Teacher training in Bolivia and the implementation of the 2010 education reform

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the lack of knowledge on the implementation of Bolivia’s latest education reform, which is supported by a re-training programme for in-service teachers. The education reform proposes a very complex and ambitious curriculum, within which Bolivian teachers need to be re-trained. The survey and interview data reveal that the majority of the teachers have a positive perception of their re-training, however, the implementation process brings with it certain challenges as well. It is important to pay attention to these challenges and discrepancies within the new curriculum, as, once overcome, this could further enhance the agency of Bolivian teachers to act as the conscious actors of change, for which the latest education reform leaves ample space.

Abstracto
Esta tesis trata sobre la falta de conocimientos de la aplicación de la última reforma de la educación en Bolivia, que es apoyado por un programa de re-entrenamiento para maestros en servicio. La reforma educativa propone un currículo muy complejo y ambicioso, en el que los maestros Bolivianos necesitan ser re-entrenado. Los datos de las encuestas y entrevistas revelan que la mayoría de los maestros tienen una percepción positiva de su re-entrenamiento, sin embargo, el proceso de implementación también conlleva ciertos desafíos. Es importante prestar atención a estos desafíos y discrepancias dentro del nuevo currículo, ya que, una vez superado, esto podría mejorar aún más la agencia (agency) de los maestros Bolivianos a actuar como actores conscientes del cambio, para los que la última reforma de la educación deja un amplio espacio.
Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination of one year academic study within the field of ‘International Development Studies’. This research allowed me to stay three months in the city of Cochabamba, Bolivia, which was an amazing experience. I am very grateful and feel privileged that I got the opportunity to get to know Bolivia and the Latin American continent at large. Moreover, this thesis is the product of my personal interest in development studies, and, more specifically, the interplay between development and education.

My Bolivian adventure showed me all the different faces and images of the country: despite its poverty, which is clearly present in large parts of the country, Bolivia’s richness in languages, cultures and nature is truly astonishing in my view. The diversity and great contrasts within the country are reflected in the perceptions of Bolivian people as well. During my research, I found it highly interesting and inspiring to speak to all the different educational actors, not only to hear their opinions but also their struggles in Bolivia’s changing education system. This thesis is an attempt to combine and do justice to this multiplicity of opinions, expectations, hopes and challenges, which reflect Bolivia’s highly diversified society.

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List of Abbreviations

ASEP – Ley Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez (ASEP law)
CEPOs - Consejos Educativos de Pueblos Originarios (Educational Councils of Indigenous Peoples)
ESFM - Escuelas Superiores de Formación de Maestros (teacher training institutes)
HDI - Human Development Index
IHDI - Inequality Adjusted Human Development Index
MAS - Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement for Socialism)
PROFOCOM - Programa de Formación Complementaria para Maestras y Maestros en Ejercicio (national training programme for in-service teachers)
SAPs - Structural Adjustment Programmes
SDR - Socially Desirable Responding
SES - Social-Economic Status
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Nowadays, Bolivia’s teacher population counts 130,000 teachers (Página Siete, 07-11-2013, 2013c), which are being defined as ‘soldiers of change’ by Bolivia’s current president, Evo Morales. Bolivian teachers are seen as important actors for societal change nowadays, which is a highly interesting development. Societal change is an important spearhead of Morales’ policies, as Bolivia’s society is historically characterised by wide diversities and inequalities. The gap between rich and poor is very large, and Bolivia could be considered one of the poorest countries of Latin America. Besides this poor economic status and the gap between rich and poor, the inequalities between different societal groups are also extremely present. That is to say, the indigenous groups, which account for approximately 70% of the Bolivian population, have always been highly marginalised and discriminated against. From a total of 37 different indigenous groups, with a myriad of different languages and cultural practices, the Aymara, Quechua and Guaraní form the largest indigenous groups. The deeply rooted social, political, economic, and educational exclusion of these groups from society, which has been contested by a very well organised civil society, has always caused a high incidence of struggles and tensions in Bolivia (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 71-74).

These inequalities and exclusion from society are reflected in Bolivia’s education sector as well. Although the primary school enrolment rate was 94.5% in 2011 (World Bank, 2014), large inequalities in educational results exist, as the results of indigenous children are significantly lower than the results of non-indigenous children (Talavera, 2009). With the installation of Evo Morales in 2006, Bolivia embarked on an ambitious change in politics and society at large. Besides redrafting the constitution, Morales and his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) party also established a new education reform law, in a consultative process, in 2010 (Crabtree, 2007). The 2010 education reform law succeeds the 1994 education reform law, the latter which has received a lot of critique and was considered by the teacher unions as neoliberal and imposed from outside due to the major role of the World Bank and the exclusion of Bolivian teachers (Contreras and Talavera, 2003: 17-18). Hence, with this new, somewhat radical, political constitution and education reform law, Morales and his Cabinet of Ministers strive to bring about larger societal change by voicing the interests of the hitherto marginalised indigenous groups. It is strongly believed that education plays a
major role in achieving this ambitious ‘politics of change’. Therefore, this thesis focuses on Bolivia’s education sector, and, more specifically, on the 2010 ASEP education reform law. I will specifically look at the teacher training programme established by the Ministry of Education to train in-service teachers in the new curriculum.

1.2 Aim and relevance

To date, there has been a lot of research into the 1994 reforms, among others in terms of educational outcomes such as enrolment and dropout rates (see Contreras and Talavera, 2003; Index Mundi, n.d.). There has also been extensively written about the recent 2010 reform. However, to my knowledge, there has not yet been much research into the implementation of the ASEP reform at school level. I will look more into the consequences and effects of its very recent implementation and what it entails for Bolivia’s education sector (and, more specifically, for the teachers following the re-training in the new curriculum). Hence, my research aims to contribute to redressing this lack of academic knowledge on the implementation of the ambitious ASEP reform. In my opinion, it is highly relevant and important to research how the implementation of the reform is perceived by teachers themselves, but also by national and local authorities and experts, and how teachers implement the new policies in their teachings. Thus, my research and thesis will be part of a larger debate on education reform in Latin America, to which it tries to contribute by focusing explicitly on teacher training – also called profesionalización or professionalisation – and the local perspective of teachers themselves.

1.3 Research question

This led to the following research question:

‘How do teachers-in-training in Cochabamba, Bolivia, experience their re-training in the ASEP curriculum, and how do they put it into practice? Do teachers feel that their agency is respected within the ASEP reform, and what kind of support do they receive?’
1.4 Outline of the study

After having shortly introduced the subject of this thesis, and having discussed the study background and relevance, I will turn to the theoretical framework used for this research. First, the theory of critical pedagogy will be discussed, where the most influential critical pedagogues – especially Freire - and their theories and thoughts will be elaborated on. Then, I will turn to the issue of structure and agency in relation to education. Here, specific attention will be paid to Vongalis’ definition of teachers’ agency along the three dimensions of obligations, authority and autonomy. Lastly, I will shortly touch upon the theories of liberal and critical multiculturalism. In chapter 3, Bolivia’s historical, social, political, regional and educational context will be discussed, to place the current education reform in a larger context. Thereafter, I will explain the research methodology and methods used for this research in chapter 4. My research relies on a constructivist ontology and a post-positivist epistemology. In terms of methods, this research relies on a mixed methods approach, as I used observations, interviews and surveys to collect my research data. In chapter 5, the first data-analysis chapter, the practical implications of the 2010 ASEP reform will be analysed and reflected on. That is, besides discussing the general build-up and structure of the PROFOCOM training programme, I will reflect on teachers’ perceptions on the programme, the implementation process, and the follow-up and pedagogical resources provided during and after the training programme. Here, I will also link my research findings to the theory of critical pedagogy. In chapter 6, the second data-analysis chapter, the ASEP reform will be analysed in relation to teachers’ agency. As already mentioned, I will analyse the data by using Vongalis’ theory of teachers’ agency. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I will give a short summary of the main findings and several policy and research recommendations, as well as a personal reflection.
2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Critical pedagogy

This research starts from the field of critical education studies, also very often referred to as critical pedagogy. Critical education studies or critical pedagogy has been heavily influenced by the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, but also by other important scholars such as John Dewey, Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux, on which I will elaborate below. Though, the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire is probably the most well known critical pedagogue. Freire has contributed a lot to the theory of critical pedagogy, the latter which could be placed within larger critical education studies. One of the most important and well known concepts of Freire’s theory is the concept of banking education. In his famous book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1970: 45-46) states: ‘Formal education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor ... This is the banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits.’ Freire rejects banking education, which is still being practiced in many schools worldwide, due to ‘the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system’ (Freire, 1970: 45-46). In this banking model of education, the teacher is seen as an instrument in the hands of the most powerful, teaching pre-established knowledge without having any agency to engage with the daily-life experiences of their pupils. Simply put, students sit behind their school desks, receiving, memorising and repeating the information provided by the teacher. Hence, banking education fails to take into account learners’ lives and their living cultures, which are seen as irrelevant (Luke, 2012: 5). Consequently, according to Freire, banking education plays a role in maintaining an oppressive social order, by transforming students into receiving objects (Blackburn, 2000: 6). Banking education tries to control thinking and action, inhibiting the creative power of students. Within this ‘oppressive’ education system, situated within larger oppressive structures in society, knowledge is defined in a top-down manner and transferred in a hierarchical way. Therefore, Freire (1970) considers banking education an instrument of oppression rather than an instrument of liberation.

Following Freire, the ultimate goal in the field of critical pedagogy is the liberation of education and education as liberation, which could be reached through the process of conscientisation. Conscientisation refers to ‘the process by which humans become more
aware of the sources of their oppression’ (Blackburn, 2000: 7). However, the oppressed may be unable to identify and reflect on these injustices, and consequently be unable to change their dismal situation. Therefore, education should start with a reflection and dialogue, not only on students’ problems, struggles and aspirations within the educational structure, but also on their life situations and the larger socio-economic, political, and cultural context outside the educational structure (Luke, 2012: 5). This is precisely what the Bolivian ASEP reform aims to achieve, by incorporating the living experiences and productive lives of pupils and their communities in the new curriculum. By reflecting upon these problems and phenomena, in- and outside the education institutes, students are able to understand larger (unjust) structures and mechanisms in society, which then could be changed. Hence, conscientisation is more than a process of reflection and ‘becoming aware’. The dynamic process of conscientisation is made up of two mutually enriching human capabilities, namely, reflection and action. In this dialectical process, reflection leads to action (to change unjust societal structures), and action leads to further reflection, which again leads to action, and so on. This reflection-action dynamic, also referred to as the fusion of theory and action or the cycle of Critical Praxis, is what Freire calls praxis. This praxis, which lays at the heart of Freire’s pedagogy, leads to increased liberation (in this case, of education) (Blackburn, 2000: 7; Gottesman, 2010: 381). Thus, the process of conscientisation makes students reflect on problems they encounter in- and outside educational structures, engaging with communal, local, regional and national problems, as these are all interrelated. In Freire’s theorising, educational structures are situated within larger (oppressive) societal structures. Therefore, he uses education to criticise larger societal problems. The process of conscientisation and ‘becoming aware’ of these problems results in an agenda for action and change to ‘liberate’ education and society at large. Furthermore, the process of conscientisation displays Freire’s highly critical stance towards structures embedded in the policies and practices in educational and societal institutions, and his support for and believe in the agency of teachers and students to take action to transform these structures. Hence, on the one hand, Freire seems to be very much agential in his approach, stimulating conscientisation and action, but, on the other hand, aims to transform oppressive structures as well through this agential process. Besides the liberation of education, Freire is committed to the larger goal of social transformation for a just society, free of any source of oppression (Rozas, 2007: 562).

The role of the educator is crucial for the ‘liberation of education’ in Freirean thought. Instead of imposing superior knowledge, to be memorized and repeated by students, an educator should engage in a (democratic) dialogue or creative exchange with his pupils to
construct knowledge. This dialogue between educator and student should be authentic and creative. Further, an educator should respect the knowledge of his pupils as valuable as his own, as different knowledges have been created or constructed within different social contexts. In Bolivia, this critical approach to knowledge is reflected in the ASEP reform law, by incorporating different indigenous knowledges and worldviews in the new curriculum. Hence, in the ‘new way’ of teaching, it is vital that all these socially constructed knowledges are respected as being valuable. In addition, educators should create a space in which students educate themselves and each other. So, dialogue is not limited to educator and participant, but dialogue also takes place between participants, in order to construct, value and critically approach different knowledges (Blackburn, 2000: 8). In short, the role of the educator as facilitator or constructor in dialogical education is very important. Gottesman (2010: 381) puts it as follows: ‘The pedagogy of the oppressed is thus a dialogue between the oppressed and those in solidarity with the oppressed and is meant to help the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation.’ Hence, dialogue between teachers and students is crucial for gaining knowledge about situations that are considered oppressive, and, consequently, acting against these problems or situations. However, this dialogue requires a ‘fundamental revolution in thinking’, as traditional teacher-student roles are being transformed (Blackburn, 2000: 8). This alternative form of education has been called popular education, popular meaning ‘of the people’. Popular education in Latin America is mostly identified with ‘doing’ education, in which students actively participate in discussions and construct knowledge to make education dialogical, instead of passively listening to lecturers (Kane, 2001: 57).

Besides Freire, other influential critical pedagogues include John Dewey, Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux, the latter two who built on Freire’s work. Already in 1897, the American reform pedagogue John Dewey wrote an article on his ‘pedagogic creed’. In this article, he argues that education should be a process from within, taking into account the child’s own instincts and activities. His pedagogy is often referred to as the von Kinder aus school of pedagogy (Dewey, 1897). A century later, Peter McLaren (1998: 37), a Canadian critical pedagogue, claims that the classroom is a place where certain dominant ideologies and visions of the past and present are created, and where power and privilege flourish. In the classroom, people struggle every day to create ‘thoroughly and fantastically narrativised cultural and social sites’ (McLaren, 1998: 37). Hence, he argues that critical education scholars need to continually interrogate the dominant ideologies and power relations present. According to McLaren, the most important questions to ask teachers are whose stories are
being told and heard; who has permission to interpret these stories; whose stories count; and how can we change these stories? Finally, the American critical pedagogue Henry Giroux is, just like Freire, committed to educational change, and resembles Freire in criticising current structures - with a strong focus on neoliberal market-based educational policies - and supporting the agency of teachers and students. Giroux (2002: 49) refers to teachers as ‘transformatory intellectuals’, and states that ‘the teachers’ task is not to mold students but to encourage human agency’. The work of Giroux will be further elaborated on below.

To conclude, all the above mentioned critical education theorists critically approach educational and societal structures that reproduce existing power relations, and offer alternative perspectives on how day-to-day classroom and teaching practices can be approached differently, to take into account how local social and cultural problems are related to broader relations of domination. Critical education theorists are very critical of the mainstream (neo)liberal education system, and propose alternatives to this system such as critical education, in which the agency of teachers and students is more fully recognised. However, despite their efforts to reform the dominant liberal education system and the alternatives being offered, critical education theorists are often criticised for being largely utopian (Cho, 2013). Further, critical education studies strongly challenge the globalisation of capitalism – which has led to growing economic insecurity and unemployment - and the adverse effects on education (McLaren, 2001: 128). Here, critical education studies can be seen as part of the larger critical school of counter- or post-neoliberalism, and the associated dependencia and alternative development movements.¹ According to Nederveen Pieterse (1998: 344), ‘alternative development has been concerned with introducing alternative practices and redefining the goals of development’. Alternative practices include among others participatory research techniques, in which Freire’s methodology has played an important role. I will now turn to the two most discussed concepts in explaining social and political phenomena, including education as we have seen above, namely, the concepts of structure and agency.

¹ One of the most important dependency scholars, Andre Gunder Frank, argued that exploitative trade relations between modern metropoles in the West and traditional satellite countries in Latin America caused underdevelopment within the world capitalist system (Frank, 1969: 162). Alternative development also takes up this critique of mainstream development.
2.2 Structure versus Agency in education

2.2.1 Structure versus Agency

In the previous section, we have seen that critical pedagogues are in general fairly critical towards structures and advocate a more agency-oriented approach. Following Hay (2002), processes can be accounted for in a more structural or agential way. How much attention is paid to either structure or agency depends on the issue, event or sector at hand. In general, the education sector, and the school as an institution, are accounted for in more structural terms. In this view, education is seen as part of the socio-economic and political context which is influenced by external and internal power structures, and that effects the conditions under which teachers teach the curriculum to their students.

The dualism between structure and agency, discussed and debated for decades in academia, seems to be a strong and longstanding dichotomy in explaining social and political phenomena. According to Hay (2002: 94-95), structure refers to the context or setting in which certain social, political or economic events occur. In addition, structure also refers to the ordered nature of the (political) context. However, in the social sciences, explaining events by referring solely to overarching structures is not taken for granted. Especially since the 1980s, the role of social actors is taken into account. This is where the concept of agency comes in, referring to action or (political) conduct. Hay (2002: 94) defines agency as ‘the ability or capacity of an actor to act consciously and, in so doing, to attempt to realise his or her intentions’. His definition even goes beyond mere action or conduct, as agency also corresponds to a sense of free will and choice: that is, the actor is able to choose another course of action after deliberate consideration.

However, according to Hay, the concepts of structure and agency, or context and conduct, need not necessarily be thought of as oppositional. Following this thought, structure and agency are related and intertwined, both influencing each other. Therefore, Hay criticises both the structuralist and intentionalist or voluntarist theoretical positions, for emphasising either too much structure or too much agency. Here, I would like to refer back to Freire, who is often considered to be positioned on the intentionalist or voluntarist side, due to his support for and believe in the agency of teachers and students. However, at the same time, Freire is committed to transform perceived structures of oppression by making use of this agency and action. Hence, one could conclude that Freire takes into account the interplay between
structure and agency. Hay articulates this interrelationship of structure and agency by stating that:

‘Agents are situated within a structured context which presents an uneven distribution of opportunities and constraints to them. Actors influence the development of that context over time through the consequences of their actions. Yet, at any given time, the ability of actors to realise their intentions is set by the context itself’ (Hay, 2002: 116-117).

Hence, although actors are in all cases constrained by a structured context, at the same time they can influence and shape that particular context. The strategic-relational approach endorses overcoming the dualism between structure and agency, by arguing that the distinction between structure and agency is purely analytical. Furthermore, ‘neither agents nor structures are real, since neither has an existence in isolation from the other – their existence is relational and dialectical’ (Hay, 2002: 127). Therefore, the strategic-relational approach makes a distinction between strategic action and the strategically selective context, transcending the abstract distinction between structure and agency (Hay, 2002: 126-127). For the purposes of this thesis, I will elaborate below on the relation between structure and agency, particularly in the education sector. In the next section, we will see that the Bolivian ASEP education reform aims to change the conditions under which teachers work and which provides more space for the agential aspects of education, by giving teachers a large role to play in the latest education reform.

2.2.2 Agency in education

Evo Morales, the current president of Bolivia, defines Bolivian teachers as the ‘soldiers of change’ (soldados de la liberación), thereby emphasising the importance of the agency of teachers in Bolivia’s new education reform (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 35; Noticias de Bolivia, n.d.). Hence, teachers are seen as important actors for (larger societal) change in Bolivia nowadays. This corresponds to the agenda for action and change to ‘liberate’ education put forward by Freire and other critical pedagogues, as well as Freire’s larger goal of social transformation for a just society (Freire, 1970; Rozas, 2007: 562). Hence, the role of teachers and their agency is pivotal in Bolivia’s ASEP reform. This is closely related to Giroux’ definition of teachers as ‘transformative intellectuals’, critically reflecting on curricula and implementation in the classroom, and educating students into active and thoughtful citizens (Giroux, 2002: 47). However, Giroux (2002) argues that there is a ‘crisis in education’ as
teachers nowadays merely transfer knowledge and implement predetermined curricula, limiting their role as transformative intellectuals. Although Bolivia strives to overcome this crisis in education through the transformation of the educational system, the question remains whether the knowledge and experience of teachers is fully recognized in the new way of teaching.

Rosa María Torres, an Ecuadorian educationalist (and former Minister of Education) who worked together with Freire, also argues that teachers should be key actors in educational change, and defines teachers as agents of change. Torres (2000: 255) claims that most reform proposals ignore one important condition for educational change: namely, the necessity of working with teachers instead of against them, accepting them as agents of reform and subjects of change. Furthermore, traditional reform considers teachers as mere reform implementers, not taking into account teachers’ own viewpoints and wishes. Therefore, Torres argues that participation, consultation and social dialogue are essential ingredients to involve teachers in the carrying out of educational reform (Torres, 2000: 257-267). Besides teachers as important actors for change, students also have a major role to play in reforming schooling according to Sleeter. Sleeter (2011: 341) argues that ‘a co-construction model of teacher professional development that repositions teachers as learners, and minoritised students as teachers, would seek to reconstruct this power imbalance, placing students as the ‘experts’ who know best what works for them’. This is very much in line with the alternative model for education as proposed by critical pedagogy.

Another scholar discussing the interplay between structure and agency within globalised education systems is the Australian researcher Athena Vongalis-Macrow. Vongalis analyses the agency of teachers in relation to educational change in the era of globalisation. From the 1960s onwards, educational thinking became influenced by the Human Capital theory (Becker, 1993), in which education was seen as an investment that could stimulate economic growth. This has greatly influenced educational policies through the conditionalities and neoliberal policies propagated worldwide by the World Bank; education systems needed to be organised efficiently, focusing on achievements and economic indicators (Vongalis, 2007: 429-430). As regards teachers, they have been treated ‘like a quality product that can be nudged into shape to best fit what schools need in order to meet the demands of future employment and economic imperatives’ (Ibid., 430). However, in order to understand teachers’ transformation in response to global educational changes, teachers

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2 Becker (1993) argued that investments in the education and training of individual persons correspond to the investments of businesses in their equipment.
need to be seen as ‘critical, complex and troublesome agents’ according to Vongalis (Ibid.). Hence, she operationalises the concept of agency according to three components, namely, obligations, authority, and autonomy, thereby giving greater multiplicity and dimension to the concept of agency. For my research, I use Vongalis’ definition of teachers’ agency along the three dimensions of obligations, authority and autonomy.

Teachers’ obligations, such as regulatory and legal constructs, define the ‘boundaries and limitations to their positions’ (Ibid., 431). In today’s neoliberal world, teachers’ obligations are two-fold: obligations to their school and to student achievement. In the global educational context, teachers’ responsibilities are being controlled ever more by government regulations, quality assurance and accountability measures and other market mechanisms, to ensure that teachers deliver a ‘product’ to their students for improving their performance. These business like rules and regulations and control mechanisms increasingly shape teachers’ work, diminishing the agency of teachers. This is properly articulated by Vongalis, who states that ‘the proliferation of rules and regulations suggest a commodification of teachers’ agency, which becomes a by-product in the input-output organisational model’ (Ibid., 432). Thus, Vongalis criticises neoliberal education structures and the resulting business like working environment of teachers. On a national level, in relation to Bolivia’s education reform, the major role of the Ministry of Education in facilitating the trainings needs to be taken into account in terms of obligations.

Teachers’ authority stems from the ability ‘to acquire and teach knowledge, this exchange ensuring that teachers are critical agents in the education system’ (Ibid., 433). In this sense, teachers are defined as ‘knowledge specialists’. Though, Vongalis argues that teachers are currently not more than messengers of the system; their authority only being recognised in terms of teaching skills and student learning outcomes. Furthermore, teachers’ authority not only comes from providing information, but should also endorse critical, conscious-raising learning. Related to this is teachers’ authority which ‘should be based on the capacity to represent different views of education and knowledge’ (Ibid.), which in turn is closely related to the theory of critical pedagogy and Bolivia’s ASEP reform.

Lastly, teachers’ autonomy relates to the ‘capacity held by teachers to determine and pursue their own interests and make effective their demands’ (Ibid., 434). Related to this aspect is the ability of teachers to decide on the curriculum, and to make well-considered choices regarding this curriculum. In addition to teachers’ autonomy in an individualistic sense, Vongalis refers as well to the collective agency of teachers through the demands of teacher unions. She points out the growing criticism towards these centralised professional
structures, arguing that the power of these organisations impedes reform and teacher autonomy (Ibid., 434-435). The major influence of teacher unions in making demands is reflected in Bolivia’s education sector as well. To conclude, in this thesis, I examine in how far each of these three dimensions is represented in teachers’ agency according to the teachers themselves, and in how far they are really able to act as the conscious actors of change in the new education reform.

2.3 Liberal and Critical Multiculturalism

Related to the critical stance of critical pedagogues and scholars towards neoliberalism, is the theory of critical multiculturalism. In their book on critical multiculturalism, May and Sleeter (2010) make a distinction between liberal and critical multiculturalism. Liberal – or technical – multiculturalism takes on a problem-solving approach and focuses predominantly on improving educational results and ‘getting along better’, through respect for and recognition of ethnic and cultural differences (May and Sleeter, 2010: 4). However, May and Sleeter argue that liberal multiculturalism is unable to tackle structural inequalities and unequal power relations. Hence, May and Sleeter put forward the concept of critical multiculturalism, which aims for ‘structural analysis of unequal power relationships’ and identifying their underpinnings. Further, critical multiculturalism strives to bring about structural change and transformation in society (May and Sleeter, 2010: 10). The two approaches of liberal and critical multiculturalism could be related to the 1994 and 2010 education reforms in Bolivia. Whereas the 1994 reform was a neoliberal or technical reform, focusing on better educational results and ‘getting along better’ between the different groups in Bolivian society, the 2010 reform could be considered a critical multicultural reform, striving for structural transformation of society by identifying the underlying reasons for the structural inequalities.
3. The Bolivian context

3.1 Historical, social and political context

Bolivia, a mountainous country located geographically in the centre of South America, is among the countries which fell under Spanish colonial rule in the colonial period from the 1500s to the mid-1800s. Already in 1524, the Spanish conquistadors took control of the Andean region of Bolivia, which was called ‘Upper Peru’ at that time. By the late 16th century, silver became a highly important source of revenue for the Spanish empire. During this time, large amounts of natural resources were channelled to Spain, which enriched itself at the expense of Bolivia. The Spanish colonisers needed a large labour force to work in the silver mines, for which the native population was being deployed. The natives worked under brutal, slavery conditions, installed by the Spanish colonisers. Over time, the sentiment against Spanish colonial rule grew larger and larger among Bolivia’s native population. In 1809, the struggle for independence started with a revolution in Sucre. Finally, after 16 years of conflict and war, the Bolivian Republic (República Bolívar – named after Simón Bolívar) is proclaimed an independent state on the 6th of August 1825 (History World, 2004).

Although colonialism and slavery were abolished, and despite 188 years of independence, the Spanish conquest has left large scars on Bolivia’s present. Discrimination and marginalisation are on the order of the day in present-day Bolivia, especially regards indigenous people, who have always been and remain highly marginalised. Historically, Bolivia has been inhabited by a multitude of 37 different indigenous groups – accounting for approximately 70% of Bolivia’s population -, the largest groups being the Quechua, Aymara and Guaraní indigenous groups. These indigenous groups have always been victim of social, political, economic, and educational exclusion. This has resulted in a highly unequal society and unequal distribution of income: Bolivia’s income Gini coefficient was equal to 56.33 in 2008, which indicates a highly uneven distribution of income (UNDP, 2012). Furthermore, with a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.675, Bolivia ranks 108 out of 187 countries in the 2012 Human Development Report, which places the country in the medium

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3 The Gini coefficient indicates ‘the deviation of the distribution of income (or consumption) among individuals or households within a country from a perfectly equal distribution’. A Gini coefficient of zero represents absolute equality in terms of the distribution of income within a country, a Gini coefficient of hundred indicates absolute inequality (UNDP, 2012).
human development category.\textsuperscript{4} When inequality is taken into account in this HDI value, this value turns out to be even lower (UNDP, 2013).\textsuperscript{5} This loss due to inequality in health, education and income is exceptionally high in comparison with other Latin American counties, which affirms the very high inequality within Bolivian society: not only in terms of income inequality but also in terms of ethnic inequality. Consequently, this large inequality and the exclusion of \textit{indígenas} in Bolivian society has always caused a high incidence of struggles and tensions (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 71-74).

The societal exclusion and inferior treatment of indigenous groups has not only caused a very large income gap between rich and poor, as explained above, it has also caused poorer educational results among indigenous groups (Talavera, 2009). Further, the divide between urban and rural areas in Bolivia is also notable in this regard. This urban-rural divide is among the 3 categorisations made within my research (which will be explained below), as it is an important divide within the Bolivian context. Generally, the numerous indigenous peoples inhabit remote and less developed rural areas in the high- and lowlands of Bolivia. Furthermore, education had been organised separately in urban and rural areas in the 1955 education reform (\textit{Código}). Despite its aim to create a single national identity, the reform endorsed two parallel education systems, striving for different urban and rural goals, thereby reflecting the urban-rural divide (Taylor, 2004: 5-6).

Besides Bolivia’s societal struggles, the country has struggled through periods of political - and economic - instability as well. Taken into account Bolivia’s strong civil society organisations - since the 1950s onwards – in combination with the societal, political and economic instability, one could well understand the high amount of social upheavals in the streets of Bolivia. After long periods of military dictatorships from 1964–1966 and 1970–1982 (Gunson, 2002), Bolivia is a democratic republic nowadays. In addition to its political profile, Bolivia takes a highly critical and opposing stance towards neoliberalism. This is clearly displayed in the counter/post-neoliberal stance and policies adopted by the current president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, and his MAS party. With the installation of Morales in 2006, Bolivia embarked on an ambitious change in politics and society at large. In the same year, Morales appointed a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. In the process of re-writing the constitution, multifarious civil society organisations were involved, which

\textsuperscript{4} The HDI has been established to go beyond conventional poverty measures based on income. The HDI aims for a broader definition of well-being, based on the ‘three basic dimensions of human development: health, education and income’ (UNDP, 2012).

\textsuperscript{5} The Inequality Adjusted HDI (IHDI) value falls to 0.444, which indicates a loss of 34.2\% compared to the HDI value of 0.675 (UNDP, 2013).
made it a fairly democratic process, though highly controversial due to major opposition from the opposition parties (Crabtree, 2007). According to Crabtree (2007: 3), a long-term objective of the new constitution has been to ‘increase direct democracy and reduce the barriers to participation for Bolivia’s indigenous peoples and strengthen their rights’. Bolivia’s redrafted constitution came into effect in February 2009. Besides redrafting the constitution, Morales and his Minister of Education also established a new education reform law, in a consultative process, in 2010. In this process, more than 35 actors have been involved, including indigenous organisations and teacher unions. Lopes Cardozo (2011: 103) even states that the initial proposal for the law was discussed with ‘332 local civil society institutions’. Hence, with this radical change in politics, Morales’ government aims to bring about larger societal change by advancing the interests of the hitherto excluded indigenous groups. It is strongly believed that education plays a major role in achieving this ambitious ‘politics of change’. After elaborating on the regional context of Cochabamba, Bolivia’s new education reform law will be further explored.

3.2 Regional context: Cochabamba

My research was conducted in the city of Cochabamba, a large city located in Central Bolivia, and capital of the eponymous Cochabamba Department (see figure 1). With an urban population of approximately 700,000 inhabitants in 2010, it is Bolivia’s third largest city (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2013). Due to its location between the highlands of La Paz, inhabited by a great many indígenas, and the lowlands of Santa Cruz, with its major diversity in terms of indigenous groups, Cochabamba has a unique position within Bolivia as a sort of ‘middle region’ surrounded by mountains. A large majority of the
native inhabitants of the city are Quechua, and, consequently, speak Quechua and/or Spanish (a smaller group of the Cochabambinos is Aymara) (PIEB, 2005). Among the participants in my survey, 97% speak Spanish, 79% Quechua and 6% Aymara. Further, due to its climate, Cochabamba is often called the ‘City of Eternal Spring’ (Cavalleri, 2013). As a result of the spring-like climate throughout the year, Cochabamba is often referred to as the granary of Bolivia, which allows for extensive agricultural activities. Besides the large agricultural sector in Cochabamba, the city is also known to be an industrial and economic hub. However, this does not apply to the entire city, as there exists a considerable polarisation between the Northern and Southern parts of the city (PIEB, 2005). The Northern part is considered the residential zone of Cochabamba, where the richer part of the population resides. This is clearly evident from the more luxurious houses, the high amount of social services provided, and the taxi’s driving around looking for customers. The transition between the two areas is painfully visible once you take a bus to the poorer part of the city and enter the popular neighbourhoods in the Southern area. You can clearly see the differences in terms of wealth, especially regards housing quality, quality of school buildings and habitat. These peripheral areas are heavily affected by rural-urban migration of farmers and other lower income sectors, who ‘illegally’ settled here (PIEB, 2005). Hence, polarisation and social inequality are highly visible within Cochabamba, as the contradiction between North and South is large. The fight against inequality and discrimination was among the factors causing the outbreak of the ‘Water War’ in Cochabamba in 2000. In these uprisings and conflicts, one of the main causes constituted the rapid expansion of Cochabamba’s urban population in combination with relative scarcity of water and privatisation of the water sector, which in turn was part of neoliberal privatisation policies (Assies, 2003: 18-19). Hence, the Water War in Cochabamba took place in the larger fight against neoliberal policies and struggles over natural resources, including water and gas (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 64).
3.3 Educational context

3.3.1 Education reform of 1994 – Law 1565

Different Bolivian governments have tried to reform the education sector and improve the educational results long before 2010. Especially during the 1950s, the nationalist government tried to improve Bolivia’s education sector. However, during the dictatorships from 1964–1966 and 1970–1982 (Gunson, 2002), these efforts were annulled as education was highly neglected. After the dictatorships, with the introduction of the neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in 1986 – financed by the World Bank – the education sector was further dismantled. The SAPs were disastrous for the education system as they sought to decentralise the costs of education and, due to inflation, the real teacher salaries dropped dramatically (Talavera, 2009). The follow-up 1994 Education Reform Law (or Law 1565) was also financed by the World Bank. The 1994 reform structurally reformed the education sector as it aimed for increased coverage, higher equity and improved quality of education, among others by means of testing. Hence, the 1994 reform could be considered a neoliberal or
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technical reform, which falls within the theory of liberal multiculturalism put forward by May and Sleeter (2010). However, the reform has received a lot of critique and was considered by the teacher unions as neoliberal and imposed from outside due to the role of the World Bank and the exclusion of Bolivian teachers (Contreras and Talavera, 2003: 17-18).

3.3.2 Education reform of 2010 – ASEP

After four years of preparations and discussion, the new education reform law, called the Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez (ASEP) law, was approved in December 2010. With this law, Morales and his MAS party aim to radically transform Bolivia’s education sector and to enhance Bolivia’s poor educational results (especially among the indigenous) from the past. Article 35 IV of the official law states that the ASEP law consists of four general principles or objectives: (1) decolonial, (2) intra- and intercultural along with plurilingual, (3) productive and (4) communitarian education (Ministerio de Educación, 2010). Regards the first objective, Morales’ decolonisation project in education strongly questions ‘Western’ knowledge, without discarding it altogether. Hence, by decolonising the education system, the curriculum should open up for other knowledges, like indigenous knowledge and technology, reviving indigenous know-how and cultural practices (Howard, 2009: 590). This fits within the broader philosophical foundation of ‘living well’ or Vivir Bien, which relates to such issues as acknowledgement of cultural and linguistic diversity, economic redistribution and political representation. ‘Living well’ is specifically opposed to the Western notion of ‘living better’ at the expense of others, instead of all living well (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 26). The second objective, intra- and intercultural along with plurilingual education, is an important spearhead in the new education law. Intracultural education strives to incorporate indigenous knowledges and worldviews in the curriculum, strengthening solidarity and each culture’s own identity within the country. Intercultural education focuses on ‘interaction between all cultures in Bolivia and with the rest of the world’. Plurilingual education endorses the use of indigenous and foreign languages in education (Ministerio de Educación, 2010: art. 6; cited in Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 105-106). The third objective of productive education aims to link education to local productive and economic activities in Bolivian society. Productive education focuses very much on vocational development to enhance job opportunities and the ‘production of knowledge’ (Ministerio de Educación, 2010: art. 35; cited in Lopes Cardozo, 2011). The final objective of the ASEP law, communitarian education, supports a community based education system.
In a way, the 2010 ASEP reform was designed as a response to the widely critiqued 1994 reform, which makes it highly special and unique. The different approach taken is for example visible in the employment of teacher trainers for the trainings: whereas, during the 1994 reform, the Ministry of Education only worked with traditional teacher trainers, connected to the Ministry, more practical people such as headmasters are employed as teacher trainers in the 2010 reform, which is a highly interesting development. Another notable difference between the two reform laws comprises the approach to language: whereas the 1994 reform was bilingual in scope (Contreras and Talavera, 2003), the 2010 reform endorses plurilingual education, on which I will elaborate later on in this thesis. The 2010 reform in itself is unique because it demands a radical change of mind of everyone involved in the reform, which makes it difficult to put into practice. This is particularly true for teachers, who are to a great extent responsible for the implementation of the reform in the classroom.
4. Research methodology and methods

4.1 Research methodology

My research could be positioned within a constructivist ontology, which questions whether there exists any ‘truth’ to be discovered and claims that all knowledge is relative and constructed (Sumner and Tribe, 2008: 58). Constructivism, or social constructivism, pays attention to both structure and agency, arguing that they mutually constitute one another (Viotti and Kauppi, 2010: 285; Hay, 2002). By emphasising the reciprocal relation between structure and agency, social constructivists acknowledge that ‘while human beings are always situated in particular contexts which inform their actions, they also reproduce, or construct, their ‘world’ through their actions’ (Steans et al., 2010: 183). Hence, constructivists ‘do not accept any social features of life as given’ (Ibid.). The focus on a constructivist ontology in my research is underpinned by the pivotal role of the perceptions of teachers on their re-training and the larger Bolivian socio-economic and political structure in which the trainings are embedded. Teachers’ perceptions are highly divided within Bolivia, and are constantly influenced by a multitude of different social, economic, and most importantly, political factors, especially within the process of change.

Following from this, the epistemological stance adopted in this thesis is post-positivist, and, more specifically, relies on a critical realist perspective. Realism occupies the middle ground between the two opposing perspectives of Positivism and Relativism. Realism asserts that there is a ‘physical reality which exists independently of the researcher’, though this reality can only be described by the dependent observer or researcher (Sumner and Tribe, 2008: 58-63). Thus, perceptions of this reality are subjective, therefore, ‘the’ truth about reality cannot be established. Following from this, an observation or process can be accounted for in more or less structural or agential terms, depending on the perspective taken (Hay, 2002: 95). Hence, this thesis will assess in how far the PROFOCOM training process can be explained from a structural and agential point of view, taking into account the larger socio-economic and political structure and the perceptions of the different actors, as already mentioned before.

As regards the theory adopted in this research, critical education studies, this theory falls within the broader strand of Critical Theory. Critical theorists believe that ‘theory is always for someone, or at least for some purpose, and so postulates a linkage between
As already explained in the former chapter, Critical Theory takes a critical stance towards mainstream (education) theories and practices, stressing the ever present issues of power and domination, which is also clear from the aforementioned quote.

Quality checks, which indicate ‘good’ research, are highly dependent on the ontological and epistemological assumptions made by the researcher. As I adopt a post-positivist epistemology, I rely on the post-positivist indicators of authenticity and transferability as identified by O’Leary (2004: 58). The indicator of authenticity acknowledges multiple existing truths, and ensures that the conclusions derived from these truths are credible and trustworthy. In relation to my research, these multiple existing truths relate to the range of different opinions and perceptions among teachers and the other research groups. These opinions and perceptions are widely diverse within different contexts in Bolivia, and, therefore, it is difficult to generalize my findings to the larger national context. However, although it is not possible to present the opinion of ‘the’ Bolivian teacher on the latest developments in the education sector, it is possible to apply some lessons learned to the Cochabamba Department, where the research was conducted, which O’Leary refers to as transferability (Ibid., 62-63). Lastly, it is important to recognize and critically reflect on my own subjective positionality within the research, which I will discuss at a later stage. This refers among others to the acknowledgement of my own opinion on the educational reforms and the teacher trainings.

As already mentioned in the introduction, this thesis aims to answer the following research question:

‘How do teachers-in-training in Cochabamba, Bolivia, experience their re-training in the ASEP curriculum, and how do they put it into practice? Do teachers feel that their agency is respected within the ASEP reform, and what kind of support do they receive?’

In order to answer the main research question, the following subquestions will be discussed in this thesis:

1. What are the main aspects and aims of the 2010 ASEP reform?
2. What is the build-up, structure and content of the PROFOCOM trainings?
3. How do teachers-in-training perceive the ASEP reform, the new curriculum and the trainings?
4. How do teachers-in-training implement the lessons learned during the PROFOCOM trainings in their teachings?
5. In how far is the agency of Bolivian teachers part of the ASEP reform and the new way of teaching, and how does it affect their obligations, authority and autonomy?

6. In what way are teachers-in-training supported with additional support and educational resources and how do they use these in their teachings?

Finally, the conceptual framework below (see figure 2) shows the main components of my research. My research, which focuses on the PROFOCOM teacher training programme, is situated in the larger social and political context of Bolivia and the Cochabamba Department. Moreover, the training programme supports the implementation of the ASEP education law, as illustrated by the outer edge of the conceptual framework. This thesis elaborates on specific aspects of the training programme, namely: the perception of teachers-in-training and other educational actors of the trainings; the implementation of the lessons learned during the trainings in the classroom; and the agency of teachers (consisting of teachers’ obligations, authority and autonomy) within the trainings and the ASEP law. The right-hand column shows that these aspects will be discussed at 3 different levels: policy, institutional, and classroom level. The policy level represents the ASEP law, designed by the Ministry of Education (which provides the resources needed for the trainings) and the CEPOs. The institutional level represents the teacher trainers who impart the trainings and provide the teachers-in-training with in-service support. Lastly, this thesis discusses how the teachers-in-training implement the new curriculum at classroom level.
Figure 2 - The conceptual framework.
4.2 Research methods and techniques

4.2.1 Mixed methods approach
The methods applied in a research are most often closely related to the ontological and epistemological assumptions made by the researcher. During my research, I used a mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. I believe that the mixed methods approach enables me to represent the most complete and holistic picture of teachers’ perceptions and classroom practices. Using quantitative methods, in this case a survey, in addition to qualitative methods, namely interviews and observations, allowed me to ask for measurable data which could be processed in SPSS, for example the number of years of work experience as a teacher. Furthermore, a mixed methods approach also enabled me to compare the answers given by the teachers, that is to say, whether they gave the same answers in the interview as in the survey and why the answers would differ. This is often referred to as the principle of triangulation, which is frequently used as a verification procedure or as a technique to control the validity or reliability of a research (Boer, de, 2006: 8).

As regards the integration of the research findings in my research, Erzberger and Kelle (2003: 457-488) distinguish three different types for integrating the results, namely convergence, complementarity and divergence. Convergence means that the qualitative and quantitative results converge or coincide; the results lead to the same conclusions. Complementarity refers to the fact that the qualitative and quantitative results relate to different aspects, but are nevertheless complementary to each other. Finally, divergence means that the results diverge or differ, and consequently, do not confirm each other. Which one of the abovementioned integration types applies to this research will be analysed in the empirical chapters.

4.2.2 Sampling method
The main research group in this thesis are primary and secondary school teachers participating in the PROFOCOM trainings (teachers-in-training). Hence, from this population, a smaller survey sample needed to be drawn. The teachers were being reached by employing non-probability sampling, that is, respondents did not have an equal chance to be part of the survey. I mostly relied on purposive sampling (McGuirk and O’Neill, 2010: 202-205), as the sample was selected on the basis of the common characteristic of following trainings at
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particular teacher training institutes in Cochabamba and Paracaya. I conducted surveys (and observations) at two Teacher Training Colleges, also called Escuelas Superiores de Formación de Maestros or Normales. More specifically, my surveys were conducted at the Normal ‘Simón Rodríguez’ (Normal 1) in Cochabamba, and the Normal ‘Manuel Ascencio Villarroel’ (Normal 2) in Paracaya (see figure 3). I gained access to teacher trainings at these training institutes by getting in contact with the persons in charge of the trainings at the particular institutes. Upon arrival at these Normales, I randomly selected a group of teachers or classroom to attend during that particular training day. This random selection allowed me to attend trainings with different groups of teachers, who filled in my survey as well, and gave me the opportunity to make connections with a larger amount of teachers and teacher trainers.

As regarding the interviews, 25 in total, 11 interviews were conducted with urban teachers and 7 with rural teachers, to ensure a representative sample of the teacher population in Cochabamba. In terms of school level, I focused on primary and secondary schools. The schools were selected by looking at the names of schools which were frequently mentioned in the surveys. By doing so, I was certain that at least part of the teachers at this particular school

6 My research is focused on formal education instead of alternative education, among others because of the pivotal role and criticising of formal education in Freire’s theory.
participated in the PROFOCOM trainings and was already familiar with my research. Regards the selection of teachers for the interviews, they were again selected by employing non-probability sampling. The teachers at the different schools were selected on the basis of, first, participating in the PROFOCOM programme, and second, although not in all cases, having filled in the survey during one of the trainings. In approximately half of the cases (9 teachers), teachers who fulfilled these requirements were selected by the headmaster of that particular school. The fact that I was introduced during the teacher trainings and that I had seen most of the teachers during the trainings, really helped in terms of their willingness to conduct an interview and in terms of familiarising the teachers with my research. In addition, in the selection of teachers for the interviews, I have also taken into account gender and ethnic/socio-economic background to ensure a representative sample. As the majority of teachers attending the trainings were female, and, consequently, the majority of the surveys were filled in by women, namely 65%, I tried to balance this out in the interviews by including a more or less even number of men and women. Nevertheless, I only managed to interview 6 male teachers against 13 female teachers.

4.2.3 Interviews

The most important qualitative method used during my fieldwork is semi-structured interviewing, as an important part of my research comprises the perceptions of teachers-in-training, teacher trainers, headmasters and experts on the ASEP reform and the trainings. I believe that semi-structured interviewing is the most suitable method for capturing the perceptions of local actors in the best possible way. In total, I conducted 25 interviews: 18 interviews with 19 teachers-in-training; 5 interviews with teacher trainers/headmasters; and 2 interviews with 5 experts. By conducting in-depth interviews, I endeavoured to understand the unique perspective of each interviewee, and to understand the local point of view. The semi-structured style of interviewing allowed me to adapt the interview questions to the particular context of the conversation and the interviewee present. Although the interview questions were adapted a bit during the research process, and the order of questions differed from time to time, the content discussed with each interviewee remained more or less the same. During the analysis of the interviews, different weight has been given to the perceptions and experiences of the various research groups, as they supposedly have different knowledges on different subjects. Teacher trainers, and, above all, education experts, are supposedly more

7 Interview no. 18 (15-08-2013) was conducted with 2 rural, female teachers.
knowledgeable and informed about the national ASEP reform law and the PROFOCOM programme. In turn, headmasters and teachers-in-training are more knowledgeable about the particular school environment and the local context in which the school is located.

In practical terms, the interviews with teachers-in-training and headmasters most often took place at primary and secondary schools (in some cases under class time). The teachers were in most cases interviewed in their classroom, while the headmasters (and experts) were interviewed in their office. Further, I tried to ask the interview questions as simple as possible, as Spanish is a foreign language for me and, furthermore, I wanted the respondents to feel comfortable during the interviews. The fact that Spanish is not my native language led to another important decision, namely, to have my interviews transcribed by a Bolivian graduate of the Universidad Católica Boliviana and the Universidad Mayor de San Simón in Cochabamba. This graduate has applied for a job as teacher herself and aims to participate in the PROFOCOM programme in the near future. Consequently, she found it very interesting and instructive to learn more about the programme and its implementation/evaluation. Taking into account these characteristics, I am certain that I made a good choice to let this particular person transcribe my interviews. Subsequently, I coded the Spanish interview transcriptions in English by using the qualitative software programme Atlas.ti, and, thereafter, I analysed my qualitative data with Atlas.ti.

4.2.4 Surveys

The second method used was a survey among 118 teachers-in-training and 3 headmasters. Hence, in total, I conducted 121 surveys, 62 at Normal 1 in the city of Cochabamba and 59 at Normal 2 in the small village of Paracaya. The surveys were conducted during the teacher trainings, among four different groups of teachers-in-training. The urban surveys were filled in during the seventh module (theme: production of educational materials) of the teacher training course, the rural surveys during the eighth module (theme: knowledge production). The majority of the 19 teachers interviewed filled in the survey before conducting the in-depth interview, which presumably gave them a better understanding what the research was about. In addition, as already explained, this allowed me to elaborate on and compare the answers given in the survey during the interview, as a form of triangulation. Hence, I believe that the two methods of interviewing and conducting surveys, which fall within different qualitative and quantitative approaches respectively, complement each other very well.
The survey mostly covered measurable data/questions, which can be compared between different groups of respondents in SPSS. For most of the questions I used a *Likert scale*, in which the level of agreement or disagreement was measured. I used 5 ordered response levels, namely: 1. strongly agree; 2. agree; 3. neither agree nor disagree; 4. disagree; and 5. strongly disagree.\(^8\) However, during the SPSS analyses, the number of respondents within each category turned out to be too small to conduct valid SPSS analyses. Therefore, I decided to merge the 5 categories into 3: 1. agree; 2. neither agree nor disagree; and 3. disagree.\(^9\) By doing so, the most ‘extreme’ and least mentioned answers - strongly agree/disagree - were merged into the consecutive categories *agree* and *disagree*, which allowed me to conduct valid SPSS analyses. Furthermore, I subdivided the variable ‘age’ into 3 categories in SPSS: young \((\leq 35)\); middle-aged \((35 < x \leq 50)\); and old \((> 50)\). These age categories are related to the professional working lives of Bolivian teachers. Teachers most often start their career around their (mid) twenties, and retire around the age of 60 to 65. By using this classification, each age category represents a period of 15 years.

### 4.2.5 Observations

The third method concerns the method of observation. According to Kearns (2010: 242), observation has 3 purposes, namely counting, complementing, and contextualizing. In my research, I counted the number of teachers-in-training per training class, which in most cases amounted to approximately 30 teachers. The second purpose of observation is providing complementary evidence, by gathering additional data to interviews and surveys. The third purpose is called contextual understanding, by acquiring an *‘in-depth interpretation of a particular time and place through direct experience’* (Kearns, 2010: 242). I attended and observed 2 training days at Normal 1 in Cochabamba and 3 training days at Normal 2 in Paracaya. During these trainings, I observed what was being taught during the trainings as well as the interaction between teacher trainers and teachers-in-training. Generally, all the observations had a non-participatory character for the researcher. However, it is safe to say that my presence in the classroom influenced both the teacher and the students, who were well aware of my presence. As regards the teacher training institutes themselves, they do not differ much in terms of building (although the institute in Cochabamba looks rather new and

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\(^9\) The 5 categories were merged into 3 categories by computing a new variable in SPSS. Thereby, the old variable was re-coded into a new variable: the categories ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’ were merged under the new category *agree*, and the categories ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ were merged under the new category *disagree*. 
modern), classroom furniture, materials and resources, as exercise books, laptops and beamer are all present at both institutes. However, they do differ substantially in terms of location: while Normal 1 is located in a residential area in the richer Northern part of Cochabamba, Normal 2 in Paracaya is located in the middle of nowhere surrounded by nature.

Illustration 2 - School 1A/1B, 3 and 4 (no picture of school 2).

In addition, I conducted observations at primary and secondary schools within classrooms, where the trainings should be implemented (see illustration 2). School 1A (primary school, morning shift) and school 1B (secondary school, afternoon shift) are located in the same building in the Southern part of Cochabamba. School 1 is a rather large urban school, with even a computer lab for its students. However, the neighbourhood in which the school is located, in the Southern part of the city, is quite poor, as the school is surrounded by houses of very poor quality. As regards the cultural and ethnic background of the students, the large majority of the students at school 1 wore school uniforms, which makes it difficult to explicitly state something about their cultural and ethnic background. Though, the parents who dropped their children off at school 1 wore traditional, indigenous clothing, which might tell us something about the cultural and ethnic context of school 1. In terms of social-economic status (SES), most students - presumably - live within a poorer economic home environment. School 2 is also a large urban secondary school, but located in the Northern part of Cochabamba in a nice neighbourhood next to a park. Here again, most students wore school uniforms, but come from middle income families, as most students go to school by taxi. By contrast, school 3 is a small rural school, consisting of a primary and secondary level, with only a small group of students per class. The classrooms are located in a couple of small buildings. The school is located on the outskirts of Cliza, a small village an hour’s drive from

10 In Bolivia, it is a common phenomenon that primary and secondary schools are located in the same building (with different morning and afternoon shifts), as there are not enough school buildings to accommodate all children.

11 In defining the school size of the different schools, I consider a school small in case it has less than approximately 100 students; I consider a school large in case it has more than approximately 1000 students.
Cochabamba, within an indigenous community. Only a very small part of the students wore school uniforms; the rest of the children wore everyday clothing (not indigenous clothing, whereas community members did wear traditional clothing). The fact that the majority of the children did not wear school uniforms, could say something about the social-economic status of school 3, as the parents could possibly not afford to buy school uniforms. Finally, school 4 is a large rural school, located in the centre of Cliza. Once again, it is difficult to state something about the cultural and ethnic background, as most students wore school uniforms. I presume that the majority of the students come from lower income rural families (see table 1). I spent most of my time at school 1 and 3, and visited school 2 and 4 once.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School no.</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Social-economic status (SES)</th>
<th>Cultural and ethnic context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 1A</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 1B</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Middle income</td>
<td>Non-indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 3</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Primary/secondary</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>Indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 4</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Low income</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - The characteristics of the different schools visited during the research.

4.3 Unit of analysis

4.3.1 Teachers-in-training

In this thesis, my main unit of analysis comprises primary and secondary teachers who participate in the teacher trainings. In total, I conducted 18 interviews with 19 teachers from 4 different schools; 11 interviews with urban teachers and 7 interviews with rural teachers. In addition, I conducted 118 surveys with teachers (and 3 headmasters). Both urban and rural teachers participated in the research, as they might have different perceptions, agency or ways of implementation of the PROFOCOM programme. Besides the urban/rural division in my research, I also clustered my data on the basis of gender (male/female) and on the basis of age (young/middle-aged/old). The vast majority of participants in my research sample are female (65%, against 35% male), which makes gender an important characteristic. Further, the large
majority of the research participants are middle-aged (51%) and older (34%) teachers (against 15% younger teachers). Overall, I mostly focused on teachers participating in the first phase of the PROFOCOM training programme (starting date in August 2012), and only included some teachers participating in the second phase (starting date in June 2013). This decision was mostly influenced by the fact that teachers from the first phase seemed more knowledgeable and experienced with the new way of teaching. The teachers-in-training from the first phase were finalising the second semester (first year) of the two-year PROFOCOM programme during my research. As teachers are considered the major actors of change in the Bolivian education reform, interviews and surveys with teachers comprises the largest dataset.  

4.3.2 Teacher trainers

Another important respondent group in my research includes the teacher trainers (or facilitadores) facilitating the trainings, who are employed by the Ministry of Education. They play a major facilitating role during the theoretical/methodological PROFOCOM sessions, in which the contents of the specific modules are being explained. As the PROFOCOM trainings are being held during the weekends, the trainers have other jobs besides being a trainer in the PROFOCOM programme, most often as headmasters. I conducted 3 interviews with facilitadores, 2 of them who worked as headmasters as well.

4.3.3 Headmasters

In my research sample, I also included headmasters of schools, as they are highly important for teachers’ participation in the PROFOCOM programme and the implementation of the ASEP reform at their schools. As a school can only participate in the programme if all teachers of the school participate (either in the first, second or third round of the programme), the headmaster’s opinion can be crucial in this decision. Several headmasters attended and participated in the PROFOCOM trainings. Another interesting point from a gender perspective concerns the fact that the headmasters who were present during the trainings and the ones who I conducted interviews with, were all men. This could indicate a gender difference in terms of position in the Bolivian education sector, as a majority of 61% of

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12 Despite the major role and influence of urban and rural teacher unions in Bolivia’s education sector, I did not include any representatives of these teacher unions in my research sample. This choice was mostly guided by the fact that I am interested in the individual, personal opinions of teachers, instead of teachers’ collective voice or opinion as represented by the teacher unions.
Bolivia’s (primary) teacher population is female, while all headmasters interviewed are male (Trading Economics, 2013). In total, I conducted 3 surveys and 4 interviews with headmasters (which in two cases coincided with their function as teacher trainer, as already explained).

**4.3.4 Experts**

It was important for me to include several experts in the field of education in my research, in order to provide more depth to the analysis at hand. During my first week in La Paz, I interviewed 3 experts from the National Coordinating Committee of the Educational Councils of Indigenous Peoples (*Los Consejos Educativos de Pueblos Originarios* - CEPOs): 1 coordinator and 2 technicians with an Aymara and Guaraní indigenous background. The CEPOs are organisations for the social participation of indigenous groups and peoples in education. They played an important role in the elaboration of the ASEP law, especially in the field of intra- and intercultural education and the development of regional curricula. Today, there exist 11 CEPOs, representing different indigenous groups (CNC-CEPOs, n.d.).

Further, I conducted an online interview with 2 education experts of the Dutch embassy in La Paz: the Deputy Head development cooperation and a former employee of the Ministry of Education. Both have long working experience in Bolivia’s education sector. For an overview of all the respondents included in my research, see table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position in education sector</th>
<th>No. of interviews</th>
<th>No. of surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers-in-training</td>
<td>18*</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher trainers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headmasters</td>
<td>4**</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>2***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 18 interviews were conducted with a total of 19 teachers-in-training

** 2 of the 4 interviews conducted with headmasters overlap with their position as teacher trainer

*** 2 interviews were conducted with a total of 5 experts (interview no. 1 with 3 experts; interview no. 2 with 2 experts)

Table 2 - Number of respondents included in the research, clustered on the basis of position (see Appendix 1).
4.4 Research context

Although the PROFOCOM trainings take place on a national scale, throughout Bolivia, I decided to focus my research on one particular region, namely the Department of Cochabamba. More specifically, I conducted my research in the city of Cochabamba, and the smaller villages of Paracaya and Cliza. This was a considered choice in terms of the feasibility of my research. Taking into account the socio-economic divides within Cochabamba, I visited schools and conducted interviews in both the richer, Northern part of Cochabamba and the poorer, Southern part of Cochabamba, in order to ensure a representative depiction of reality. I repeated this procedure in Cliza, a small village located an hour's drive of the city of Cochabamba. Here, I attended classes and conducted interviews at a school in the centre and a school located outside the village of Cliza.

Most of the active research was conducted during the re-training sessions at Normales and at primary and secondary schools. Throughout Bolivia, at a national level, the same trainings are given at all teacher training institutes during a particular weekend. Different groups of teachers participate in the one-day trainings on Saturday and Sunday. Furthermore, teachers are grouped according to school or residence (for example: all teachers from Cliza were grouped together in one classroom at the teacher training institute). During the trainings, the teachers had a proactive and critical attitude in my opinion, writing actively and responding quickly to the questions of the teacher trainer. As already mentioned, it was during these trainings that the surveys were distributed amongst the teachers. The formal (and quiet) context of the training certainly helped teachers in concentrating themselves to fill in the surveys. However, filling in the surveys took quite some time, which gave me the impression that Bolivian teachers in general are not very accustomed to filling out surveys and the like. As regards the interviews, these most often took place at primary and secondary schools. The majority of the interviews at primary schools were conducted under class time, as most of the teachers did not want to spend their spare time on an interview. As a result, some interviews were quite chaotic, and the recordings of those interviews were very noisy. By contrast, the interviews at secondary schools were conducted under class time but in empty classrooms, without children present. This allowed me to elaborate more on the answers of my respondents. Now, I will turn to some ethical considerations involved in my research.
4.5 Ethical considerations

In terms of access to the teacher training institutes and primary and secondary schools, my contact person at the Dutch embassy\textsuperscript{13} arranged an official letter from the managing director teacher training of the Ministry of Education. This ensured permission to attend the trainings and conduct observations at schools. Here, it also worked to my advantage that I am ‘only’ a student.

Further, though indigenousness is still a controversial topic in Bolivia, it is not a highly charged topic anymore. While identifying as indigenous has long been considered ‘backward’ in Bolivia, people nowadays more often openly talk about and identify as being indigenous due to the revival of indigenousness under the Morales’ government. A teacher from school 2 clearly reveals this revival of indigenousness:

\textit{‘Some time ago, it was a crime to speak an indigenous language. If you spoke in Quechua you were from the countryside, they would say to you ‘this [person] knows nothing’, they discriminated us therefore. Now that we are starting to revalue our culture, our identity, we have to develop this’\textsuperscript{14} (interview no. 14).}

However, the policies and reforms pursued by the current government remain controversial. A lot of teachers consider the ASEP education reform backward and anti-modern, and argue that with the new reform, Bolivia goes back in time (Lopes Cardozo, 2011). Given that the ASEP reform is highly controversial, and as I found proponents as well as opponents of the reform, it is important that the anonymity of the respondents is ensured in this thesis. This is related to the issue of not doing any (social) harm to my respondents. Besides confidentiality, I also considered informed consent an important issue during my research. Before starting an interview, I asked the respondents (those who were willing to conduct an interview and be involved in my research) whether they had any questions about the interview or the research, so that they knew exactly what they consented to (Dowling, 2010: 28-29). I also explicitly asked for permission to record the interviews. Another ethical consideration to take into account regarding the interviews, is the fact that most interviews took place under school time, which reduced the teaching time dedicated to students (although several teachers conducted an interview during a break). Further, during the surveys, I accurately explained what my research is about and what the purpose is. Here, I made clear that my purpose is to

\textsuperscript{13} The Deputy Head development cooperation.

\textsuperscript{14} All quotes in this thesis, put forward by the interviews respondents, are translated as \textit{accurately} as possible by the author from Spanish to English.
display what teachers think about the reform and the trainings, how they deal with the implementation thereof and in how far their agency is recognized in this process, thereby giving voice to teachers themselves.

As regards my positionality within the research, I had to consider and take into account my own position as a ‘white, Western and seemingly rich’ woman in a context where most of the people are indigenous and do not have such high living standards. During the research, it proved to be important to reflect on my own position, as it has probably affected the research participants and also my understanding of the people and processes being researched. An obvious example is the effect of my presence as an observer in the classroom, which has most likely given a distorted picture of day-to-day classroom practices. To mitigate this effect, I conducted observations in multiple classrooms.

Finally, in terms of reciprocity, I did not pay the respondents for participating in the research, as I believe this might have caused a wrong incentive for participation. Instead, the respondents got the opportunity to contribute to academic research. Furthermore, I shared my research findings with some of the teachers, and I will sent my finalised thesis to representatives of the Ministry of Education.

4.6 Limitations

One of the well-considered choices in my research, namely, the explicit focus on teachers, could also well be a methodological limitation in terms of representation. That is to say, I have not included the voice of community members, parents or students themselves in my research. I acknowledge the fact that this might not capture a holistic picture of the implementation of the ASEP reform, since parents and the larger local community play such a large role in the new education law. However, I also believe that the explicit focus on teachers (and teacher trainers) allowed me to conduct a more focused research, which enables me to say more about the teacher population in Cochabamba.

Another issue to take into account regarding surveys is the issue of socially desirable responding (SDR). Socially desirable responding refers to ‘the tendency of individuals to present themselves favourably with respect to current social norms and standards’, which represents a wide-ranging concern within social science research and other fields of research (Zerbe and Paulhus, 1987: 250). One possible example of SDR in my survey concerns the question whether teachers feel capable to put the new curriculum into practice. Here, 90% of
the teachers in my sample (strongly) agree that they feel capable of implementing the new curriculum. Since 90% is an exceptionally high percentage, SDR could play a role herein. Therefore, it is useful to reflect on this limitation, as the ‘real’ percentage of teachers feeling truly capable might be slightly lower than 90%.

Further, a (minor) limitation relates to the issue of gender. Bolivia’s teacher population has a rather skewed gender distribution, with 61% female teachers of the total percentage of primary education teachers in 2004 (Trading Economics, 2013). My survey and interview samples show the same pattern, although the division is somewhat higher here: 65% of the survey participants and 68% of the interview participants are female. Hence, although the data say more about the female teacher population than the male teacher population, this gender division is representative for my research sample and Bolivia’s teacher population in general.

Finally, as stated earlier, yet another minor limitation concerns the fact that part of the interviews conducted at primary schools were quite noisy and chaotic, due to the children’s presence in the classroom. This could possibly have influenced the level of concentration of the teacher during the interview. In the next section, I will discuss the main empirical findings of my research.
5. Practical implications of the ASEP reform

‘Together we implement the Curriculum and encourage the Educational Revolution’
‘Juntos Implementamos el Currículo e Impulsamos la Revolución Educativa’

(Ministerio de Educación de Bolivia, 2013a: 2)

The Avelino Sίñani-Elizardo Pérez law, approved in December 2010, has produced several important changes to the Bolivian education sector. The first important change concerns the introduction of a new curriculum. This curriculum - consisting of a national, regional, and local curriculum - is underpinned by the philosophical foundation of ‘living well’ or Vivir Bien. The broad philosophical foundation of Vivir Bien relates to social, economic and political aspects of society. Its core aim is ‘living well’ for all, instead of – the often considered Western notion of - ‘living better’ at the expense of others (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 26). The implementation of the new curriculum is supported by the PROFOCOM programme, a re-training or professionalisation program for in-service teachers, which is the main focus of this thesis. The PROFOCOM programme started with 44,000 teachers-in-training in August 2012, and another 66,000 teachers-in-training participated in the second round of the programme. At present, the PROFOCOM programme has a total of 110,000 participants, which corresponds to roughly 80% of the total of 130,000 Bolivian teachers (Página Siete, 07-11-2013, 2013c). Below, I will discuss the build-up and content of this programme, the teachers’ perceptions on the programme and several practical examples as regards the implementation process. Within the PROFOCOM programme, teachers are stimulated to change their accustomed way of teaching by taking on a more research- and practice-oriented approach to education and including – among others - indigenous knowledges and worldviews in the curriculum. All these changes to the ‘old’ way of teaching pose severe challenges to teachers. Hence, teachers experience significant difficulties in implementing the new curriculum, which will be discussed below. Lastly, I will look more into the types of follow-up and pedagogical resources provided to teachers-in-training to assist them in the process of transforming the education system.
### 5.1 New curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General objectives</th>
<th>Cross-cutting dimensions</th>
<th>Thematic areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Decolonial;</td>
<td>• Socio-psychological (ser);</td>
<td>• Cosmos and thinking;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intra- and intercultural</td>
<td>• Epistemological/cognitive (saber);</td>
<td>• Community and society;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>along with plurilingual;</td>
<td>• Sociological/productive (hacer);</td>
<td>• Life, land and territory;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Productive;</td>
<td>• Political (decidir).</td>
<td>• Science, technology and production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communitarian education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4 - The structure of the new curriculum.**

The ASEP law has produced several important changes to the Bolivian education sector, the most important change being a very ambitious and complex curriculum. As already discussed, the ASEP law consists of four general objectives: (1) decolonial, (2) intra- and intercultural along with plurilingual, (3) productive and (4) communitarian education (Ministerio de Educación, 2010; Ministerio de Educación, 2012a: 3-4; see figure 4). These objectives form the basis of the new curriculum. The underlying rationale of the new education law concerns the full inclusion of Bolivia’s historically marginalised indigenous peoples in the education system and the enhancement of Bolivia’s poor educational results (especially among the indigenous) from the past. By including the aforementioned objectives in present-day education, the government aims to stimulate a critical approach to (existing) knowledges, and open up the curriculum for indigenous knowledges, cultures, languages and productive and communal activities, which are constructed within different regional and local contexts.

In order to open up the curriculum and transform the education sector, the teacher training has been transformed on the basis of 4 holistic, cross-cutting dimensions of the learning process: (1) socio-psychological (ser); (2) epistemological/cognitive (saber); (3) sociological/productive (hacer); and (4) political (decidir) (Ministerio de Educación, 2012a: 20; experts, Dutch embassy, interview no. 2A/B). The dimensions of being, knowing, acting
and deciding, which are all interrelated, form the philosophical basis of the ASEP reform and the new curriculum. The socio-psychological dimension of ‘being’ (ser) relates to social and community (sociocomunitarios) principles and values, such as solidarity; respect; and equality. It also relates to the attitudes and mindsets of teachers and students. The epistemological dimension of ‘knowing’ (saber) is associated with the cognitive aspect of knowing, understanding and analysing different forms of knowledges. Furthermore, the sociological/productive dimension of ‘doing’ or ‘acting’ (hacer) relates to the development of certain skills and abilities, to engage in the transformation of societal problems. This could be linked to the practical, productive side of education. The dimension of ‘acting’ could in turn be linked to the final dimension of ‘deciding’ (decidir), that is, taking action to resolve communal problems and transform reality/society (Ministerio de Educación, 2012c: 13-21). These actions, which are not solely theoretical or practical but are focused on having a social impact, correspond to the larger aim of critical pedagogues and Bolivia’s ASEP law to transform the education sector and the larger society.

Besides the 4 general objectives and the cross-cutting dimensions of the learning process (see figure 4), the new curriculum is organised into 4 different thematic areas: cosmos and thinking; community and society; life, land and territory; and science, technology and
production. These thematic areas correspond to the different subjects being offered (see figure 5) (Ministerio de Educación, 2012b: 29-30). Hence, the new curriculum offers an integrative learning approach.

The methodological orientation of the pedagogical process is based on the following 4 methodological steps: practice (práctica), theory (teoría), analysis and reflection (valoración) and production (producción). Hence, the pedagogical process now starts from practice (by bringing practical materials to class), then proceeds to theory, continues with analysis and reflection on the value and utility of a certain learning subject, and, ultimately, ends with the production of strategic methodologies (Ministerio de Educación, 2013b: 34).

Figure 6 - The build-up of the plurinational curriculum.

The new curriculum is considered plurinational because it consists of a national (60%), regional (30%) and local (10-20%) curriculum (see figure 6). Whereas the national curriculum is based on knowledges which apply to each and every Bolivian, the regional and local curricula are more catered to the specific regional and local contexts. More specifically, the regional curriculum departs from the socio-cultural, linguistic and productive context of the specific region. The local curriculum, in turn, responds to the needs and expectations of the local population (Ministerio de Educación, 2011). The Councils of Indigenous Peoples

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15 In Spanish ‘Campos de conocimiento: cosmos y pensamiento; comunidad y sociedad; vida, tierra y territorio; ciencia, tecnología y producción.’
(CEPOs) have played quite a large role in the development of the regional curriculum. The CEPOs are strongly engaged in the harmonisation and complementarity of the national and regional curricula (interview no. 1A). Below, we will see how the formal curriculum is perceived and being implemented by teachers-in-training in their classrooms. The implemented curriculum is referred to as the enacted curriculum by Priestley (2012).

5.2 PROFOCOM

This thesis predominantly focuses on the re-training of teachers – also called profesionalización - in line with Bolivia’s education reform, for the implementation of the new curriculum. Towards the end of 2012, the Bolivian Ministry of Education launched a national training programme for in-service teachers (Programa de Formación Complementaria para Maestras y Maestros en Ejercicio – PROFOCOM, 2012) to implement the new curriculum. These trainings are implemented by several teacher training institutes (Escuelas Superiores de Formación de Maestras y Maestros, ESFM, also called Normales), and by pedagogical universities (Universidades Pedagógicas) (Ministerio de Educación, 2012a: 3). Teacher training institutes are generally seen as important sites for educational change, and subsequently, for bringing about societal change. However, in general, these institutes have quite a bad reputation and low status in Bolivia and Latin America at large, due to low-quality training, low academic achievements, insufficient resources, and a disconnection between theory and practice (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 6). To mitigate these long established problems within teacher training institutes, the Bolivian Ministry of Education does not only work with traditional teacher trainers, but has involved more practical people on the ground, such as headmasters, to impart trainings. I will now turn to the build-up, structure and content of the PROFOCOM trainings.

5.2.1 Build-up, structure and content

Following the objectives mentioned in article 33 of the ASEP law, teacher education should:
‘(1) train critical, reflexive, auto-critical, innovative and research oriented professionals, who are committed to democracy, social transformations and the full inclusion of all Bolivians in society; and (2) develop an integral training of (female and male) teachers with high academic quality both in specialised subject matters as in pedagogical matters, on the basis of an understanding of the reality, the cultural identity and the socio-historical processes of the country’ (Ministerio de Educación, 2010: art. 33).

The key terms that stand out in this statement are the training of critical, reflexive, auto-critical, innovative and research oriented professionals, in order to transform educational practice and society. Furthermore, the trainings are intended to strengthen critical and proactive thinking, through reflection and discussion on the new curriculum and educational practice (Ministerio de Educación, 2012a: 6). These aims of the PROFOCOM programme are reflected by one of the teacher trainers as well, as he states that ‘it is important for the teachers-in-training to be much more critical, proactive, and act as knowledge producers, because we [teachers] are crawling within the new system, and extensive work still has to be done’ (interview no. 15). Due to the large amount of work still to be done, this teacher trainer is not too optimistic about the possibility of any short-term results in the realm of educational change, as he states: ‘[this is why I told you] that it is not an implementation that is going to pay off in 4 or 5 years, I am talking about an implementation of about 20 or even more years in order to change our mindsets’ (Ibid.). The PROFOCOM documents (workbooks or cuadernos) do not state a clear timeframe within which the results of the trainings should become visible.

In terms of the overall build-up and structure of the programme, the PROFOCOM programme offers a Bachelor (licenciatura) and Master (maestría) degree. I focused my research on some of the modules taken within the Bachelor programme. This degree takes 2 years to complete, and is divided into 4 semesters (teachers pay a tuition fee of 100 Bs. per semester). The PROFOCOM programme consists of a total of 16 modules; each semester deals with 4 modules or ‘training units’ (Unidades de Formación). Every module takes 150 hours to complete, and consists of 3 sessions: a theoretical and methodological classroom session of 8 hours; an implementation

Figure 7 - The structure of the Bachelor degree within the PROFOCOM programme.
and critical reflection period in teachers’ own classroom – with involvement of the community - of 138 hours; and finally, a wrap-up and sharing (socialización) classroom session of 4 hours (Ministerio de Educación, 2012a: 7; see figure 7). In between (and after) these sessions, teacher trainers visit the teachers-in-training at their schools to provide in-service support (see subchapter 5.2.4). In the first theoretical session of each module, the content and methodology of each module/theme is explained. From my observations, I saw that this session is guided by the teacher trainer, who provides the teachers-in-training with the necessary knowledge and skills to implement the new curriculum. The first session is built up of 6 ‘moments’ or steps: (1) dialogue based on activating questions in indigenous language16 (30 minutes); (2) dialogue and discussion on problematising questions (60 minutes); (3) analysis and reflection on the theme of the specific module (60 minutes); (4) elaboration on the methodological strategies (120 minutes); (5) plenary (120 minutes); and (6) guidelines for the development of activities to be implemented during the second session (60 minutes). The second session or implementation period is very practical and takes a hands-on approach, as the teachers have to apply the lessons learned in their classrooms, in the context of their school and community. Hence, this second session is pivotal in the combination of theory and practice. The final third wrap-up and sharing session comprises a reunion day for teachers-in-training to present the results they have achieved and critically discuss, evaluate and share their experiences (Ibid.). After each module, the teachers-in-training complete written and/or oral exams to assess their knowledge and competence in the curriculum.

Illustration 4 - A presentation by one of the teachers during the training.

16 Only if all group members speak the specific indigenous language, if not, the activating questions are discussed in Spanish (which happened in most of the cases I observed).
As regards the content of each of the 16 modules, the different subjects of the modules are mentioned in the table below. During my research period in Bolivia, only 8 of the module subjects were known. As a consequence, I am not familiar with the content of modules 9 to 16. Up until now, 12 of the 16 subjects have been made public by the Bolivian Ministry of Education (PROFOCOM, 2013; see table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module number</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Socio-communal and productive education model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Curricular structure and its diverse elements: own knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strategies for the development of a socio-productive curriculum: understanding the curricular structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teaching methods within communal learning: curriculum planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Methodological strategies for curriculum development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participatory evaluation in educational processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Production of educational materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Production of knowledge in the socio-communal and productive education model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Curriculum management of the educational process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Methodological tools for the systematisation of transformative experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Problematisation from the experience of implementing the socio-communal and productive education model for systematisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Curriculum development from the perspective of the countryside and the approach of the areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - 16</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

Table 3 - The subjects discussed within each semester and module.

5.2.2 Teachers’ perceptions

Following the definition of Oxford Dictionaries (2013), perception refers to ‘the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted’. In the context of my research, this ‘something’ refers to the ASEP education reform law and the PROFOCOM trainings. More
specifically, I will elaborate on the way in which teachers (but also, to a lesser extent, teacher trainers, headmasters and experts) perceive, that is to say, how they regard, understand and interpret, the ASEP law and the PROFOCOM trainings. Linking back to the (critical) realist perspective taken in this research, ‘reality’ is embedded in a structured context and can only be described by the dependent observer or researcher. Following from this, there is no real ‘truth’ to be discovered, as all knowledge is relative and constructed. Perceptions are therefore always subjective, and are embedded within a structural context and timeframe, which is important to keep in mind (Sumner and Tribe, 2008: 58-63).

Figure 8 - The main reasons for teachers’ participation in the PROFOCOM trainings.

In this section, I will expand on teachers’ perceptions of and experiences in the PROFOCOM trainings. The perception of teachers might be coloured by the fact that 6 out of the 19 teachers-in-training interviewed (32%) stated that they feel obliged - either by the government or by their school - to sign up for the PROFOCOM trainings. I will elaborate more on this sense of obligation in the following chapter on teachers’ agency. Nevertheless, it is important to first identify the reasons why teachers participate in these trainings. The survey data reveal that the main reasons for teachers’ participation in the PROFOCOM trainings include: 1. contribute to children’s development (34%); 2. contribute to the reform of the education
system (28%); and 3. passion for teaching (20%) (see figure 8). The interview data (partly) reveal other reasons why teachers participate. During the interviews, the large majority of the teachers (13 of the 19 interview respondents, 68%) argued that the main reason for their participation is ‘actualisation’ or updating oneself (actualización): the possibility to learn and understand the new education law. This corresponds to the vision of Torres, who argues that teacher training should be seen as a requirement for the professional development of teachers (Torres, 2000: 257). Further, 2 of the 19 teachers-in-training interviewed (11%) and 1 of the 3 teacher trainers stated that the most important reason for participation is the obtainment of an academic Bachelor or Master degree, which is mentioned by 14% of the teachers in the surveys as well.

Hence, one could observe a slight divergence between my survey and interview data: whereas 82% of the survey respondents refer to reasons with a more societal and communitarian character for their participation, 79% of the interview respondents refer to updating oneself or obtaining an academic title themselves as the main reasons for participation in the trainings, the latter which allows for the professional development of teachers themselves. This discrepancy could be explained by several reasons, for example the limited answer options in the survey, as ‘updating oneself’ and ‘obligation’ were not included (though I included a category other in the answer options). Furthermore, the issue of professionally or socially desirable responding could also play a role in surveys, as already explained in subchapter 4.6 on limitations. The teachers in my surveys could have presented themselves more favourably by giving professionally and/or socially desirable answers to the question why they participate in the trainings. However, when seen from the perspective of the professional development of teachers, there might be less of a divergence - and even slight complementarity - between the survey and interview data. That is to say, the professional development and training of an individual teacher (as referred to during the interviews) might serve the interests of children, the community and the larger education sector as well (as referred to in the surveys). From this perspective, both the survey and interview data reveal an individual, professional, social and communal attitude and mindset of Bolivian teachers.

As regards the overall perception and appreciation of the PROFOCOM trainings, the large majority of the teachers-in-training is highly positive about the trainings. During the interviews, 14 of the total of 19 teachers (74%) explicitly stated that they like the trainings in general and positively assess the training sessions. The positive arguments mentioned by

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17 The ‘positive’ teachers are mostly female, middle-aged teachers, which corresponds to my research sample.
the majority of the teachers-in-training include, first, the fact that 21% of the ‘positive’ teachers (and 2 experts) regard the teacher training institutes and the trainings as a meeting place (*lugar de encuentro*) to meet and communicate with other teachers and exchange ideas and experiences, which is often referred to as the possibility of *peer learning*. This is illustrated by 2 experts who argue that ‘*[the trainings stimulate] peer learning and an exchange of experiences and problems encountered, which can improve classroom practices*’ (interview no. 2A; 2B). Hence, the trainings give teachers the opportunity to exchange experiences and learn new ways of teaching presented by other teachers (interview no. 2A; 2B; 3; 6; 17). In addition, other positive arguments include the community focused and participatory outlook of the new curriculum, as well as the emphasis on ‘rescuing’ indigenous knowledges and caring for the environment during the trainings. Further, as regards the *negative* side of the PROFOCOM trainings, only 1 teacher-in-training (5%) and 1 headmaster stated a negative opinion in the interviews. The teacher argued that the materials and readings used during the PROFOCOM trainings are written by non-Bolivian authors, which does not serve the needs and interests of Bolivian teachers (interview no. 11). In addition, the ‘negative’ headmaster put forward the view that with the ASEP law and the PROFOCOM trainings, Bolivia goes back in time with its current backward-looking educational approach. The headmaster defines the new model of education as a recoil for Bolivia (his opinion is shared by one of the teachers-in-training, who nevertheless appreciates the training sessions) (interview no. 25).

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<th>Valid Percent</th>
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<td>en desacuerdo</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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</table>

*Table 4 - The percentage of teachers-in-training indicating that they like (*me gusta*) the PROFOCOM trainings.*

In the surveys, a very large majority of 84% of the teachers-in-training indicated that, in general, they like the PROFOCOM trainings (*see table 4*). By contrast, only a very small minority of 4% indicated that they do *not* like the trainings. When the 3 different
categorisations within my data (urban/rural; male/female; and young/middle-aged/old) are
taken into account in terms of perception, no statistical significant relations are found within
the data in SPSS. That is to say, the perceptions on the trainings of urban or rural, male or
female, young, middle-aged or older teachers-in-training do not differ substantially according
the survey outcomes.

From the foregoing, one can conclude that there is considerable convergence between
the interview and survey data. The main conclusion is that the vast majority of the teachers-
in-training participating in the interviews and surveys have a highly positive perception on the
PROFOCOM trainings (74% and 84% respectively). Among the different arguments
endorsing this positive assessment – including the emphasis on indigenous knowledges, the
community and the environment - is the peer learning aspect of the trainings (mentioned by
21% of the positive teachers and 2 experts): that is, peer contacts that create the possibility to
meet and share experiences with other teachers. Hence, teachers appreciate the dialogical
aspect of the trainings, as the sessions (especially session 3) leave ample space for dialogue,
debate, discussion and collective reflection. Here you could clearly see the link with the
pedagogical fundamentals of critical pedagogy and Freirean thought, as reflection and
dialogue play a pivotal role during the trainings. By critically listening to the stories and
arguments of other teachers-in-training, a space is created in which the teachers-in-training
educate themselves and each other. Hence, dialogue takes place between the participants, in
order to construct, value and critically approach different knowledges, which is highly
important in critical pedagogy. In Freire’s words: ‘people [teachers] teach each other,
mediated by the world’ (Freire, 1970).

Recommendations for the PROFOCOM trainings

Despite the highly positive assessment of the PROFOCOM trainings, there is still some room
left for improvement, as a considerable amount of teachers gave recommendations. More
specifically, a small majority of the teachers (10 of the 19, 53%) and headmasters (2 of the 4)
interviewed gave recommendations on how the training sessions could be improved. In
addition, 51 of the 121 survey respondents (49%) gave recommendations. In general, the
recommendations given were quite diverse, hence, I will discuss the recommendations most
frequently mentioned by the interview and survey respondents. First, during the interviews,
40% of the teachers (4 of the 10) who gave explicit recommendations stated that the
PROFOCOM trainings are in general quite theoretical (interview no. 9; 18A; 18B; 19). It is
important to note here that this might apply to the first theoretical and methodological
classroom session, in which the content and methodology of each module/theme is explained by the teacher trainer. The 4 teachers referred to above would like to see a more dynamic and practical approach to the trainings (or, to be more specific, to the first session).\textsuperscript{18} The latter statement was explicitly confirmed by 16\% of the survey respondents (8 of the 51) as well. Only a few teachers expressed alternatives to make the trainings more dynamic: for example, by inserting short breaks in between the various parts of the training session, in which the teachers-in-training could consider and share their thoughts - thereby creating more space for collective reflection - and could continue the session with a fresh perspective. Another idea put forward is to play informative games, just as teachers do with their students to make their lessons more interactive (interview no. 9; 18A).

As regards the practical approach to the trainings, the 4 teachers referred to before mentioned that they would like to learn during the trainings how to put the lessons learned into practice (interview no. 9; 18A; 18B; 19). The following quote illustrates this view:

‘[I hope that] they teach us how to manage the law: that they teach us how we are going to put [the law] into practice; how we are going to start producing; and how we are going to educate the students to be able to be, know, act and decide. We already have thoughts, we already have ideas, but we do not know how to realise these within education’ (interview no. 18A).

\textsuperscript{18} This statement seems to contradict the earlier positive argument that teachers appreciate the dialogical aspect of the trainings. However, from my research and observations, I presume that the latter positive statement relates to the third wrap-up and sharing session, while the recommendation for a more dynamic approach relates to the first theoretical session, as the teacher trainers seem not fully capable to translate theory to practice.
The above quote on the teaching skills of teacher trainers links up to another critique: namely, teachers’ critique on the teacher trainers or facilitadores. More specifically, 18% of the survey respondents with recommendations (9 of the 51) expressed a critical stance towards the teacher trainers. During the interviews, 30% of the teachers-in-training (3 of the 10) and 2 of the 4 headmasters stated that, in their opinion, the teacher trainers are not well enough prepared and/or knowledgeable enough about the different aspects of the new education law (interview no. 7; 20; 23; 24; 25). This critical stance towards teacher trainers is shared by the CEPOs experts, who argue that the trainers are not sufficiently prepared, because they do not know well enough the proposals put forward by the various indigenous peoples of Bolivia (for the regional and local curricula), which is highly important according to the CEPOs. Therefore, they recommend to employ teacher trainers of indigenous origin (interview no. 1A). Further, 2 teachers-in-training stated during the interviews that the teachers trainers merely dictate the text displayed in the PowerPoint presentation, and they recommend that the trainers deepen and elaborate more on the content of their presentation (which is also confirmed by 12% (6 of the 51) of the survey respondents). Furthermore, a stricter selection of teacher trainers is suggested, for example only university graduates (interview no. 7; 23; 24). However, one should keep in mind that it is easy to blame the teacher trainers for teachers’ own lack of understanding of the education law.

To conclude, the most often heard critiques and corresponding recommendations relate to the theoretical part of the training sessions, as teachers-in-training want more space for collective reflection during the first session, and the teaching skills of teacher trainers. In terms of recommendations, the teachers-in-training would like to see more dynamic and practical trainings, and better prepared teacher trainers. Further, 4 teachers-in-training indicated during the interviews that not enough attention is paid to implementation within the trainings, that is, the translation from theory to practice (interview no. 9; 18A; 18B; 19). Hence, I will now turn to the implementation process, and discuss several practical implementation examples as well as experienced challenges.

### 5.2.3 Implementation process

The implementation of the new curriculum is an ongoing process, which started last year with the first grades of primary and secondary school. Initially, the Ministry of Education envisaged a gradual implementation, progressively extending the new curriculum to the next grades over a period of 6 years. However, last November, the Minister of Education
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announced that from 2014 onwards, the new curriculum will be implemented by all education levels (first through sixth grade of primary and secondary school), thereby renouncing the gradual implementation plan (Página Siete, 06-11-2013, 2013b). Within the PROFOCOM programme, the teachers-in-training get the opportunity to implement and practice the lessons learned during the second session or period: the so-called implementation and critical reflection period. In the final wrap-up and sharing session, the teachers-in-training have to present the activities undertaken to implement and practice with the new curriculum. In general, several (practical) activities seem to be very important in the new curriculum, as they return throughout the implementation process: that is, a two weekly class/curriculum planning for teachers (interview no. 6; 7; 13; 15; 24); self-evaluation by students to assess what they have learned (interview no. 10; 12; 14); and students working together on assignments in smaller groups (interview no. 8; 12; 13). During the interviews, nearly three-quarter of the teachers (74%) explicitly stated that they actively implement and/or practice with the new curriculum, and they mentioned several practical examples as well. I will discuss several of these examples, which in some cases are very much related to the activities of the specific schools, to illustrate how teachers-in-training give shape to the implementation process.

The practical examples will be discussed on the basis of the four general objectives of the new curriculum: (1) decolonal, (2) intra- and inter-cultural along with plurilingual, (3) productive and (4) communitarian education. The first objective, decolonal education, strives to take into account indigenous knowledges, expertise and languages in the curriculum, in order to decolonise the education system. During the PROFOCOM trainings, I observed that a considerable amount of teachers mentioned traditional indigenous medical knowledge as an example of indigenous knowledges and expertise. Especially the healing effects of natural medicines such as chamomile were frequently mentioned during the trainings. During the interviews, 2 teachers elaborated on the use of indigenous medical knowledge in class: teachers explain their students which benefits these medicines have, which parts of the natural medicines they can use, and why it is important to value this indigenous medical knowledge (interview no. 18A; 18B). Further, several teachers-in-training referred to indigenous technical knowledge. One teacher gave an illustrative example in the area of mathematics, where monumental stone buildings from the ancient Aymara city of Tiwanaku are used to explain geometric shapes such as triangles (interview no. 10). Hence, the abovementioned examples illustrate that within the new curriculum, teachers make a start with incorporating Bolivia’s own indigenous knowledges, by starting from their own current and historical reality. This approach to education is reflected in Freirean thought, who argued that it is
important to take into account learners’ lives and their living histories and cultures (Luke, 2012: 5).

With the second objective of the new curriculum, intra- and intercultural along with plurilingual education, the new curriculum pays attention to all of Bolivia’s 37 indigenous cultures to get to know one’s own culture and language (intracultural), but also to the understanding of and interaction between all these different cultures, as well as the interaction between Bolivia and the world (intercultural). Within the classroom, the habits and customs of different indigenous groups are discussed nowadays, as well as such issues as discrimination against indigenous groups (interview no. 15). Furthermore, the new curriculum also aims to be plurilingual or trilingual. That is, teachers are supposed to teach their students in Spanish, an indigenous language and a foreign language. As a large majority of the native inhabitants of Cochabamba are Quechua, Quechua is the indigenous language most often taught to students. My survey data reveal that 75% of the teachers-in-training teach their lessons (partly) in Quechua. For example, teacher and students greet each other in Quechua, and they make jokes in Quechua (interview no. 8; 9). As regards the foreign language, a teacher trainer/headmaster and a teacher interviewed emphasised that this foreign language need not necessarily be English, but that it could also be French or Portuguese or any language other than Spanish, depending on the relations of the particular region in Bolivia with other countries in the world (interview no. 15; 23). This aligns with Bolivia’s post-neoliberal stance and the resistance against neoliberal educational practices, such as English curricula. However, the survey data reveal that only 2% of the teachers-in-training speak English in their daily lives and give (part of) their lessons in English, which is a very small percentage. Furthermore, none of the teachers-in-training speak Portuguese. Hence, although the new education law aims to be trilingual, it will be difficult to put this into practice, as the large majority of the teachers-in-training do not speak a foreign language. This illustrates another gap between theory and practice, on which I will elaborate in the next section.

The third objective, productive education, aims to link education to local productive and economic activities in Bolivian society. As discussed earlier, productive education focuses on vocational development to enhance job opportunities and the ‘production of knowledge’. Given the large role of agricultural productive and economic activities in Bolivia, most of the educational activities relate to agriculture and growing plants and seeds, especially at 2 schools in my sample. A good example is the project with vegetable gardens

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19 The survey data do not display any additional information on how extensive the use of Quechua is during the lessons. Therefore, I cannot say whether the use of Quechua is limited or extensive.
implemented at school 3. Within this project, each class is responsible for its own vegetable garden, in which children themselves sow seeds, water the plants and take care of the garden. After the vegetables have been harvested, the teachers organise a fair or market where the vegetables are being sold to the larger community (interview no. 19; 21). A market has also been organised at school 1A, where fruit was being sold.

Illustration 6 - An example of a transdisciplinary project theme, in this case fruit.

The chosen project theme, in the latter case fruit, is transdisciplinary as it is being interrelated with the other subjects given: that is, the biology class discusses the nutrition of these fruits; students spell the names of the different kind of fruits during language class; they add and subtract fruits in mathematics class etc. (interview no. 6). Hence, the organisation of these projects, in which plants and seeds are being grown and discussed and a market is simulated, have a clear link with local(communal productive and economic activities. The activities and projects have a more practice-oriented approach, as they start from the everyday life situations of parents and students. Further, it is well possible that these kinds of projects have larger societal impact: during the interviews, a teacher mentioned the example of natural fertilisers, which are being used in the vegetable gardens. Children are being told that they should discuss the harming effects of chemical fertilisers with their parents, to make them aware of the benefits of natural fertilisers (interview no. 19). Hence, the projects could address certain societal problems and could stimulate larger societal change, which is in line with Freire’s theorising and his reflection-action dynamic (or praxis).

Finally, the fourth objective of the ASEP law, communitarian education, supports a community based education system. That is, the school has a central place in the community, and focuses not solely on learning, but also on reflecting on and solving communal problems. In addition, the school itself functions as a community, in which the headmaster, teachers,
students, (grand)parents and local authorities are supposed to work together as a team to educate their children. The new education law dedicates a large role to the participation of parents and other educational actors in education. The participation of parents can have different forms, for example: filling in a survey designed by teachers to elaborate on teaching practices nowadays and in the past; participating in classroom activities by telling a communal and/or indigenous story or singing a song; or bringing practical materials to class (for example plants or seeds) (interview no. 1A; 17; 20). During the interviews, one third of the teachers-in-training (6 of the 19) stated that they currently work with parents, and that these parents participate in educational activities. At the same time, a fifth of the teachers-in-training (4 of the 19) experienced problems and difficulties with involving parents in education. The most frequently heard problem – as stated by 37% of the teachers-in-training interviewed - concerns the fact that parents, especially fathers, are too busy with their jobs at home or abroad, and, as a consequence, have no time to be involved in their children’s education. However, the problem with ‘absent’ parents could be a (structural) difficulty of the new curriculum, that demands quite some participation from the community, while time might be very scarce for poor labourers and farmers.

To conclude, the examples discussed above reveal that the implementation of the new curriculum leads to educational activities in Bolivia’s current education system that try to relate theory and practice in different ways. This is in line with Freire’s reflection and action approach, in which theory is built on the basis of practice and vice versa. The current educational activities have a more practice-oriented approach, including the everyday life situations and problems of parents and students within the curriculum. The dialectical relation between theory and practice is reflected in the working methods of critical pedagogues, in which students actively participate to construct knowledges. As regards these ‘knowledges’, teachers aim to incorporate Bolivia’s own indigenous knowledges within the new curriculum, by starting from their current and historical reality. This approach to education is reflected in Freirean thought, who argued that it is important to take into account learners’ lives and their living histories and cultures. Further, despite the fact that nearly three-quarter of the teachers explicitly stated that they actively implement the new curriculum, I observed several implementation difficulties and gaps between theory and practice, to which I will now turn.
Implementation challenges

The implementation of a new education law and a new curriculum is almost never an easy process without obstacles; this is also true for Bolivia’s ASEP law. During the interviews, 2 of the 4 headmasters, 1 of the 3 teacher trainers and only a small minority of 16% of the teachers-in-training (3 of the 19) stated that they find the implementation process difficult. At the same time, 2 of the 3 teacher trainers and a majority of 58% of the teachers-in-training (11 of the 19) stated that they do not experience difficulties within the implementation process. Hence, from the interviews, one could conclude that the majority of the teachers-in-training do not consider implementation of the new curriculum difficult. It would be interesting to see whether the surveys reveal a different pattern. In the surveys, a majority of 64% of the teachers-in-training agree that it is (very) difficult to implement the lessons learned in their classroom, while only a small minority of 12% disagree with this statement, which highly contrasts the interview data. When you look at the different categorisations within my data, the Fisher’s Exact Test found – with 90% confidence – a statistical significant relation between the difficulty of implementation and age (see table 5 below). That is, middle-aged and older teachers (70% and 68% respectively) find it much more difficult to implement the lessons learned in their classroom than younger teachers (33%). By contrast, 27% of the

\[ \text{null hypothesis} \]

20 The Chi-Square test assesses whether paired observations on two variables, in this case the difficulty of implementation and age, are independent of each other. Thus, the null hypothesis is always that there is no significant relation between two variables. Since one of the requirements of the Chi-Square test in terms of expected counts is not met (33% of the cells have an expected count less than 5, while the allowable percentage is 20%), I ran the Fisher’s Exact Test for small sample sizes. This test gave an exact significance of 0.079. With a significance level of 0.10, the null hypothesis is rejected with 90% confidence, as the exact significance is lower than the significance level. Thus, one could conclude with 90% confidence that there is a statistical significant relation between the difficulty of implementation and age (see table 5).
younger teachers disagree with the statement that implementation is difficult, against only 11% and 8% of the middle-aged and older teachers. Hence, what is notable in the frequency distribution are the rather low percentages of teachers who do not consider implementation difficult, against the very high percentages of – especially middle-aged and older - teachers who find implementation difficult. The fact that senior teachers experience more difficulties with the implementation of a new curriculum could be explained by several issues. Altinyelken (2010: 238) argues that more experienced teachers find it difficult to adapt to curriculum change, as they have developed their own way of teaching due to their longstanding experience in the teaching profession. These teachers continue to rely on more traditional teaching methods (direct teaching) instead of organising practical classroom activities, as they view change as ‘tiring and demanding’. Furthermore, teachers’ attitude to curriculum change could be linked to teachers’ motivation to change their way of teaching. During the interviews, 1 headmaster, 2 teacher trainers and 2 teachers-in-training (interview no. 13; 15; 16; 19; 24) revealed that younger teachers are generally more motivated than older teachers to participate in the trainings and change their way of teaching, that is, implementing the new curriculum, due to for example approaching retirement (interview no. 13; 19; 24).
### Teacher training in Bolivia and the implementation of the 2010 education reform

#### Table 5

**Case Processing Summary**

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**Es difícil poner en práctica las aprendizajes * Edad Crosstabulation**

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*a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected counts less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.77.

*b. The standardized statistic is -2.032.

Table 5 - The percentage of teachers-in-training indicating that they find it difficult to implement the lessons learned during the PROFOCOM trainings in their classroom, categorised by age (young – middle-aged – old). The third table shows the outcome of the Fisher's Exact Test for these variables.
In terms of practical implementation challenges, multifarious examples were given by the majority of the teachers-in-training during the interviews. The most often heard challenges include, among others, limited time to implement the new curriculum (mentioned by 5 teachers and 1 headmaster; interview no. 6; 7; 13; 14; 17; 25); limited materials provided during the PROFOCOM trainings and in the classrooms (mentioned by 3 teachers and 2 headmasters; interview no. 4; 20; 22; 24; 25); changes in student assessment/evaluation (which is not solely based on students’ knowledge anymore but also on students’ own characteristics and personality) (mentioned by 4 teachers and 1 headmaster; interview no. 6; 7; 17; 21; 24); parental opposition towards the new curriculum (due to an overemphasis on values instead of content) (mentioned by 2 teachers; interview no. 14; 20); and trilingual education (mentioned by 4 teachers and 1 headmaster; interview no. 9; 18A; 19; 22; 25). As regards the latter challenge of trilingual education, which was shortly mentioned above, the new ASEP law aims to be trilingual, that is, the new curriculum should be taught in three languages: Spanish, a native language such as Quechua or Aymara, and a foreign language. However, the implementation of the plurilingual part of the new ASEP law remains controversial and very difficult, as 97% of the teachers-in-training participating in the surveys speak Spanish, 79% speak Quechua, but only 2% speak English; any other foreign language is not mentioned by the teachers-in-training in the surveys. Hence, the survey data reveal that the large majority of the teachers speak both Spanish and Quechua, but lack knowledge of a foreign language. Therefore, one could conclude that the new curriculum for the most part remains bilingual (Spanish and Quechua), which is confirmed by 3 teachers-in-training and 1 headmaster (interview no. 18A; 19; 22; 25). So, although from the outset the ASEP law endorses trilingual education, this remains highly ambitious, as the large majority of the teachers-in-training do not speak a foreign language.
Figure 9 - The aspects of the PROFOCOM trainings most difficult to put into practice.

The pie chart above shows the distribution of the survey responses in terms of the most difficult aspects of the PROFOCOM trainings to put into practice in the classroom. Here, the answers most often given are decolonial education (15%); develop a (communal) dialogue (15%); communal learning (13%); link daily life to school activities (12%); and plurilingual education (12%) (see figure 9). From these survey answers, one could conclude that most teachers struggle with the decolonial aspect of education and involving their community in education, that is, engaging in a dialogue with the community and including their daily life activities in educational activities. Further, the challenge of pluri- or trilingual education is also mentioned by 12% of the teachers-in-training, which was also mentioned by 5 interview respondents. However, other examples were mentioned during the interviews which were not included in the survey, such as limited time and materials. This divergence between the interview and survey data could be explained by the fact that the surveys were designed before conducting the interviews, thereby assessing and including implementation challenges from my own point of view. These challenges turned out to be somewhat different after talking to the teachers-in-training, as is shown by the diverging interview answers.

To conclude, the interview and survey data show very different patterns in terms of implementation challenges. During the interviews, a minority of 16% of the teachers-in-
training stated that they find the implementation process difficult, against a majority of 58% who do not experience major challenges. By contrast, during the surveys, a large majority of 64% of the teachers-in-training indicated that implementation is difficult, against a small minority of 11% who indicated that it is not difficult to implement the lessons learned in their classrooms. It is far from easy to explain this discrepancy between the interview and survey data; a possible explanation could be that the teachers felt more anonymous and hence more secure to display their struggles during the surveys, and felt somewhat less comfortable to reveal their struggles and uncertainties in a face-to-face interview. Furthermore, the survey data revealed a statistical significant relation between difficulty of implementation and age, that is, senior and more experienced teachers find it much more difficult to adapt to and implement a new curriculum. Lastly, several practical implementation challenges were discussed, the most important being limited time; limited materials; communal involvement in education; and trilingual education. The future will tell whether these challenges and gaps between theory and practice will be bridged.

5.2.4 Follow-up and pedagogical resources

Follow-up

During the PROFOCOM trainings, the new methodology on how to teach within the new curriculum is being explained to teachers. However, the training sessions alone are not sufficient to transform educational practices and Bolivia’s education sector at large. Therefore, the trainings need to be complemented with some sort of follow-up. Within the PROFOCOM programme, this follow-up consists first and foremost of visits (in Spanish: seguimiento) of the teacher trainers to the primary and secondary schools participating in the PROFOCOM programme, also called in-service support. During these visits, the teachers-in-training can ask their trainer questions concerning the curriculum, and discuss their doubts and uncertainties. The visits conducted by teacher trainers also provide for some monitoring and evaluation on the side of the teacher trainers. The survey data reveal that the large majority of 77% of the teachers-in-training indicated that the teacher trainers support them sufficiently to put the lessons learned during the PROFOCOM trainings into practice in their classrooms, against only a small minority of 3% who disagree with this statement. However, during the interviews, only 1 teacher-in-training and 1 headmaster (interview no. 14; 24) mentioned that the trainers visit their schools and provide for some monitoring and follow-up.
Nevertheless, the visits were confirmed by all 3 teacher trainers during the interviews (interview no. 12; 15; 16) but in different timeframes. Whereas 1 teacher trainer (interview no. 12) stated that he visits every school under his guidance at least 2 times per module, another teacher trainer (interview no. 15) stated that he only does 2 visits per month. The latter trainer stated in this regard: ‘[But] not all [trainers] do these visits, why? Because the trainers, as in my case, have their own jobs ... I do not dedicate myself for 100% to my PROFOCOM job, thus the most I can do is to make 2 visits per month’. Hence, the interviews show that teacher trainers could be somewhat more consistent in their visits and/or more supportive towards the teachers-in-training under their guidance, but this does certainly not apply to all teacher trainers, since this slightly negative pattern is not confirmed by the survey data.

Another kind of follow-up consists of meetings between teachers-in-trainings, which are organised by the teachers themselves at the participating schools. During these (often (bi)weekly) meetings, teachers-in-training of that particular school meet each other and discuss and evaluate on the content of the trainings and the way in which the lessons learned will be implemented. The survey data confirm that the large majority of the teachers-in-training (94%) indeed discuss the content and implementation of the PROFOCOM trainings with their colleagues. The interviews reflect the same pattern, with a majority of 68% of the teachers discussing the PROFOCOM trainings with each other. In addition, a large minority of the teachers-in-training (37%) stated during the interviews that they discuss problems or doubts with the headmaster of their school. Hence, one could conclude that, besides the (sometimes limited) support provided by teacher trainers, the large majority of the teachers-in-training discuss content and challenges of the PROFOCOM programme with their colleagues and/or headmaster.

**Pedagogical resources: cuadernos and textbooks**

Besides a new teaching methodology and the consequent follow-up provided to the teachers-in-training to change educational practices, the ASEP curriculum needs to be complemented by additional educational resources and materials as well. In terms of the materials provided for the PROFOCOM trainings, the Ministry of Education has provided workbooks or exercise books (in Spanish: cuadernos) for each of the 16 modules given within the programme. Within these cuadernos, the specific subject of the module and working method for the teachers is being explained. These workbooks also contain a section with additional or supplementary readings, that is, parts of articles or books on which the modules are based.
Teacher training in Bolivia and the implementation of the 2010 education reform

(often written by influential philosophers or pedagogues). Teachers-in-training are supposed to read these additional materials, preferably the entire book or text, to gain a greater understanding of the new curriculum and the ASEP reform. However, during the interviews, it became clear to me that the additional readings are not always provided for on time (either via internet or in real life) by the Ministry of Education (interview no. 7; 19). The latter issue constrains teachers’ ability to consult extra materials and prepare for the teacher trainings.

Further, the PROFOCOM materials, such as the cuadernos, are only provided to teachers-in-training; students have not (yet) received new textbooks to work with the new curriculum. This supposes that teachers themselves give shape to new materials used within the classroom, which is not a very realistic expectation (although the laptops provided make it easier to search for teaching materials, see below); it is more likely that the same textbooks and materials will be used by teachers and students. This is quite an ambivalent issue, as this might undermine the implementation of the new curriculum. This curriculum is very much focused on Bolivia’s own knowledges and encourages the production thereof, but how can students produce and reflect on these knowledges if their textbooks are not adapted to the ASEP curriculum? Hence, to conclude, although the Ministry has provided the teachers-in-training with workbooks for each corresponding PROFOCOM module, they should also strive for a timely distribution of additional reading materials. In addition, it would be recommendable to provide teachers and students with new textbooks, as the lack thereof could undermine the implementation of the ASEP curriculum.

Pedagogical resources: ‘Una computadora por docente’

In 2011, the Morales government decided to give all Bolivian teachers a laptop as part of the ‘una computadora por docente’ programme (this programme is explicitly not part of the PROFOCOM training programme, however, the 2 programmes could be seen as complementary). By doing so, the Morales government aims to stimulate a scientific revolution and to transform the education sector by entering the digital era (Ministerio de educación, 2012d). The aim or objective of the computadora programme is defined as follows: ‘The purpose of this donation is that teachers are going to work with the new educational model that is being implemented in the country, which seeks to incorporate new information and communication technologies in the learning processes at all levels and subsystems of education’ (Página Siete, 09-10-2013, 2013a). This quote makes clear that the laptops are intended to assist teachers to implement the ASEP educational model, as well as assisting students in their learning process. This research examined in how far the
computadora programme supports teachers to put the reforms into practice. Thereby, I aimed to find out how important the laptops are in assisting teachers in their teachings. The survey data show that 98% of the teachers-in-training received a laptop from the Bolivian government, which is also confirmed by 95% of the interview respondents. Hence, one could assume that (almost) all teachers have received a laptop, at least in my research area: the Cochabamba Department. Furthermore, the surveys reveal that 75% of the teachers indicated that they can actually work with a laptop (23% indicated that they know a little how a laptop functions, while only 2% indicated that they cannot work with a laptop). These percentages correspond to public statements of representatives of the urban and rural teacher unions, who estimated that 80% of Bolivia’s teachers know how to use a computer, or at least have basic knowledge thereof (Ibid.). Finally, the surveys show that a large majority of 91% of the teachers-in-training think that a laptop enriches the content of their classes, that is to say, that a laptop is an added value to their way of teaching. In terms of the purposes for which the laptops are being used by teachers, the interviews show that there is an important division within these purposes: namely, whether teachers use their laptops at home for personal use (for example for curriculum planning; searching teaching materials; processing grades; making exams; or making PROFOCOM assignments) or in the classroom with their students (for example to show movies or listen to music). The interview data show that, on the one hand, a majority of 63% of the teachers-in-training use their laptops for personal use, mostly for curriculum planning. The latter example indirectly influences students’ learning processes as well, however, the current use of laptops does not contribute directly to the learning processes of students. On the other hand, only a minority of 32% of the teachers-in-training stated that they use their laptops in interaction with their students, either for showing (cultural) movies or listening to music in the classroom (an equal percentage of teachers explicitly indicated that they do not use their laptops with their students). Part of the problem of limited in-class use of laptops could be the lack of internet or beamers at schools, the latter issue which is indicated as the main problem by a majority of 58% of the teachers. A teacher stated about this: ‘Sometimes, when it is necessary, I bring my laptop [to class] but we do not have a beamer, which is why it [a laptop] is not used
much, I use it only in the planning or for making exams’ (interview no. 4). Hence, to conclude, with a large majority of 91% of the teachers-in-training regarding their laptop as an added value to their way of teaching, it is mostly an added value to their own working methods (which could have an indirect influence on students’ learning processes), as the majority (63%) of the teachers use their laptops for personal use instead of in-class use with their students (32%). Therefore, it is questionable whether the computadora programme truly assists students directly in their learning processes, as stated in one of the programme’s objective above.

5.3 Concluding remarks

One of the most important changes to Bolivia’s education sector introduced by the ASEP law constitutes the introduction of a very ambitious and complex curriculum, based on the 4 general objectives of decolonial, intra- and intercultural along with plurilingual, productive and communitarian education. The implementation of the new curriculum, which needs to be implemented by all education levels from 2014 onwards, is supported by the PROFOCOM training programme for in-service teachers. This two-year programme is divided into 4 semesters and supported by 16 different modules; every module in turn consists of 3 sessions.

As regards the general perception on the teacher trainings, the vast majority of the teachers-in-training have a highly positive perception on the PROFOCOM trainings. The peer learning aspect of the trainings is among the main arguments endorsing this positive assessment. Especially the third wrap-up and sharing session leaves ample space for dialogue, debate and collective reflection, which are very important fundamentals of Freire’s pedagogy. Despite the positive assessment of the PROFOCOM programme, a small majority of the teachers-in-training (and headmasters) gave recommendations to improve the trainings: namely, a more dynamic and practical approach to especially the first theoretical session of the trainings, with more space for collective reflection, and better prepared teacher trainers.

In terms of the implementation of the PROFOCOM trainings in teachers’ classrooms, I discussed several practical examples - on the basis of the four general objectives of the new curriculum - such as indigenous medical knowledge; trilingual education; a project with vegetable gardens; and parents’ participation in education. These practical examples reveal that current educational activities try to relate theory and practice in different ways, which corresponds to Freire’s reflection and action approach. Furthermore, the practical
implementation examples revealed several challenges within the implementation process as well. Here, the most remarkable conclusion is the major divergence between interview and survey data: during the interviews, a majority (58%) of the teachers-in-training stated that they do not find implementation difficult, whereas a large majority (64%) of the survey respondents indicated that they do find implementation difficult. Another interesting conclusion in terms of implementation challenges is the statistical significant relation found between difficulty of implementation and age, which reveals that senior and more experienced teachers find it much more difficult to adapt to and implement a new curriculum. Lastly, I discussed several practical implementation challenges, the most important being limited time; limited materials; communal involvement in education; and trilingual education.

Finally, in terms of follow-up provided to the teachers in between and after the training sessions, teacher trainers visit the teachers-in-training at their particular schools, to discuss the curriculum and provide for some monitoring and evaluation. Although the large majority of the teachers (77%) indicated in the surveys that the trainers support them sufficiently in the implementation process, only 1 teacher and 1 headmaster confirmed during the interviews that the trainers visit their schools (although confirmed by all 3 teacher trainers). Further, the amount of visits conducted per teacher trainer in a particular timeframe seem to differ. However, besides discussing content and challenges with their trainer, a large majority of the teachers discuss these issues with their colleagues and/or headmaster as well. In terms of pedagogical resources provided for the trainings, the Ministry of Education provides workbooks for the teachers-in-training. Though, the Ministry should aim for a timely distribution of additional materials, as well as new textbooks for students. Further, all teachers have received a laptop as part of the ‘una computadora por docente’ programme. The main conclusion here is that the majority of the teachers (63%) use their laptops for personal use instead of in-class use (due to for example a lack of internet or beamers at schools), which makes it questionable whether the computadora programme contributes directly to students’ learning processes or is merely an added value to teachers’ own working methods (indirectly affecting students’ way of learning). In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the agency of teachers in the ASEP reform and the new curriculum.
6. Teachers’ agency in the ASEP reform

‘The teacher is the soldier of the liberation and decolonisation of Bolivia’
‘El maestro es el soldado de la liberación y descolonización de Bolivia’
(Morales, cited in Noticias de Bolivia, n.d.)

Teachers are seen as important actors for societal change in Bolivia nowadays, which is evident from Morales’ definition of teachers as the ‘soldiers of change’ or the ‘soldiers of liberation and decolonisation’ (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 35; Noticias de Bolivia, n.d.). In the ASEP law, it is stated that teacher education should ‘train critical, reflexive, auto-critical, innovative and research oriented professionals, who are committed to democracy, social transformations and the full inclusion of all Bolivians in society’. Further, teacher education should train academically qualified teachers, ‘both in specialised subject matters as in pedagogical matters, on the basis of an understanding of the reality, the cultural identity and the socio-historical processes of the country’ (Ministerio de Educación, 2010: art. 33) The objective of the Bolivian Ministry of Education to train (auto-)critical, reflexive, innovative, research oriented and academically qualified teachers is related to the agency of teachers in order to act as the conscious actors of change in Bolivia’s ASEP reform. Hence, in this chapter, the agency of teachers in the ASEP reform will be analysed on the basis of Vongalis’ definition of teachers’ agency along the three dimensions of obligations, authority and autonomy (as explained in subchapter 2.2.2). I will assess in how far these dimensions of teachers’ agency are represented within the ASEP reform.

6.1 Teachers’ obligations

Teachers are being controlled ever more in today’s neoliberal world by all kind of business like rules and regulations and control mechanisms, such as government regulations and quality assurance and accountability measures. Vongalis (2007: 432) argues that the proliferation of these rules and regulations increasingly shape teachers’ work and ‘suggest a commodification of teachers’ agency’. Hence, Vongalis criticises current neoliberal education structures and the consequent business like working environment of teachers, as the resulting obligations diminish the agency of teachers. Vongalis mostly relates teachers’ obligations to global developments such as globalisation and the spread of neoliberalism within today’s
education systems. However, Bolivia tries to break with this global neoliberal system, of which the ASEP education law is a prime example. As stated above, the ASEP law aims to train teachers ‘on the basis of an understanding of the reality, the cultural identity and the socio-historical processes of the country’ (Ministerio de Educación, 2010: art. 33). Bolivia’s post-neoliberal stance shows an alternative to Vongalis’ theorising about ever growing obligations and controls in a globalised, business-like education system and the resulting decrease of agency. Hence, in theory, the new way of teaching should enhance teachers’ agency, as the ASEP curriculum deviates from the obligations within the current neoliberal education system. It would be interesting to see whether this is experienced in the same way by the teachers themselves, or whether they experience different forms of obligations.

In general, half of the teachers-in-training (9 of the 19) stated during the interviews that they either feel obliged to participate in the PROFOCOM trainings or to implement the new curriculum. This sense of obligation put forward by half of the teachers (and 1 headmaster and 1 teacher trainer) is illustrated by the following quote: ‘The government has obliged this PROFOCOM [programme] so that we have to implement the law, the new law, therefore they [the government] have obliged us’ (interview no. 13). This sense of obligation is related to the fact that, from 2014 onwards, all education levels have to implement the new education law. Yet another teacher elaborated on the role of the government in imposing certain policies, by stating that ‘[I think that] every government imposes its ideology, and Bolivia is no exception herein ..... every education [system] always reflects the political ideology’ (interview no. 11). This teacher puts forward a political analysis of the new education reform, by arguing that every government imposes its own political ideology, and that teachers (and the education system at large) always have to follow this ideology.

Besides this direct sense of obligation towards the government, some teachers also stated that they feel indirectly obliged towards their school or other schools, due to better (teaching) positions offered for those educational actors who participate in the PROFOCOM programme and implement the new curriculum. The teacher mentioned before stated in this regard that better positions at schools are offered to those people that are up to date with the new curriculum. Hence, he does not feel directly but indirectly obliged to participate in the trainings, because ‘you have to show that you are up to date, you have to show these changes at your school, if you are not up to date you will not be competent [for a better position]’ (interview no. 11). Another headmaster was even more explicit and went further by arguing that ‘those [actors] who do not participate in PROFOCOM will not be able to be authorities [officials], hence this is blackmail’ (interview no. 25). Hence, this teacher and headmaster
argue that teachers and other educational actors are indirectly obliged to complete the PROFOCOM programme, in order to either maintain one’s position or to be eligible for a higher position within a certain school or the larger education system.

Finally, besides the abovementioned (in)direct obligations, a headmaster and an expert from the Dutch embassy put forward the view that participation in the PROFOCOM programme could also well be a moral obligation in the view of teachers and other educational actors (interview 2A; 24). The headmaster argued that ‘the PROFOCOM programme is a moral obligation instead of a direct [obligation] for teachers ..... because in order to implement you need to have certain tools, some clear ideas about what will be in the implementation process, otherwise, what if there will not [be such tools and ideas]?’ (interview no. 24). Hence, in this view, teachers feel morally obliged (for example towards their students, school, community or larger society) to participate in the teacher trainings in order to implement and convey the new curriculum to their students.

To conclude, none of the interview respondents spoke about neoliberal, business like rules or specific government regulations introduced within Bolivia’s education sector following the PROFOCOM programme. However, part of the teachers still feel a sense of obligation to participate in the trainings and implement the new curriculum, either towards schools, the government or the society at large. More specifically, half of the teachers feel directly obliged by the government, a teacher and a headmaster feel indirectly obliged to participate in order to obtain or maintain a better position within their school or other schools, and, finally, others put forward the view that teachers feel morally obliged to participate in the trainings and implement the new curriculum. Hence, although the ASEP curriculum deviates from the obligations within the current neoliberal education system, one could conclude that Bolivian teachers do not have much agency in their decision whether or not to participate in the PROFOCOM programme and whether or not to change their way of teaching in line with the ASEP curriculum, due to their (perceived) direct, indirect and moral obligations.

### 6.2 Teachers’ authority

‘One of the fundamental pillars of [being] a teacher is that we never stop learning ..... the training of a teacher should be continuous and ongoing, always, for life’

(teacher, interview no. 18A)
The authority of teachers stems from their ability ‘to acquire and teach knowledge, this exchange ensuring that teachers are critical agents in the education system’ (Vongalis, 2007: 433). Hence, authority is very much focused on knowledge, and teachers’ ability to internalise and convey this knowledge onto their students. In the case of Bolivia, the ASEP curriculum aims to revalue Bolivia’s own (indigenous) knowledges, instead of solely relying on foreign knowledges. In line with this, Bolivia’s PROFOCOM programme aims to enlarge the authority and autonomy (see subchapter 6.3) of teachers. However, Vongalis argues that teachers are nowadays merely messengers of the system, only transferring information onto their students, instead of being ‘critical agents’. It would be interesting to see whether this is the case for the PROFOCOM programme, and how this is perceived by teachers-in-training themselves.

First, the way in which teachers-in-training acquire knowledge during the PROFOCOM trainings will be discussed. During the surveys, a large majority of 70% of the survey respondents indicated that they understand the subjects which are being explained during the trainings. Furthermore, a minority of 30% of the respondents understand the subjects a bit, while none of the respondents indicated that they do not understand the subjects explained. The subjects discussed during the trainings refer among others to the different elements of the ASEP law, which are well understood by a majority of 61% of the survey respondents, against one third who understand the different elements of the ASEP law a bit, and a small minority of 5% who indicated that they do not understand these elements. These outcomes suggest that the ASEP law and the different modules are well explained by the teacher trainers, and that the teachers-in-training acquire knowledge quite easily. However, in subchapter 5.2.2, we have seen that several educational actors put forward a critical stance towards the teacher trainers, by arguing that the trainers are not well enough prepared and/or knowledgeable enough about the ASEP law and curriculum. Hence, the role of the teacher trainer in teachers’ acquirement of knowledge is somewhat ambivalent, as the research data do not display a coherent view regarding this issue.

Besides the input provided by the teacher trainers, it is also important to consider the possibility for teachers-in-training themselves to contribute with their knowledge and experience to the trainings. That is, whether teachers are fully recognised as ‘knowledge specialists’, as defined by Vongalis (Ibid.). The survey data reveal that 96% of the survey respondents indicated that there is enough space to contribute with their own knowledge and innovative ideas to the content of the trainings (against only 3% who disagree with this statement). In addition, 81% indicated that they have opportunity to criticise the contents of
the trainings (against 6% who disagree herewith). During the interviews, half of the teachers-in-training (9 of the 19) argued that they can actively participate in and contribute to the trainings, for example by means of reflection and discussion (against only 2 teachers-in-training explicitly stating that they do not have this opportunity). A teacher illustrated this view by stating that ‘this new law is under construction, therefore the opinions and arguments that we put forward will be systematised ..... everything that is pointed out in the socialisations [third sessions] are taken into account for next year, hence in this way we are participating’ (interview no. 17). This teacher strongly feels that teachers can contribute with their own opinions and arguments to (the build-up and contents of) the (prospective) trainings, which endorses critical, conscious-raising learning, as supported by Vongalis. In terms of teachers’ own role in acquiring knowledge, it is also worth mentioning the peer learning aspect of the trainings again here, as already explained in subchapter 5.2.2.

Finally, I would like to discuss the way in which teachers teach the acquired knowledge to their students. That is to say, whether they are mere messengers of the education system, as argued by Vongalis, or whether they are able to act as critical agents. Within the research data, I did not find a general opinion on the statement whether teachers are mere messengers of the system, only transmitting information to students, however, I did find some illustrating quotes which might contribute to some reflection on the above statement. A teacher stated in this regard: ‘[I think that] with this new law ... children themselves are starting to create their own learning. In the past, it was very different; children had to do all [assignments] a teacher gave them. Now, this is no longer the case, as the teacher also learns from the students, they from us [the teachers] and we from them, nowadays teaching is shared’ (interview no. 20). This quote, which focuses on mutual sharing of knowledges and critical learning, could be related to the proposition of critical pedagogues that education should foster a dialogue or creative exchange between teacher and students. This is related to the view put forward by one of the teacher trainers, who argues that ‘[teachers are] not just ‘implementers’ because teachers’ work is not automatic/static, it is intellectual work [in order to] produce knowledge’ (interview no. 15). Thus, the aforementioned quotes suggest that Vongalis’ argument that teachers are merely messengers of knowledge within today’s education system does not apply to the new way of teaching within the ASEP curriculum, and that Bolivian teachers are able to act as critical agents.

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21 Here again, the build-up of the third wrap-up and sharing session might play a considerable role in this view.
However, one should keep in mind that no general conclusion could be drawn on the basis of these 2 views.

To conclude, one could say that the role of the teacher trainer in teachers’ acquirement of knowledge is somewhat ambivalent: although the survey data reveal that the large majority of the teachers have a good understanding of the subjects explained during the trainings, the data reveal a critical stance to the teaching skills of trainers as well. The role of teachers-in-training themselves in their learning processes is clearer: the interview and survey data both reveal that the majority, and in the interviews half, of the teachers stated that they can actively participate in and contribute to the trainings with their own knowledge and experience. The issue of peer learning also needs to be taken into account here. Finally, the last section suggests that Bolivian teachers are able to act as critical agents. Hence, on the basis of the interview and survey data, one could conclude that the PROFOCOM programme succeeds to a large extent in its aim to enhance the authority of Bolivian teachers.

6.3 Teachers’ autonomy

‘Now with this new law, we, the teachers, are the principal actors, and I think that all teachers will produce knowledges according to our reality’

(teacher, interview no. 14)

The autonomy of teachers relates to their ‘capacity to determine and pursue their own interests and make effective their demands’ (Vongalis, 2007: 434).22 Simply put: the autonomy of teachers is closely related to the amount of freedom teachers have in implementing a curriculum in their classroom. In relation to the PROFOCOM programme, which aims to enhance the autonomy of teachers-in-training, this autonomy is influenced by such issues as their ability to make their own choices in terms of the ASEP curriculum, and the freedom to assess which elements of the trainings are useful to implement in their classrooms. Teachers’ choices in terms of the curriculum should be well-considered, and school authorities such as headmasters have to trust their teachers in this sense.

22 More specifically, the autonomy of teachers in an individual sense will be discussed here. Despite Vongalis’ critical theorising about the role of teacher unions in teachers’ collective autonomy, and the major role of urban and rural teacher unions in Bolivia’s education sector, I deliberately chose not to include these organised actors in my research (as explained in footnote 12). Therefore, I cannot say anything about the role of Bolivia’s teacher unions in teachers’ autonomy on the basis of my research data.
In general, from my observations, I saw that teachers have a considerable amount of freedom in deciding themselves which educational activities to undertake during the second implementation period within each module of the PROFOCOM programme. During this implementation period, (groups of) teachers from the same school have to discuss and decide which activities correspond best to the interests and characteristics of the particular school. The teachers have to present the activities undertaken during the third wrap-up and sharing session. I attended several of these sessions, in which it became clear to me that (almost) every group of teachers came up with different innovative activities. Based on these observations, one could say that the PROFOCOM programme leaves considerable space for teachers to determine and pursue their own interests and demands (Ibid.), as they have quite a large amount of freedom to choose their preferred activities and pedagogical strategies/methodologies to work with, which enhances the autonomy of teachers. The following quotes by two teachers-in-training endorse my observations, as one teacher states that ‘the sessions are very open ..... they [the trainers] do not impose us, they do not tell us “this will be [done] like this” ..... every [teacher] has [its own] teaching strategies, hence the trainer tells us that we could do a role play, that we could make a conceptual scheme/map, or that we could design a survey, and this is very good: allowing a student [or teacher-in-training] to choose his or her own way of learning [or teaching]’ (interview no. 20). This teacher confirms that teachers(-in-training) can select their own learning strategies within the trainings. Another teacher elaborates on the way in which the curriculum is being implemented: ‘the teachers cannot implement [in the same way] as it is done there [at the Normal] because not all [teachers] work under the same conditions at schools, others have certain limitations, mostly in terms of materials ..... therefore some [teachers] seek alternative solutions to implement [the curriculum]’ (interview no. 21). The latter teacher argues that the ASEP law is being implemented in different ways by different teachers, who propose alternative solutions due to different conditions at schools (for example a lack of materials). Furthermore, 2 teachers-in-training explicitly stated during the interviews that teachers have the possibility to experiment with the new curriculum: that is, undertaking different activities and teaching methods to see which ones give good results in terms of student outcomes for example (interview no. 21; 23). The aforementioned examples reveal that teachers themselves are (partly) responsible for inventing activities and implementing the new curriculum, which acknowledges the autonomy of teachers in the ASEP reform.

Further, as stated above, headmasters and other school authorities have to trust teachers in taking (part of this) responsibility for undertaking activities and implementing the
ASEP curriculum. That is, school authorities should believe in teachers’ capacity to make well-considered choices for implementing the curriculum, in order for teachers’ autonomy to be fully recognised. As regards teachers’ belief in their own capacities, a large majority of 90% of the teachers-in-training indicated in the surveys that they feel capable to implement the new curriculum (against 2% who do not feel capable). In addition, a large majority of 96% of the teachers-in-training indicated that, as a result of the PROFOCOM trainings, they will change their way of teaching (against 2% who will not change their way of teaching). This confidence in the capacity of teachers is confirmed by 3 of the 4 headmasters participating in my research (1 headmaster who is at the same time a teacher trainer), stating that they have a strong belief in the capacity of teachers to implement the new curriculum and change their way of teaching. A headmaster illustrated this view by stating that ‘sometimes we [headmasters/teacher trainers] think that a teacher does not have this potential, but when we give him/her that opportunity [the teacher] starts to pull out all the strategies he/she has’ (interview no. 12). This quote clearly illustrates the confidence of headmasters in the way of teaching of their teachers.

To conclude, teachers-in-training have quite a large amount of freedom within the trainings to choose their preferred educational activities and pedagogical strategies/methodologies to work with. Hence, the trainings allow the teachers to determine and pursue their own interests and demands. Furthermore, school authorities such as headmasters – and teachers-in-training themselves - have a strong belief in teachers’ capacity to implement the new curriculum and make well-considered choices regarding this curriculum. Based on the foregoing, one could conclude that the PROFOCOM programme lives up to its aim to acknowledge and enhance the autonomy of teachers.

6.4 Concluding remarks

The post-neoliberal stance of the Bolivian government shows an alternative to Vongalis’ argument about increasing control mechanisms within a neoliberal, business-like education system. The ASEP law derogates from these obligations and controls within today’s neoliberal education system. However, despite this alternative stance within education, part of the teachers and other educational actors still feel obliged to participate in the trainings and

23 Although a majority (64%) of the teachers-in-training find implementation of the new curriculum difficult, as is shown in subchapter 5.2.3, a large majority (90%) express as well confidence in their own capacity.
implement the ASEP curriculum. They either feel directly obliged by the government – a feeling which might be well-founded as all education levels have to implement the new education law from 2014 onwards; indirectly obliged to their own school or to achieve a better position at another school; or morally obliged to convey the new curriculum onto students. Due to these (perceived) direct, indirect and moral obligations, one could conclude that the agency of teachers is not fully recognised in the new reform and training programme in terms of obligations.

Further, the authority of teachers within the ASEP reform refers to their ability to acquire and teach knowledge. Whereas the role of teacher trainers in teachers’ acquirement of knowledge during the PROFOCOM trainings is somewhat ambivalent, the teachers-in-training themselves are an important link in their own learning process. The research data reveal that the majority of the teachers-in-training feel that they have the possibility to actively participate in and contribute to the trainings with their own knowledge and experience. The peer learning aspect of the training also needs to be considered in this regard, which fosters dialogue and creative exchange between trainers and teachers-in-training (and teachers and students). Thus, Bolivian teachers are much more than only ‘implementers’ or messengers within the new curriculum, by supporting critical, conscious-raising learning. Therefore, one could say that the PROFOCOM programme supports and enhances the authority of Bolivian teachers.

Finally, teachers’ autonomy relates to their capacity to determine and pursue their own interests and demands. The research data reveal that the trainings allow teachers to realise this capacity, as they are able to discuss and select their preferred educational activities and pedagogical strategies/methodologies to work with. Furthermore, school authorities and teachers-in-training show a strong belief in the capacity of teachers to implement the ASEP curriculum and make well-considered choices regarding this curriculum. Hence, one could conclude that the training programme and the ASEP law at large acknowledge and encourage the autonomy of teachers.

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that, although part of the teachers and educational actors feel (in)directly or morally obliged to participate in the trainings, the PROFOCOM programme lives up to its aim to enhance the authority and autonomy, and hence agency, of Bolivian teachers. This development shows a clear alternative to Vongalis’ reasoning of ever growing neoliberal obligations in the current education system that diminish and impede the authority and autonomy of teachers. On the other hand, this research shows that Bolivian teachers are able to act as the conscious actors of change in the ASEP reform.
7. Conclusion

This concluding chapter will draw together the various themes and findings discussed in this thesis, in order to answer the main research question of ‘How do teachers-in-training in Cochabamba, Bolivia, experience their re-training in the ASEP curriculum, and how do they put it into practice? Do teachers feel that their agency is respected within the ASEP reform, and what kind of support do they receive?’ This thesis has shown that, overall, the majority of the teachers-in-training positively assess their re-training in the ASEP curriculum (which is very much based on Freire’s pedagogy), although they experience several implementation challenges as well (especially senior and more experienced teachers). It is important to pay attention to these challenges and discrepancies within the new curriculum, as, once overcome, this could even further enhance the agency of Bolivian teachers, for which the ASEP reform leaves ample space. This section will elaborate concisely on the main findings resulting from the data analysis, which enables me to answer the main research question.

7.1 Summary of the main findings

As regards the first part of the research question, this thesis aimed to find out how teachers-in-training experience and perceive the two-year re-training programme for in-service teachers. The main conclusion in this regard is that, in general, the vast majority of the teachers-in-training have a highly positive perception of the PROFOCOM trainings; the possibility of peer learning is one of the main arguments for this positive assessment. A small majority of the teachers-in-training gave recommendations for improvements as well: a more dynamic and practical approach to especially the first theoretical session, and better prepared teacher trainers.

The second part of the research question deals with the implementation of the lessons learned during the PROFOCOM trainings in teachers’ classrooms. Here, an important outcome is that current educational activities attempt to relate theory and practice in different ways, which reflects the major influence of Freire’s pedagogy (in this case, Freire’s reflection and action approach) within the ASEP curriculum. In terms of implementation challenges, the interview and survey data found very different outcomes: whereas a majority of the interview respondents do not consider implementation difficult, a large majority of the survey respondents do find implementation difficult. Furthermore, regarding the categorisations
made within my research data (urban/rural; male/female; young/middle-aged/old), I only found a statistical significant relation within the latter category: namely, between difficulty of implementation and age, which displays that senior and more experienced teachers find it much more difficult to implement the ASEP curriculum.

Further, the latter part of the research question elaborates on the (in-service) support provided to teachers-in-training. The main finding here is that a large majority of the teacher-in-training discuss content and challenges of the training programme with their trainer (who could be somewhat more consistent in the (amount of) visits to the schools), their colleagues and/or headmaster. Furthermore, in terms of pedagogical resources provided to support the trainings, the Ministry of Education should strive for a timely distribution of additional reading materials and new textbooks (in addition to the workbooks already provided). In addition, although all teachers have received a laptop, the research data reveal that the majority of the teachers use their laptops merely for personal use instead of in-class use in interaction with their students, due to a lack of internet or beamers. Hence, the current way of using a laptop impedes a direct contribution to students’ learning processes.

Finally, in relation to the agency of teachers, as mentioned in the last part of the research question, this thesis examined in how far Vongalis’ definition of teachers’ agency - divided into obligations, authority and autonomy - is recognised in the ASEP reform. Although the ASEP law deviates from current neoliberal obligations and controls, teachers feel nevertheless (in)directly or morally obliged to participate in the PROFOCOM trainings and implement the new curriculum. Despite this sense of obligation, which does not fully recognise teachers’ agency, this thesis argues that the agency of Bolivian teachers is recognised and enhanced in terms of their authority and autonomy in the training programme and the ASEP law, which shows an alternative to Vongalis’ reasoning. Hence, it is argued that Bolivian teachers are able to act as the conscious and main actors of change in the ASEP reform. The following quote perfectly illustrates this view: ‘they [educational authorities] make us [teachers] the actors/subjects that are going to change the educational reality’ (interview no. 14).
7.2 Policy recommendations

The Bolivian government strongly believes that education plays a major role in realising their ambitious politics of change. However, to really bring about educational and larger societal change, and to achieve Freire’s ‘liberation of education’, several issues need to be addressed within the PROFOCOM training programme. The first recommendation relates to one of the fundamental objectives of the ASEP law, that is, plur- or trilingual education. Although the new ASEP education law aims to be trilingual, my observations and the data revealed that Bolivia’s current education system remains very much bilingual: whereas the large majority of the teachers speak both Spanish and Quechua, they lack knowledge of a foreign language such as English or French. Hence, the implementation of the plurilingual part of the ASEP reform remains highly ambitious and difficult. For the new curriculum to become truly trilingual, the Ministry has to provide extra language training or support to teachers, or at least has to put extra effort into this issue in order to fully realise trilingual education in Bolivia.

Another recommendation relates directly to the PROFOCOM trainings, and, more specifically, to the teacher trainers imparting the trainings. During my research, several teachers-in-training and headmasters argued that the trainers are not knowledgeable and/or prepared enough to facilitate the trainings. Hence, the Ministry of Education has to ensure that the facilitadores are suitable and well-enough prepared for this function, for example by making a stricter selection in the employment of trainers. Within the selection of trainers, it would also be recommendable to point out more clearly what is being expected from the trainers: for example that they are supposed to provide the teachers-in-training with in-service support by visiting the schools. Now, the trainers seem to be somewhat inconsistent in their visits, as the amount of visits conducted within a certain timeframe seem to differ.

Finally, in practical terms, besides providing workbooks for each corresponding PROFOCOM module, the Ministry should take care of a timely distribution of additional reading material for teachers-in-training as well, either via internet or in real life. By doing so, the teachers-in-training could better prepare the trainings, which would enhance the content and quality of the trainings. Furthermore, it would also be highly recommendable to provide beamers to all schools (either by the Ministry or local/regional education department), in order for the teachers and students to make full use of the laptops in the classroom.
7.3 Recommendations for further research

This research focused to a large extent on the experiences and perceptions of teachers-in-training and other educational actors, such as teacher trainers, headmasters and experts, of the ASEP curriculum and the PROFOCOM trainings. Due to the large role of the community within the ASEP reform, it would be interesting to explore the perceptions of community members, such as parents, on the new curriculum and their presumed participation within this curriculum. Furthermore, it would be highly interesting to look more into the experiences of children with the new curriculum in the classroom. That is, whether they notice any differences between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ way of teaching, whether they value the new way of teaching and the new curriculum, and whether they perceive any direct influences on their learning processes.

Further, since my research concentrates on the Cochabamba Department, it would be interesting to research the implementation of the PROFOCOM programme and the new curriculum in other Departments of Bolivia. Further research would allow for a better understanding of the different regional and localised knowledges, and the way in which these knowledges are incorporated in the new way of teaching. In addition, it would be useful to see whether teachers in different departments, with different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, implement the curriculum differently, and whether this results in different classroom practices.

Finally, it would be recommendable to research the implementation of the ASEP curriculum within a couple of years from now, to see whether the new curriculum is fully implemented by then. It would also be valuable to assess by that time whether the ASEP reform has truly lived up to its aim to enhance Bolivia’s education results, especially among the indigenous population.

7.4 Personal reflection

This thesis sought to examine teachers’ own perceptions of the PROFOCOM trainings, which support the implementation of the ASEP curriculum, and the perceived challenges within the implementation process. It is important to raise awareness about and take action on the basis of these challenges, as this could enhance the agency of teachers even further, for which the ASEP reform leaves ample space as argued in this thesis. Furthermore, it is also important to
raise teachers’ awareness about their assumed role as actors of change within Bolivia’s education system and society at large. I hope that my research has contributed in one way or another to this awareness raising, and to further reflection and debate on the way in which the ASEP law and the PROFOCOM trainings are being implemented in the classroom.

In general, one could say that the post-neoliberal education reform pursued by the MAS government shows an alternative to the neoliberal education policies currently pursued in other countries. And although the majority of the Bolivian teachers-in-training positively perceive the ASEP education reform and the resulting training programme, there will always be opposing voices to the government’s chosen path. One headmaster perfectly illustrated this view by stating that ‘Bolivia goes back in time with its current backward-looking educational approach’ (interview no. 25). Although I have respect for the alternative, critical and post-neoliberal stance adopted in education and other policy areas by the Bolivian government, Bolivia should not forget or underestimate its place in today’s world in my opinion. After long periods of indigenous exclusion and marginalisation, it is essential to include indigenous knowledges within education. However, by doing so, the government and Ministry of Education should not overlook the equally important contribution of other, foreign knowledges to students’ learning processes and children’s development. Hence, although I acknowledge the fact that Bolivia’s past very much influences the country’s present and future, it is vital to adopt a forward-looking approach in education and other policy areas.

Finally, during my research, I gained great respect for the teachers themselves: besides their regular teaching job, which is already highly challenging due to Bolivia’s political, social and cultural context, they dedicate (part of) their weekends and spare time to participate in the PROFOCOM programme. In my view, it is highly admirable that they participate in this ambitious programme besides their busy personal and professional lives. In addition, teachers are made solely responsible for Bolivia’s educational and societal change by defining them as the ‘soldiers of change’, which might be an excessive burden for teachers. Hence, although the ASEP law leaves ample space for teachers to act as the conscious actors of change, it remains to be seen whether teachers will be able to live up to this promise.
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## Appendix 1

### List of interview and survey respondents

**Interviews conducted with experts**

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**Interviews conducted with urban teachers, headmasters and teacher trainers**

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Teacher training in Bolivia and the implementation of the 2010 education reform

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Interviews conducted with rural teachers, headmasters and teacher trainers

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