported by the government and other educational actors in La Paz and Cochabamba, which had the purposes of explaining and exploring the concepts of the proposed education reform to the general public. I also had the opportunity to interview two people working at a teacher-training NGO in Vinto and participate in a roundtable discussion with workers in a teacher-training NGO in Cochabamba. A specific ‘Interview List’ can be found at the end of this thesis.

As my interviews were minimally structured, each was unique. While many of the academics I spoke with offered me between thirty minutes and an hour-and-a-half of their time, other interviews were much shorter. Those with government officials were generally around thirty minutes, while the government presentations I attended ranged from thirty minutes to full days. A few interviews with teachers were as short as five minutes, while most were closer to twenty or thirty. These length discrepancies were due to teachers being incredibly busy. Entering each school, I was very aware that I was not, nor should be, a teacher’s highest priority, as their own students should take that role. However, teachers were mostly very gracious in offering up their time, whether in between classes, during recess, or in the case of a few, after school or during classes (while their students worked independently). Additionally, anyone whose name or position is used in this thesis has either granted permission in writing, is an elected official, or is quoted in a public context (i.e. an informational meeting open to the public); otherwise anonymity has been preserved. Finally, I started each interview with the question “*what do you think of the reform in general?*” and built the conversation from there.

c. Reflexive Science as a Research Methodology for Coloniality

The ECM closely relates to coloniality (as my theoretical framework) in many ways. Firstly because it requires a reflection on Bolivia's historical relations of power as well as the power of social interactions, which includes a focus on identity politics such as that of race and class which are emphasized in coloniality. This focus on understanding context is highly important in both the ECM and coloniality (Burawoy 1998:5; Quijano 2007:168). Additionally, the emphasis from PAR for a process of engagement and reflection is also one of the fundamental goals of decolonization within the coloniality framework (Grosfoguel 2008:29-30). Finally, both the ECM and the participatory approach recognize that "*there are always multiple knowledges*" (Burawoy 1998:15) and that the purpose of research is to "*[legitimize] forms of knowledge... not normally seen as valid*" (Stoecker 1999:841). This recognition of a different epistemological understanding is the fundamental basis of coloniality (Sanjinés 2002; Walsh 2007:231; Grosfoguel 2008:4). For the above reasons, my research methods and methodology were directly related to my theoretical framework.

d. Ethical Considerations/Situating Myself Academically

This is the privilege of those who live in powerful countries, no? He gets to come here while we can't move because we are dying of hunger. — La Paz Urban Teachers' Union Representative (37)

I was greeted with the above statement after explaining that I was in Bolivia as a researcher coming from the United States via the Netherlands. Using this ice breaker allowed for many assumptions in all interviews and it generally became a great way to dive into the subject matter—if I could explain my own motives to the people I spoke with, they would be able to support and respect what I was doing on an interpersonal and constructive level. While in that moment this response struck me off-guard, by agreeing and discussing the issue I was able to gain his trust and honesty. This is a central challenge that all social science researchers face—the interaction built by the relationship between researcher and researched. As opposed to seeing this as a challenge, reflexivity allows me to see it as a central part of any research process, and that this reflection is very helpful and constructive. Moreover, it grew my understanding of my own role as an outside researcher and allowed a deeper and more critical conversation about the research subject matter.

Before going to Bolivia, I had many ethical concerns related to the research process. After three months of interviews and exploration, the same issues concern me. First and foremost was the above issue—of using my own privilege as a (relatively) rich outsider coming from one of the most powerful countries in the world to do research in one of the region's poorest countries. I realized that the best way to deal with these concerns was to blatantly (and awkwardly) confront them, as in the above example.

Still another challenge involves supporting false representations in this writing. The difficulty here is to represent a multiplicity of views and struggles between the various political and population groups rather than representing the groups as unified. Again, this challenge is addressed by reflexivity and the ECM.

I see many problems with the common positivist approach to academic research, and I hope to work against these problems or at least be transparent in my understandings of them. Central here is that knowledge in academia usually stays in academia. I will use various techniques to step outside the ‘ivory tower’ and use my research to better inform various-level discussions on the purposes of education and educating for decolonization.

In Bolivia, I gave each respondent a flyer with information about this research, which included my contact information. Additionally, I will follow up with research participants by sending them a summary of this thesis in Spanish as well as posting the summary online. Also, I received a fellowship to present my research at a conference in Barcelona, Spain in December 2009 and I have been invited to co-author a chapter on Bolivia’s education reform in the context of larger regional changes in Latin America. Finally, I hope to publish a few academic articles on topics relating to this research and I will also continue to seek out venues to present my findings.

Additionally, it is important to critique the timing of my research. While the debates are certainly interesting, as the law had not officially been approved by the government at the time of research or writing, it was too early to make predictions about prospects for implementation.

A final important limitation in my research design was that as the purpose of education is fundamentally for students, education policy should be constructed for their benefit. While not organizing the research process around them could be seen as questionable, teachers’ voices were central for this specific circumstance. This is because it occurred within a policy-driven social and educational system which has sought teachers’ input and importantly has yet to be implemented. The role of the student will be critically examined in relation to this education reform in Chapter 7.



Illustration 3: In between classes, La Paz

Chapter 4. Contextual Background

Before arriving in Bolivia I had studied some of the country's basic history and current context, especially related to education, but from the first interview on I realized that local history and current context was a central part of the responses I would be getting. Not only was I researching a law presented by the first indigenous government of a majority indigenous country, but some people with whom I spoke asserted that the entire revamped constitution was born out of the education reform—that the country's changes were not loosely related to what I was studying, but rather deeply interconnected. For this reason, the context within which I did my research is important for an in-depth understanding of the meaning of this decolonial education reform. While the current processes of change are incredibly interesting and deeply important for this understanding, perhaps more so is the relationship these changes have with a Bolivian interpretation of colonization (as the new Constitution and ASEP are based on the rejection of that experience). This contextual chapter will therefore explore Bolivia's more general history, an exploration of Bolivia's education systems of the past half century, Evo Morales' historical election in 2005 and the more recent constitutional change.

a. Historical Context

If one looks at what indigenous education has been, the politics have always come from above. The dominant groups and the oligarchy have always thought for the indigenous, for the Indians.
— Sofia Alcón, University of the Cordillera (45)

In order to better understand the way Bolivia is operationalizing the coloniality theory in its education system, it is important to understand ways in which Bolivia's history is reflected in today's context, especially in terms of education. While this is no place for such an extended description, the following short summary should help to contextualize.

Before Spanish colonization of the Americas, as there had been no borders and states as we think of them now, Bolivia and its surrounding area was populated by an incredibly diverse population. Although the region had experienced colonization a number of times (by the Aymaras, the Quechuas, etc.; 18), the populations maintained many cultural practices, from things we may think of as folkloric (dances, foods, etc.) to language and agricultural methods. During the hemisphere-wide process of colonization beginning with Columbus' 'discovery' of the Americas the Spanish took political and economic power of Bolivia. As a fundamental aspect of this process, in many areas the Spanish forced the populations into slavery. Importantly, however, Sofia Alcón asserts that the idea of a colonized society is not so absolute, in that the colonized population was affected very differently depending on their experience. At least in Bolivia's context, different communities were affected in different ways. *"The Spanish colonizers weren't interested in some contexts because it was cold, so they wanted the 'better' places—with valleys, with a*

lot of water and where they could produce more... Colonization is relative” (45). This relativity allowed for some of the smaller indigenous groups to live with comparably minimal interruption of their ways of life. Additionally, as Bolivia is a landlocked country with incredible biodiversity and has never had direct access to the Atlantic Ocean, slavery in the area rarely involved Africans.

Bolivia was rich with a politics of resistance to colonialism. In the latter half of the 18th century, Tupac Katari along with Tupac Amaru led an independence movement in the Altiplano region which failed as Katari was caught by the Spanish and his body tied to multiple horses, each running in different directions. Soon afterwards, however, in the early 19th century, Simon Bolivar led an anti-colonial movement across much of South America, and after Bolivia’s independence in 1825, the country was named after Bolivar himself (who was also its first president). However, as explained by Walter Gutierrez of the Ministry of Education, Bolivar’s political approach was dominated by colonial strategies. “*Simon Bolivar wanted to integrate the Indian into national society... But what does this integration mean? It means acculturating them, changing their language—from this comes monolingual education, monocultural if you’d like*” (43).⁹ In this way, while Bolivia had gained political independence, the society was set up in a deeply unequal way.

Jumping forward more than a century, 1952 saw another revolution. As the country had been structured feudally, the working-class was tired of it. Led by a group of miners, the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR; National Revolutionary Movement) attempted to gain power through electoral means in 1951, but after failing, they led a successful revolution in 1952. The MNR created Bolivia’s first formal education reform in 1953, which was implemented in 1955 (Luykx 1999:47). Previous to the reform, the education system was concentrated in cities which were largely populated by whites and Mestizos and ignored rural and indigenous populations, Bolivia’s non-Euro-centered cultures. What little state-led schooling occurred in rural areas served largely to engage poor people in the country’s labor force and to encourage migration to urban areas (Drange 2007:2), as the government “*said the Indians should only get three years of education in order to learn to read and to sign their name, and later to learn technical vocations*” (30). However, it is important to note that the indigenous peoples of Bolivia were not uneducated, but rather they were not educated in a classroom with a formal structure (43). Additionally, there were a few exceptions to this informality—the most famous being a 1931 school system set up in the rural and indigenous town of Warisata. Coordinated by educators Elizardo Pérez and Avelino Siñani (Mestizo and Aymara, respectively), the school was built around principles of community engagement, bilingualism and the absence of grades. Furthermore, the

⁹ Gutierrez uses the word “monocultural” in the same way as de Sousa Santos does, as explored in the Theoretical Framework.

school's pedagogy was built around the idea of education as a source of social struggle. However, after 10 years of existence, the government shut down the school and replaced the school's leaders (Luykx 1999:45-46).¹⁰

The MNR's 1953 Code of Education was the first time that rural (indigenous) populations were systematically recognized by the government. The reform formalized the education system in all areas of the country for the first time. However, while urban students had the opportunity to be educated through the university level, only five years of schooling was available to rural students (30). Additionally, exclusive use of Spanish in classrooms forced indigenous peoples to learn the language in order to be involved in education systems and for participation in the national economy. In this way, as described by an education researcher, *"the reform of '55 is a vision of integration of the indigenous peoples into national life—a little recessive, and not recognizing the experience of Warisata because Warisata conserved and respected indigenous culture and its cultural organizations"* (30). Realistically, the education reform functioned to re-create power dynamics similar to those of previous and colonial times (Patz 1999), and had the basic purpose of *"westernizing the ethnic communities"* (Drange 2007:2). This minimizes indigenous peoples' diversity, and visions their participation in capitalist economic systems only as part of the rural peasant class. Ministry of Education official Victor Pinalla describes this, *"since 1952... [as] a process of genocide. It is not a process of physical genocide, but rather a process of cultural genocide. The culture, the languages, the identities, of the peoples are being killed"* (31). As this 'cultural genocide' has victimized Bolivia for five centuries, it has created an absence of cultural thought re-emphasized by the 1952 revolution. In its place, Eurocentric thought validated by the colonizers, entered absences created by geno- and epistemicide. Jose Luis Saavedra explained that Eurocentrism is therefore *"the epistemic dimension [of] the modern capitalist system of domination"* (2). He added that this epistemic dimension is more profound than the physical because it has *"colonized our interiority, our subjectivity"* (2). The shift from pre-colonial knowledges to Eurocentric coloniality of knowledge has, according to a Cochabamba rural teachers' union representative, most fundamentally affected human-nature relationships. In his interpretation, *"the earth gives us everything or it does not give us anything. If we do not have the food which is given to us by the earth, how could we live?"* (21). This relationship is deeply important in Bolivia, as many indigenous cultures have strong respect for *pachamama* (or a highly spiritual Mother Earth). *Pachamama* is treated not as something that can be exploited, but rather a functional being which requires a reciprocal relationship. Formal colonialism, however, brought with it intense exploitation of the land and natural resources, a trend that has continued through what are often referred to as 'colonial' policies.

¹⁰ Today's significance of the schools in Warisata will be explored in Chapter 5.

The repositioning of the subjectivity of Latin America's population in such a deeply psychological way was the basis of the creation of norms and racial structures which, again, were re-emphasized by the MNR government. As part of this process, colonization created "*collective subjectivities*" which have served to alienate Others (31). It has positioned European colonizers in an exclusive upper class, Bolivians who have assimilated into European modernity as a lower class (Mestizos), and those who follow their own logics in an even lower class as politically and economically objectified (indigenous peoples). The important role played by the MNR is that as a nationalist revolution it supported creating a national identity. Following this line, the schools contributed to the MNR's goal of "*consolidating a Mestizo identity*" (Gamboa Rocabado 2009:6), which has since been central in the identities of much of Bolivia's populations. This homogenization destructively minimizes many vastly diverse cultures which have historically used varying systems of production not necessarily coinciding with the MNR's wage and labor-centered ideas (Zoomers 2006:1035-1036).

The MNR's revolution was validated by electoral processes until 1974, when its own president, Hugo Banzer (elected in 1971) replaced the civilian government with a military dictatorship. While political turmoil followed, one or another dictatorship remained until 1982 when a democratically elected government was finally inaugurated (Tapia 2008:218). However, Bolivia's transition from dictatorship to democracy has not been so smooth. Having one of the highest poverty rates in Latin America (Contreras *et al* 2003:7), Bolivia saw a need to develop, and it received many loans from international development organizations. Bolivian intellectual Oscar Vega Camacho pointed out that the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the late 1980s which were embedded in the loans followed similar assimilationist methodologies to those previously described of Simon Bolivar (using vastly different methods). "*The most important groups to incorporate were the indigenous organizations—more than unions, than workers, than the labor forces... It was the first time in Bolivia that they were incorporated into power*" (12). While the change was not immediate, a constitutional overhaul was passed in 1994. While it was the first time the country systematically recognized the diversity of its population through the idea of interculturalism (Drange 2007:2), the politics behind this reform have more recently been credited to foreign neoliberal involvement related to the SAPs (12). In 1990s and the early 2000s, neoliberal policies supported by the governments and the Constitution of '94 ran rampant through Bolivia. A Cochabamba rural teachers' union official puts the blame directly on the United States and specifies the US's neoliberal goals. "*They imposed laws. They imposed many things... What was the objective? To take the natural resources that we have here*" (21).¹¹

¹¹ Most famously, this neoliberal resource extraction culminated into Cochabamba's 'Water War'—when all of the city's water being privatized by the Bechtel corporation, as well as El Alto's 'Gas War' (where the natural gas

b. Education Reform of 1994—Law 1565

The Constitution of 1994 engaged a newer education reform—Law 1565. Finally, the indigenous population was recognized in the schools. Based around ‘inter-cultural and bilingual’ education, the text of the law recognized Bolivia’s cultural diversity, teaching both Spanish and a local indigenous language. This would allow the Bolivian population to be able to contribute to the national culture while not separating themselves from their indigenous communities (as did the 1953 reform).

i. Critiques of 1565

We feel that Law 1565... is a legal reform that doesn't take into account the principle actors of education. — Director, CTEUB (4)

While Law 1565 seems revolutionary considering Bolivia’s previous education system, I heard many critiques of it (e.g. Drange 2007, Howard 2009:3-5). Exploring these varying perceptions of the law is important to this research on the newer reform because the latter is based on a rejection of 1565 and the process of its creation.

There is a clear agreement by educational stakeholders that the development of 1565 was mostly based on foreign involvement as part of the neoliberal politics of the period and was therefore an imposition (Lopes Cardozo 2009:419). What this meant was that Bolivian educational stakeholders did not play as strong a role as they could have. More specifically, I encountered a large consensus that the creation of the law involved virtually no participation by educational actors outside the Ministry of Education (e.g. 40; 4-see above). In response, the teacher unions, especially the urban union, went on regular strikes to oppose the reform. This lack of involvement was repeated in each interview in which that law was mentioned (e.g. 9, 30, 31, 40). However, some argue that the law should not be dismissed as an imposition. An educational researcher who has co-authored at least one book on the previous reform (for the World Bank) explained that “*In Bolivia there had been intentions to have a reform, but we didn't know how and in addition there weren't resources*” (30). The foreign support, then, was much needed on a practical level. In fact, only 29 percent of Law 1565’s funding from 1995 through 2003 came from Bolivia’s National Treasury while 45 percent came from the World Bank and 16 percent from the Inter-American Development Bank (Gamboa Rocabado 2009:53). While that support may have been a necessity, the researcher added that “*the education reform entered along with neoliberalism, along with politics of structural adjustment*” (30). For this reason, the funding cannot be viewed alone, but as one of the ways foreign neoliberal forces engaged Bolivia’s development for their own interests.

industry was sold to a foreign corporation). For more about Bolivian processes of privatization and peoples’ resistance to it, see Dangel 2007.

Beyond the development of the law, there was much critique of the operationalization of its major concepts—those being inter-culturalism and bilingualism. Guillermo Mariatekumi critiqued 1565's use of bilingualism: *“this state has restrained this component of inter-culturality to a very specific context. This specific context has gone to the rural areas... but not to the urban context”* (32). While the law stated that all students should learn a local indigenous language as well as Spanish, it neglected the urban areas. City schools taught only Spanish while rural schools focused on Spanish and used local languages to help that process (31). Researcher and academic Mario Yapu characterized this as ‘transitional’ bilingualism. *“It has always been discussed in terms of a transition. They said, for example, that indigenous peoples should learn Quechua to better learn Spanish”* (46). Thus, where bilingualism was embraced, the education system's use of it allowed more participation in colonial and capitalist power structures by validating a part of indigenous identity while incorporating the rest of it into colonial relationships. While the education system again reflected a systematic integrationism into Mestizo and urban life, researcher Erick Jurado takes a more pragmatic approach to its reasoning. He said that *“learning these languages is faster”* because there had been decades of pedagogical experience to back them up, whereas no one had ever formally taught the indigenous languages in a classroom setting (14).

While this practical understanding could ease some tension, at the larger level this *“transitional bilingualism”* reflected the issues of 1565's inter-culturalism more generally. Two major critiques of inter-culturalism stand out. First and foremost, as described by Saavedra, it

is a reductionist vision... It's to say we accept diversity, tolerate diversity, but don't interact with diversity; or diversity doesn't influence me—the Other doesn't influence me... This is exactly what happened during the '94 education reform. Therefore it is a form of inter-culturalism that sounds nice-very smooth and nice... but it didn't transform any form of power (2).

This reductionist vision of inter-culturality saw culture from folkloric perspectives rather than a deeper understanding of their meanings. This justified both the use of bilingualism as the only universal inter-cultural policy as well as the maintenance of power structures, as a truly equal relationship would require a contextual shift outside of the education sector along with it. Academic Javier Sanjinés characterizes the law as using *“functional inter-culturalism”*, which sees cultural interaction from a neoliberal perspective, limiting it to folkloric values and a liberal democratic state (3). Because these systemic power dynamics remained, the ideological parent of the newer reform, Felix Patzi, criticizes 1565 as contributing to colonial hierarchies, just as was done again and again in previous development plans (1999:539). While indigenous peoples were finally recognized and their languages validated, Patzi explains that the new approach again enforced assimilation into the national colonial culture and created *“subjects formed around occidental scientific rationality... [which] conformed to the logic of capital and ignored other communal rationality”*, and therefore, Law 1565 enforced *“symbolic violence”* against indigenous

communities (1999:543, 551). In this way, the law was again assimilationist, and supported integration into urban and Mestizo life (45).

However, while the critiques are strong and critics are many, a SEDUCA official explained that the reform was “*programmed for 25 years*”. For this reason, while acknowledging that the reform was problematic, he questioned whether it would be possible to have a full critique of the law only halfway through its lifeline (19). Furthermore, some people explained that implementation of the reform did not begin in some places until long after its mandate in 1994 (14, 33) and specifically did not reach the urban schools in La Paz until 2000 (Contreras *et al* 2003:36). Finally, many told me that while the reform may have been implemented, they had not seen any practical changes beyond a shift in discourse and name changes of classes (e.g. 6, 8, 9, 15, 18). As articulated by an administrator of a teacher-training school, “*Simple changes in terminology don’t make a transformation, it can’t create a structural change in education, and lamentably this has been repeated by many governments for many years*” (22).

Law 1565 was clearly an ideological turning point from previous education laws. Intellectually it could have contributed to an equitable and culturally plural society. However, the lack of support for inter-culturalism in areas outside of education seems a vital problem, along with the lack of engagement teachers themselves had in the law’s development process. In this way, as the law was practically difficult to put into practice, it has seemingly furthered the assimilationist and integrationist policies of previous governments. Intellectually, however, it has laid the groundwork for a new education reform and new historical changes in Bolivia’s power structure (Gamboa Rocabado 2009:34), perhaps shifting from Sanjinés’ “*functional inter-culturalism*” to what he describes as a more “*critical inter-culturalism*” (3).

c. New Government, New Constitution, New Framework for Imagining Society

We want to be truthfully free. We want to govern ourselves, to think for our own future, to exploit our own resources, to have a new education for everyone... that there wouldn’t be a privileged class... where they eat off tables and we eat off the floor, and we get what falls from the table, nothing. We have to work hard in order to have nothing while they don’t work at all and have everything. So we want to be decolonized starting from our minds and in practice. We want the whites to understand that they have the same rights as us, we have the same capacities, we think equally with them, we work equally with them. —
Representative, Cochabamba Rural Teachers’ Union (21)

As indigenous social movements had re-emerged in the early 1990s, they grew to such an extent that 15 years later a social movement leader gained enough support to be elected president. Evo Morales was inaugurated as Bolivia’s first indigenous president in 2006, signaling a shift in the population’s priorities as well as the country’s global political positioning. This change is deeply important, as Bolivia has the largest per capita indigenous population in the hemisphere while being the one of the poorest countries on the continent. Moreover, rural indigenous communities bear the brunt of economic poverty (Zoomers 2006, Contreras *et al* 2003:7), and as Morales comes from a poor farming family, he is the first

president of Bolivia to represent the majority of the population in the country's 500 year history. Important in this shift is the government's use of the coloniality theory, basing its discourse on historical structures of knowledge and political power, to redefine its development.

Beyond the president and his government itself, the post-election experience has engaged a longer lasting change. The new government and the country's legislating bodies created a new constitution, inaugurated in early 2009, which reorganizes Bolivia's approach toward diversity along the lines of a plurality of identities. Following this, the country changed its official name from the 'Republic of Bolivia' to the '*Plurinational State of Bolivia*', offering a new concept of nationhood. It is the first operationalization of coloniality within a constitutional framework, and the Constitution is unique because of it. As the balance of power which created the original concept of the nation had been controlled by a minority, the Plurinational State is geared towards an equalization of the Bolivian population—especially supporting the country's indigenous peoples (23, 30). Towards this equalization, the Plurinational Constitution recognizes 36 nations within the country, each with a corresponding language. Additionally, it affirms that the state is based on the principle (among many) of decolonization, and the concept of Plurinationality is rooted in that idea. While the new Constitution contains a whopping 411 articles, these points are the most important to this research. Also notable are that the Constitution requires equal gender representation in the congressional bodies, and that any elected person in the government must speak a local language apart from Spanish.

Importantly, much of this new discourse has been created in reaction to discourses of the past. As academic and researcher Mario Yapu described, "*decolonization is the path opposite of colonization*" (46). Thus, as this thesis focuses on the operationalization of the decolonial and Plurinational State within the education sector, before those concepts can be explored we must consider colonialism and its relevance in Bolivia today. Following the coloniality theory, Bolivia uses 'decolonization' to reject the experiences which have come to shape historical inequalities in Latin America (32). For this reason, Guillermo Mariatekumi described the new conception of state in that it should "*displace the monocultural colony*" of the past (32). Since Bolivia gained independence from formal political colonialism in 1825, the state has taken on various relationships with both its own population and the global political and economic community. These relationships materialized in a full embrace of the 'coloniality of power', at least until 2006. In short, the process has assumed "*that cultures and peoples are objects... so the form I relate to objects is the way I relate with my culture*" (32). This experience is deeply meaningful in Bolivia, where after 500 years of colonization, the country's incredible diversity has been deeply objectified.

As the new government identifies previous governments and education systems as ‘colonial’, in that they have been oriented toward assimilating indigenous populations into the national Mestizo identity, these debates are important. The new Constitution exemplifies this discussion and challenges the ways we have thought about social and cultural subjectivity and the formative role education systems play in it. By engaging in these debates on operationalizing (de)coloniality in its Constitution and proposed education system, Bolivia has presented an alternative.

However, Plurinationality has also been understood less optimistically. Simon Yampara echoed an interpretation repeated by many, considering the change “*a historical moment, a kind of bridge. It is a trampoline for the big changes... This is its historical role, and the people are often a little drunk with the presence of their identities... They think he [Morales] will transform society, and it is not like this*” (47). The effect, then, of the government’s indigenist rhetoric is a sense of hope for the future with the responsibility for change placed solely on the government. Sanjinés described that this relates to Bolivia’s history: “*As it is still just over 20 years old, democracy is still developing... We don’t have modern party systems and we still cling to people, to figures*” (3). As Morales is a product of social movements, there is strong faith in his government-led change. However, while Morales’ support has united social struggles in an unprecedented way and allows the government to take strong stances, it could be argued that government support by social movements has consolidated them into an organizing branch of the MAS political party itself. In the second case, it would be difficult for movements to think independently, thus nullifying the possibility of non-government-centered, movement-led change. For some very radical Bolivian activists, this has become a rallying cry and they have considered acceptance of electoral representation as negative, prompting statements like, “*With Evo it is actually worse; worse because he has popular support*” (37). While the relationship between social movements and the government is often discussed in these polarized terms, it is clearly not a dichotomous issue, as it has shown both benefits and drawbacks.

Bolivia has seen many changes in its recent history. While some disagree or argue that they remain at a discursive level, no one I spoke with deny the significance of electing the country’s first indigenous president. Morales represents change to many, as he has united indigenist social movements which had emerged since Bolivia’s democratic period. Elections in Bolivia will come and the government will eventually change, but the Plurinational Constitution has been supported by a majority of the population and will remain (3). The country will then be forced to continue imagining a Plurinational society, embracing its cultural diversity and a decolonial path to development.

Chapter 5. ASEP Definition and Exploration

There is a very strong relationship between the new Constitution and the new education reform... These concepts in the new law are from the new Constitution. —Jose Luis Saavedra, Academic (2)

Bolivia's recent power shift has engaged a new concept of the state, embedding an educational reform in the Plurinational Constitution. This reform, called 'Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez' (ASEP), reimagines the relationship between schooling and social reproduction. As previous education reforms have been criticized for reproducing social inequality, the new reform uses education to reject that inequality and create, as does the Constitution, a 'decolonized' society. Walter Gutierrez of the Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of ASEP in the context of governmental change, as he explained that this education proposal "*was the base for constructing the political articles of the state*" (my emphasis; 7). While this perspective is not universal, many people I spoke with agreed that at the very least the education reform has been, in Oscar Vega's words, "*an important laboratory for the government*" to explore the concept of Plurinationalism (13). Therefore, understanding the reform is a grounded way to understand Bolivia's new Constitution and its use of the concept of coloniality.

This chapter will give an overview of the reform by discussing ASEP's pillars from the government's perspective. It will use the most recent publicly accessible text of the law (a version presented to Bolivia's National Congress in September of 2006). Additionally, input from presentations I attended which were organized by the government to explain ASEP to Bolivia's public will be used. Following this, the chapter will explore the meanings of ASEP interpreted differently by a variety of educational actors.

a. Description of Textual Law

The proposed education reform, ASEP, begins with a two page "*Explanation of Motives*" describing the backdrop of the reform and Bolivian society's need for it. The opening text declares that according to the new Plurinational Constitution, "*education is the highest function of the state*"¹² and then explains Bolivia's previous maintenance of colonial power relationships, directly enforced by the country's education system throughout its entire history. It clearly names colonialism as the root of inequality, and gives a romantic vision of indigenous culture prior to the Spanish colonial process:

The indigenous peoples of our continent developed important civilizations and created harmonious societies... Colonial education, enforced by the invaders, destined exclusively for the colonizers and their

¹² This is a reference to Article 77 of the Plurinational Constitution.

*descendents... [imposed] cultural values of the colonizer; negating, subduing, denigrating and intending to destroy the culture and erase the historical memory of the subjected indigenous peoples (ASEP 2006:2).*¹³

The preamble-of-sorts then names capitalism as central to the colonization process; describes the MNR's 1955 Code of Education as "*assimilationist and acculturating*"; characterizes education Law 1565 of 1994 as "*destined to consolidate neoliberal measures and adequate Bolivian education to the dictation of transnational globalization*"; and summarizes ASEP's goal as the creation of "*a new society of solidarity, justice, harmony, and supporting its cultural identity*" (ASEP 2006:2-3). From the first sentence on, it clearly embraces the ideas of coloniality through a historical critique of Bolivia's power structures, although ASEP fails to reflect on any positive roles education has played since colonization.

Specifically, ASEP is based on four fundamental pillars, as described by Victor Pinalla of the Ministry of Education: (1) decolonial, (2) intra- and inter-cultural along with plurilingual, (3) productive and (4) communitarian education (31). As he, along with all government representatives who I spoke with explained, each of these pillars involves many processes, although decolonization should be considered a broader political umbrella term for the entire law while the other points describe specific educational ideas. In summary, the government explains each pillar in the following ways: decolonization is a rejection of "*imposed cultural schemes of thought*" and of the previous "*colonizing education, built to erase our identity*", supporting an "*equal distribution of cultural capital*" (31). Moreover, within the concept of decolonization, Pinalla added that the educational "*revolution*" should rebuild epistemological processes through deconstruction of: "*1. The myth of race; 2. Eurocentrism; and 3. Capitalist development*" (31).

The second pillar, intra- and inter-culturalism as well as plurilinguism is substantial. Inter-culturalism has been deeply criticized in Bolivia, as it has been active within the education system since 1994. The alternative, then, is inter- *and* intra-culturalism, inter- meaning supporting relationships between cultures by focusing on "*the complementarity of knowledges and wisdoms*" of those involved, while intra- means "*to recover, develop, protect and defend the knowledge of indigenous and afrobolivian nations*" (ASEP 2006:9, 10). Finally, Plurilingualism requires each student to learn Spanish, the local indigenous language, and a foreign language (most likely English) in recognition of the plurality of the Bolivian population and their interests (ASEP).

The next pillar, 'productive' education, is "*oriented toward work and sustainable development which guarantees processes of production, conservation, and support and defense of all natural resources*" (ASEP 2006:5). It is based on a merging of 'technical and humanistic' forms of production.

¹³ My translation.

The ‘technical’ aspect supports vocational development leading into wage labor, whereas humanistic education supports the production of knowledge. Moreover, the two should be taught together in order to put theory into practice in the daily lives of the students, providing every high school graduate with the ability to move directly into the labor field as well as to the university. Additionally, this goal is designed in support of Bolivia’s vast poor population who should be able to lift themselves out of poverty with it.

Finally, the goal of ‘communitarian’ education is most closely related to ‘indigenist’ politics, supporting a community-based outlook on the world rather than an individualistic one. Communitarian education supports collectivity, solidarity, “*harmonious living with nature*”, and the philosophy of “*living well*” (31).¹⁴

While the reform revolves around these concepts, three additional aspects are important to mention. First, ASEP is directed toward all Bolivian schooling, from kindergarten through university and technical schooling, as well as all *fiscal* (public), *de convenio* (semi-private), and *particular* (private) schools. However, some teachers I spoke with considered it important at only some academic levels, particularly other than their own. A Cochabamba teacher explained that “*It should not be for [little] children. They would not understand these politics of decolonization and anti-imperialism... [It should be] for higher education*” (16). While this teacher made an important point, I imagine the government’s response to be that each topic of ASEP should be implemented differently at each level, and of course a 6 year-old student should not be expected to engage in a conversation about decolonization but could rather engage in processes of it (i.e. plurilingualism, etc.).

The second aspect is that ASEP requires that education be secular. This is complicated, as most of Bolivia’s *particular* schools are religious and *de convenio* schools are cost-free for students because they are co-funded by the state and (usually religious) institutions. Again, this reflects the larger constitutional change, as one Cochabamba urban teachers’ union official explained that “*Before, it said in our Constitution that the official religion was Catholicism... Now there is [religious] freedom in the classroom*” (16). The specifics have not yet been clarified, but this could mean major changes for many of Bolivia’s schools which receive funding from the Church.

Lastly, under ASEP, education is decentralized, in that “*the curriculum must respond to the necessary characteristics of the region*” (24). The law, however, is vague—it does not describe to what extent regions and schools will have input into their curricula.

¹⁴ In line with the Plurinational Constitution, this last goal is often repeated by government officials as a rejection of the idea of living better than others, but rather to live well enough for oneself and people in the community. The term is borrowed from the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas’ (ALBA’s) People’s Trade Agreement.

ASEP's language does not define the processes it requires, but it is clear that the Bolivian government is attempting to institutionalize a spirit of resistance to neoliberalism and coloniality within the education system. To engage the coloniality framework specifically, ASEP describes its purpose as *"to develop cultural knowledges and wisdom... to complement scientific and technological advances in order to contribute to the development of humanity"* (2006:5). ASEP's concepts, though, are not clearly explained by the government. These ideas have been defined in a conceptual sense, but grounding them into any sort of practice—let alone to a classroom with a teacher and 30 seven-year-olds—has not happened yet.

b. Process

The construction of Plurinational curriculum is not written at the desk of some thinkers. — Walter Gutierrez (7)

ASEP was initially proposed in 2006 after the government convened an educational congress to develop it under the leadership of a new Minister of Education, Felix Patzi. As a guiding method to the new approach, ASEP was conceptualized through participatory means—involving educational actors such as teachers, teacher unions and various academics (although actual participation is debated by some actors. See Chapter 7). Many of the government officials with whom I spoke, for this reason, described ASEP as created from the bottom-up, and supported that concept with a reminder that participation is required in the new Constitution (7). In order to connect with the government's broad bases of support, this participation is important. As Oscar Vega Camacho discussed, if it were not like this, *"we would fall into this dangerous place where a few academics or specialists decide all the politics. And they can be very intelligent, but they will not have social relevance"* (13). Vega Camacho's thus explains the government's motivation for participation, and government officials therefore regularly refer to ASEP's bottom-up participatory development. A presentation by one Ministry official named twenty-three *"social organizations and institutions"* participating in the original planning meeting (31S).¹⁵ He added that this event led to the Educational Congress of 2006 where ASEP was fully developed, and featured the participation of 31 education-related organizations from around the country (31S). Finally, he described ASEP's process of creation as *"an education law from Bolivians for Bolivians"* with no participation by outside consultants (as had been done in the previous reform of 1994) and explains that the participation includes those who have historically been excluded from the political system (31, 31S). He did not mention the role of previous government officials.

More recently, the government has been working to develop a curriculum that all actors can agree on and be consistent with ASEP. Before I started my research in Bolivia, the Ministry of Education had

¹⁵ Reference refers to slides presented in reference in interview 31.

organized seven nation-wide participatory events to work on the new curriculum with a wide ranging group of actors (7). By using participatory methods in the creation of ASEP as well as the curriculum, the government has gained support. While there is debate over the actual level of participation by some educational actors (explored below), this experience has given shape to ASEP and the curriculum. Those who participated in ASEP's formation may deeply support it while others felt that the discourse of participation is just that, and this is used by the government to validate its processes and proposals. This discourse has shaped government rhetoric, in turn deeply effecting populations who have been unhappy with the previous centralized, top-down, neoliberal approach to development.¹⁶

c. Differentiating ASEP from Law 1565

The rules of the former reform and system are being fixed. Now is the educational revolution. It is changing structures of thought. The aim of the reform is a liberating education. —
School Director, La Paz (11)

In 2006 the Ministry of Education legally annulled Law 1565 in preparation for ASEP's implementation (Gamboa Rocabado 2009:26). While the reform was cancelled almost four years ago and no new curriculum has been agreed upon or passed by the Congress, the former reform's framework and methods continue to be used in most Bolivian classrooms. While a comparative analysis would be impossible given the differing levels of development, two points of comparison between the former reform and ASEP were brought up in interviews: the difference in the process of creating the two laws and the usage of inter-culturalism, as it is central in both reforms but plays very different roles. Both aspects point to the difference in the overall conceptual and governing framework under which these laws were created and implemented (in the case of ASEP, will be implemented).

Bolivia's new government prioritizes participation of various educational actors in ASEP's development. The previous reform, Law 1565 of 1994, was built as part of the neoliberal structural adjustment programs of the time and used foreign consultants as guides. That reform was developed and implemented through top-down means, and "*there was virtually no participation*" (40). There is a wide consensus around this issue. The Executive General of Cochabamba's rural teachers' union explained their direct rejection of the former reform: "*The teachers did not approve this project because it was an imposition directly from the government*" (16). On the other hand, ASEP has been viewed as a bottom-up approach, because of its comparatively higher level of participation. Moreover, this has contributed to the critical perception that 1565 has actually created many problems (16). For example, Saavedra affirms that "*Bolivian society was less racist before the reform*" (2).

¹⁶ Additionally, there is quite a bit of conflict about social participation in ASEP's creation; explored in Chapter 6.

While keeping that critique in mind, positive effects of the education reform of 1994 should be considered. As inter-culturalism was a central part of the former reform, it is used along with intra-culturalism in the newer reform. There is a clear difference between the two, but, as described by Walter Gutierrez, “*We should remember that the earlier reform at the very least contributed a lot to of our conceptual clarification of inter-culturalism*” (7). Law 1565, although created in a neoliberal context, recognized diversity for the first time. Now, the emphasis on language and culture has grown. While inter-culturalism has not been achieved, it has at least meant a valorization of folkloric aspects of culture rather than a deeper recognition of the cosmovisions and cultural aspects of daily life (30, 40, 42, 45; Lopes Cardozo 2009:422). However, Tomás Robles criticized the previous interpretation of inter-culturality: “*The most that they [the government] realized was that the principle element of Bolivian culture is the problem of languages, because... access to Spanish gives the possibility of interacting*” (10). Bilingualism, then, was the only real emphasis of inter-culturalism of the past. Robles added that “*they have continued to fail with bilingual education*” (10), with others articulating that bilingualism was limited to Spanish, Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní (Contreras *et al* 2003:18)—much less than the 36 languages recognized by ASEP and the new Constitution. Furthermore, bilingualism has been critiqued by many, as its implementation has been mostly limited to rural areas. Contreras *et al* evidence this with, “*In 2000, 2,037 schools or 18.8 percent of rural schools were bilingual... In the urban areas [however], only 10 out of 3,140 [or 0.3 percent of] schools were bilingual*” (2003:40). For this reason, the inter-culturalism of Law 1565 is often considered to be “*of a colonial character*” (32), as students speaking indigenous languages gained skills to assimilate into Mestizo society, whereas Spanish speaking students have not shared this linguistic cultural interaction. Therefore, inter-culturality of a decolonial character requires a different model.

d. Warisata’s Relevance

ASEP is specifically inspired by the school system in Warisata during the 1930s. Most directly, its name comes from Warisata—Avelino Siñani and Elizardo Pérez being the main intellectual builders of those schools. Additionally, however, the four pillars of the law (decolonization, inter- and intra-culturalism as well as plurilingualism, productivity and communitarian education—as previously described) are reproductions of concepts from Warisata’s school system. Interestingly, there is frequent discussion on the relevance and importance of the experience of Warisata in Bolivia’s political and educational climate today. Understanding these perceptions helps one gain a stronger grasp of the issues and debates around ASEP’s four pillars.

Early in my research experience, a school director in La Paz explained to me that in order to understand ASEP, it would be important to first “*do a comparison to the schools in Warisata where*

Avelino Siñani and Elizardo Pérez were. Their entire perception was the exact same focus... [ASEP] is the same, only now it is changing names” (33). A few of the fundamental aspects of the schools in Warisata, then, are central. Firstly, “*Warisata conserved and respected indigenous culture*” (30), which sharply contrasting the national education systems of the time. Beyond this, Warisata’s schools were based around ideas of academic studies along with physical production (9). Saavedra describes this bridge as the most important aspect of Warisata’s experience. However, he added that while the schools were developed with this bridge in mind, the productive aspect did not actually take place in schools as much as it did in extra-curricular community practices (2). Furthermore, productivity in Warisata meant, “*for example, to make carpets, to make tiles and sell these things, and better the quality of life of the population... To make things that [would] generate an income*” (30). In this way, Warisata’s school system responded to the needs of the community through a validation of the larger economic structure in which it functioned.

Warisata’s approach toward language also related to that economic structure. Whereas the new proposal requires education in three languages, Warisata’s schools were taught completely in Spanish (30). Mario Yapu points out that “*sometimes they say that Warisata was an antecedent to inter-cultural and bilingual education. It is not like this. Warisata was not thought out so that Indians learn in Aymara or learn in Quechua or in Guaraní*” (46). While the sole use of Spanish could not have contributed much to an inter- or intra-cultural dialogue, it was the first time that any type of literacy was systematically brought to a high concentration of indigenous peoples. Saavedra explained that the sole use of Spanish may have contributed to indigenous migration to urban areas, as “*when indigenous people went to the cities, in order to not suffer discrimination, it was important to learn Spanish*” (2). Thus, Spanish education, as a point of economic importance to the local population, contributed to the round-about role of Warisata’s support of to the Mestizo racial category (30), leaving city-bound indigenous migrants in a Spanish-oriented working class.

Spanish literacy, paradoxically, was a contentious subject for the urban and owning classes. “*Once they [the government] saw that Indians were literate, they said ‘be careful, they will all be doctors, and who will work?... Give them only a little literacy, and offer practical education in agriculture, etc. to improve their work’*” (30). Clearly, skilled indigenous people were a threat to Bolivia’s power structure. While the government and owning classes may have wanted a functional labor force, Warisata’s productive and Spanish education did not stop there, teaching students at such a level that they could challenge their productive role. This also seems to have played a role in the government closing Warisata’s schools in 1940. As Saavedra described, “*Warisata didn’t break. It was destroyed, and it was destroyed because... it was against the system*” (2).

Yapu added that it is necessary to explore the contextual differences of Warisata and ASEP. He criticizes current discourses on Warisata for romanticizing its perfection and the application of that perfection today. He assures us that as a nation-wide education system, it simply cannot work. “*Why? Because Warisata functioned in a very limited zone, when the peoples and Bolivia were not integrated into a globalized world*” (46). Indeed, Warisata is a small town in a comparatively large country, and the world and state’s politics have changed vastly over the past 75-or-so years.

How, then, does ASEP take the schools of Warisata into account? Although the context of ASEP is different in virtually every way from that of Warisata, the new law is a modern adaptation of some of its basic ideas. Both give high importance to school-community relationships, production and indigenous cultures, which have been historically excluded from national educational discourse.



Illustration 4: Painting of Avelino Siñani and Elizardo Pérez in Warisata. "Founders of the first indigenous school"

e. Decolonization

When I say 'decolonization', it means recovering what is good of what we have in this moment, in this reality; and to create a more just society, more critical of neoliberalism. —
Walter Gutierrez, Ministry of Education (43)

'Decolonization' was not a part of Warisata's discourse, but ASEP's creators have used it as an umbrella term to cover the ideas that have been adapted from that experience. While ASEP uses an understanding of decolonization based on coloniality, not one of the people I spoke with described the concept in exactly the same way. The conceptual understandings will continue to develop, and each actor will appropriate the term in the way that they understand it best. For this reason, decolonization will not be a homogenous process. To the contrary, decolonization in schools will be a very individual experience, with differences ranging from administrative techniques, teacher approaches and students' interactions with the ideas at hand.

As previously explored in chapters 2 and 4, the government uses a decolonization framework following the 'coloniality' concept. It breaks out of a discourse of formal political colonization and references colonization of power, society, economics, languages and cultural logics. Just like Mignolo's critical border thinking and Castro-Gomez's 'epistemic democracy', Bolivia's government uses a discourse of dialogue between all types of knowledge—from those of all 36 indigenous nations to that of Euro-centric modernity.

While most agree that this discourse is aesthetically positive, many feel that it will not translate into reality. Academic Mario Yapu, for example, explained that on a conceptual level decolonization has been well developed and that he agrees with it. However, he sees that there will be a clear disjuncture between "*discourse and action*". More bluntly, he added "*it won't work*" (46). These frustrations were common. Educators supported government discourse, but when confronted with a question about imagining decolonization in their own work, responses took different shape. For example, the director of a teacher-training institute in Cochabamba explained that he imagines his practice will be a purely "*cultural type of decolonization*", without giving further details (23). This would only be a part of the government's vision. The urban teachers' union of La Paz agrees that decolonization will focus solely on culture; however, they view this process negatively, as they consider decolonization based in economic terms.¹⁷

Sanjinés, however, pointed out that these understandings of decolonization are limited by colonial ways of thinking; "*Those structures are part of the way we feel, the way we breathe, the way we*

¹⁷ Chapter 8 explores La Paz's urban teacher union's positioning, critiques, and imagined utopia.

are and the way we think... When you're in this other scheme, you have to realize that there are no utopian ends; that you're still constructing and always fighting your own demons" (my emphasis, 3). Decolonization, then, has no specific vision of society, is rather a never-ending process in itself. Rather, society is a never-ending process, rejecting the concept of a decolonized public, and emphasizing a decolonizing or decolonial one, in which democracy is built around engaging constant reflection and action towards the process itself.

The current processes of change are then the beginning of the decolonial society, and the struggle of this phase should be to engage people in a reflection/action process. Enrique Dussel, an intellectual who inspired the colonality theory, explained that the current processes of change are important because they inspire *"political self-determination [which] is what supports the possibility of decolonization, but it also helps economic [and cultural] decolonization"* (1).¹⁸ Therefore, as colonality describes the objectification of the Other, decolonization reconstitutes human subjectivity and self-determination. Furthermore, Giovanni Samanamut of the Office of the Vice-President explained that *"this concept of subjectivity for decolonization has two consequences: not only recovering subjectivity, but rather producing a new type of democratic civilization"* (32). For a representative of the rural teacher union of Cochabamba, subjectivity meant that *"you are just as equal as everyone and you can't impose anything"* (21). These visions allow for the process described by Sanjinés (above). Salvaging subjectivity is a central tenet of Bolivia's vision of a decolonial society, with decolonization as an umbrella term for the approach toward education whose purpose is to create that society. More specifically, both inter- and intra-culturalism are aspects of ASEP's approach to that vision.

f. Inter-culturalism

If you decolonize, you can't just go into education itself. It's a broad thing. There are various other aspects of life-so what's education? The combination of all this put into some sort of system. — Javier Sanjinés (3)

As ASEP considers the previous use of the concept of 'inter-culturalism' colonial, the new policy reformulates the concept in three central ways: (1) it contextualizes it within the Plurinational framework, (2) it focuses on the universal importance of inter-culturality, and (3) it adds the concept of intra-culturality. The first reformulation is more conceptual, and focuses on the larger context in which the education system is directed. As an education researcher described, *"In '94 the state was not promoting inter-culturality. It was in the education reform and nothing more. There was not a state that supported it."*

¹⁸ The conference in which Dussel spoke was titled 'Towards the Construction of the Start of Decolonization and Inter-cultural Vision of the Plurinational State' and was sponsored by various organizations and ministries of the government, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Decolonization. Events such as these are not uncommon in Bolivia, as the government uses them to spread of dialogue around concepts embedded in the new constitution.

The difference now is that there is a state which supports the politics [of inter-culturalism]” (30). Not only does the government support these politics, but they are embedded in the Plurinational Constitution, which, again, characterizes education as “*a supreme function*” of the state (Article 77) and recognizes the country’s vast cultural diversity.

It seems that inter-culturalism itself may not have to change much as long as its surrounding context changes, in order to become a function of decolonization. Sanjinés explains that inter-culturality without the Plurinational context is not an effective use of education because what is taught in schools (if it is in fact taught in schools) is negated by society’s structures (3). Without these other efforts for cross-cultural dialogue, inter-culturalism became a false effort which could not create social progress without non-school engagement. For this reason, he characterizes the older version as “*functional inter-culturalism*” and the newer one as “*critical inter-culturalism*” (3), the difference being that the older version allowed urban students to continue living as they had while giving little recognition to the diversity present, whereas “*critical inter-culturalism*” forces a personal and social reflection previously absent. Moreover, he explains that this newer version connects back to the development of the law. “*When you promote the Plurinational state linked to this powerful critical inter-culturality, you are also starting from the roots up. These others move from the top-down*” (3).

The bottom-up development of ASEP, then, comes full circle to a bottom-up inter-culturality. With systems in place to integrate the populations’ ideas, critical inter-culturalism and participatory development work hand in hand. Critical inter-culturalism working within a Plurinational state clashes directly with the functional inter-culturalism of the past. The latter concept was characterized by assimilationist practices which pushed indigenous students towards cities and allowed urban students to define the national culture just as they had been.

On the other hand, Oscar Vega Camacho articulated the opposing decolonial idea of inter-culturality: “*The theme of inter-culturality is a necessity of decolonization, because minimally you have to meet and know who you live with. It should be a priority for urban areas, not the reverse like in neo-liberal times*” (13). Instead of pushing rural populations toward cities, urban populations are forced to recognize and interact with diversity. This is the second key difference: this decolonial characteristic of inter-culturality applies to everyone. Rather than the previous recognition and minimization of diversity, this version supports interaction between multiple cultures. The new Plurinational state, then, enforces inter-cultural dialogue through three main aspects of the proposed education reform: inter-culturalism, intra-culturalism and plurilingualism.

This final difference is essential. While inter-culturalism by itself remains as it was, its context (the Plurinational State) and its juxtaposition with intra-culturalism is central to understanding the two reforms. As described by Saavedra, “*in the new law... there is no distinction between inter-culturalism and intra-culturalism. We view it as a single word: ‘inter-and-intra-culturalism’*” (my emphasis, 2). In this case, while there is a clear difference between the two concepts they cannot be separated. However, during the research process it became clear that while the two concepts are interconnected, many educational actors give them their own definitions.

The above paragraphs should give an intellectual explanation of inter-culturalism in ASEP. In interviews, actual on-the-ground interpretation ranged from very non-critical positions on inter-culturalism as the presence of multiple cultures to a much more engaged version which could achieve ‘liberation’—the non-critical stance simply being “*the indigenous cultures together*” (6), or “*groups of various cultures. One child is Aymara, another Spanish—a child of every culture. This is inter-cultural*” (5); whereas the more engaged approach “*is about respect, valorization and re-valorization of the cultures of other peoples*” (19). Moreover, this second interpretation should be seen “*as a way of relating, of respect, and of liberating ourselves. This is fundamental*” (32). A Cochabamba rural teachers’ union official offered a specific example of this deeper inter-cultural exchange: “*They speak of pachamama, of mother earth; and that idea reaches to some people who come from Europe and the United States (who we call gringos) and they adapt to partake in some of the local cosmovision. This is inter-culturality*” (16). This deeper understanding and engagement with other people’s cultures is very important. A number of people I spoke with pointed out that without this, inter-culturality risks being reduced to folkloric aspects of culture. For example, academic Mario Yapu warned that “*doing rituals in schools, having parties in schools, this is a part, but it is the folkloric part of culture. The more technical part [risks] not being there*” (46). Sofia Alcón of the University of the Cordillera added her worry that inter-culturalism allows for students “*to, for example, put on holiday clothes... these are school routines that happen in the classrooms. They will put on a poncho and say they are being inter-cultural*” (45). So, inter-culturalism, as it is about a cultural exchange, risks a kind-of folklorization, even within the Plurinational state and alongside intra-culturalism. However, Walter Gutierrez asserted that “*the thoughts, the knowledges, the cosmovisions, the oral or written history that comes from indigenous communities, the values of indigenous cultures, are now in the education system’s curriculum*” (7). As this point is debated by many people in schools themselves, Gutierrez’s point reassures us that the Ministry is at least trying to engage a critical inter-culturalism in classrooms.

g. Intra-culturalism

Intra-culturalism comes alongside inter-culturalism. A school director in Vinto, a rural town outside Cochabamba, explained his vision of intra-culturality as “*cultural development within one’s own culture. It is not replacing ‘inter-culturality’ with another idea, but rather strengthening cultural identities from cultural elements within the locality*” (27). In this way, intra-culturality’s absence in the previous education reform “*spoke of [a tree’s] branches, but it fundamentally missed the idea of the country having its own roots*” (23). Intra-culturality, then, identifies and develops Bolivia’s roots. Giovanni Samanamut of the Office of the Vice President explained that this begins with “*the question of identity, the question of self valorization, of self motivation, etc.*” (21). This type of personal development into one’s own cultural context is clearly significant. More than intra-culturalism only being for oneself, however, it is “*the field of ritual, of religion, of spirituality of the communities, it is the relationship that poor and indigenous peoples have with the land... So this ritual is the principal way of internally strengthening communities*” (2). Samanamut and Saavedra’s points together emphasize both personal development and understanding of one’s own culture as well as supporting cultural growth at larger community levels. Therefore, intra-culturality must be considered on a deeply personal level. Gutierrez offered questions which an intra-cultural education should answer: “*What is your origin? What is your history? What is your form of thought? Your ideology? Your philosophy? ... It is to look at who we are in reality. What do we know? What do we have? How do we think? etc.*” (7). These questions are daunting and important, and it is quite the task to undertake, as many of the answers have been hidden through processes of colonization.

This combination of inter- and intra-culturalism will make it “*much easier to establish this nexus of interchanges with other knowledges and other cultures*” (46) and allows for “*actually giving solid value to the diversity which is present*” (8). The two –culturalities together, then, allows for full support and recognition of Bolivia’s cultural plurality and will compliment each others’ development. It then fully supports the 36 official cultures and Plurinational Constitution, allowing for stronger and more open cultural relationships. This “*change of 180 degrees in education for those who have been marginalized*” (31) is therefore central in the education system’s role in decolonization. A CTEUB official explained that intra-culturality allows “*[children] to respect and rescue their culture... This is decolonization*” (4). Adding, a Cochabamba urban teachers’ union official added that intra-culturality is at the heart of the decolonial process and that “*the idea of decolonization [is] for this purpose—to know our own culture up until the edges of our country*” (16). Decolonization, then, revolves around the dialogical relationship between inter- and intra-culturality, which therefore both support the Plurinational Constitution in many ways. Anke van Dam, however, brought up an important critique—as culture is an evolving process,

indigenous Bolivian cultures have become part of the modern globalized and urbanized world. For this reason, schools have to either support students' cultural development as a part of the global community *or* from an exotified pre-colonial vision of culture (40).

h. Plurilingualism

While inter- and intra-culturalism remain at a theoretical level, the practice of the Plurinational education system has not been implemented. Plurilingualism is ASEP's most practical proposal to create a level playing field for inter- and intra-culturalism to function smoothly. The proposal is to teach the local region's indigenous language, Spanish as the national language and a foreign language (7). Just like inter-culturalism, it is a growth from the previous education reform based on inter-culturalism and bilingualism. The addition of a foreign language is a large change, especially in Bolivia's context of debate around the validity of teaching bilingually. Saavedra explains that the use of Spanish is for "*the construction of the national culture*", while the use of a foreign language should "*open ourselves up to the world*" (2). Those two languages, then, are practical aspects of inter-culturalism, while teaching local indigenous languages is that of intra-culturality.

The Executive General of Cochabamba's urban teacher union explained his support of teaching native languages: "*Language is how we transmit our reality... [Indigenous peoples] need to learn in their native language to contextualize [the material] within their world, within their reality*" (16). This approach to language allows students to learn using their own in order to develop their respective cultural logics. The use of bilingualism in the previous education reform, on the other hand, taught in indigenous languages under the pretext of developing a national and Spanish-driven form of logic. The National Director of CTEUB explained that the difference enables ASEP to achieve its decolonial goal. "*The children didn't understand what was going on. Now, they will learn in their own languages, and Spanish material will be introduced to teach [it] as well, in order to integrate into the whole country*" (4).

For an indigenous child, learning their respective language is deeply important, as those languages were developed along with their respective cultural logics, and languages are built to transmit those logics. A teacher in Cochabamba expressed that "*the children of indigenous and native people already do not speak Quechua or Aymara. It's a shame*" (16). Due to this, the logics associated with Quechua and Aymara cultures are also not being developed. Moreover, his use of examples is notable, as Quechua and Aymara are the two largest remaining indigenous populations in Bolivia. If they have lost much of their language, the smaller groups have certainly been affected in the same way or worse. In fact, teacher trainer Tomas Robles explained that already "*There are some [languages] that have less than 70 families... because of the church, because of evangelization and other things, but thanks to [previous education systems] these cultures are losing their languages*" (10). With less than 70 families speaking

one language, an enormous challenge to Plurilingualism presents itself: As completion of a teacher-training school is required to teach in ASEP, who will teach an indigenous language to a community of 70 families, if no one from that community already speaks the language?

Gutierrez affirms that teachers need to “*teach in diverse languages... The teacher has to be qualified to teach in their respective place in diverse languages—this is Plurilingualism*” (7). Beyond that, he re-affirmed that the teachers must be able to teach in a foreign language as well. The practical implications of the challenge described above, however, remain. Moreover, I heard this concern about practicality in most interviews. A La Paz teacher explained, “*It would be nice to have the right teachers for the students in order to share with them, but in our situation... we don’t know the different languages. We know about them, but we don’t know how to speak them. So it is very difficult. All the students come from different places, but they all speak perfect Spanish*” (34). A seven hour bus ride away, a Cochabamba teacher agreed. “*Many of us still cannot speak bilingually. Most speak Spanish as their native language, and possibly they know Quechua, or Quechua and Spanish, but it is not spoken well, and we don’t know how to write it well either*” (16).

There is, however, a possible solution to this major problem, which is to teach teachers and teachers-in-training these languages. However, most people I spoke with were not optimistic about this. A La Paz school director said “*I don’t think there are resources*”, and teachers will not pay for classes themselves because the government is “*not going to pay more for Aymara-speaking [teachers]*” (35). On the other hand, another teacher added, “*Anything can happen if you give it strength*”, emphasizing the need for government-funded language training (34).

Additionally, a major concern is that as Plurilingualism is the most practical proposal within ASEP, many pragmatic problems come with it. Firstly, Dutch cooperation worker Anke van Dam stated that while Plurilingualism is important, ASEP’s legal text has only been offered in Spanish, so the 36 recognized indigenous languages of Bolivia have been excluded from the process in this way. She added that “*not all languages have the same status here. There is a hierarchy of languages*” even within the Plurinational State (40). In short, these languages have clear relationships to social, economic, and political power, so entering the debate on a linguistically-even playing field is not a realistic goal.

Secondly, researcher Erick Jurado explained that even within Aymara, the most spoken indigenous language, there are “*regional, territorial and local differences. The Aymara from the East or West or Southwest is distinct from the Aymara of the middle of the country. So, they already have problems with the normalization of languages between Aymaras*” (14). Teaching an ‘Aymara’ class is, then, very difficult. Even if a teacher is fluent and literate, they may speak a different dialect from the

local population. Finally, a math teacher in Cochabamba explained that Quechua, the local native language, would be insufficient to teach math. Even though he is fluent in Quechua, he asserted that “*In English you can teach a math class because there is technical English. In Quechua there is not*” (15). This difficulty is especially present in math, as Quechua’s logic does not use the concept of ‘zero’ (40). Therefore, this teacher who has taught math for decades to various grades would have to completely re-organize his curriculum around Quechua logic—something that he has not been professionally trained in at all.

While some urban teachers have not accepted the proposal, the rural teachers’ analysis was much more open. A representative of Cochabamba’s rural teacher union explained that “*the people are scared because the campesinos are playing a protagonistic role*”. He went on to explain that “*it was unjust that they had to learn our language [Spanish], and we didn’t have to learn theirs. It seems to me that this way will be just, that we will be able to communicate in a better way*” (24). Along with this idea of justice, however, is the more practical purpose of national integration. A member of the Centro Yachay Tunkuy in Cochabamba (a community-based educational research and training center) explained that integration should be a universal concept—not only applying to rural-urban migration, but rather emphasizing continuity and communication in any and all of Bolivia’s diverse areas (20). For this reason, Plurilingualism is a central aspect of inter-culturalism and the primary one in school settings.

Victor Fuentes of SEDUCA in Cochabamba, however, explained that perhaps Plurilingualism would not actually achieve inter-cultural relationships besides at local levels. “*Now, we’re teaching two languages: Spanish and Quechua... The thing is, when an Aymara comes to the [Quechua-speaking] city, the only way they can communicate is through Spanish—but by using it we are not decolonizing. This is a contradiction*” (19). In this case, I asked him if he had any further ideas to turn language education into a positively decolonial classroom practice. His suggestion, while seemingly not functional, was interesting—that effective decolonization would teach “*only indigenous languages*”, which would support intra-culturalism and inter-culturalism between non-assimilated cultures (19).

Finally, as a critique of the third element of Plurilingualism, a Cochabamba rural union representative expressed that “*the foreign language is not principally a tool of learning, but rather it serves as an inter-cultural commercial mechanism, and we have to learn this in another way*” (16). Shifting the discursive emphasis of the foreign language would be more honest, as for many, the interest in learning English, for example, would be to appeal commercially within the confines of capitalist economics, to either domestic or foreign work and travel.¹⁹

¹⁹ Chapter 7 will further engage this clash between capitalist integration and decolonial independence.

i. Productive Education

The United States would send flour, oil, etcetera to the communities, under the auspice of helping, but in practice the help was not good because we became accustomed to receiving rather than producing. And this is what we don't want anymore. We want to produce, and not just receive. — Cochabamba Rural Teachers' Union Representative (21)

Productive education, being the third of the four central pillars of ASEP, also met controversy in my research. The legal text of this aspect is quite short, which allows for individual interpretation of its role. While the law supports both 'technical and humanistic' productive education, it fails to provide details, whether theoretical or practical. I encountered three general lines of understanding, the first emphasizing the technical aspect, the second emphasizing the humanistic, and the third using each to teach the other. While his writing came long before discussions of ASEP, Paulo Freire prophetically wrote that *"Any change, even a change initiated timidly, in the interest of new material conditions in any significant aspect of society (such as, for example, in the dichotomy between manual and intellectual labor) necessarily provokes resistance from the old ideology that survives in the face of forces to create a new society"* (1978:15). Freire, here, expects nothing less than resistance to change from a focus on material production to that of intellectual production. Perhaps this idea explains the current situation in Bolivia, where there has been no consensus on the meaning of productive education. Even among government sources, I found no clarity. For this reason exploring each of these interpretations is important. A school director in Vinto explained that this is a major issue—even *"those who come to socialize the law do not understand it, so of course the audience doesn't understand it"* (27), and Anke van Damn added that the issue here is the *"struggle to find the equilibrium between technical and humanistic production"* (40). Finally, this struggle is hampered by many pessimistic attitudes around the availability of resources to implement any productive education.

The roots of the first technically-based interpretation of ASEP are directly inspired by Warisata's schools where students were trained vocationally for jobs available in the region: mostly agricultural (30). In this way, school teachers and directors imagined productivity as varied from lessons about *"school gardens, where children will learn to plant seeds and care for the plants like lettuce... and eventually they will be able to grow a salad"* (8) to *"preparing wood, learning carpentry, soldering, mechanics, electricity, working on computer education... We need to teach things which will allow them [students] to specialize in something so that they will be useful in the future"* (21). This purpose aims to train students in a way that allows them to enter the job market after high school to receive personal economic gain. In a country with such a large poverty rate, this is a clear priority for many people. One teacher explained that at the high school level, productivity will go beyond skill-based education and students will be able to sell what they produce. This way, students would be *"inserted into the methods of production of society"* (8), approaching social participation as economically-gearred citizens. At a government workshop to explain

ASEP to parents, the facilitator explained just this: *“education has to contribute to forming the integral man. From my point of view, we are humans to do work. What are our differences with animals? We work”* (18). This approach, especially coming from this source, articulated ‘production’ in a very specific manner for the parents in attendance. Whether or not they agreed on humanity, this approach could push their children into work roles, and possibly limit them from growing intellectually or attending university.

Additionally, this technically-focused approach would need to be highly contextualized. Most people I spoke with distinguished between urban and rural areas, as modes of production and cultural experiences highly differentiate between the two. *“In agriculture, in the countryside they have to work on grains, fertilizers, etc. Later they’ll raise animals. We also have to conceptualize urban centers for scientific work, for technological work, in production. For example... in the cities they can work on metalworking and car repair”* (9). While all respondents agreed that contextualizing productivity is important, it is a contentious issue for others. For example, a teacher in La Paz explained that new school materials for young students specifically make reference to parts of rural life, like llamas, cows and other animals as well as farming. This teacher argued that because of this, productivity only applies to kids in a rural reality (5). Furthermore, a SEDUCA worker explained that *“we don’t have these things [in the cities]. What are we going to eat? What happens in the city when we speak of production?”* (19). This attitude is not isolated. The Executive General of Cochabamba’s urban teachers’ union explained that *“we [the union] agree with this, [that] in some provinces vocational productivity will [work]... but in cities, what do we do?”* (16). These responses are troubling, as they emphasize even stronger polarization of urban/rural life in Bolivia. This ultimately maintains the urban and Mestizo classes as superior to rural and indigenous peoples. As Mestizos in this case would have access to global social, political and economic markets, the rural and indigenous populations would be separated from them.

Broadening from this personal economic stance, some people felt that productive education is more of a part of national economic development. For example, the Executive General of the Cochabamba rural teachers’ union explained that the purpose of productive education is *“to make the country’s economy better, and to make conditions of life better. There is a lot of poverty, a lot of economic inequality. Why? This is a rich country. What has happened? We have to come to the conclusion that we haven’t efficiently used all of our resources”* (24). This national approach to productivity supports the larger stance of the Plurinational Constitution, and validates productivity as related to economic growth.

The second general line of understanding of productivity is based on the production of intellect. This emphasizes intellectual production but also clarifies that it could later contribute to technical production. A La Paz school director offered that production should be an analytical process of answering

questions: “*How could I symbolize [the subject matter]? How could I turn it into a story?*” followed by application of the answers, “*for example, to learn to read a story and to share something with that story and take it into one’s own life—then you are producing*” (33). This production of analysis, then, allows for innovation through critical thinking and subsequently affecting lives in a more concrete way. Therefore, the focus on intellectual production could contribute to economic production, though this is not the goal. Analytical production seems key to allowing new forms of material and intellectual production in the country. However, on a curricular level, it is difficult to imagine change beyond use by individual teachers.

The third approach to production, then, is a combination of the first two. While each of the previous two allow the other to exist in a less central role, this third option combines the approaches to allow each type of production to contribute to the other. A La Paz school director offered a practical example—that a school could teach various recipes using one main ingredient, then “*the child should learn the nutrition value and how to cultivate the plant. Then, where can it be produced? At what altitude can it be produced? Later, the nutrition values of the plants, the commercialization of the plant, whether or not there is a market for it*” (35). Students would then start with practical approaches toward agriculture, but through that material process they could analytically understand the role each plant could play in their own or a community’s life and livelihood, which could eventually contribute to advancing personal or communal economic strategies. It would seem that this third approach would most strongly recognize ASEP’s idea that classrooms teach both technical and humanistic education. Each enriching the other and allowing students to use their advanced analysis to imagine their own social, political and economic participation certainly fits into ASEP’s idea of ‘liberating education’.

However, just like Plurilingualism, productive education faces many practical issues. While I rarely encountered conceptual opposition, one problem was production applied to mathematics. While the Ministry of Education maintained that “*productive education means practical and applied mathematics*” (31), a math teacher explained that “*it is a pure science—you cannot always apply it*” (15). The Ministry’s response to this could be that if it cannot be applied it should not be part of the curriculum. However, this is also a practical issue, as that math teacher has been teaching a type of mathematics he was trained to teach in, and most people I spoke with reaffirmed that there was not funding or resources to support the change for teachers who were trained how to teach under previous ‘colonial’ education systems.

This issue of funds and resources plays a major role in the perceptions of educational actors. Each respondent repeatedly expressed this problem. When I asked a school secretary in Vinto, where most students’ families support themselves through agricultural production, about funding for productive education, she explained that “*We have a little garden over there, but we can barely produce... We don’t*

have land” (29). Additionally, a teacher at an orphanage (which served as a school for the children who lived there as well as local children in Cochabamba) explained that their interpretation of production is carpentry, and they do not have enough materials to complete a small project over many months (15). That school’s director added, “*We don’t have monetary support or sufficient materials. Parents buy some materials*” (17). Besides the obvious problem that at an orphanage many students would not have parents to buy materials, this puts an extra burden on families who often struggle to make enough money for other necessities. For these material reasons, a teacher-trainer of Cochabamba’s SEDUCA explained that “*most schools are not qualified to be technical-humanistic, but rather only humanistic*” (19). While intellectual and analytical growth is clearly important, it seems unlikely that this part of productivity can be successful alone. By itself, productivity under the second definition could function, although a Cochabamba rural teachers’ union representative said that “*it wouldn’t do anything to have a ‘productive’ education on the blackboard. It needs to be taught in a way that is a part of [students’] lives*” (24). This need along with the lack of funding for both material needs and teacher training mitigates against larger possibilities of implementing productivity. The need for resources, then, should be a central concern for this pillar’s implementation.

Finally, once students complete their schooling, where could they take the technical aspect of productivity? Researcher Erick Jurado presented this problem: “*Everyone wants the schools to be technical... But we don’t know why—‘we are forming workers’. Workers for what? We don’t have industries... There are a lot of these things which are not clear*” (14). For this reason, Freire affirms that “*A high degree of political clarity must underlie any discussions of what to produce, how to produce it, for what and for whom it is to be produced*” (1978:14-15). Unfortunately, this political clarity is lacking and many share Jurado’s concern. A Cochabamba urban teachers’ union official added, “*What things will we produce here? How will we arrive at practice? No one knows*” (16). This governmental opacity seems to be a gatekeeper, dissuading many people of ASEP’s validity and practicality.

j. Communitarian Education

We cannot cross our hands and contemplate how they continue destroying mother nature. For this, communitarian education has been proposed, which means incorporating other types of thought into schools. — Victor Pinalla, Ministry of Education (31)

ASEP’s final pillar, communitarian education, is perhaps the most applicable of its decolonial aspirations. While the legal text is quite abstract, the people I spoke with had specific ideas of how implement it, albeit their ideas were often quite different. As a general basis, however, most responses emphasized non-individualistic relationships. Nicolas Siles of Cochabamba’s SEDUCA office reflected this general interpretation, that “*communitarian education is what exists in common*” (18). Beyond that,

interpretations varied. However, I encountered three interesting lines of thought, those being (1) a communal approach within the classroom, (2) relating school to production, and (3) recognizing parents and members of the larger community as formative aspects of the students' education.

The first approach is based on students as equal and supportive members of the school community as opposed to competitive approaches which were characteristic of previous reforms. A school director in La Paz explained her experience using the collective approach that she envisions: *"When I was a teacher in El Alto, I put a shoe box in the middle of the classroom. Each student put something in it [as a present to the class]. They put coins and whatever they had, even a pencil. If a child didn't even have a pencil they could take out a pencil and use it to write a note to put in the box. This is solidarity. This is what 'Avelino [Siñani-Elizardo Pérez]' says. Communitarian education is solidarity"* (35). This collective approach emphasizes a communal space, and rejects a classroom as a competitive space—an educational characteristic criticized by those I spoke with. Moreover, Oscar Vega Camacho explained, *"we have to be responsible to everyone"* and the theme of communitarian education supports collective responsibility (13).

The second approach relates communitarian education to ASEP's third pillar of production. Victor Fuentes of Cochabamba's SEDUCA explained, in this line, that *"children [should] learn to produce in a way that is appropriate to the local community"* (19). Members of an education and cultural center, *Centro Yachay Tunkuy* in Cochabamba, explained how to do that: *"everyday knowledges in the communities [should] form part of the curriculum... so that they know that what they have in the community is integrated into part of academics"* (20). This incorporation of local knowledges takes account of the community's approach toward production. However, the urban/rural divide comes up again, *"It will be difficult to implement communitarian education in the city"* (18). This critique is important because if communitarian education is based on the larger community's everyday knowledges and approaches to production, it would be difficult to apply in areas where that 'larger community' is larger with incredibly diverse productive economies, as, as students would be able to relate to everthat have more than a few sources of economic productivity. Interestingly, this critique comes from a government official who offered it at an informational session about ASEP.

Finally, the third approach is about the relationship of the larger non-school community to in-school decision making. For a school director in Cochabamba, *"This is what personally scares me... This gives more power to parents and families, more power for participation, more forms of control. It's not that I have a fear of control, but of the use of power, about what control could mean"* (17). Another school director explained what the control could mean: *"They could designate teachers, they could designate directors, without knowing the correct technical capacity of who it should be or who should*

form part of an educational institution” (27). If communitarian education occurs in offering more control to untrained community members, the school system could become organized by people who are unaware of the technical aspects of school systems. While community participation in schooling decisions could be of great benefit, it seems that some educational actors feel threatened by this possibility.

Each of the three interpretations of communitarian education greatly differ, although each stands out with a possibility of playing an important role and changing educational approaches. Again, this pillar was the least problematic for all people with whom I spoke, and few supported the competitive and hierarchically organized schools of previous education reforms. Contrarily, they were mostly convinced that a communitarian approach, albeit according to their own interpretation, was an important aspect of the Plurinational state’s vision of a decolonial society.



Illustration 5: Mural in Cochabamba. "Brother Indian, you have taught us to resist with dignity... For in our veins runs blood of liberation. Our ancestors protect us and guide the resistance against attacks of the fascists that cannot hear our calls of rebellion, equality and liberty"

Chapter 6. Practical Implications

While ASEP is legally solidified in the Constitution and the reform is on its way to becoming official, a major question of this thesis is how and to what level the reform will be implemented, and what role classroom decolonization will play in changing the lives of students and Bolivia's approach to development. As demonstrated by the previous chapters, there are many challenges to implementation. In Chapter 5, this challenge was demonstrated by a lack of consistency in the understanding of the law's pillars by different actors as well as critiques that the law has had in terms of its conceptual and political viability. This chapter, then, will explore issues facing implementation first through a look at teacher-training, then through the issue of labor, and finally the debate surrounding the government discourse of participation in ASEP's development.

a. Teacher Training

I hope that education changes this because there is no other thing that can change it. Who would change it? The president isn't going to change this with decrees, nor the provincial representatives, they won't change it with decrees either. We are going to change the teachers. We have to change ourselves as teachers, and start to educate in another way. — Representative, Cochabamba Rural Teachers' Union (21)



Illustration 6: Entrance of Warisata's Teacher Training Institute

As demonstrated in debates in earlier chapters, implementation of the reform will have a close relationship with the economic support it receives. The issue with plurilingualism most simply emphasizes this, as teachers need financial support to learn multiple languages. Moreover, Lopes Cardozo points out that it is not simply subject matter (as in languages) which is needed for implementation, but also a strong ownership of the curriculum. In her words, “*when not negotiated well by teachers, [integration of a diverse student body] can trigger discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion*” (2009:419). Therefore, high-quality teacher training is central to implementing this law. The government has, in fact, begun to address this concern. The *Normales*—teacher-training schools—will be changing in some ways. Until now, these institutes had not undergone significant changes since the Constitution and

education reform enacted in 1955. As described by Saavedra, “*They’ve continued to function the same way, not only in terms of not changing theories, pedagogies, or curriculum, etc. but also that material conditions of poverty that are in the Normales is realistically alarming*” (2). He went on to explain that the *Normal* in La Paz, which is the country’s largest, “[has] only one computer... *Their library is really poor... These are the conditions of the Normales, and this is the largest one, in La Paz. You can only imagine how poor they are in other areas*” (2) For this reason, many people I spoke with agreed that changes in the *Normales* are deeply important for effective implementation of the law.

In a meeting with parents, a SEDUCA representative explained that he was confident that implementation can occur, but it will need to be based on incoming teachers because “*new teachers have a patriotic energy to transform the world, to transform education*” (18). The *Normales*, then, should build a new curriculum in line with ASEP in order to build on that energy. Saavedra added that the best way to get schools to embrace change and engage real implementation of the reform is to focus the first concrete efforts on new teachers. “*At this point, it is necessary to approach the Normales, the institutions that form teachers... When a government truly wants to change the system it has to seriously and intensely support these centers of teacher formation*” (2).

How, then, do these training institutes need to change to recognize the new law? I encountered three fundamental proposed changes: that of the lengthening of schooling from three to five years, the graduation requirement of fluidity in a native language, and elimination of any differences between urban and rural *Normales*. Extending teacher training from three to five years also allows for a more complete education for teachers. The time extension, while perhaps not very attractive to some considering teaching as a profession, would allow *Normales* to teach at this advanced level, as well as give them more time to explore the shift between teacher-training under Law 1565 and ASEP. Moreover, they will extend education from a *tecnico* (equivalent to an associate’s degree) to a *licenciado* (equivalent to a five year bachelor’s; 22). A Cochabamba rural teachers’ union official explained that “*In these five years they [will] already have a [higher degree], and with this they should be able to speak and write a foreign language. With these knowledges they will be able to go to the children and teach in English*” (21). In this vision, the lengthening of time at the *Normales* would make sure that teachers would be able to fully teach the ASEP curriculum. While it seems that many changes will need to be embraced at all the *Normales* in order for this to function, the above vision leaves hope that the change will be engaged.

On the other hand, however, it seems that it is currently inopportune timing for these kinds of attempts at implementation. A *Normal* professor explained that “*The new reform also has planned to create a whole new curriculum for the Normales... At this point I have understood that the curriculum is in discussion, so we can’t say whether the situation will or will not change, because it [the curriculum] is*

still not defined” (20). While this does not stop a training institute from interpreting ASEP in its own way, Simon Rodriguez’s Academic Director explained that it is impossible to do in a strong way, as “*we don’t know exactly what significance the law has*” (23). For this reason, he described the efforts that they are making at his school as experiments, which he hoped would be able to be incorporated into the curriculum when it is implemented (23).

Finally, in order to create a more socially just education and support students equally, the government has pledged to unify any differences in teacher education between rural and urban *Normales* (18). Urban and rural schools have been discursively (and practically) polarized in terms of teaching styles, language and relationships to the non-school community. Through this initiative the curriculum will be unified for all teacher-students and later for all students in all schools in the country.

As this vision of the *Normales* in supporting a decolonial society works within the government’s framework, teachers who have already completed their training need to be supported as well. Saavedra suggests that in-service teachers require more training than new ones, in that “*If there are a lot of people profoundly colonized in our society, it’s certainly the teachers who have gone through [primary] schools, high schools, and the Normales*” (2). Rosaleen Howard describes this as a “*paradox*”, in that “*those charged with changing the system (i.e. the teachers) were the very products of that system*” (2009:3). This presents a large challenge to Bolivia’s educational structure. Moreover, given the role that *Normales* of the past have played, Saavedra suggests deep challenge: “*All these teachers are alienated from their indigenous cultures, indigenous peoples and indigenous languages. To find a teacher who not only speaks, but is proud to use their indigenous language is incredibly difficult*” (2). For these reasons, perhaps *Normales* will be able to revolutionize approaches toward teaching many new teachers, but it does not leave much hope for the ‘colonized’ and experienced ones, as “*[they] are in the midst of deep [epistemological] structures*” (17). This leaves Bolivia’s school system with a major obstacle for implementing ASEP: how can colonized teachers teach a decolonial curriculum?

A Vinto school director saw dismal chances for implementation based on this obstacle. “*I would say that 90% of teachers don’t know what the reform is about and are opposed to it... The teachers don’t accept the reform out of fear, because they have a fear of realizing this change... This fear prevents them from improving... Deep inside they have a fear of accepting that they don’t know some things. This is our problem in Bolivia*” (17). This further emphasizes the need for teachers to have a deep sense of engagement with any changes to their labor, especially with such an over-arching education reform. As many are afraid of engaging this change, it clearly has a lot to do with a lack of continuing education. Therefore, for example, educational change based on government decree will not be effective. A representative of Cochabamba’s urban teachers’ union explained that the only real possibility is “a

change which is realistically from the base” (16). This perspective directly echoes that of many teachers with whom I spoke.

Moreover, it seems that some people do not have much confidence in teacher training based on previous examples, as under Law 1565 “*the Ministry of Education did very little work with the teachers. It didn’t really convince the teachers to assume the new reform on their own accord*” (2). An official at Cochabamba’s SEDUCA who professionally explains the law and curriculum to in-service teachers reinforced this idea, that “*when we are making the curriculum and national programs we don’t know how to explain the concepts to the teachers. If we don’t know how to explain it to the teachers, how are the teachers going to explain it to the children?*” (19). Moreover, he went on to explain that the school directors will “*have a double role: to do the administrative work as well as to capacitate the teachers*” (19). While this approach is perhaps the most practical, as school directors interact with teachers on a daily basis, it seems unrealistic. If those working for the government whose job it is to explain the law cannot do so for teachers, school directors who already have a full schedule should not be expected to do so. If SEDUCA is worried that teachers will not be able to use the new curriculum with students, perhaps outsourcing their jobs to others with an entirely different skill-set is not the best option. At the same time, perhaps it is all the government can hope for, especially given yet another reminder by a different SEDUCA trainer that “*there aren’t resources, there just aren’t... How are we going to train teachers?*” (18).

While it does not seem like there is any option for training in-service teachers, a pathway needs to be developed. Perhaps this can relate to the pathway already being developed in the *Normales*. This is a major challenge to implementation that remains to be discussed at an institutional level, and Bolivia’s economic situation does not help. As economic resources for training are sparse, however, barriers to implementation reach even further in Bolivia’s teacher community.

b. Approaches to Teaching: Pedagogy vs. Labor

There is this issue of security, and many only speak of the pedagogical aspects of the reform, but... [in] going from a theoretical formation to practical formation, there are many limitations... In these circumstances, the organization and planning of this innovative pedagogical proposal is just a discourse.
— School Director, Vinto (27)

Teachers turn to their profession for numerous reasons. I, however, encountered a specific pattern of teacher motivation. In such a poor country with a large part of its economy based on the black market, steady employment is a priority for many Bolivians. Teaching is one of the few professions which guarantees life-long job security, and teachers often end up in their jobs for this reason. Described by Mieke Lopes Cardozo, “*A particular desire to teach is frequently not a motivation to start the teaching*

career” (2009:417). A school director in Vinto described the common motivation in that “*the community wants their children to study as teachers because it is the most secure source of labor*” (27). While their labor is secure for life, teachers’ wages are considerably low. The school director explained that “*the state... doesn’t have the economic resources to pay [teachers]*” (27). This has been a point of contention for decades, emphasized by many teacher strikes.²⁰ The balance, then, in the life of a teacher is guaranteed long-term employment albeit with low wages.

At the same time that personal economics plays a central role in teacher motivation, the *act* and *process* of teaching is pedagogical. According to those with whom I spoke in Bolivia, these two aspects of teaching often clash. Critically important, here, is that all in-service teachers have pedagogical training from former education reforms. Unfortunately, that training was not strong enough to support pedagogical innovation, as in a discussion of the 1994 reform Contreras *et al* explain that “*teachers were unprepared for curricular decisions since their initial training and professional practice oriented them only toward copying and repetition. They had not fully developed their creative and innovative capacities*” (2003:29). For this reason many teachers lack the skills to creatively address curriculum change and leave their teaching (or pedagogical approach) as a function of their wages. For this reason, Saavedra describes teaching in Bolivia as a “*vicious cycle. Teachers are badly trained [and] later they’re badly paid... This work is destined to be mediocre*” (2). This mediocrity is in every way defined by economic poverty, whether it is the poverty of the *Normales* or personal poverty which allows teachers to justifiably engage in their jobs as workers instead of pedagogues, as their family’s livelihoods often depend on their labor. Additionally, it raises a debate around the role of pedagogy in teaching. If a teacher is not pedagogically driven, their role as an educational facilitator is questionable.

This issue comes to a head in that ASEP is largely pedagogically driven—that is, it is built around theoretical approaches to classroom engagement (e.g. inter- and intra-culturalism, etc.). As teachers are principle agents of implementation, while the reform is pedagogically driven and the teachers are driven by personal economic interests, it seems that successful implementation would require a shift toward one of the two to appeal to the other. However, a Cochabamba teacher explained that “*with the security that teachers have in terms of salaries, etc., it is one of the professions that is least adaptable to change*” (20).

This is a major stumbling block, as education reform requires teachers to explore new and different ways of teaching, and possibly even new approaches toward schooling. As it is, some teachers are resistant to embracing pedagogical change while their economic situation remains unaffected. These teachers sensibly see the effort it takes to learn new approaches to teaching as lost time, as it is generally

²⁰ Teacher strikes have been numerous since Bolivia’s democratization, although their numbers have been shrinking and salaries have risen over the past decade and especially since Evo Morales’ election in 2005 (30).

unpaid work that had not been a part of their job. A school director in La Paz explained that this has worsened since the previous education reform: “*When Law 1565 passed I learned many things. I have five diplomados²¹ and they were paid for by the government, but now I have to pay for myself. If I go to a workshop by the government, by SEDUCA, I will lose my time*” (33). This pedagogical development is key in implementing education reforms, especially with ASEP. While it is understandable that job security and income are incredibly important for teachers (or anyone), it seems that working with teachers to embrace change should be a pedagogical issue, but again, many people I spoke with asserted that the government simply does not have funding for pedagogical training outside of the *Normales*.

The issue again, then, is not with new teachers who will be educated in the *Normales* under ASEP, but with the teachers who have been pedagogically trained under previous reforms. As Saavedra explained, “*The principle fear of teachers is that a process of change could fracture their stability and security*” (2). Perhaps, then, teacher communities would be more open to top-down governmental changes to their jobs if they were economically supported and felt that working with young people is not only a pedagogical role, but that a privileged one. However, as it is a pedagogically-driven reform, it leaves room for much to be either interpreted or ignored by teachers.

This ignorance of the law has been emphasized by teachers unions. As the basic role of any union is to struggle for better working conditions, the rural and urban teachers’ unions in Bolivia are built around lobbying for the economic needs of teachers. My own analysis, however, leaves teachers’ unions rejecting ASEP because it does not fundamentally change the worker-rights or economic gains of teachers, and according to the analysis in the previous paragraph, leaves teachers giving up extra unpaid time. However, the national rural and urban teacher unions have responded very differently. While La Paz’s urban teachers’ union rejects the law, the national unions both support it. As the national urban union finds a balance of struggling for better working conditions while supporting reform, the national rural union feels a deep sense of ownership of it, and claims that ASEP originated from their ideas (to be explored below). If this is true, in a sense their stance has been incorporated into the political structure of the government. As teacher unions represent the rights of teachers against the government (for public schools), but a union’s positioning has been consolidated into the government structure, it remains questionable whether that union can represent teachers who oppose a part (no matter how small or big) of a government plan. On the other hand, perhaps unions supporting the government’s plans pedagogically can continue to support teachers as workers. In this case, the union’s relationship with the government could be a uniting force between the teachers’ interests of job-security and the government’s pedagogical interests.

²¹ *Diplomados* are diplomas received for continued education.

This paradoxical relationship between the support of pedagogy and personal working rights of teachers leaves no answers, and is somewhat ignored by educational stakeholders in the practical domain (less by academics). It seems that this double duty of teachers and their unions, as state agents of cultural and public pedagogy while being workers and economic contributors must be addressed. By addressing it there could be a shift in both the approach towards change by teachers as well as by teacher unions and their relationships with the government. On the other hand, if it remains unaddressed, actual implementation of ASEP appears difficult.



Illustration 7: The Presidential Palace depicted before and after Morales' election—before with indigenous protesters and white people in power and vice versa for afterward. Adapted from cover of Crabtree et al.

c. Participation

As briefly explored in Chapter 5, the government maintains that ASEP's creation was deeply participatory and took its direction from teachers themselves. This specifically corresponds with information available to me before going to Bolivia, as I had read many articles describing the Ministry of Education's history of and plans to develop curriculum in regional meetings with teachers (e.g. ABI 05/05/2009; Ministerio 19/05/2009). As the government had used this participatory discourse to justify its goal of decolonization, my alternative findings were troubling. My research shows that teachers often have the perception that the reform was designed by academics or officials who have not had experience with students. This perception has alienated teachers from the process and contributed to their resistance, in which case it would be easy for teachers to simply choose not to implement the law in their own classrooms.

This section is divided by respondent groups, first exploring the issue at hand followed by the government's position, then each national union's position, and finally teachers' positions. It concludes with suggestions by these various stakeholders with possibilities of remedying the conflict around participation.

i. Government line

The creation of the law is dynamic. —Walter Gutierrez, Ministry of Education (7)

The government is committed to the position that ASEP has been created by educational actors themselves and it has used this position very strongly to differentiate ASEP's creation process from the former reform, Law 1565. Anke van Dam articulated that the “‘94 reform was top-down and there was virtually no participation” (40). Thus, the Ministry of Education has embraced bottom-up participatory change in an unprecedented way. While I was exposed to this line of thought in all the articles I read before going to Bolivia, every government worker or government document describing ASEP would give special emphasis on the high level of participation. For example, in my first engagement with a Ministry official, Walter Gutierrez explained that “*the construction of Plurinational curriculum is not written at the desk of some thinkers... The idea of this curricular proposal was recognized in seven national events with teachers, with parents of families, with entrepreneurs and with the population*” (7).

Beyond these seven events, much of a lecture by the Victor Pinalla, another representative of the Ministry of Education, went through slide-after-slide describing events which used participation of the bases of education. He described that “*Sectors which have always been excluded, which have never been taken into account, have participated. The difference of ‘Avelino Siñani’ is that it has emerged from the bases*” (31). However, he later explained that the participation he was referring to was actually that of high-up union officials “*Because, for example, the director of the CONMERB does not represent his own person, he represents his bases; and the proposals that emerged from them came from those bases*” (31). While this straightforwardness explains how the government may be describing participation in ASEP's creation, it maintains representative participation rather than the participation of in-service teachers which most officials described. Pinalla added something that could be interpreted to further problematize the government's stance. He explained that the participation he referred to from the unions was especially drawn from individual proposals of the different unions. “*For example, the indigenous peoples presented their ‘green book’, the proposal of indigenous peoples in a full document. The rural teachers presented their own document as well; and the urban union shared their proposal, their ‘red book’; and also the Ministry had its education proposal. Fundamentally, from these four documents, the education reform was created*” (31). While engaging the proposals of different representative sectors of Bolivia's teacher community is important, it still seems far from having the type of bottom-up development which is so embedded in the government's discourse. Furthermore, it seems that while each teacher is part of their respective union, their union representation in ASEP does not necessarily represent them.

ii. CONMERB



Illustration 8: Plaque outside CONMERB office, La Paz

The National Union of Teachers of Rural Education in Bolivia (*Confederación Nacional de Maestros de Educación Rural de Bolivia*; CONMERB) agreed with Pinalla's analysis of participation, and felt a deep sense of ownership over ASEP. In fact, the union's Executive Secretary explained that their ownership runs deep: "*the law 'Avelino Siñani' was born out of [CONMERB]*" (9). This deep sense of ownership should allow for a strong implementation of the law. He went on to describe a number of meetings, informational sessions and other activities in which teachers from around the country participated. His understanding of participation was specifically related to these meetings, as he described that "*As leaders [of the union] we see that there are no problems because... there is a consensus that it is the work of the teachers. This is the best part of the new proposal of Avelino Siñani*" (9). While I was not excited to burst his bubble, our meeting came soon after a meeting with some teachers who felt very differently. When confronted with the idea that not all teachers agreed, he responded with a much softer approach: "*Here in the Federation, the leaders—not everyone—but the leaders created and approved the law...*" (9). This line of thought fits in better with that of Pinalla's, in that organizations which represent many teachers were very involved in the creation of ASEP and the new curriculum rather than teachers themselves.

iii. CTEUB

While the rural teachers' union felt a deep ownership of the law through their involvement in ASEP's creation, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Educación Urbano de Bolivia* (CTEUB; Confederation of Urban Education Workers of Bolivia) were not as convinced. The organization's National Director explained to me that "*there have been events in all parts of the country, where not only teachers have participated, but the teachers, the communities, the religious churches, to create the new curriculum... Us teachers believe we should continue this process until they achieve perfection, or make it better, because so far it has been insufficient*" (4). This approach sees participation in the creation of ASEP's curriculum, but recognizes its need to have more. Cochabamba's local urban teachers' union followed this same line, with a recognition that there has been participation, albeit not enough. One representative explained that it has been much better than the reforms of the past, as "*at the least, in this new reform we are involved*" (16). Additionally, he added that the government "*translated some of our*

needs into their curricular design” from CTEUB’s educational proposal, ‘*La Escuela para la Rescata de la Patria*’ (‘The School for the Recovery of the Homeland’; 16).²²

iv. Teachers

Finally, we come to the teachers’ perspective. While I did have the opportunity to speak with many teachers, it should be clear that my research was limited in many ways. As a result, the limited number of teachers I spoke with should not be perceived by the reader as a majority and should not be understood as necessarily representing the views of the wider teacher population. On the other hand, I encountered some specific patterns of thought and I am certain that those patterns are not completely limited to those with whom I spoke. While each teacher agreed that the government discourse emphasized the positive role of teacher participation in the creation of ASEP and its curriculum, most said that they themselves had not been involved. I found three patterns worth mentioning here: Firstly, when and where there have been participatory events (like regional meetings for feedback, etc.), only a limited number of teachers were invited. Secondly, those who did attend those meetings explained that they were not in fact participatory, but were rather set up with the intention of explaining the government’s process to teachers under the guise of participation, which invalidates the idea that the reform has been designed from the bottom-up. Finally, as many teachers have not been able to attend these meetings, they do not have information about the current processes of educational change, and they do not know how to go about getting that information.

The common response that teachers and school directors have not been invited to participate show that teachers generally have had a very different experience than has been explained by the government or the unions. For example, a Vinto school director explained that he did not know anyone who had been to the meetings (28). As Vinto was the only place I did research which was part of a rural teachers’ union, this response was troubling, although he agreed that there had been participation by the representative bodies of teachers (unions). Because of the lack of teacher involvement, Sofia Alcón of the University of the Cordillera describes this idea of participation as just “*another discourse. While they say it was created with social participation, this is clearly a justification for those who created the new law*” (45). On these terms, the justification allows for the imposition of ASEP rather than honest teacher ownership and implementation through participation. What this means under the government’s own definition is that decolonization (without participation) is invalid. Saavedra explained that “*What they [the government] have to do is put value on convincing [teachers that] they can be the protagonists in this*

²² While some aspects of the design may have been incorporated into ASEP, *La Escuela para la Rescata de la Patria* itself opposes Evo Morales, the MAS government, and ASEP specifically (CTEUB 2006).

change.” A *Normal* administrator in Cochabamba explained the problem with the level of participation—not that there has not been any, but rather that universal participation is a logistical nightmare.

The Ministry of Education has dialogued, has invited people, has conversed, had meetings with different organizations in order to present their proposals... The problem is that if we invite the Confederation of Teachers and we say to them that 200 teachers can come participate in the meeting, the Confederation of Teachers invites teachers from different regions of the country and lamentably it stays there, with the 200 teachers. When it gets directly to the schools, the information isn't spread around (23).

Saavedra added that “*Realistically, it is easier to impose the law and not dialogue or get consensus, etc., because it [participation] takes more time*” (2). As the law has already been in development for four years, it seems that speeding up the process could be a legitimate motive for the participative discourse. While this point is clear in that it would be impossible to involve every single teacher at the national level, and that those who do participate should bring their experiences back to their communities, the expectation of teachers to report back to their communities seems flawed. The people I interviewed who had attended meetings explained that they were not paid for their time or reimbursed for transportation. Bringing information back to their communities might seem like a good faith gesture; however it is not part of their jobs. As I understand it, if those teachers were specifically paid for their time both at the meetings and for dissemination of the relevant information, perhaps information would get passed on and more teachers would be able to feel ownership over the law.

However, for those who are able to attend meetings, it seems that the participation spoken about by the government is more about the dissemination of information than feedback and change. A Vinto school director explained that the government has not “*allowed other things to enter [into the education reform] other than what they want. I've spoken with many people who went, and they [government] talked and then just wanted them [teachers] to sign*” (17). This idea was consistent with others I had spoken with who had participated in the meetings which the government spoke of. A teacher at the Cochabamba *Normal* explained to me that he had heard about a meeting about developing the curriculum for teacher-training under ASEP. He spent weeks preparing himself and coming up with ideas. Finally, he spent his own money to travel to Sucre, where the meeting was, and the government described their idea and passed around their proposal for everyone to sign off. After this he became very disgruntled with the new law, and has opposed it because the government was using that event to prove a bottom-up development which was non-existent (15).

Again, these were not unique stories. A teacher in La Paz explained to me that there are meetings for real participation, but they are limited to people who already support the government. “*There [has been] participation of some teachers, but teachers who think within their political line—those who are*

Communists or in the Bolivian Marxist party. They were able to participate. We haven't participated... They came and showed us the curriculum and told us 'approve this'" (36). Additionally, more than this direct exclusion, Jurado explained that there may be even more opposition to the participatory discourse which is silent but has valid motives. "There is a strong identification of the bases—of parents, of popular sectors—with the government, with Evo Morales... This lowers the capacity of debate... [Debate] isn't prohibited, but if you criticize the government in a constructive way, politically you are on the other side, against it. There are only two sides" (14). If this is the case, Morales and MAS supporters have not spoken up against the education reform or the surrounding discourses, even if they had deep disagreements with it. A school director in Vinto articulated this:

The law hasn't respected all the demands of the teachers to make it better; so all the teachers, only to stay without shame, do not speak up about their opinions which are inconsistent with the law. But nevertheless, there have been internal meetings where they have expressed their discontent. There is a total discontent. Ideologically they agree with this government, and in order to not stay in shame, they won't speak their opinion publicly (27).

This complexity in terms of teachers relationships with teaching and the political atmosphere of change has made the possibilities of achieving full and honest participation very difficult. Teacher ownership of ASEP and the new curriculum seem to be deeply tied into this supposed idea of participatory development, and the government uses this discourse to work with teachers who need more convincing. However, at least for me, this non-participatory method of involving teachers was somewhat of a revelation in terms of the difference between government discourse and reality on the ground. In my entire research period, outside of the unions I did not speak with any teachers who had been to one of these meetings and continued to have faith in the law and its surrounding processes.

Perhaps, though, an even larger problem is with the teachers who have no idea what the educational change is. This final problem with the discourse of participation which I encountered was the most widespread. While few are invited to meetings, and those who attend do not consider them participatory, the majority of teachers I spoke with explained that the entire process was closed off and they were unaware of what was going on beyond a few general aspects. As this majority was clueless about the process, it explains why there is no consensus on the definitions of ASEP's four pillars. These teachers generally consider the reform top-down and explain that the Ministry can do whatever it wants, but change will not occur from the Ministry-on-down. Rather, change will occur from the teachers as principle actors. Again, this was a shock to me, as I began the research process having read only positive things about participation and bottom-up development. Near the beginning of my time in Bolivia, I

approached *Escuela Amaru*²³, a school in La Paz not far from the center of town. This was the first school I entered, the first teachers I spoke with, and the first time my previous perception of the development of the law had been challenged.

At *Escuela Amaru* I first spoke with two teachers together on a break between classes. The first thing the music teacher told me when I asked his general perceptions of the law was that he would like to be more involved, but “*the Ministry’s doors are closed [to teachers]*” (5). In a reflection I wrote directly after my time at the school, I described my surprise: “This negates the stories I’ve read in the news, which explain that the Ministry is having meetings regularly with teachers around the country. I don’t doubt this is happening, but it is clear that the Ministry hasn’t reached out to these people at all”. The next teacher I spoke with explained that “*not much information is available or given to teachers about the new law*” while the following one added that “*they haven’t brought us photocopies or anything about the new law. One would have to research it [on their own]*” (6, 5). While it seemed that this problem was accentuated at *Escuela Amaru*, this experience highlights the major problem of communication by the Ministry of Education to teachers in regards to how their jobs will change with the reform. The last teacher I spoke with on that first day described how she had known a reform would be coming to the school, but that she did not know any details at all of what the changes would be. Because I had come into the school and explained my research, she added that she wanted to know what the changes would be and asked me to bring a copy of the law for her the next day. I found it painful that a teacher who was so interested had not been able to obtain the information previously. The next day I returned with a copy of ASEP for her. After she had a chance to read it, she admitted something that she had previously left out. “*I went to the marches [organized by her union against ASEP] ... But I went because I was not informed. I didn’t want an education reform to happen and not know anything about it*” (6). While the protests by La Paz’s urban teachers’ union had not been small²⁴, perhaps this was a larger pattern—maybe teachers were siding with their union rather than the reform simply because information only came from the union, that they were only exposed to the critiques of the law rather than the government’s positive discourse about it. In this way, the lack of communication by the Ministry is self sabotaging, as the teachers protest the law not because they oppose its contents but rather because they oppose their non-involvement or understanding of it. That teacher ended our conversation with, “*I think the process is broken*” (6).

²³ The school’s name has been changed for anonymity.

²⁴ While an educational researcher explained that the protests are smaller than they have been in the past three decades (30), the one which I attended seemed significant.

About a week later, the director of *Escuela Amaru* had time to speak with me. She agreed that “the reasons that teachers have been striking and opposing the new laws is that there is no information available to them about what is going on with the reform” (8). Additionally, she agreed that “the changes need more participation by teachers and people in the schools”. However, she also admitted that “there is a dialogue between us [the school’s administration] and the Ministry” (8). In this case, it is important to recognize that while the Ministry is not successfully communicating with teachers, that school administrators could take the lead. In fact, earlier that day a teacher from the same school explained her hope for precisely that. On the other hand, however, the administrators are already overwhelmed and again this help would be extra unpaid labor.

This first in-school experience set the basis for perceptions on participation by teachers that I spoke with throughout my experience in Bolivia whether in La Paz, Cochabamba or Vinto. As teachers were unaware unless they took initiatives to learn more about ASEP, they would have all liked to have more and clearer communication with the Ministry as well as participation in the curriculum development process. As the government continues to use the rhetoric of participation and bottom-up development, the teachers I spoke with had an entirely different experience, and rather than taking part in the creation of the law or curriculum they felt alienated from the process. This experience has, in some cases, led to a distrust of reform and the feeling that it is being imposed. As teachers are the primary agents of educational facilitation, this perception of reform as an imposition dampens hopes that the decolonial law will be able to be implemented. As long as information continues to be limited to government sources and the few who communicate with it such as the unions, full implementation of the reform seems unlikely.

My own analysis of the discourse of full teacher participation is that it appears difficult if not impossible in a state-led education system. It is precisely because the education system is a mechanism of a centralized government that it cannot be decentralized to the point that each teacher’s input would be recognized in the curriculum. While an education system cannot be *reformed* from the bottom-up, it can *integrate* bottom-up input, and this is a step which the government is seemingly failing. Many people who I spoke with offered further suggestions for a positive measure of implementation, most of those being centered around stronger communication between teachers and the government in order to support teacher ownership of ASEP and its curriculum. None of these suggestions came from government officials, as the government does not admit that participation is a major problem. Everyone else though—whether academics, teachers, union directors, etc.—had ideas. Saavedra explained that he “believes it has to be explained to teachers in a more convincing way, more close to home. For example, what does the new law consist of? What advantages are they going to have with this project? How will it better the situation of teachers? The government needs to win the support of teachers for this project. [This way they can] be

the protagonists of the change” (2). This convincing is central, as the alternative leaves much to be desired—mainly that the government would be using the discourse of participation at the possible expense of a quality education system. Clearly, teachers’ input matters, and for this reason, when I spent a recess with teachers at *Escuela Amaru* and asked what they would like change to look like, the overwhelming chorus of responses described just that: If the change is made by teachers it will be good and they will support it (6).

The teachers with whom I spoke intensely do not recognize the role of the Ministry and see the reform as a top-down process. It is for this reason that they will be resistant to making change in their own classrooms. Moreover, teachers want to be more involved in the curriculum development process, and while the Ministry maintains that its doors remain open, it is clearly not open enough. For these reasons, everyone I asked said that if the Ministry tells them to do things differently, it will continue just as before. *“They’ll put a different name, but it will be the same. They keep saying these things are changes, but in reality, by the time it comes here to the schools, it is the same. It’s all on a government level”* (6). Therefore, teachers need to be both informed of and more involved in the process. This has to occur from both the Ministry and subsequently the school administration so that information is distributed for each teacher to be well informed about issues related to their jobs. Without this, a policy gap is likely.



Illustration 9: Student parade in Warisata

Chapter 7. Conceptual Validity of ASEP

a. Unwanted Decolonization

In our dreams we give power to colonialism because in our dreams we dream of being like the colonizer.
— Jose Luis Saavedra, Academic (2)

As ASEP has yet to be legally approved, let alone implemented, it would have been difficult to do research based on the perspectives of the real primary educational actors: students. At the same time, while this research was not based on student perceptions, it was based around people who work with them and consider students in their daily lives. For this reason, I will briefly outline perhaps the most important issue related to the Plurinational Constitution's educational vision. Every Bolivian I spoke with emphasized that some students would not want to be on the receiving end of a decolonial education. For this reason, while the reform has been designed within the developing indigenous framework of governing, it is also being imposed on students. The validity, then, of universalizing this reform is questionable, as some are more interested in engaging what have been called 'colonial' systems of thought than the negation of them. As Erick Jurado explained, "*the communities want the market, they want to modernize. This is a tension, and it is not in this other vision [of ASEP]. It says 'you have a beautiful culture'... They say, 'yes we do, but we also want to travel to Miami' "*" (14). In this case, decolonization by imposition, as indigenous peoples are culturally invested in modernity, should be considered as part of a critical challenge to ASEP's validity.

This issue comes up in two ways: first, through the lived realities of many Bolivians, especially the impoverished rural population; and second through the proposal of plurilingualism. US-based Bolivian academic Javier Sanjinés explained that "*Kids don't want to stay where they are, they want to move into modernity, and rightly so*" (3). It is 'rightly so' because they are living in deep poverty and for generations have lived and learned within pull-yourself-up-by-your-own-bootstrap modernity. As larger society has long been structured around these intentional lessons through a 'hidden curriculum', the generational aspect is quite important. Mario Yapu explained that "*None of the people from Pisili, Cororo, or El Paredón think of school as a place where their children can learn what their parents can teach them at home. What they want is something different*" (quoted in Howard 2009:4). Embedded in this statement is a description of the relationship many indigenous peoples have with their own identities. Coupled with a thought of Saavedra's, that poor people, "*rather than approaching education as a psychological process of liberation approach it as a livelihood strategy*" (42), these ideas offer that aspiration for change relates to personal economic growth (which inter-relates with social relationships and perceptions). As their cultures have historically been passed down outside of modern institutions, parents often continue this tradition in order to give as much institutional space possible to education as a

financial gain strategy. Intra-culturalism as a central aspect of ASEP is perhaps not an element of schooling desirable to many parents. It is therefore an imposition into their lives rather than a liberatory educational approach. Additionally, beyond hopes for economic growth, these anti-ASEP attitudes have contributed to migration of rural and indigenous peoples to cities, which has subsequently meant integration into the national Mestizo identity.

For the above reason, indigenous peoples should not be considered separate from modern systems of development, as “*in their daily lives they [indigenous peoples] are modern just like us or more*” (45). The government, however has expressed the opposite sentiment on occasion. The rationale described above, then, makes the following statement by Walter Gutierrez of the Ministry of Education deeply troubling: “*The strongest obstacle that we face is the ignorance of indigenous peoples... The indigenous peoples see us as an obstacle to development*” (43). Gutierrez’s use of the word ‘ignorant’ implies a hierarchical idea of change, wherein the people who do not support the ideas of decolonial education are unaware and should be enlightened. If Gutierrez’s own analysis is correct, then it seems that the role of ASEP is meant to be an imposition, and therefore its decolonial validity should be questioned.

On a practical level, objection to teaching about one’s own culture relates to language. While ASEP proposes ‘plurilingualism’, the fluidity of Spanish, a local indigenous language and a foreign language are not necessarily appealing to everyone. A school director in Vinto explained that at his school, “*[the parents have this vision in which they don’t want [us to teach] Quechua. It’s a shame. It is their native and first language, but the parents say ‘no. [We want] Spanish’*”. When asked why he thought this was, he explained that “*the parents always have the idea that ‘we speak better Quechua at home than the teacher, and the reason we send them to school is to give them more privileges and to civilize them’*” (28). An education researcher connected this interest directly to labor, explaining that “*if they don’t speak Spanish they will suffer, so [parents] want them to be lawyers, to be professionals and to go to the university*” (30). In this way, knowledge of a native language would not negatively affect a student’s chance of success in the labor market, but classes in that language would take time away that could be used to master Spanish, as most employers—especially in urban areas—have little interest in Aymara or Quechua-speaking staff.

In fact, this resistance to native language classes is not new. As Law 1565 of 1994 used the idea of a bilingual education, teaching both a local language and Spanish, people opposed that for the same reason as mentioned above. Saavedra described an incident that he witnessed over a decade ago.

In ‘95 or ‘96... one morning, a ton of education reform models appeared at the door of the Ministry of Education, and all the models were in Aymara; and a ton of indigenous authorities—Mallkus—from the communities and organizations came and said ‘we don’t want Aymara. Us parents can teach it more than

sufficiently to our children. We don't want it. What do we want from school? That schools teach Spanish because when our children go to the cities, when they don't speak good Spanish they are discriminated against. Teachers and Ministry: please teach our children good Spanish' (42).

As parents seemingly continue in these patterns of thought, their children follow along, and in Sanjinés' words, 'rightly so'. Simon Yampara attributes this attitude to previous education systems which *"have domesticated us in such a way that our thought process [is] domesticated... They have sold us the idea of development, of progress, of modernity, of technicality, of science and universal history"* (47). In this way, modernity has trained people to be modern within a narrow definition. While inter- and intra-culturalism may have been socially important in the region before Bolivia existed as a country, people are now often faced with dire economic situations and see integrating with modernity as the best way out. And who is to tell them that they are wrong? Certainly not a researcher who bounces around the world for the purposes of obtaining a masters degree (me), and I do not believe it is the role of government officials who have a steady and comfortable salary.

It seems that modernity has led us into an uncomfortable position, wherein Bolivia—or any society for that matter—has a choice between creating a new process against the will of some people or allowing modernity to flourish. While the previous chapter engaged the question of whether ASEP has been developed from the bottom-up in order to imagine challenges that face implementation (and considering teachers as the 'bottom'), perhaps the bottom is not about the teachers at all. Even if teachers fully engage the law, and even if the government discourse around that design was completely honest, some students may simply be uninterested in the change. In this case, the radical development project theorized within the 'coloniality' framework is an imposition and therefore highly questionable. The fact is that many parents want their children to integrate into the capitalist economic structure as a livelihood strategy, and rightly so, as it cannot be easy to focus on the betterment of an entire society while living in a dire situation.



Illustration 10: Students in La Paz

b. La Paz Urban Teachers' Union Critique

Colonization is fundamentally economic. It is not of thought, of culture. So to see a decolonial education the government has to expel the colonizer! And for us, the North American control that we see in Bolivia... this is colonization. — Representative, La Paz's Urban Teachers' Union (35)



Illustration 11: Calendar on wall of La Paz's urban teachers' union. "Socialism or Barbarism". With one hand smashing MAS with "Proletariat Dictatorship" and with the other "To Combat backwardness and hunger"

It is for this reason that the local urban teachers' union of La Paz rejects ASEP entirely. In fact, it rejects all of the recent changes including Evo Morales' election and the Plurinational Constitution. Before my fieldwork, I had only been exposed to the idea that they rejected every type of change, and what I had heard about them was discussed as if they were crazy without deep thought processes behind their rejection (13, 16). My own perception did not change when I first spoke with people from the union, but it drastically shifted once given a chance to reflect on their analysis. This group should not be ignored, as they offer important critiques of ASEP's validity and ability to be truthfully decolonial. This has also

meant union-organized protests which block traffic in order to force the larger population to at minimum recognize their role.²⁵

As this union identifies itself as ‘Trotskyist’, its justification for rejecting the changes is that it is irresponsible to work with inter- and intra-culturalism while allowing the country’s economic poverty to persist. Referring to the government’s processes of change, a representative of La Paz’s urban teachers’ union explained that “*They are developing without breaking with capitalism... So they stray from the point. They speak using Marxist language, but they create bourgeois politics*” (37). Based on what has been written previously in this thesis, you may be wondering what kind of bourgeois politics he refers to. I wondered the same thing. It threw me off even more when an official from Cochabamba’s urban teachers’ union explained that “*for them Evo Morales is the same as Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada—the face of neoliberalism here [as he was Bolivia’s president during much of the neoliberal era]. They say that this one is an Indian who doesn’t speak good Spanish [Morales] and the other was a gringo who couldn’t speak good Spanish [Sanchez de Lozada]*” (16). While the two use vastly different rhetoric, the idea is that their difference is limited to discourse.

US sociologist Vivek Chibber clarifies this analysis, explaining that “*even if you have a government committed to overthrowing capitalism, unless it does it like this (snap), for any span of time that’s going to be the duration in which it is implementing its policy, it’s going to require revenues... just to pay the salaries and the bills on an everyday level*”. In his analysis, these revenues come from taxes, taxes from employment, employment from capitalists, and capitalists are individual and make individual decisions—they are responsible to themselves and their investors whose interests are profit-driven. Given the modern mobility of capital, as Chibber succinctly puts it, they can say “*fuck it, I’m not investing*”. This causes an economic slow-down. As growth slows down because investment slows down, job creation follows suit. If there are less jobs, income stops growing which causes lower tax revenues for the state. In this way, if a rhetorically anti-capitalist and revolutionary government does not immediately restructure the form of capital (as Bolivia is doing), the government will not have enough funding to lead the change that it speaks of (Chibber). This is why governments are forced to appeal to their funders rather than their rhetoric, and it is precisely what La Paz’s urban teachers’ union points out, rejecting change if it does not entail a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’.

A La Paz union representative explained that this rhetorical versus realistic inconsistency applies directly to the schools within the framework of ASEP.

²⁵ I attended one of these protests, where my (very unscientific) attendance estimate was about 600 teachers marching through LaPaz’s largest street while chanting demands for retirement funding, rejecting ASEP, and shooting off fireworks.

For example, while the law 'Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez' speaks of equality of conditions, of democracy, it continues the fact that in Bolivia there are three types of schools: particular, de convenio and fiscal. When you create three types of schools you are creating discrimination: for those who have money, particular; for those who don't have money, fiscal; and for those who are in between, de convenio... We speak of education without discrimination but in action discrimination is affirmed (44).

Alternatively, then, La Paz's urban teachers' union affirms an educative goal which would fit within their utopist vision of a dictatorship of the proletariat, essentially vying for a 'decolonial' education but in the reverse order of ASEP. As the Constitution and education reform now focus development on both inter- and intra-culturalism in order to achieve a decolonial consciousness, the union believes that while culture may play a role, that role is secondary to economic decolonization. The La Paz union representative explained that *"We believe that the only form of systematic change for the education problem is to [first] radically transform capitalist society"* (44). Thus, while inter-cultural interaction may open the eyes of those involved it cannot change their relationship if access to and control of capital is unequal.

In Bolivia, these perspectives have been polarized, with the government advocating culturally-led decolonial efforts and La Paz's urban teachers' union advocating economically-led ones. However, this is not a black and white issue. Mario Cabral, the Education Commissioner of Guinea-Bissau during that country's post-revolution reconstruction, warned that

The whole plan for the transformation of the national instructional system will not be worth anything if there are not similar transformations in all of the other sectors of activity... It is possible, that, in a certain sense, education initiates the challenge. It is necessary, moreover, that structural transformations be made, giving support to the challenge, so that the practice implied in the challenge may become concrete" (quoted in Freire 1978:47).

Thus, as the Bolivian government is allowing education to initiate the challenge along with some other changes, the structural transformations brought up by La Paz's urban teachers' union should be considered. However, education may be the most important step in the short term.

By understanding the Trotskyist analysis of power we can gain an understanding and respect for these strong critiques of ASEP as well as the larger processes of change in Bolivia. As this group continues to protest and make public their concerns, most of the people I spoke with who were not directly involved with the union dismissed their stance, from the proposal for a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to the economic critique of the culturally-driven reform process. For example, Ministry of Education official Walter Gutierrez simply explained that *"the Trotskyists oppose everything, so for us it is a joke to talk about their opposing the law"* (7). Moreover, while La Paz's urban teachers' union makes their presence known locally, the General Director of CTEUB was quick to point out that *"they are a minority—they are tiny. The majority likes the constitutional document that we've made"* (4). As this is hardly deniable and even recognized by the union officials with whom I spoke, the chance that the

country will engage a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ is none (at least anytime in the near future). Therefore, Oscar Vega Camacho posed an incredibly important critique of the group: *“they don’t want to make changes [or] reforms in their labor or profession, and this doesn’t permit a debate of discussing their role and function in society... So I ask them, how much of this radical discussion is part of the function of reproducing power structures?”* (my emphasis; 13). As a quick move toward hardcore socialist economics is less than unlikely, La Paz’s teachers’ union is working against the baby steps supported by ASEP. Their role in implementation of the reform, then, could be regressive—although according to their ideology they do not care—the baby steps are a simple cover up for maintaining systems of inequality.



Illustration 112: Grafitti in La Paz. "The Elections Distract [From] The Revolution"

c. Cultural vs. Economic Decolonization

The critique of cultural decolonization by La Paz’s urban teachers’ union as unimportant next to economic inequality is key, and helps explore some of the dynamics of the debates in Bolivia. There is a clear contrast between those who advocate cultural decolonization and those who advocate that of economics. For example, Vega Camacho described the cultural version: *"If we want a just and equitable society to live well in, we have to have a society that recognizes cultural diversity, and cultural diversity means that public politics responds to distinct peoples. For this, we have to know, understand and interact with the peoples. And for this we need, minimally... to communicate as equals"* (13). Saavedra added that *"we want to participate in equal relationships of interchange, or reciprocity with more countries and peoples at the global level"* (2). While these ‘equal’ relationships could mean stronger ones, the opposing argument (which La Paz’s urban teachers’ union would embrace) is that this equal communication is impossible while economic inequality continues to exist. I agree that equal relationships cannot function while large systems work for the benefit of one group. Therefore, equality growing from unequal historical power relationships is inequitable, unless it is defined differently—for example, based on a period of equitable development which later builds toward equality.

Additionally, Sanjinés pointed out that while the government’s discourse centers on decolonization and equality, *"the private enterprise is left on its own... There’s not a single private industry that has been destroyed"* (3). While Bolivia’s government has nationalized parts of industries

(e.g. natural gas) and its focus does not support these private sectors, they are still validated by it. The governmental structure maintains the competition of profits rather than development through equal relationships. For this reason, Jurado, who is not (openly) Trotskyist, problematized Bolivia's processes of change in that *"we are fighting for these little things and the bigger ones which organize social relations aren't being taking into account"* (14).

d. Re-Visioning Globalization

Education is practically at the center of society. More clearly it's the center of the future. —
Representative, Cochabamba's Urban Teachers' Union (16)

ASEP is one of these 'little things', and it should also be scrutinized under this light. If private industry remains, and especially foreign companies (which often focus on Bolivia's vast natural resources), what does 'productive education' lead to? Some felt that productive education directly supports unjust exploitation of natural resources by supporting skill-based training with which, under Bolivia's capitalist economic structure, the people would inevitably try to work for the highest paying jobs—often foreign corporations. Additionally, plurilingual education had the same critique, as, if many people in Bolivia spoke English, and the country remained open to international capitalist growth, foreign corporations would be highly attracted to doing business there. While this would provide jobs and support practical livelihood development for Bolivia's vast poor population, it would also maintain economic inequality.

As the analysis suggests above, the immediate destruction of capitalist economic structures is easier said than done in the context of strong global neoliberalism. Saavedra, then, suggested that the government is, instead of offering resistance to neoliberal globalization, supporting an alternative form with ASEP as part of its implementation.

We are not negating, and we can't negate the market... But also, we don't want to be a part of exploitation ... We don't want to enclose ourselves because we know that to enclose ourselves would be suicide in this time period. Rather, we want to open up, but open up in equality, of brotherhood, and of reciprocity... We know the impressionable value of friendship, sharing, of dialoging, etc. For us, this is a way for us to fight the system (2).

Sanjinés added that *"there is a sense where we are always thinking of the global issue, of globalization, but on our own terms"* (3). Re-organizing the system of global relations, then, is central to anti-exploitative growth in the modern world. One worker I spoke with at a community education center in Cochabamba explained the goal of his vision of this process: *"It isn't really the question of whether I will reject everything from outside [the country] but rather the question of putting the systems of power into these terms and identifying them... The idea is to arm people with the capabilities of being critical and reflexive to the powers that are imposed. This is how I understand the reform"* (20). It is clear then, as

articulated by Jurado, that “*the instrument for articulating this large global, regional, national problem is education*” (14). This process of re-visioning globalization rather than negating it leaves hope with many that global integration—as is the modern reality—can exist without exploitative and inequitable relationships. A teacher of seven and eight year-olds in La Paz appreciates this alternative version of globalization, as “[*students*] have access to more things. We’re preparing their minds for the bigger world” (5).

Finally, as this re-visioning of globalization is important, it is also important to keep in mind the Trotskyist critique: While hope is important it does not change concrete reality. This line of thought puts immediate economic change as the primary goal, as “*at some point all of the reforms failed because schools don’t transform society*” (44). The difference here is that this critique sees schools as a result of change whereas Bolivia’s government sees them as an agent of it.

e. Education vs. Schooling

As all these debates surround relationships people have with the school system, schools are only one of the many facilitators of education. Even though Saavedra was Vice-Minister of Education during the creation of ASEP, he offered one strong critique of it. When I asked him how he interprets both intra-culturalism and communitarian education, he described those aspects in broad terms. “*In terms of strengthening indigenous people’s communities, it cannot happen only in school—it shouldn’t be in school because the school is a typical device of occidental modernity. The school is a typical place of discipline towards European industrial modernity. It is a contradiction to think you see the strengthening of communities with a [modernizing] device*” (2). Again, this refers to the difficulty of entering a decolonial dialogue within the framework of modernity.

Mario Yapu, a researcher and director of the University PIEB (a research institution in La Paz) added that “*to think of a decolonizing education is ridiculous because education on its own is colonizing. You as a child were colonized by different types of knowledge by adults*” (46). This analysis, aided by the discussion of a ‘hidden curriculum’ or ‘strategic pedagogy’ of the school system, views a decolonial education system as oxymoronic. If education systems have hidden curriculums which are colonizing, then there can be no such thing as an education system which is decolonizing, as that would negate the purpose of schools as an institution. Therefore, stepping outside boundaries of schools, some of the concepts imagined by ASEP under the idea of ‘decolonization’ should be re-considered in a different light. While coloniality specifically recognizes that decolonization cannot refer to a pre-colonial framework, this critique emphasizes that the entrance to dialogue is a major challenge.

A worker at a Cochabamba educational community center explained that “*it is the communities and the people in the community... who know the local contexts*”, and that communitarian education should in fact be guided by the wider community outside the school setting. In this way, “*the community, the families, are converted into a type of teacher as well*” (20). Not only would this approach deeply embrace communitarian education, but it would also support intra-culturalism through having community members bring a personal perspective which comes from their own cultural experiences. In this way, Saavedra explained that while inter- and intra-culturalism are deeply intertwined, they play parallel practical roles. “*The school can be a very good tool of inter-culturalism. Not intra-cultural, but inter-cultural because the school can be an excellent environment for a dialogue of knowledge*” (2). Intra-culturalism and communitarian education should then be based on non-school education. In this way, students would be exposed to the thought processes in their classrooms and would be able to apply those school-based skills (i.e. critical thinking and critical analysis) to their experiences in the larger world. A primary school teacher in La Paz described this process precisely: “*True education is a relationship between theory and practice, but where is the practice? It should be in the social environment. We don’t only learn within the four walls of the classroom*” (36).²⁶

How, then, does ASEP engage non-school aspects of education? It seems that both intra-culturalism and communitarian education are approaches for in-school educational development. Saavedra explained that “*Unfortunately, in the legal project [of ASEP], nothing of this is included. Maybe we need more theoretical development, better research for this, but no, this hasn’t come to the point of institutionalization*” (2). This lack of reflecting education to the larger community through the schooling reform is, according to a Primary school teacher in La Paz, “*completely contradictory in the law ‘Avelino Siñani’*” (36), as decolonial education would require a shift in the relationship between schools and the wider community.

Alternatively, some people proposed that decolonial education would be possible as long as different cultural logics were truly able to enter the school setting. As ASEP proposes precisely this, Tomás Robles takes issue with this discourse; “*it is a vision that pretends that all the students learn everything about the cultures, about the ancestral knowledges, but there isn’t any information about the contents... There is nothing [specific]*” (10). Jurado added that the reason for this lack of content is because the government has not asked the harder questions: “*What citizen do we want to form? How do we understand the subject of education?... How are we thinking of the individual who will pass through the education system? What will they do in the future?—is it for industrialization? We aren’t preparing*

²⁶ This idea draws from Freire’s ideas of praxis—engaging school-based theory in the practice of larger social, political and productive structures (1978:21).

for this. Is it for rural life? We aren't preparing for this. What are we preparing for? What are we forming? This isn't the debate. It needs to be clarified" (14). This lack of clarity, according to Sofia Alcón, allows for a blind validation of culture. *"If you don't account for your historical process and a historical memory, you can speak of culture and language but it doesn't have much meaning"* (45).

Mario Yapu, then, offered a way to account for the historical process. He thinks that indigenous logics could be incorporated into the actual structure of schools rather than embracing non-school education. The issue there, in his words, is that *"We don't know much about indigenous knowledge. There is very little research about it... What is important is that the knowledges are systematized for something to help... This is a strategy to contribute to the curricular politics of the schools of the future"* (46). Importantly, he pointed out that each type of knowledge taught in schools were once at the level indigenous logics are at now. He used the example that chemistry was informal and passed down through practical uses and family ties, largely in connection with production. Over time, the knowledge of chemistry was systematized in order to bring the knowledge to a level which could be taught in a standardized way throughout a school system. His proposal, then, is to *"research and systematize [indigenous knowledges]"* which would lead to the same type of standardization of related classroom approaches throughout the education system. While this is certainly a practical approach, and given Yapu's position as a researcher it makes sense, my own analysis leads me to question whether systematizing indigenous logics and knowledges is actually a colonial process. According to Yapu, if these knowledges are not systematized, a decolonial and inter-cultural education system is impossible. On the other hand, if they are systematized then it raises the issue that schools may be entering into another level of colonization.

It seems to me, then, that the previous proposal of teaching indigenous knowledges outside the school setting and using schools to promote the relationships between in-school and non-school knowledges, is the closest possibility to have a true dialogue under an epistemic democracy. This refers to Critical Border Thinking as explored in Chapter 2, which emphasizes discourse independent of the hegemonic norm. It is a pity that ASEP is not making this effort. Although ASEP has many curricular aspects that will benefit students and probably Bolivian society, perhaps the law is not fully decolonial because of the above contradictions.

Chapter 8. The Future

a. Development Strategies *from* Bolivia

Implementation of ASEP relies on many factors, and some specific ones were discussed and emphasized in my experiences in Bolivia. In my first week in La Paz, at a conference sponsored by the government, coloniality theorist Enrique Dussel explained that the Bolivian process of development is unique, and it gives him hope for the future in the entire region. He explained that Bolivia's articulation of decolonization within the Plurinational Constitution supports "*political self-determination [which] is what supports the possibility of decolonization*". In this way, self-determination, or subjectivity, should be playing a central role in Bolivia's decolonial discourse. Moreover, Bolivia has managed to support these ideas from within the country, as opposed to adapting foreign development definitions as had previously been done for decades (42). While the process is clearly not perfect, it is part of a process of adaptation to a different way of thinking in spaces of government. An academic researcher explained that "*the indigenous people are learning how to govern... It is learning about power, and this is hard*" (30). The main difficulty with this process is adapting indigenous logics to a governmental structure, which has not been done in such a large-scale way in the Americas. Bolivia is then paving the way for what could be a different logic of governing. Dussel added that "*decolonization of a Plurinational state through inter-cultural dialogue is something that needs to be defined, but it is fundamental and an example for all of Latin America*" (1).²⁷

One practical aspect of this is the adaptation of indigenous movements toward political campaigning and policy. The most concrete block to ASEP's implementation at this point in time is that it has not been fully supported by Bolivia's Congress. On December 6th, 2009, there was a new round of Congressional (as well as Presidential) elections. As the research for this thesis occurred before the election, the following ideas were speculative at the time, although in hindsight some seem prophetic.

In discussing the elections, the director of CTEUB, the national urban teachers' union, explained that they are very important for ASEP, but they also affect the larger social changes. "*The elections of the 6th of December... will form the assembly to have a majority [of] support, and then we can get support for the law 'Avelino Siñani'... Up to now, they have rejected... the education reform, and there are many laws they have rejected—the senators won't pass them*" (5). As indigenous peoples are now learning how to govern, researcher Erick Jurado explained that this has to do with a general lack of acceptance among the older politicians of the new approach toward governance. He described that the education reform is now

²⁷ He added that "*The Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela doesn't have in any way the complexity and the political and cultural richness of you. Ecuador wants to do something [like this], but it is still very far away*" (1).

stuck “*in the Parliament with a lot of conflict because the vision of decolonization of indigenous sectors starts to negate everything... so it generates a lot of conflict*” (14). As a result of this conflict and stalled processes, the Bolivian people have shown that they feel supported by the change in discourse of Morales’ government and reciprocally supported MAS electorally. The December elections offered MAS a vast majority in the Congress.

This new majority finally gives ASEP a chance to become praxis after almost four years of discussion. During the research process, people expected nothing less. For example, an administrator of a Cochabamba *Normal* explained that “*This new law... will be approved after December when there is a new government in charge*” (22). I am sure this expectation is even higher now that the election is over and MAS has gained a strong Congressional majority.

Additionally, Jose Luis Saavedra explained that Morales has “*said that the first law which will be approved in the Plurinational Legislature will be the education reform, so we will most likely have it in January*” (42). This trust in the legal support for ASEP was echoed by everyone I spoke with, although a La Paz urban teachers’ union representative explained that “*the law won’t pass because of its actual [content] but rather for its spirit*” (44). The intention behind this statement was that the representatives, especially if they support indigenous policies, are attracted to the discourse surrounding ASEP rather than its substance, as the law is lacking a consensus on its embedded ideas. For this reason, the union representative added that “*the union will struggle as it did against Law 1565. An approved law doesn’t mean a law put into action*” (44). As it seems that union and/or teacher discontent could be a large barrier to implementation, La Paz’s urban teachers’ union has embraced this strongly, and will seemingly encourage the teachers it represents to follow its ideology rather than the law.

i. Implementing Ideology

This ideological polarization is precisely, according to some, why implementation will prove difficult if not impossible. Mario Yapu explained that the law is supported by a discourse which makes it difficult to apply. “*It is a discourse that functions very well politically... [but] it is not theoretical*” (46). Anke van Dam added that a theoretical discourse can be grounded, but an ideological law cannot (40). In Bolivia’s context, and especially that of La Paz, where groups differ greatly in political ideology, ASEP as an ideologically-focused reform will be difficult to implement once it is legally passed. I was surprised how often this came up. The director of a non-governmental-organization which works with teacher training in Vinto explained that “*this government, in education, has found itself trapped within their ideology and they don’t know how to operationalize [it]*” (10). These discourses appeal to much of the population, which is why so many people expected MAS’s victory in the December 6th elections. However, the fact that multiple education reforms can pass throughout a single teacher’s time in a

classroom, and there is very little or no change in their colleagues' and their own approaches re-enforces that if ASEP is to be implemented, it needs to be done with care, intention, and a budget that allows for teacher training and support (20).

Putting the theoretical and ideological aspect of the reform into practical terms is therefore central for implementation to occur, and this should happen in a different manner than that of Law 1565. An education researcher explained that "*it was the same with the reform of '94—it had a very nice design, but to bring it into practice was difficult and it took a long time*" (30). For this reason, it would be preferable to have a more grounded discourse on education policy as soon as it goes through the new Congress, but when I left Bolivia in September it was far from that stage of development. All the teachers I spoke with were frustrated about lack of clarity in the new law, and even Walter Gutierrez of the Ministry of Education agreed: "*Stop with these theoretical debates. It is time to instrumentalize and operationalize the proposal*" (43). If this critique is coming from the Ministry itself, the country must be ready for specifics; although again, there are very few.

b. Change Only in Words

For this reason, while I had read that the reform would be implemented by early 2010 before arriving in Bolivia, I soon realized this would not happen. Even Gutierrez admitted that he did not expect any changes to enter schools on a national scale until 2011 (7). Moreover, Contreras *et al* add, in discussing Law 1565, that Bolivian education reforms begin chaotically and partially (2003:59). Additionally, a SEDUCA official explained that the entire process will take quite a while. "*To implement a reform should take 25 years*" (19). A Cochabamba school director added that of this 25 year process, "*the first five years are to form the teachers*". This leaves 20 years for students to complete all levels of school, from primary through university (17; all of which will be affected by ASEP).

This lengthy prospect for implementation has left many of those I spoke with feeling unappreciative of the reform process. While full implementation may take 25 or more years, people who support the law want to see concrete changes quickly. On the other hand, the perception of a few teachers that not much changed for the previous education reform leaves them expecting a policy gap in that nothing will change with ASEP beyond discourse. A La Paz school director explained that "*the reform of '94 involved changing the names of things, but not much changed in reality, in curriculum—only minor things, just like in this reform*" (8). An administrator at a Cochabamba Normal added that "*[1565] hasn't shown any results. Rather, it has only changed some terms and terminology. Simple changes in terminology don't make a transformation—it can't create a structural change in education*" (22). Moreover, Erick Jurado (whose current research is a comparison between Law 1565 and ASEP)

explained that *“In certain rural areas the transformation of the education reform of ‘94 is still coming”* (14). If 15 years has not been enough to *begin* implementation in some schools under the previous reform, ASEP will need to take some kind of different approach. Many call the current experience an ‘educational crisis’, and a school director in Vinto emphasized that *“at minimum it will take us 10 or 20 years to recover”* (27). Hopefully, though, that recovery period will overlap with the time it will take for ASEP’s full implementation.

These reflections of the failures of the previous reform were repeated by many, as they often leave educational stakeholders apprehensive that ASEP will be yet another sugar-coating to Bolivia’s previous education. While some recognized positive changes made by the previous reform (e.g. Contreras *et al*, 33), many described precisely what La Paz’s urban teachers’ union had said—that *“If I brought you documentation, you would see that only some words have changed with their synonyms... It is just a synonym—nothing beyond this will change. And some paragraphs are exactly copied up to the periods and commas... only, like I said, with some synonyms”* (36).

While the above ideas illustrate difficulties toward implementing ASEP, it seems possible that the government could be doing more in order to convince some oppositional teachers. Simon Yampara complained that the government *“is not initiating any serious and responsible action of decolonization. It just isn’t. They speak, they value it, they discuss it, but they don’t do anything”* (47). This suggests that Yampara, and probably others, would have faith in the law if they were able to see changes being made. While this may occur after the new Parliament votes on ASEP, it seems that the discursive emphasis rather than an emphasis of praxis could widen the policy gap and leave teachers with less and less trust that things will actually change.

It is probably for this reason that after I sat in on an informational meeting for parents about ASEP at Cochabamba’s SEDUCA, some parents were incredibly surprised that there was anything to consider positively about the law. One parent stood up and said *“I want to thank you for explaining the positive parts, because sometimes lots of teachers or parents only focus on the negative parts, and if we are having this big process of educational change, there must be some part that is good”* (18). After saying this, the parent got a standing ovation from others in the room. From further comments, it was clear that many of the parents still were not fully supportive of the law, but at the same time they had appreciated a different description, as information about these changes is not widely available if people do not seek it themselves.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

ASEP is an experiment in decolonizing the minds of Bolivia's young people. As part of my broader interests, this thesis has explored the prospects for implementation of that experiment. Specifically it explored the four sub-questions described in the Introduction. These four issues are: the meaning of decolonization and interpretations of it by relevant educational stakeholders; prospects for implementation based on teachers' needs; whether this idea of decolonization is valid on a conceptual level and from a top-down approach; and if and when the reform will be implemented. Unfortunately, after three months of research and quite some time reflecting, I have not been able to fully respond to these issues, and I have many more questions. I hardly encountered two people agreeing on their interpretation of decolonization in general or ASEP overall, although the surrounding discourse—especially the four pillars of the law—was brought up by each person I spoke with. What has become clear is that the law cannot be fully implemented until people agree on content and their own roles, which will not happen quickly. In the longer term, however, Bolivia's current context of debate and dialogue will help those definitions, although I would be uncomfortable saying that all educational stakeholders will come to agreement. Moreover, the exploration in this thesis brings into light Bolivia's future vision as defined by the Plurinational Constitution and its relationship with ASEP.

In the research process, I encountered many people with criticism of the top-down (state-led) approach to decolonization. This especially played out in discussions about the process of ASEP's creation and communication between teachers, their respective unions and the Ministry of Education. Communication, then, has to be better in order to see change occur. Moreover, while the government insists teachers have been deeply engaged in ASEP's development, many teachers disagreed. Often, they seemed angry or offended by the government's participatory rhetoric while pursuing top-down action. As they are the primary actors of implementation, participation is central for teachers to feel engaged and invested enough to result in strong implementation of the law. As long as the government maintains its self-serving discourse that the law has been developed in a deeply participatory manner, it seems that many teachers will not engage the reform in their classrooms. This suggests that government transparency is central in seeing change, and there is a strong relationship between the government's discourse and prospects for implementation. That is, rather than helping the prospects, the discourse damages them. Transparency, then, should lead to openness and acceptance on the part of teachers.

Additionally, education reform focused on pedagogical change is problematic if it leaves labor aspects, such as teacher pay or retirement funding, virtually untouched. Seemingly, this is a universal educational issue, as it plays a large role in Bolivia as well as in my experience in the US. While Bolivia's

situation is unique between its new Constitution and the decolonial education reform, if these foundational issues were addressed, perhaps Bolivia could serve as a model for educational changes in general to be more successfully implemented.

The Executive General of Cochabamba's urban teachers' union explained his idea of how implementation could work. He suggested that informational experts be sent around the country "*to open the debate and [give] training to the bases*". Through this process, he added that "*the government should not try to implement the law purely, but rather on a slow but sure pace*" (24). By embracing the reform as a long process rather than an immediate shift, it could be possible for teachers to gain a sense of ownership over the new approach by experimenting with smaller aspects rather than a more intimidating overall reform.

However, while teachers need ownership over this type of reform in order to engage the law, it is the students and their families themselves who need to feel ownership in order for decolonial processes to be successful. While the reform could be implemented in some ways, students still live within local structures of vast inequality as well as a global structure of neoliberal capitalism. Just as Bolivian society has a hidden curriculum or strategic public pedagogy, so does the culture of globalized capital. Because of this, many students and their families have the perception that they will remain impoverished if they do not embrace livelihood strategies embedded within modern development frameworks. Instead of cooperatively building for their communities, people then try to get a 'better' job and to go to 'better' areas.

Thus the tension described here is between the strategic public pedagogy of Bolivian society and that of globalized capitalism. It is clear to me that neither will independently abolish the other, as the new framework of the state in Bolivia is not a momentary experience but rather a widely supported step in the process of recognizing the country's diversity. At the same time, globalized capitalism has nothing to fear from Bolivia's changes independently. On the other hand, however, the country's relationship with other Left emergences in Latin America does pose a threat to global capitalist hegemony.

While there is no consensus on praxis in Bolivia's education reform, ASEP and Bolivia's Plurinational Constitution are built out of a framework of coloniality, which suggests that knowledges, logics and societies be in a series of historically-bound dialogues. Because of the tension mentioned above, in a way, dialogue already exists and coloniality is successful. However, in this dialogue the two actors do not play equal roles even though each is offered the same power. This equal dialogical relationship means that epistemic democracy is faulty within an inequitable society as there *are* winners and losers—as in those who have lost a language or a connection to the cultural identity of their ancestors

through integrationist or Mestizo political economic policies. La Paz's urban teachers' union reaffirms this notion—that dialogue with globalized capitalism is not only a waste of time but also self destructive. Even Walter Gutierrez of the Ministry of Education cast doubt on the possibility of a functional dialogue: *“In what way can a decolonial and communitarian education be proposed if the same context that we are living in gives priority to efficiency, to effectiveness, competitiveness and individualism, which are basic principles of the North American model, of the neoliberal model?”* (43). Relating this focus on equality to Mignolo's metaphor of a meeting room explored in the Theoretical Framework directly reflects the shortcomings of the coloniality theory. Perhaps rather than unlocking each door equally, the entrances for historically marginalized groups should be larger, offering an equitable approach by giving those groups more space in the discussion.

My own critique to the validity of ASEP's idea of decolonization is that it focuses on changing the content of schooling and neither the process by which schooling occurs nor the structure of schools themselves. Moreover, the reform's vision also occurs within political economic structures which have not been decolonized.

This conclusion may leave little hope for ASEP although this is not the intention. Rather, it is to give recognition to the fact that basing a political process on a theory which has no history of practical experience on this scale leaves many questions unanswered. Perhaps ASEP's flaw is theoretical and discursive—it could be argued that it is not decolonial because of various ideas presented in this thesis. Whether or not it is decolonial is important in considering the way society will be shaped in the future. However, it is also important to recognize the radical changes that the reform offers aside from its associated rhetoric. As part of Bolivia's larger social and political changes, ASEP supports the population's diversity in innovative ways. The education reform will create the future society imagined by the Plurinational Constitution, and the population supports that vision, as evidenced by December 2009's elections.

Interestingly, in reference to the hidden curriculum argument, education reform exists to create a shift in social legitimacy. This reform could be seen as MAS's approach to creating social integration. However, the umbrella term 'decolonization' recognizes the role education has often played in validating specific ways of life and modes of production, as the law is also discursively anti-capitalist. However, as ASEP is a basis of the new Constitution, it clearly advocates social integration—only a radically new type: Plurinationalism is the country's constitutional response to the ideas of inter- and intra-culturalism. Instead of an assimilationist or homogenizing integration policy, this one is based in communitarian, personal and state diversity. Perhaps this type of 'integration' should not be considered integration at all, but rather a recognition of the plurality and interactions of the population.

While implementing ASEP will boil down to teachers' actions and students' responses, many issues influence their understandings and approaches to the reform and schooling. These issues are especially affected by Bolivia's poverty. For example, there are not resources for sufficient teacher training. Because of this, it remains to be seen how the Ministry of Education will hold schools accountable for non-implementation. Given the lack of extra training, perhaps accountability should be taken by the Ministry itself.

As it is difficult to conceptualize how education will change specifically, the reality of ASEP will show itself, and constant analysis and reflection will be important over the coming years. The option, then, is to build on critiques of attempts at changing education and governmental systems in order to take action. This action is an experiment in developing an approach to Other knowledges, and more experiments are needed. Although no one knows how or when ASEP will be implemented, and moreover what each of its pillars means, its praxis will be an experiment that deals with issues of culture, identity and citizenship in a new way. As this research looks at these processes conceptually, future research will be able to explore the praxis of Bolivia's decolonial education system.



Illustration 123: Mural on the outside of a school, Vinto

Chapter 10. Personal Reflection

To what point are we really operating with indigenous logics—Aymara, Quechua, Andean—or to what point are we simply translating modern Occidental thoughts and trying to give them an indigenous value? I think this is a very serious problem. We need our own categories to think of our own education proposal. How can we think of an education from the Andean categories? — Jose Luis Saavedra, Academic (42)

As coloniality of power and knowledge have grown through a long and violent process of domination, answering Saavedra's question is impossible. Decoloniality, as described in this thesis' Theoretical Framework, envisions a world engaged in epistemic dialogue while resisting alignment with any specific form of production (especially that of capitalist imperialism which assisted in the colonial process). The problem in imagining current changes is that conceptually decoloniality offers no suggestions for ridding economic and production systems of hierarchy. It seems, then, that the coloniality framework can reflect positively on cultural processes of development, but this postmodern analysis allows each actor to enter the 'dialogue' as equals while there are historical systems which have violently maintained unequal power dynamics since conquest.

As MAS has spoken through the framework of coloniality since its inception, it has been honest to its politics throughout. It is for this reason that Luis Gomez and Jean Friedsky, just before Morales' first election, wrote, "*The possible downfall of a MAS government could actually result from its complying with its own agenda, rather than its inability to do so*" (2005). While Morales has won five more years in office as well as overwhelming majorities in Congress, the party itself has clearly not fallen, although perhaps its revolutionary and decolonial politics have been compromised from the start. I do not mean to say that MAS has not made important changes. Rather, I believe that Bolivia's political process since 2006 has offered important opportunities for individuals as well as the country as a whole, and has served as a model for social justice movements around the world. My intention, on the other hand, is to say that the theoretical framework used by the party is perhaps not functional for their discursive intentions.

For this reason, I propose a re-visioning of coloniality. This would not only create an inter- and intra-cultural dialogue, but also, as it is rooted in Spanish conquest, it would recognize the primary shifts created by the process of colonization: not only interpretations of culture and statehood, but the conception of the State itself. While coloniality's framework references the social creation of race (in Bolivia's case, the 'Mestizo' and 'indigenous' populations), there is an utter lack of discussion around the validity of the State as a social creation. At the time I did not understand what Erick Jurado meant, but over the past few months, the following idea has deeply influenced my reflection: "*Perhaps [we need to] demystify the theme of the indigenous and understand a pluri-cultural citizen that lives in different ways. The theme of the conceptualization of differences rapidly approaches territorializing differences—and*

there aren't borders" (14). As evidenced by the Americas before colonization, states are not an inevitable part of human culture, just as race and capitalism are not. While taking action is daunting, critically re-visioning geographical border systems could contribute deeply to coloniality.

Throughout the research and writing process, I have deeply explored the conflicts and discourses which make decolonization difficult. While it was not the purpose of my research to come up with a solution, this process has engaged me in a deeper reflection which has led me to the conclusions above. While my conclusions relate to Bolivia, they are just as applicable to any nation-state. In Bolivia, issues relating to development are vast—much deeper and wider than anything I had expected before going—and they range from changing discourses on citizenship, to identity politics involving reinforcing the concept of race, to debates around the role of school in education as well as in a community. That list could go on, and a number of those issues have been neglected in this writing in order for it to fit within the constraints of this academic graduate program. Critical reflection and re-imagination, then, not only of the seemingly unreachable concepts of race, economics and borders, but also on issues closer to home, are important. For example, what is my role in engaging these critiques? How can I make a valuable contribution? Just as the issues presented in this thesis are open-ended, so are these questions, but they demand a reflexive methodology, that is, a critical reflection-reimagination-action process, allowing for the creation of 'Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise'.²⁸

²⁸ See footnote 3.

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Interview List

This is a chronological list of interviews and government events which this thesis is based on. The first column of numbers corresponds with in-text citations of thesis. Each event or interview was in Spanish and translated by the author unless otherwise noted. Each school official (teacher, administrator, director, etc.) was at a primary school unless otherwise noted.

#	Date	Name / Position	Notes / Location
1	10/07	III Seminar/Conference: <i>Hacia la construcción del horizonte de la descolonización y la interculturalidad como vision del estado plurinacional</i>	Speakers: Minister of Culture, Viceminister of Decolonization, Juan Bautista, Enrique Dussel, Hugo Zemelman; La Paz.
2	13/07	Jose Luís Saavedra	Academic, Author and former Vice-Minister of Education; Café Ciudad, La Paz.
3	15/07	Javier Sanjinés, La Paz	Bolivian scholar teaching at University of Michigan, US; his apartment, La Paz. Interview in English.
4	20/07	Director General, CTEUB (National Urban Teachers' Union)	At union headquarters, La Paz
5	21/07	4 School Teachers	<i>Escuela Amaru</i> , La Paz
6	22/07	School Teachers, 1 Administrator	Lunchtime roundtable discussion with a group of teachers during their lunch break together and administrator on my way out; <i>Escuela Amaru</i> , La Paz
7	22/07	Walter Gutierrez	Director of the 'Political Unit for Inter-cultural, Intra-cultural, and Pluri-lingual Education' in the Ministry of Education; his office, La Paz
8	23/07	School Director	In school's administrative office; <i>Escuela Amaru</i> , La Paz
9	24/07	Secretary General of CONMERB (National Confederation of Rural Teachers of Bolivia)	In union office; La Paz, Bolivia
10	26/07	Tomas Robles	Director, teacher support and training organization in Vinto; his house over lunch, La Paz
11	31/07	School Director	In school's administrative office, La Paz
12	31/07	2 School Teachers	In their classrooms, La Paz
13	31/07	Oscar Vega Camacho	Author, member of the <i>Grupo Comuna</i> , newspaper columnist. Originally described to me as a 'constitutional expert'; Café Alexander, La Paz
14	04/08	Erick Jurado	Researcher working at PIEB (research institute). Current research is a comparative analysis of Law 1565 and ASEP; At PIEB office

15	10/08	Math teacher at a <i>Normal</i> and math teacher at a Middle School	I was connected with these two teachers by a friend in La Paz. During my time in Cochabamba, I stayed at their house (they are a married couple); Cochabamba
16	11/08	Cochabamba Urban Teachers' Union	Interviews with three people at the office of the urban teachers' union of Cochabamba. The first two were union representatives while the third was a local teacher; Cochabamba
17	12/08	Middle School School Director	Has worked at this school for 35 years; Cochabamba
18	12/08	Nicolas Siles, SEDUCA	Public seminar by SEDUCA, to educate parents about ASEP; Cochabamba
19	13/08	SEDUCA Official	In office; Cochabamba
20	17/08	Centro Yachay Tunkuy, Cochabamba	The director of this teacher training NGO set up a round-table discussion with herself and five workers there. One is also professor at the Catholic University, another at a <i>Normal</i> .
21	17/08	Cochabamba Rural Teachers' Union Representative	In office, Cochabamba
22	18/08	General Director, <i>Normal Simon Rodriguez</i>	In office; Cochabamba
23	18/08	Academic Director, <i>Normal Simon Rodriguez</i>	In office; Cochabamba
24	19/08	Executive General, Cochabamba Rural Teachers' Union	In office; Cochabamba
25	19/08	School Director	Vinto
26	19/08	Worker at Teacher Training NGO	Same organization as Robles (10); Vinto
27	19/08	School Director	In school's administrative office; Vinto
28	19/08	School Director	In school's administrative office; Vinto
29	19/08	School Secretary	In the school's administrative office; Vinto
30	25/08	Academic and Education Researcher	In her apartment, La Paz
31	27/08	ANDECOP Seminar, Day 1	Public seminar on ASEP; Victor Pinalla, Ministry of Education and Amalia Rodriguez, ANDECOP; In ANDECOP office, La Paz. Also includes PowerPoint slides referenced in Chapter 5b.
32	28/08	ANDECOP Seminar, Day 2	Public seminar on ASEP; Giovanni Samanamut, Office of the Vice President and Guillermo Mariatekumi; In ANDECOP office, La Paz
33	31/08	School Director, La Paz	La Paz
34	31/08	School Teacher, La Paz	La Paz
35	2/09	School Director, La Paz	La Paz
36	2/09	School Teacher, La Paz	La Paz
37	3/09	Director, La Paz Urban Teachers' Union	At union headquarters; La Paz
38	3/09	Director, La Paz Urban Teachers' Union	While at the union headquarters, this union representative was interviewed by a local newspaper and I was invited to record it (same

			person as 37)
39	3/09	La Paz Urban Teachers' Union Representative	At unión headquarters, La Paz
40	4/09	Anke van Dam, First Secretary, Education and Emancipation Expert, Dutch Embassy	In her office, La Paz. Formally worked for the Ministry of Education
41	4/09	La Paz Urban Teachers' Union Protest	Transcriptions and notes taken from protest of the urban teachers' union of La Paz against ASEP and for retirement support
42	9/09	Jose Luis Saavedra and Sofia Alcón	Café Ciudad, La Paz
43	11/09	Walter Gutierrez, Ministry of Education	Public presentation entitled "Education and Decolonization" at Espacio Simón Patiño; La Paz
44	14/09	La Paz Urban Teachers' Union Representative	Personal Interview in union headquarters, La Paz
45	16/09	Sofia Alcón, University of the Cordillera	In her office, La Paz
46	22/09	Mario Yapu, Researcher and Academic Director, University PIEB (research institute)	In his office, La Paz
47	22/09	Simon Yampara, Office of Tourism and Indigenous Intellectual	In his office, La Paz