Education For All?

A study of teachers’ attitudes to gender equality in the Bolivian education system.

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Abstract:

The latest education reform in Bolivia seeks to decolonise the education system to achieve educational equality as part of the government’s broader agenda for social justice. Gender equality is seen as an important principal of Education For All and yet, whilst it was emphasised in the previous education reform, now the importance accorded to gender equality has been diminished in favour of a focus on interculturality. Given this change in discourse, this thesis hopes to provide an overview of gender (in)equality in the education system and how this concept is perceived by teachers, who, as the ‘soldiers of change,’ are central to the education reform process.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEP</td>
<td>Bolivia’s latest education reform law ‘Avelino Siñani and Elizardo Perez.’</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBDE</td>
<td>Bolivian Campaign for the Right to Education (Campaña Boliviana para el Derecho a la Educación).</td>
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<td>CIDEM</td>
<td>Women’s Centre of Information and Development (Centro de Información y Desarrollo de la Mujer).</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>UNESCO’s Education For All Initiative established in 1990.</td>
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<td>FAWE</td>
<td>Forum of African Women Educators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund.</td>
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<td>INE</td>
<td>National Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas).</td>
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<tr>
<td>iNGOs</td>
<td>International Non Governmental Organisations.</td>
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<td>JICA</td>
<td>Japanese International Cooperacion Agency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LRE</td>
<td>1994 Bolivian education reform ‘Ley de Reforma Educativa.’</td>
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<td>MAS</td>
<td>Evo Morales’ political party, Movement Towards Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo).</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals, established by the United Nations in 2000.</td>
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<td>MNR</td>
<td>The Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario).</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Bolivian Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación).</td>
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<td>MoJ</td>
<td>Bolivian Ministry of Justice (Ministerio de Justicia).</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organisations.</td>
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<td>PE</td>
<td>Physical Education.</td>
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<td>PIEB</td>
<td>Strategic Investigation Programme, Bolivia (Programa de Investigación Estratégica en Bolivia).</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNIO</td>
<td>The Bolivian Ministry of Justice’s National Plan for Equal Opportunities (Plan Nacional Para la Igualdad de Oportunidades).</td>
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PNUD  United Nations Development Programme (*Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo*).

S1, S2, S3  Schools One, Two and Three respectively

SEDUCA  Local Education Authority.

SLIM  Municipal Legal Service (Cochabamba office).

SNV  Netherlands Development Organization.

SRA  Strategic Relational Approach.

SRHR  Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights.

UN  United Nations.


WHO  World Health Organisation.
Acknowledgements

I feel very privileged to have been able to experience the research process from start to finish: from developing a research project and proposal, to embarking on the ‘adventure’ of research in Bolivia and, finally, devote time and energy to the matter of writing. All in all, this thesis is the result of many months dedication and would not have been possible without the help and support of many people.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Research relevance and rationale

A group of 10 girls and their mothers face the crowds and march up to the entrance of the school. It is 6 February 2012, the first day of the new school year and these girls are exercising their right to education by entering the most prestigious school in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The only catch? This is an all-boys school. Single sex institutions have been banned under current legislation yet many single-sex schools continue to exist throughout the country. Furthermore, the enrolment of these girls was met with ferocious resistance and disapproval from the parents of the current students such that the girls, their families and their defendants met with abuse and violence.

The families sought to enrol their daughters in Colegio Bolivar1 before the start of the school year in Bolivia. Finding themselves rejected by the parents of the boys and forced out of the queue, their parents approached SEDUCA2, the local education authority, to help their daughters to attend the school. SEDUCA then gave the headmaster a list of the girls’ names with orders to enrol them (El Deber, 2012). This was met with outcry from parents of boys already attending the school and those queuing to enrol their sons this year. One of the girls involved who now attends Colegio Bolivar with her 9 contemporaries explained the events as follows:

“Everybody has to queue so you can put your name on a list to register. And, well, in this instance, the [boys] parents did not want to include us girls and that’s when we started to make our own list and then, finally, two days before the deadline to register, that’s when the fighting and everything started because we brought our list to the school to get our names on the master list, made by one of the other parents. But the parents tore up our list and started to insult us, to shout things at us” (P2).3

When the girls tried to enter the school on the first day of term, they met with further resistance from the boys and their families, and the police were called to disperse the crowds with tear gas (El Diario, 2012). The days that followed were filled with protests and the school was closed by the authorities whilst a resolution was negotiated. Public opinion across the country rallied behind the girls as the story captured the hearts and minds of the Bolivian people. Finally, after over a week of negotiations, an agreement was reached which would allow all 10 girls to attend the school and provisions were made to improve school infrastructure to accommodate more female students in the future.

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1 Bolivar School.
2 The local education authority.
3 All interviews were conducted in Spanish and transcribed and translated by the author.
This event was portrayed in the national press as evidence of the continuing existence of machismo\textsuperscript{4} in Bolivian society, a country plagued by social inequalities based on ethnicity, race, class and gender. Bolivian society is characterised by a strong patriarchal tradition in which women are seen primarily as wife and mother and whose active role in society has historically been restricted (see chapter 4). The Director of Regular Education (P9) from the Ministry of Education (MoE) clearly sees the events at Colegio Bolivar as a victory for women in working towards gender equality in Bolivia however, although the authorities strongly supported the case of the girls to enter the school, this focuses on the idea of access to schools, or a measure of gender parity.

1.1.1 Girls’ education in Bolivia

The figures from the 2011 Education For All (EFA, explained in further detail below) monitoring report\textsuperscript{5} (UNESCO, 2011) show gross secondary school enrolment in Bolivia at 82\%, with a gender gap of just 0.97.\textsuperscript{6} The statistics show a fairly significant drop in enrolment between lower secondary (93\%) and upper secondary (78\%) with less girls enrolling at secondary level, although more girls than boys survive to upper secondary level. Overall, the first impression is that girls are doing better than boys. However, whilst it is clear from this that Bolivia has made significant progress towards achieving equality of access to education, gender parity does not equate to gender equality in education.\textsuperscript{7} Whilst important, this is an incomplete interpretation concept of gender equality in the education system. Social inequalities – including gender inequalities - are often reproduced within the education system (Kabeer, 2005) through the curriculum, hierarchies and teachers’ attitudes. Thus, these statistics fail to capture the dynamics of the discrimination girls and women face daily, and so say little about the reality of gender equality in schools (Stromquist, 2001). When I spoke to the Manager of Gender, Generations and Social Justice from the MoE, she stressed that it was the parents, rather than the teachers or the school itself, who were responsible for the discrimination.

\textsuperscript{4} Machismo - A concept deeply rooted in the Spanish-speaking world. It has its origin in a sense of honor, felt to depend on a man’s own actions and those of his close family, particularly its female members. Machismo is present in the home, where even working women usually do most of the housework, and extends to the workplace. It can affect the legal status of women. (Wordreference.com 3/12/12).

\textsuperscript{5} Using data gathered between 2006 and 2008.

\textsuperscript{6} Where 1 indicates parity between girls and boys, less than 1 indicates more boys enrolled than girls, and more than 1 indicates greater enrolment of girls than boys.

\textsuperscript{7} For the purposes of this research gender is defined as “the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women” (WHO, 2012). The social marginalisation of women in Bolivia means the primary focus of this thesis is on redressing gender inequalities faced by girls. Whilst gender equality is often conceived as a more normative idea, and gender equity requires the removal of “deep-seated barriers to equality of opportunity for both sexes” (Aikman et al., 2005: 47). For the purposes of this thesis I use gender equality as a cover-all term.
against the girls in the case of Colegio Bolivar. The fact that it was the boys’ mothers who responded with such vehemence against the girls’ admission demonstrates the depth to which the patriarchal mentality is entrenched in Bolivian society (PIEB, 2012) and the fact that it is very often women who replicate and perpetuate gender stereotypes. However, the education system remains a hugely unequal environment and, as both the school and the family act as sites of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 2001), what, then, is the role of education in creating gender justice in future generations?

In light of these events I feel it is important to delve into the reality of schooling in Bolivia and what the government is trying to do to redress gender inequalities in education. This chapter will establish the research context, including positioning the Bolivian case in relation to the international agenda on education, and the research questions applied for this investigation. Finally, I will give an overview of the layout of this thesis but first, it is important to establish the unique political context in Bolivia at a time of great social change.

1.1.2 Morales comes to power

In January 2006, Evo Morales took office as Bolivia’s first indigenous president, having won over 50% of the vote with a pledge to integrate indigenous rights at the centre of his governmental policy. As leader of the political party ‘Movement Towards Socialism’ (MAS), his election signified a shift in the political standing for the country. A former coca farmer of Aymara descent, his focus on indigenous rights and participation follows a trend in Latin America to turn away from the Western agenda and develop their own form of ‘home’ politics. The need for this comes after centuries of oppression and marginalisation of indigenous people; the long colonial history of more than 300 years embedded a mode of social organization in which the indigenous people were excluded and marginalised. When Bolivia gained independence from Spain in 1825 this had little impact on the societal structure; power remained in the hands of the criollos, with the indigenous people on the margins of society. This legacy can be seen to this day as, although 62% of the population consider themselves ‘indigenous’ (Drange 2011), their needs have historically been overlooked by the political agenda.

Transforming this historical marginalisation of the indigenous groups forms the foundation of the current government’s political agenda. The election of Evo Morales represents the first true political challenge to this status quo and the MAS seek to create a more egalitarian society which achieves social justice for all, in which the needs of the indigenous people are integral to the national policy. The Morales government created a new national constitution to reflect the
revolutionary society they envisioned through a process of *descolonización*, or decolonization. Ratified in January 2009, it places indigenous rights at the very heart of the country’s agenda. The changes include greater indigenous rights and political participation, legitimisation of indigenous systems of justice and the decentralisation of power into 4 levels of autonomy: departmental, regional, municipal and indigenous (BBC, 2009). National interests are protected under the new constitution with large scale land reforms and the nationalisation of natural resources (Lopes Cardozo, 2011). Furthermore, he has largely rejected assistance from the World Bank and the IMF in the education sector (Lopes Cardozo, 2009) and adopted the philosophy of *vivir bien* or “to live well.” Morales describes this as: “to live in equality and justice. Where no-one is exploited or exploits others, where no-one is excluded or excludes others, where no-one is marginalised or marginalises others. To ‘live well’ is to live as a community, collectively, in reciprocity, in solidarity and, most importantly, harmoniously” (Bossi, 2007).\(^8\)

### 1.1.3 The ASEP reform

Further to drafting a new constitution, the government has put in place a revolutionary education reform to decolonise the country and create greater social justice. The Morales government abolished the Education Reform Law (here on referred to as LRE) established under the previous government in 1994 and introduced a more radical education reform, initially known as the *anteproyecto*.\(^9\) After a 4 year delay due to negotiations between the MoE and teachers, the Church, universities and social organisations to reach a consensus on the proposed reform (Director of Regular Education, P9), the *anteproyecto* was ratified to become the Avelino Sñani Elizardo Perez (here on referred to as ASEP) education reform in 2010. In order to achieve this, the government has established teachers as ‘soldiers of change;’ key actors in creating social justice in Bolivia (Ministerio de Educación in Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 2), highlighting the importance of their agency for bringing about change. The reform carries the names of two educators, Avelino Sñani and Elizardo Perez, who used their agency to establish a revolutionary indigenous education programme in Bolivia in the 1930s (Talavera, 2011). Although short lived, the legacy of the education programme, which promoted bilingual education and technical training (Arteaga, 2011), lives on in the ideas incorporated in the ASEP reform. The use of this name for the reform demonstrates just how integral the indigenous rights agenda is to the government’s social vision.

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\(^8\) All Spanish sources have been translated from the original by the author.

\(^9\) The name the reform was known by during the development phase.
The ASEP reform has three main pillars: decolonisation, community participation and productivity (Drange, 2011). The premise behind decolonisation, the main focus of the ASEP reform, is “bringing ethnic boundaries to an end and not allowing western thoughts to be privileged as the sole and universal ones, but to underline the thoughts, knowledge and technology of the cultures of Amerindian societies” (CNNLEB cited in Drange 2011: 33-4). Although many aspects of this model are unique to Bolivia, the idea of providing quality education for all which shapes the essence of the reform is in line with the international EFA agenda on education. However, it is not possible to achieve quality education without first ensuring equality in education because gender inequality undermines the effectiveness of schooling (Aikman et al. 2011).

1.1.4 Gender Equality in the ASEP Reform

One of the main differences between the ASEP reform and the LRE is the emphasis placed on gender equality; whilst the LRE had a clear, central focus on gender equality, in line with the EFA agreement, the ASEP reform gives far greater discursive weight to indigenous rights whilst overlooking the problematic of gender equality. Yet huge gender disparities remain within the education system: in 2007, of the 58,000 children nationwide who failed to complete primary school 40% were girls (PNUD, 2010: 172). So with the idea of vivir bien and the rhetoric of social justice central to the reform, it would suggest that gender equality should be given greater prominence. Gender equality needs to be a central factor in Bolivia if the government hopes to create social justice. Luykx (2000: 163) suggests that at least part of the resistance to the gender discourse “arises from the perception, on the part of indigenous educators and authorities, that they are under pressure to walk the occidental path.”

Gender equality is often conceptualised in Bolivia, as a Western, neoliberal concept, imposed from above as a form of cultural imperialism. Since the government eschews the neoliberal development model, the idea of gender equality is given less discursive weight. Furthermore, under the LRE reform the gender equality agenda was seen as rather at odds with the emphasis on indigenous cultures and traditions (Luykx, 2000) and the unification of the two concepts caused conflicts at many levels. As such, the ASEP reform integrates the idea of complementariedad or complementarity in order to represent gender equality. This forms part of the process of decolonisation and is based on the Andean notion of gender complementarity known as chachawarmi\(^{10}\) which sees the “married, heterosexual couple as the fundamental social subject in society, and of female and male forces as the opposing but complementary constituents of the

\(^{10}\) In Aymara, chacha means man, warmi means woman.
cosmos” (Burman, 2011: 66-67). Men and women form two halves of a whole, whereby each plays a distinct role in the household and society. However, the man is the public face of the household; going out to work, attending community meetings, airing the ‘family’ view etc., whilst the woman is the silent partner; staying at home to look after the house and to raise the children, which still fails to embody gender equality, at least in the western sense. Given the male dominance in this model, especially as the public face and voice of the family, it incorporates a risk that girls and women will continue to be marginalised (Widmark, 2007).

Despite being perceived as contradictory, the discourses of gender equality and bilingual and intercultural education are closely interrelated (Luykx, 2000; Widmark, 2007), as both ultimately strive for social justice. Until a satisfactory way is found to unite interculturalism and gender rights, this discursive emphasis on indigenous rights calls into question the centrality and importance of gender equality to this government.

Despite the disadvantages faced by girls in schools, gender inequality and education in Bolivia remains relatively under researched. In this context, with the introduction of the ASEP reform and the reinterpretation of gender equality in the discourse, it is interesting to look at how gender equal the education system in Bolivia is and whether the discourse is being translated into practice to ensure equality for all. In order to do so, it is important to first establish the international context relating to gender and education.

1.2 International context for Gender Equality in Education

Research in the 1990s showed that out of over 100 million children without access to primary school education, at least 60 million were girls, whilst two thirds of the 960 million illiterate adults were women (UNESCO, 1994), making gender equality an important focus of the international education agenda. In the last two decades there has been a global push for universal education embodied by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established in 2000, and more particularly by UNESCO’s Education For All (EFA) Initiative, first launched at the World Conference on Education at Jomtien in 1990. The basic premise is to provide “quality basic education for all children, youth and adults” (UNESCO, 2011). This commitment was reaffirmed at Dakar in 2000 when a target year of 2015 was identified and 6 goals were defined, of which goal 5 sets out to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and gender equality in education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000: 8).
Initially, the ideas incorporated in the international education agenda were derived from the liberal feminist discourse which placed greater emphasis on access to education rather than rights within education. In recent years, however, as it became apparent that access to education alone was insufficient, the emphasis shifted to quality education for all. The EFA global monitoring report from 2005 states “reducing gender disparities in education relies strongly on strategies that address inequalities in the classroom and in society” (UNESCO, 2004). This is in line with the work of critical feminists who stress how social structures and institutions oppress women through a male-dominated hierarchical system. Education often plays a key role in the process of social reproduction and control; for women, it often plays the role of conveying traditional messages about women’s reproductive functions in the household and family and about productive functions in ‘feminine’ occupations (Stromquist, 1992). As central actors in the education system, teachers are key agents in terms of delivery of the curriculum (Aikman et al., 2005) and using their agency to create change for greater gender equality, or as ‘guards of continuation’ (Lopes Cardozo 2011: 20) who recreate social stereotypes within schools. It is for this reason that teachers’ perceptions of gender equality are so important; to consider their awareness of their agency in this. This is amplified by the recent change in education policy on gender equality, most importantly in relation to teacher training, leaving teachers with varying awareness of gender (in)equality whilst also established as the ‘soldiers of change.’

1.3 Research Context and locations

Image 1: Map showing position of Bolivia in South America, and map of Bolivia showing research locations.
Source: CIA World Factbook, 2012
1.3.1 La Paz

The main focus of my research was the city of La Paz. Whilst Sucre is the seat of justice and the official capital of Bolivia, La Paz is generally recognised as the country’s capital as home to the national government. The national census of 2001 records the population of La Paz as around 800,000, of which 49.5% are men and 50.5% are women (INE, 2011).

In La Paz I worked with 2 secondary schools during the process of the data collection. These schools were in different neighbourhoods and were quite different in respect to their access to resources. This was a conscious decision made to give an overview of gender equality in secondary schools and gather teachers’ attitudes and perceptions from within different school settings.

- **School One**
  The first school (S1) in Miraflores was founded in the 1950s following the Bolivian National Revolution, corresponding with the expansion of the education system which broadened popular education to include women. This school is very well regarded in La Paz and the majority of the children are from middle-class families and come from nearby neighbourhoods to attend the school. It is well-funded compared to other schools in La Paz and the rest of the country and yet remains in a state of disrepair. This school has around 48 teachers, a staff of 10 administrators, including the head teacher (male) and is attended by more than 900 pupils.

- **School Two**
  The second school (S2) was in the neighbourhood of Sopocachi. Whilst this neighbourhood in itself is quite affluent, being home to various embassies, iNGOs and international residents, the school is a poorer institution than the one in Miraflores and is attended by children from lower- and middle-class families. The school includes both the intermediate and secondary levels of education and is attended by 370 pupils. There are 29 teachers in total, of whom 18 teach at the secondary level. The administration consists of 5 people including the head teacher (female).

1.3.2 Coroico

To ascertain whether there were any great differences between the urban and rural contexts I also worked in the rural town of Coroico. Coroico is the capital of the northern Los Yungas province in

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11 Just outside the city of La Paz is the city of El Alto. Originally a province of the main city, the urban area has grown so much in recent years that it now classes a city in its own right, with a total population of around 650,000. The population is mainly indigenous and this is seen as the heartland of Morales’ support base (Pagina Siete, 2012).
the department of La Paz which in recent years has become a popular tourist destination. In 2001
the population was recorded at just under 2,200 of which 49.6% are men and 50.4% are women (INE,
2011).

School Three
This school (S3) was also founded following the 1952 Revolution and, although it was originally a
Catholic school run by nuns, it is now secular. The school has 465 pupils and 20 teachers, with 2
people working in the administration of the school. A new Sister head teacher was appointed 2
years ago and she has carried out numerous renovation works in the school and, as such, it is in a
much better state of repair than the schools in La Paz. This was financed through the small stipend
of 8 Bolivianos\textsuperscript{12} requested from parents annually, although according to the headmistress not all of
the parents pay. This money is used to provide the school with what is most needed, without
getting caught up in other expenses (Head teacher, S3, P66).

1.3.3 Cochabamba

Finally, I conducted a small case study in the city of Cochabamba which has a strong tradition for
single sex secondary schools. As the capital of the Cochabamba department, it is a mid-sized town.
Set at a lower altitude than La Paz, Cochabamba is commonly known as the granary of Bolivia as it
has a much more temperate climate, perfect for agriculture, and at the heyday of the silver mines,
Cochabamba was a thriving city, providing food to people all over the country.

Colegio Bolivar
The case study in Cochabamba involved the prestigious Colegio Bolivar; an all-boys school
established approximately 100 years ago which, as described above, famously had problems earlier
this year when 10 girls enrolled to attend the school. The decision to study this was made once I
reached Bolivia; whenever I mentioned that my study focused on gender equality in secondary
schools people would ask if I was going to Colegio Bolivar. Not only was my interest piqued by this
story but it seemed to represent an important issue surrounding gender equality for the Bolivian
people I spoke to.

Due to the notoriety of the Colegio Bolivar case and the presence of newspaper articles on the
internet I do not feel it is realistic to maintain anonymity for this school and therefore this is the only
school (S4) I address by name in the course of this thesis.

\textsuperscript{12} €0.89 at the time of writing
1.4 Research proposition and questions

With teachers established as the soldiers of change under the government’s agenda I feel it is particularly pertinent to look at teachers’ perceptions of gender equality and how they do or do not use their agency to create a gender equal learning environment. Furthermore, I think it is important to look at how central they believe the role of formal education to be in creating gender justice in Bolivia. Finally, I want to ascertain to what extent this is allowed for in the ASEP policy. Therefore, based on the research problem outlined above, the main research question of this research is:

*What are teachers’ perceptions and actions towards gender equality in secondary schools in Bolivia and how does this relate to the education policy discourse?*

From this main research question and the concepts it incorporates, I have developed the following sub-questions to help answer the main question. These are:

1) How is gender equality conceptualised in the Bolivian education policy discourse?

2) What are secondary school teachers’ perceptions of gender equality?

3) Does the education policy discourse influence teachers’ perceptions of gender equality?

4) What role do secondary school teachers’ actions play in creating gender equal classrooms and schools?

5) How do teachers’ attitudes reflect their stated perceptions of issues surrounding gender equality?

1.5 Thesis layout - overview of chapters

In order to answer the questions posed above, this thesis is divided into 7 distinct chapters. Chapter 2 will be dedicated to explaining the methodology of this research, looking at the research methods and techniques used and the limitations encountered. Chapter 3 will then layout the theoretical perspectives used to frame the set up and analysis of this research. I will then use Chapter 4 to provide a detailed overview of women’s rights in Bolivia, the last 2 educational reforms and how they have addressed gender equality, including a policy review of the ASEP reform and the content relating to gender equality. This will be followed by further data analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 to look at teachers’ perceptions of gender equality in education and their actions towards it. Finally, Chapter 7 will draw together all these ideas to provide a conclusion to this thesis.
Chapter 2 - Methodology

This chapter will address the research methods of this study. Since the ontology and epistemology of this research are based firmly in critical realism and the Strategic Relational Approach (SRA) part of the theoretical framework will be given over to situate my research in these two theories. This methodology chapter, then, will focus on the methods of data collection, units of analysis and a description of the empirical setting of the research. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of ethical considerations and difficulties encountered whilst in the field.

2.1 Research Methodology

The ontology of critical realism adopted for this thesis will be explained in Chapter 3. Epistemologically, the specific interpretation of critical realism I apply requires a critical constructivist approach (Lopes Cardozo, 2011) so that we must first understand actors’ (in this case, teachers’) understanding of their context before we can, in turn, understand their behaviour and power relations, particularly in relation to the political influence and agenda (Hay 2002 in Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 24). Further to this, SRA develops an epistemology which allows us to explore the interaction of structure and agency (Jessop, 2005). Since this research is concerned with the actions and perceptions of teachers’ in relation to gender equality, and the relation they have to the government’s education discourse, the critical realist perspective and the SRA are paramount to the study of this thesis.

2.2 Unit of analysis

2.2.1 Teachers

The principal unit of analysis in this thesis are secondary school teachers. This research set out to collate data on teachers’ perceptions and actions towards gender equality and, as such, interviews with teachers comprise the greatest data set. In total I conducted 26 interviews with teachers from 3 different secondary schools, as can be seen in Table 1 (see below). Amongst the teachers I spoke to were two representatives from the Teachers’ Federation Syndicate; one from S1 and one from S2. The data collected from the teacher interviews has been triangulated with the data obtained from the classroom observations in which both the teachers and the students are the units of analyses.
2.2.2 Experts

Experts also form an important unit of analysis for this research, providing depth and understanding to the analysis and helping to triangulate the data. The experts I interviewed work for national and international education and gender organizations, as well as within the MoE. Whilst expert interviews are always a very useful tool in the course of field research, they have particular value in this case due to the recent change in education policy in Bolivia. The aim was to gain a greater understanding of how the ASEP reform and the discourse on gender equality are perceived by national and international civil society organizations working in Bolivia. I spoke to the representatives from the Bolivian Campaign for the Right to Education (CBDE), Bolivian Centre for Education Investigation and Action, and SNV Netherlands Development Organization. I also wanted to speak to organizations focusing on gender and women’s rights to obtain their perspective on the latest reform so I interviewed a representative from CIDEM (Women’s Centre of Information and Development). To this end I conducted two interviews with the OHCHR Human Rights Gender specialist working at the UN offices in La Paz. Finally, I interviewed the Dutch Education and Emancipation expert at the Dutch embassy in La Paz.

In order to obtain the official side of the story I spoke to three representatives from the MoE: the Director of Regular Education, the Manager of Gender, Generations and Social Justice, and a teacher working as a consultant with the gender equality team.

In reference to the Colegio Bolivar case study, I conducted two interviews with professionals involved in this case; the first an Ombudsman from the Mayor’s office and the second being the Director of SLIM (Municipal Legal Service) which offers psycho-social support to victims of familial and inter-familial abuse and domestic violence.

2.2.3 Students

Data was collected directly from the students in three different ways; mainly through focus groups and classroom observations but also through interviews in the case of Colegio Bolivar. The secondary school students who participated in the focus groups and observations were aged between 14 and 17. I chose to work with students from this age range because I felt it was important that they were slightly older and so may be considering their options and opportunities for after school.
When collecting data surrounding the case of Colegio Bolivar in Cochabamba (see Chapter 1) I was unable to obtain an interview with the head teacher or administration of the school or with any teachers but I did obtain two interviews with students; one girl and one boy. These 13 year old students were directly affected by the events in the school; the girl is one of the female students who gained entrance to the school and the boy is in the same year group and takes classes with the girls.

2.3 Research methods

In order to collect data to answer the research question, four different methods of data collection were used in this investigation, all qualitative in nature; interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis. The data analysis software Atlas.ti was used to manage and analyse the data collected in the field. Where interview quotations are provided, they are followed by the interview number from Atlas.ti. These quotations, unless otherwise stated, reflect widely held opinions from the interviews.

2.3.1 Interviews

As my research question focuses, in part, on perceptions of gender equality in schools and the education policy discourse, interviews were the preferred method by which to obtain this information. During my 10 weeks in the field I collected a total of 40 semi-structured interviews with teachers, experts and students. Semi-structured interviewing is a useful technique which gives the interviewer the ability to steer the conversation whilst allowing the respondent to give their own thoughts and feelings on the matter at hand. The semi-structured style was chosen because this allowed me to adapt the order of the questions to follow the flow of the conversation as well as insert or remove questions where necessary, but overall, the same themes and topics were discussed in each interview. In the course of my research I conducted interviews with three main groups: teachers, experts and ministry officials. I also conducted 2 interviews with students for the case regarding Colegio Bolivar as explained above.

13 In February, the head teacher of Colegio Bolivar was male but it is interesting to note the head teacher has changed since these events and he has been replaced by a woman.
2.3.2 Observations

I conducted 5 observations during the course of my fieldwork: 2 observations in S2 in La Paz and 3 in S3 in Coroico. These observations were across a range of subjects and with students of different ages in order to give a more reliable sample of the classroom environment. The subjects of the observed classes were: psychology and philosophy, physics, mathematics, and history, geography and civics. The observations I conducted were non-participatory as I did not contribute to the class. It is worth noting that my presence may have influenced the behaviour of both the teacher and the pupils to some extent. I also have less formal observations of sports lessons, collected as I entered and exited the schools.

2.3.3 Focus groups

During the course of this investigation I felt it was important to obtain an impression about students’ awareness of gender equality, how they felt within the school and what their aspirations were for when they finished school. Research into gender and development has shown how the hidden curriculum (see Chapter 3) may reinforce gender roles, expectations and discriminations and thus create low self-esteem and aspirations among the female students (Kabeer, 2005).

I held a total of four focus groups which comprised of between 9-32 students in 2 of the institutions I worked with; in S1 in La Paz and in S3 in Coroico. The focus group in S1 was composed of 32 13-14 year old school children (17 boys and 15 girls) and the 3 focus groups in S3 consisted of 10 fourth year-, 9 third year-, 11 fifth year- students, with 2, 3, 2 boys participating respectively. These focus groups were arranged during lesson time with the cooperation of the teacher or school administration. In S1, the music teacher offered her class for a focus group because she had finished teaching the curriculum for the semester so I was not taking ‘teaching time.’ In S3, the focus groups were carried out during after school English classes which I gave freely, using some of the time from the last session with each group to conduct the focus groups. Given the size of the groups I broke the students down into smaller groups so that they could first discuss the questions between themselves before we came back together to discuss it as a group.

2.3.4 Document analysis

In order to evaluate the discourse of gender equality in the latest education policy in Bolivia I carried out a policy review of the ASEP reform. As recognition of the different needs of certain social groups, including women and girls, grows within the education system, Critical Discourse Analysis becomes
increasingly relevant in order to analyse gendered language in the official curriculum as well as government policy (Luke, 1996). In this case, the language and discourse of gender equality in the education agenda has changed considerably from the previous reform so a policy review helps identify these areas.

Further to this I have analysed the latest version of the curriculum in order to evaluate how the discourse of gender equality embodied in the reform is transferred to the working documents of the education system.

Other documents analysed for the purpose of this investigation include newspaper articles relating to the development and implementation of the new education reform as well as newspaper articles referring to the events surrounding the case of Colegio Bolivar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>School 1 (La Paz)</th>
<th>School 2 (La Paz)</th>
<th>School 3 Los Yungas</th>
<th>Colegio Bolivar, Cochabamba</th>
<th>La Paz experts</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom observations</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Summary of research methods and participants

2.4 Sampling method

To gain access to the schools I found it was necessary to stress that I did not wish to interrupt teaching practices in the school; that I would talk to the teachers in their free time, if they were willing to talk to me. As such, I regularly attended the schools in La Paz for a couple of hours and approached teachers during their free periods. This method proved effective to get a wide sample of teachers. No one refused to speak to me although in a few cases we arranged to speak another day when the teacher had more time. Consequently, I employed a purposive sampling technique in order to select people, in this case teachers, with an understanding and knowledge of the social phenomenon at hand; gender equality in secondary schools (Bryman, 2008). I used theoretical
saturation to determine at what point I had enough data, when I believed all the concepts which had emerged from the interviews had been fully explored (Bryman, 2008). I then conducted three second interviews in order to deepen the research, confirm responses and obtain more information on specific areas of interest.

A smaller sample was composed of various education experts and policy makers, with data obtained from semi-structured interviews (see above), in order to enrich my data surrounding the Bolivian education policy discourse. I chose the experts I spoke to by researching experts working in La Paz in the fields of gender and education and then by contacting the organizations. I found, in general, it was better to turn up at the organization office in order to arrange an interview as emails often went unanswered.

2.5 Ethical considerations and experienced limitations

This section will discuss ethical considerations taken into account during the course of this research as well as the limitations I experienced during my time in the field.

Ethics is a field of study concerned with how best we should act and conduct ourselves (Sumner and Tribe, 2010), a subject of great relevance to the field of research as a whole, and in International Development Studies in particular. Research in the field of International Development calls for particular reflexivity and an awareness of the implications of research for those involved. In the case of my research into gender equality in schools in Bolivia, it is important to bear in mind that gender equality is quite a sensitive issue in Bolivia, where many perceive it as a form of Western Imperialism (Luykx, 2000). As such, I first provided all participants with a comprehensive explanation of my research so they could make an informed decision about participating. I also obtained permission from the administration of each school, SEDUCA and the MoE to conduct my research. I then presented the various letters of permission to the teachers so they were aware I was in the school with the express agreement of the school authorities.

In order to ensure the anonymity of my respondents I have left the names of those interviewed as well as the names of the schools separate from this thesis, except for in the case of Colegio Bolivar which I refer to by name throughout (as explained in Chapter 1). Before each interview I informed the respondent that any information they gave me would remain anonymous and that there are no right or wrong answers, thus ensuring informed consent (Bryman, 2008). This helped put them at
ease and made them more comfortable about the fact that I recorded the interviews, having secured the express permission of the respondent.

I had some problems gaining access to schools at the beginning of my research and these problems regarding access extended to the end of my research as well. At the beginning of September, in one school the secretary approached me regarding my letter of permission from SEDUCA which I produced as requested. The next day she approached me and said that the head teacher of the school no longer wanted me to attend the school. Fortunately I had largely finished collecting data from this institution and was able to liaise with teachers outside of the school in order to obtain my final interviews. I was given various reasons for this sudden dismissal from the school ranging from complaints from parents that I was taking up the teachers’ time, to the fact that I no longer had permission from SEDUCA to be there, of which I question the veracity. I had always had the impression the head teacher was not entirely comfortable with my presence and I believe he may have seized the opportunity to stop me coming to the school. When I subsequently met with one of the teachers for a second interview we discussed the matter and it is his belief, from what he had gathered around the school, that someone complained to SEDUCA who then brought my presence to the attention of the head teacher. However, I had express permission from SEDUCA to work with this institution and therefore it seems improbable that they would question my presence there. Furthermore, the teacher told me he does not believe the headmaster considers gender equality to be an important issue. Whatever the reason, these events are interesting since they reflect the sensitivity of the issue of research in schools but also the controversy surrounding the problem of gender equality. These events have been a further motivation to keep the identity of the schools anonymous in order to respect the decision of the head teacher.

Research inevitably involves a relationship and interactions between the ‘researched’ and the ‘researcher,’ and in this case my research in Bolivia is no exception. However I believe this feeling was mitigated to some extent by the fact that I was investigating the teachers’ perceptions and therefore asking them for their thoughts, making them feel valuable to the research. Given that I spoke to a teachers in just 3 schools in Bolivia, about their perceptions of gender equality, this research does not reflect a complete picture of gender equality in the Bolivian education system. Although it would not be possible to exactly replicate the conditions of this research, I do hope it will contribute and stimulate a broader discussion of gender equality in Bolivian schools.

As a young, white, blonde woman I am quite obviously an ‘outsider,’ despite the fact that I speak Spanish. Furthermore I was researching gender equality which, as mentioned above, is often
perceived as a Western concept imposed on Bolivia and Latin America. Furthermore, it is often perceived as closely related to feminism and, as the feminist movement carries negative connotations in Bolivia, some teachers may have adjusted their answers on this basis. These two factors combined mean it is possible that some respondents answered my questions with what they thought I wanted to hear. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that my heritage may influence my understanding of the situation.

Whilst I already spoke Spanish to a high level before leaving for Bolivia I believe the language barrier still posed some problems for me. On reflection I believe some questions could have been better phrased to get my intention across to the respondent, and therefore some questions may have been “lost in translation.” Furthermore, Bolivia is a country of bureaucracy and social courtesies which are hard to grasp and fully understand as an outsider, making issues such as access to schools rather complicated, requiring the researcher to jump through many hoops.

To avoid perpetuating the idea of the researcher and the researched, and promote the sharing of knowledge in different centres, I have made a commitment to the MoE in Bolivia to share the results of my thesis with them. As such, I intend to produce a summarised version of this thesis in Spanish for distribution amongst my contacts at the MoE, NGOs and various teachers who expressed an interest in reading about the results of my investigation.
Chapter 3 - Theoretical framework

In this chapter I outline the theoretical framework I adopted for this research and provide an overview of the different aspects which comprise gender equality in the classroom in relation to teachers’ perceptions and actions. The focus of this research on teachers led me to the theory of the Strategic Relational Approach and ideas of teacher agency. The centrality of social justice to the Bolivian education discourse prompts me to examine Fraser’s social justice theory, although I principally conceptualise and operationalize this through Wilson’s (2003) work on rights to, within and through education. I also touch on the theory of gender-responsive pedagogy in order to apply this to teachers’ actions in the classroom and the education discourse. The central reflexive interaction of the concepts in this research are illustrated in the conceptual scheme below.

![Conceptual scheme of central relationships at work affecting gender equality in schools.](image)

Figure 1 shows how the structures of the school, family and society all influence gender equality in the classroom. Depending on the individual teachers’ awareness of the problematic of gender equality will influence the strategies they employ for gender equality in the classroom. The ideas of gender equality introduced in the classroom affects the students’ ideas of gender relations which then feed back into the institutions established at the start. These institutions and teachers’
perceptions are influenced by the education discourse which is shown feeding down into these areas. These relationships are central to this research and remain embedded within the different theories I employ in this research.

3.1 Critical Realism

Before discussing the theoretical framework I used to frame my research, I will first explain my metatheoretical approach. This research is derived from a critical realist approach which acknowledges that our reality is socially constructed through our experiences and knowledge (Fairclough, 2005); this approach argues that whilst there is only one reality, there are many different ways of interpreting it. Critical realists adopt an ontology which makes a distinction between the real, the actual and the empirical (Jessop, 2005) whereby “the ‘real’ is the domain of structures with their associated ‘causal powers’; the ‘actual’ is the domain of events and processes; the ‘empirical’ is the part of the real and the actual that is experienced by social actors” (Fairclough, 2005: 922). It is in the domain of the ‘empirical,’ then, that the teachers inhabit. In order to gain an understanding of behaviour and relations, we need to first understand the ideas various actors hold (Lopes Cardozo, 2011); in other words the objective is to understand actors’ interpretations of reality. Since my thesis deals with teachers’ perceptions and actions towards gender equality in the Bolivian education system, the critical realist approach is particularly important since these perceptions are themselves an aspect of reality; each individual’s interpretation of reality is distinct but by collecting various perspectives I hope to develop an understanding of this reality.

3.2 Strategic Relational Approach (SRA) and teacher agency

The actors’ perspectives of their realities filter down to the level of their agency and influences the actions they take within their specific context, influenced by institutional frameworks. The strategic relational approach envisages structure and agency as intrinsically linked, and each one cannot be examined without looking at the other (Jessop, 2005). This approach sees the two elements as dialectical (Lopes Cardozo, 2011) and focuses on the relationship between the two as key to an understanding of the relation between structure and agency. Whilst structure is used to refer to the context, more specifically institutions, practices and routines, which implies a certain rigidity or structure (Lopes Cardozo, 2011), actors are reflexive and strategic (Hay, 2002) and adapt themselves to situations; they have free will to act (politically) which is what gives them agency (Lopes Cardozo, 2011). Teachers, then, are agents working within the structures of the school and the education
policy, and society as a whole, using their actions reflexively and strategically within their environment. Agency may be both positive and negative; the positive face being the power to act and make decisions about one’s life, whereas negatively agency can refer to power over others, to be able to control and overpower their agency (Kabeer, 2005). Teachers as actors in the classroom environment have a certain power to dictate children’s experiences in this environment. Finally, it is the strategies actors apply to realise certain outcomes and objectives which are central to the SRA (Hay, 2002; Lopes Cardozo, 2009, 2011). Strategies are the means by which actors exercise their agency and can be either intended, which Hay (2002) terms strategic, whereby “strategy is intentional conduct oriented towards the environment in which it is to occur” (Hay, 2002: 129) or intuitive where actors act out of habit and may, unknowingly, communicate intentions or preferences (Hay, 2002).

For this research, it is the strategies teachers employ and actions they take which are of interest, influenced inevitably by their perceptions and empirical reality. Furthermore, if actors are reflexive as Hay (2002) suggests, then their perceptions of reality will most likely evolve over time. In the context of Bolivia, I find it interesting to focus on teachers’ perceptions in light of the fact that the gender equality agenda has changed under the latest reform, leaving teachers with different levels of awareness of the concept. Consequently, different teachers are at different stages of this evolution process, creating a range of views and perceptions of gender equality. Since the dominant social discourse is often recreated within schools through the official and the hidden curriculum (see below), teachers’ perceptions and their associated agency are central to creating a gender equal schooling environment.

3.2.1 Teachers agency and the hidden curriculum

Giroux (cited in Regalsky and Laurie 2007: 233) sees schools as “contested spaces where struggles between groups [...] become manifest.” In fact, Apple (1979: 64) suggests that through their “curricular, pedagogical and evaluative activities in day-to-day life in classrooms, schools play a significant role in preserving if not generating these inequalities.” The curriculum was originally conceived of as a mechanism through which to preserve the cultural and economic hegemony and to reproduce the dominant culture (Apple, 1979) in which the official curriculum replicates gender stereotypes and norms within textbooks as well as subject areas. However, it is in relation to the hidden curriculum that teachers’ agency becomes important. Apple (1979: 87) states:

14 Here I refer to the fact that boys and girls may be encouraged or forced to study certain subjects based on their gender, such as maths and science for boys and sewing and cooking for girls.
“The hidden curriculum in schools serves to reinforce basic rules surrounding the nature of conflict and its uses. It posits a network of assumptions that, when internalised by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy.”

The hidden curriculum forms an important part of the schooling experience and plays a central role in reproducing social hierarchies and interactions. In patriarchal societies such as Bolivia, these societal norms may be reproduced in school hierarchies, male-centric curricula, and by both male and female teachers who reinforce societal gender norms by transmitting subtle messages to the students. These relate to their attitudes and expectations for male and female students, and the differences in the future achievements they believe possible, and methods of reward and discipline used depending on the student’s gender (Leach, 2000). In fact, by participating in the patriarchal school system, the dominant societal gender roles may be reinforced for children (Leach, 2000; Kabeer, 2005). In a recent study into violence in schools in El Alto, Mollericona (2011) states that the school is the place where students construct their masculinity amidst manifestations of violence, power relations and inequality. Furthermore, language is important in reinforcing gender roles (see Cooley 1902; Mead, 1934), and Boroditsky (cited in Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2011) has shown how grammatical gender influences our interpretation of the world in relation to gender. Prewitt-Freilino et al. (2011) have shown that in countries which speak gendered languages, a lower level of gender equality is evident. Therefore, the language employed by teachers in the classroom may have an important impact on the students’ understanding of gender roles and perpetuate social norms, thus forming another important element of the hidden curriculum.

### 3.2.2 Social reproduction and potential transformation

The hidden and official curricula may combine to produce a process of social reproduction within schools. Pierre Bourdieu (2001) has conceptualised this process in his theory of social reproduction which refers to the idea that the mechanisms present within our society reproduce the cultural hegemony and perpetuate the marginalisation of the subaltern, whether based on class, ethnicity, race or, in this case, gender. Thus, without taking into consideration the society and gender roles it is impossible to understand the processes of social, or cultural, reproduction in education. In Bolivia, a country with huge social disparities based on class, ethnicity, race and gender, these mechanisms run deep. Bourdieu (2001: 85) sees the main agencies of social reproduction as the family, the Church and the educational system. Collectively they serve to maintain the cultural and economic hegemony. Although the role of the Church is outside the scope of this research I will discuss both the role of the family and that of the education system.
However, the school environment can also play an essential role in transforming societies, changing attitudes and fostering equality (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000: 3). Within this, the attitudes and actions of teachers towards girls and boys impact the outcomes of gender equality in the classrooms, and the wider context of the school as a whole. This, too, is linked to their perceptions or even their awareness of the importance of gender equality. It is their agency, and the structure they work within, which determines to what extent gender equality is created in the classroom.

In recognition of the transformational role of the education system the government has placed education at centre of their agenda for social justice, with teachers identified as the central actors. Yet, as seen above, the family also plays an important role in social reproduction. Where, then, does the balance lie? It takes a combination of the government’s agenda and the teachers as agents to use their strategies to create gender equality in the classroom to help create social justice. This relationship is reflected in the conceptual schemes below: figure 2 shows how the process is influenced by the SRA; through a process of structure versus agency. Figure 3 illustrates the process of social reproduction, which remains embedded in the structure vs. agency relationship. ‘Institutions’ influence teachers’ perceptions which, in turn, dictate their intuitive strategies in the classroom thus contributing to the hidden curriculum. Gender relations in the classroom then feed back into the institutions.

3.3 Gender equality as social justice

The principle definition of social justice I will adopt for this thesis is that developed by Nancy Fraser (2005a) which defines social justice as parity of participation, without which it is impossible to participate as an active member of society. Gender justice comprises an important element of social
justice theory since Fraser (1996: 8-9) identifies victims of injustice as “distinguished by the lesser esteem, honor, and prestige they enjoy relative to other groups of society.” In the case of Bolivia, the historical marginalisation of women and the dominant machismo culture ensures that women are accorded lesser social status men. In order to address such inequalities, Fraser (2005a, 2005b) highlights the importance of recognition, redistribution and representation as the means to address the three principle dimensions of social justice, and specifically gender justice; cultural, socio-economic and political parity, respectively. Economic structures or socio-economic status may result in a lack of necessary resources for full participation, which can be interpreted as injustice through uneven distribution. Similarly, cultural and social norms may result in an imbalance of participation due to institutionalised hierarchies, stereotypes and associated discrimination creating misrecognition. The final dimension, that of political misrepresentation refers to exclusion or lack of participation in the decision making process. In order to overcome any or all of these forms of social injustice, it is necessary to create a society which does not institutionalise disparities (Fraser, 1996). The current government agenda in Bolivia focuses principally on indigenous rights but if they truly seek to create social justice then I believe their agenda needs to include women just as much as indigenous groups. The education system is an important factor in this process, as described below, where it is important to ensure these traditional gender stereotypes and inequalities are not institutionalised.

3.3.1 Social justice and education

For social justice within education, parity of participation requires equal access and equal opportunities. Tikly and Barrett (2011) have developed a framework with which it is possible to conceptualise quality education in terms of social justice: redistributive justice is applied to inclusion in education; recognition justice is seen as relevance; and representational justice is applied to democratic participation.

Wilson (2003) has conceptualised gender equality in education in three distinct elements: rights to education, rights within education and rights through education. The right to education refers primarily to availability of and access to education, both in terms of the social and economic right as well as the provision of schools within the state. Whilst having the right to education is clearly important, simply measuring gender parity in education fails to acknowledge the broader implications of gender discrimination and that inequality arises from unequal power relations (Subrahmanian, 2005). Women’s lower social status in Bolivia means the relevance of their education has traditionally been seen as limited, a fact which has been reflected in the education
system. Furthermore, schools often replicate societal norms and stereotypes and thus, access to education may further reinforce discriminatory behaviour. Teachers’ attitudes, the curriculum and the school infrastructure can all serve to limit the opportunities of girls and perpetuate societal norms. In Bolivia, women traditionally occupy the ‘indoor’ space whilst men dominate the ‘outdoor’ space; these expectations and lower positions of women are replicated through the curriculum, the management structure within the school and teachers’ attitudes. This represents the concept of rights within education, in reference to the treatment girls receive within schools. Finally, rights through education refers to the opportunities available to girls once they have completed school. If, as in Bolivia, gender inequalities remain deeply embedded in society women may continue to face barriers when it comes to accessing employment and thus, any gains made regarding rights to and within education remain limited unless society also recognises women’s rights through education.

Access to schooling remains the easiest way for institutions to measure and quantify gender equality in education, simply by looking at whether there equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled in a school (UNESCO in Aikman et al., 2005), yet this clearly overlooks rights within and rights through education. For gender equality to be meaningful, mechanisms for ensuring equality of treatment as well as equality of opportunity for men and women are important. These in turn rest on a commitment to non-discrimination (Subrahmanian, 2005). For a full understanding of social justice in a given context, it is important to consider the cultural, economic, political and historical background; understanding gender equality requires a comprehension of the relative positions of genders in Bolivia.

3.4 Critical pedagogy

In order to explore the themes of social justice and educational rights it is necessary to employ a critical pedagogy. The theory of critical pedagogy has perhaps been most famously explored by Paolo Freire in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed from 1968. Freire sees critical pedagogy as primarily concerned with conscientização, or critical consciousness, to be achieved through a liberating education system (Freire, 1996). Ultimately, this will lead to social justice through the transformation of “inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations” (Burbules and Berk, 1999). In order to create the social justice it aspires to, the government should consider the idea of critical pedagogy in the implementation of the education reform which would enable students to participate democratically in the classroom and prepare them to act and expect the same after school. This would pave the way for parity of participation and allows students to fully exploit their rights to, within and through education. Once again, it is teachers’ strategies as
agents working within institutions or structures which enable this. Critical pedagogy, then, is closely linked to social justice and, for the purpose of this research, I will base my theoretical framework around the branch of critical pedagogy concerned with issues of gender; that is gender critical pedagogy, or gender-responsive pedagogy.

3.4.1 Gender-responsive pedagogy

As a branch of critical pedagogy, gender-responsive has not been widely explored. The Forum of African Women Educators (FAWE) defines gender-responsive pedagogy as “teaching and learning processes which pay attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys. It calls for teachers to embrace an all-encompassing gender approach in the processes of lesson planning, teaching, classroom management and performance evaluation,” (FAWE, 2006: 9) as well as sharing cleaning tasks equitably, instead of automatically assigning them to girls. This also includes using non-gendered language, and textbooks free from gender stereotypes. A gender-responsive pedagogy, then, helps build on the idea of rights within education and increase gender equality and rights through education. As described briefly above, figures and statistics for (dis)parity in enrolment say very little about the politics within the school and classroom (Unterhalter 2005; see Chapter 1). Schooling may in fact perpetuate discrimination, recreating the dominant ideology within the education system and schools. Teachers, in their capacity as agents, are crucial when it comes to implementing egalitarian measures and attitudes in the classroom; boys and girls need to participate in classroom and school activities as equals in order for gender inequalities to be addressed (Aikman et al. 2005).

3.5 Concluding remarks

This theoretical framework has identified the key theories used to frame this research and analyse the data. The overarching framework of the thesis is the metatheoretical approach of critical realism. Teachers are seen from within the SRA which helps identify how their actions reflect their agency and awareness of gender equality. Beyond this, I introduced the ideas of social justice and educational rights, and discussed how critical pedagogies can be used to introduce this in the classroom.

The following chapters will help further establish the empirical context of this research before leading into an analysis of the findings of this research, starting with a policy review of the ASEP reform.
Chapter 4 - Empirical context

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a greater understanding of how gender equality is conceptualised in the ASEP reform. In order to do so I will first provide a brief overview of women’s historical position in Bolivian society and the education system. This leads into a discussion of how a gender equal was introduced to the education system through the LRE and how this has been changed under the Morales government. This provides the foundation to conduct a policy review and document analysis of the ASEP education reform and curricula materials. Finally, I will touch on teacher training in order to establish the extent to which gender equality is included in the education agenda. This will help answer the question “How is gender equality conceptualised in the Bolivian education policy discourse?”

4.1 Historical overview of women’s rights in Bolivia

Gender roles in Latin America are largely dictated by the idea of machismo, strongly influenced by the legacy of the Spanish colonial rule and the influence of the Catholic Church which played important roles in women’s subordination in Bolivia. Women occupied the private sphere of family life which kept them on the margins of society; in fact, in 1830 a civil code was passed which severely restricted women’s rights and citizenship. This code continued to dictate women’s rights, with very few revisions, until a new constitution was drafted in 1976 (Smeall, 1994). As with women’s rights in general, women’s access to education was restricted and even where women did have access to education, the definition was limited. Education for women was only permitted up until the third grade of primary school, once they had learnt to read and write, but even this basic level of education was impossible for most women as it was argued that education would only distract girls from their principal function; that of wife and mother (Arteaga, 2011).

4.1.1 Viva La Revolución

In 1952, the Bolivian National Revolution instated the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) who sought to right social inequalities and create a more egalitarian Bolivian society. The primary focus was the expansion of indigenous rights, but subsequent laws which expanded Universal Suffrage also inadvertently benefited women. An inclusionary education reform was introduced in 1956 granting all Bolivian citizens the right to education, thus expanding the education system to
include women. However, whilst this symbolised an important development for women in Bolivia, it did little to improve the reality of women's access to education.

It was not until the 1990s that the matter of gender equality would be a focus within the education system; until then education remained principally a male domain, as I will discuss below.

4.1.2 Machismo in contemporary Bolivia

Despite the clear advances that have been made towards gender equality since the 19th century, gender relations in Bolivia are still largely dictated by machismo. In February 2012, when the story of Colegio Bolivar had recently disappeared from the newspapers and attention to gender equality issues was high, further evidence of machismo came to light, this time within the upper echelons of the government. Morales was accused by the popular press of machismo following a public celebration in Cochabamba in which he told lewd jokes about women, including some female ministers. Morales sang: “For this kind-hearted president, all the female ministers take off their panties;” “The female ministers walk on the balconies, begging for handouts in exchange for her panties;” “These Bartolinas are very famous, because I take them all to my bed;” “I want Nardita [a Minister], as the saying goes, to just marry me on a whim” (El Mundo, 2012). This is not the first time that Morales has been criticised by the press and feminist movements for “making jokes, machista comments and allusions to his supposed womanizing (El Dinamo, 2012). What is more, in a speech made shortly following his election Morales articulated a view of “‘the woman’ being first and foremost a mother symbolizing values such as care and honesty working for the unity of the family” (Widmark, 2007: 89). Morales, then, has not only displayed machista and sexist behaviour but also appears to have quite definite views regarding the proper place for women which are more aligned with traditional interpretations of gender roles than equal gender relations.

Many times in my interviews with teachers it was mentioned that Bolivia is still ‘unfortunately’ a machista society. Even though many women work as well as their husbands, the house is still their domain and women are expected to take responsibility for the housework. Furthermore, despite the fact that more and more women have to work to help provide for their family, this is seen as a negative thing, reflecting poorly on them as mothers. One teacher who is a single mother told me of the criticism she receives: “those who don’t comply with what is socially acceptable, those who break away from the norm, they are [seen as] the worst. They are bad women, libertines, these women do not really have a home. And I say, well, so where am I from? The zoo?” (P14).

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15 The celebration of this indigenous festival requires men and women to exchange stanzas.
16 Name of an Indigenous women’s movement in Bolivia.
Bolivia continues to dictate that women should be mothers and housewives, reinforced through the enduring tradition of *machismo*. It is often thought to be women themselves who perpetuate the “ideological and cultural beliefs that keep them subordinated” (Smeall 1994: 321). The idea that is women who maintain these strict gender roles and instil these attitudes in their children came up repeatedly during the course of my interviews. Whatever its source, *machismo* remains ingrained in Bolivian society to this day, relegating women to the role of housewife.

Having established the historical context of women’s role in society in Bolivia I will now discuss how the concept of gender equality has been incorporated in the education system.

### 4.2 The 1994 Education reform for Gender Equality

In 1994 the Bolivian the pro-neoliberal government introduced the LRE, developed in partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO (Regalsky and Laurie, 2007), in line with contemporary global policies (see Chapter 1). In essence, the reform set out to provide education to all children with equal opportunities, free from discrimination, to “produce a favourable change towards the construction of a more equal society” (Lara, 2003: 3) and ensure education was “intercultural and bilingual, so as to honour the socio-cultural heterogeneity of the country in an environment of respect between all Bolivians, men and women” (Ministerio de Educación y Culturas, 1994). The LRE made access equal for all, scrapping single-sex institutions and making coeducation compulsory. Furthermore, the LRE put an end to subject streaming by gender so that all children were taught the same subjects. Implementation of the reform largely focused on primary education and the proposed curriculum was intended to incorporate gender equity into the school system as a whole in order to “generate an atmosphere of trust, understanding and equity both inside and outside the classroom” (Lara, 2003: 6). Finally, gender equality was to be introduced across the board as a transversal theme, included in the curriculum for primary and secondary education and in the teacher training (JICA, 2006), making gender equality one of the central pillars of the education reform.

Whilst the LRE was internationally regarded as highly successful (Regalsky and Laurie 2007), locally it was not perceived so favourably. As Lopes Cardozo (2011: 95) states; “the reform process was complicated, lengthy and only to a limited extent successful.” Unfortunately, partly due to the resistance from the teaching profession and because of its poor implementation, the LRE did not succeed in achieving the majority of its objectives.
4.3 Changing policies

On taking power in 2006, the government abolished the LRE, criticising its colonial and neoliberal nature and execution. They felt the foundations of the LRE were too far from their political agenda, making it necessary to abolish it entirely and introduced the ASEP reform. Nonetheless, the ASEP reform builds on many ideas incorporated in the LRE, broadening the idea of interculturality, to include intraculturality; to look inwards at one’s own culture in order to revive it (Howard, 2009). Similarly, bilingual education has become plurilingual education. The main shift, then, is the discourse on gender equality. The MoE representatives I spoke to strongly believe that the idea of gender equality is included in the reform. In fact, the Director of Regular Education argued that gender equality was not very prominent in the LRE:

“There needed to be a correlation between the theory and the practice. Or rather, how we interpret gender equality in practice and how it appears in the discourse. Now, we are working with the topic of gender and we want to see that what is laid out in the ASEP law correlates with the practice” (P9).

It is clear, here, how the MoE argues that the educational practice did not reflect the discourse, yet I argue this is what continues to happen under the new agenda.

Having established the context of the reform, I will now analyse the contents of the ASEP reform in relation to gender equality, compared with that of the LRE in more detail.

4.4 ASEP policy review

I believe the LRE contained a much clearer statement on gender equality, integrated throughout the document, compared to the ASEP reform. For example, under Article 2, the 8th objective of the LRE is “to generate gender equality in the school environment, in order to stimulate greater active participation by women in society” (Ministerio de Educación y Culturas 1994: 2). However, there is no such clear statement for creating gender equality in the ASEP reform.

The period between the abolition of the LRE in 2006 and the enactment of the final ASEP reform in 2010 was filled by the Anteproyecto. As their first public statement for their education agenda, it was undoubtedly important to clearly establish their priorities. The second foundation is stated to be “free and obligatory [education] at all levels for all Bolivians, men and women, with equal opportunities without social, cultural, linguistic, or economic discrimination across the whole of the national territory” (Ministerio de Educación, 2006, my emphasis). Whilst it clearly states ‘men and
women’ it only speaks of social, cultural, linguistic, and economic discrimination and omits to mention gender discrimination, showing immediately how gender equality has been marginalised within the education agenda. Throughout the document, there are 9 references to gender equality in education, through referring to ‘men and women’ and yet not once is the term gender equality used. The final ASEP reform contains only 7 references to gender equality, normally through phrases referring to equality for all, and the term *gender equality* is used just twice.

The MoE argues that gender equality has been translated to a more profound level of the reform; where previously it was included in the LRE as a transversal theme, it has now been included in the very foundations of the reform. This view was supported by the CBDE representative I interviewed (P8). However, having reviewed both reforms, I found that gender equality was included in the foundations and objectives of the LRE. Article 1, part 5 states that education is “intercultural and bilingual, because it allows for the nation’s socio-cultural heterogeneity in an environment of respect between *all Bolivians, male and female*” (my emphasis) whilst part 6 even more specifically states that education is the “right and duty of every Bolivian [...] without restriction or discrimination based on ethnicity, culture, region, social condition, physical or mental capability, *gender*, creed or age” (Ministerio de Educación y Culturas 1994: 1, my emphasis). Gender equality in education, then, is unequivocally mentioned in the foundations and objectives of the LRE. In the ASEP reform the idea of gender equality is also included in the foundations and objectives of education however not until Article 3.13 is the idea introduced explicitly:

> [education] upholds the values of unity, equality, inclusion, dignity, freedom, solidarity, reciprocity, respect, complementarity, harmony, transparency, equilibrium, equal opportunities, social and *gender equality* of participation, common wellbeing, responsibility, social justice, distribution and redistribution of the products and social goods, in order to live well (Ministerio de Educación, 2010b, my emphasis).

As mentioned above, this is one of just 2 direct references to gender equality in the ASEP reform. This model of gender equality corresponds with Fraser’s (2005a, 2005b) theory of social and gender justice to ensure full social participation regardless of gender.

I found that gender equality is not central to the objectives of the reform. The OHCHR gender specialist I interviewed previously worked at the Vice Ministry of Gender and collaborated with the MoE on the ASEP reform and told me of the problems he encountered: “When we suggested introducing a focus on gender the governmental policymakers did not understand how we were going to do it [...] So] the ASEP reform does not incorporate a focus on gender equality” (P6). He

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17 One of four transversals covered under the LRE: gender equality, democracy, health and environment.
clearly believes the embodiment of gender equality in the ASEP reform is insufficient to create gender equality in the education system. I see the principle ways the MoE has brought gender equality into the reform as being through language, complementarity, depatriarchalisation and equality of access. I will now explore each of these elements below.

4.4.1 Use of (non)Gendered-Language in the education discourse

As a gendered language, Spanish contains masculine and feminine nouns, adjectives and pronouns which tend to incorporate ideas relating to gendered behaviour, gender roles and social norms (see chapter 3). The ASEP policy documents use gender neutral or non-sexist language\(^{18}\) to incorporate gender equality. The CBDE representative sees this as a positive move towards gender equality embodied in the reform (P8). The ASEP reform contains 69 gender neutral phrases\(^{19}\) and just 4 uses of gendered language. In contrast, the LRE contains 5 examples of gender neutral language as opposed to 22 cases of gendered language, so the use of gender neutral language has increased significantly. However, there is some inconsistency; for example, in the ASEP curriculum (Ministerio de Educación 2010a: 7) a paragraph which refers to teachers using the male collective noun (maestros) then uses non-sexist language to refer to students (los/as estudiantes/as). Furthermore, in the next sentence, students are also referred to by the male collective noun (los estudiantes) showing a further lack of continuity in the language used. I believe, therefore, that the concept of gender equality has been integrated into the ASEP reform linguistically making it more apparent in the discourse without, to date, including gender equality in educational practice.

The OHCHR Gender specialist also believes gender equality is conceptualised more rhetorically than practically; “they say the law incorporates a focus on gender but it is something rhetorical, discursive. It is unclear, unfortunately, the gender focus in all this. [The policymakers] think it is sufficient to introduce women and the language of las-los and nothing else” (P6). Whilst language plays an important role in the formation and reinforcement of gender identities, until training programmes and curricula materials are introduced, the use of non-gendered language in the law will have a limited effect for gender equality. The lack of practical implementation of policies towards gender equality reflects the problems the government are encountering across the board with bringing concepts from the discourse to practice (Talavera in Lopes Cardozo and Scholten, 2012).

\(^{18}\)Where the gender used in Spanish language has been made neutral.

\(^{19}\) For example, using niños y niñas (boys and girls) instead of just using niños which can be used to refer to boys and girls collectively.
4.4.2 Complementarity and Gender (In)Equality

The ASEP reform and the national constitution present chachawarmi and complementarity as the local solution to gender inequality. A review of the ASEP policy shows 9 mentions of complementarity, though never explicitly in relation to gender equality. So although the government justifies their agenda towards gender equality based on complementarity, at no point in the education reform do they discuss the two together.

Furthermore, the gender roles within this indigenous tradition are not uncontested (see Chapter 1) and embody an unequal power balance. In the National Plan for Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has created a vision of how to redress the concept of complementarity to reflect gender equality (see Image 2).

![Image 2: The de-hierarchization of male-female relations](Source: Ministerio de Justicia 2008)

The left hand image shows the current hierarchical structure found in indigenous communities with men on top and women below, whilst the right hand image shows the non-hierarchical gender relations the MoJ aspires to for an egalitarian social system. However, the OHCHR gender specialist I interviewed believes the ASEP reform was developed without taking the PNIO into consideration, showing the lack of communication between ministries, and that this has consequently been overlooked in the ASEP reform.

4.4.3 Depatriarchalisation

The MoE cites the idea of despatriarchalización or depatriarchalisation as central to their agenda on gender equality. However, a review of the ASEP documents shows this concept is only mentioned twice. Furthermore although I was not able to ask every teacher about despatriarchalización during
the course of my data collection, those that I did were not clear what the term meant. Similarly, in a study conducted by CBDE (Arteaga, 2011), when asked “Do you think the education here is sexist?” teachers replied by saying “If you explain to me what sexist education is then I will answer your question.” I also found I had to explain what sexist education is which suggests teachers are probably not practicing it. Given that this is stated as central to the gender equality agenda of the MoE and yet teachers are unclear what the term even means, shows how little focus is given to gender equality under the latest legislation.

4.4.4 Access and co-education

The fact that coeducational institutions have been compulsory in Bolivia since the introduction of the LRE in 1994 was often emphasised by teachers and ministry officials to demonstrate the existence of gender equality in education in Bolivia. The events at Colegio Bolivar were also often used as evidence of how girls and boys have equal rights to education. Following the events in February a national newspaper conducted a survey into the traditional single sex institutions and found that, despite legislation to the contrary, 38 continue to exist as single sex schools (Calle, 2012). Therefore, 18 years after this legislation was introduced, there remain a considerable number of schools maintaining the tradition of single sex education. This shows the limited impact this legislation has had since its introduction and demonstrates that just because a law is enacted does not mean it is enforced. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind the mechanisms which may be in place within the schools to reproduce gender inequalities.

The CBDE (Arteaga, 2011) report on Sexist Education stresses the importance of recognising the difference between coeducation and mixed education where mixed education refers to boys and girls studying together in the same classroom, taking the same subjects, and submitting to the same evaluation whilst coeducation holds as its objective the disappearance of discriminatory mechanisms, implying a total shift in organization across the school, the curriculum, activity design, and classroom relations (Arteaga, 2011: 29-30). However, in the Bolivian context coeducation has been taken to mean little more than mixed schools and the current government has done nothing to change this. Since allowing girls to enter the institution, Colegio Bolivar has committed to building more classrooms and bathroom facilities but other than that they have made no (apparent) changes to the educative system within the school. Coeducation needs to be about more than just the unification of boys and girls as each gender will, more often than not, merely reproduce the dominant gender roles seen in society. As the report on sexist education produced by CBDE (Arteaga, 2011: 29-30) states “there is no coeducation without a simultaneous fusion of cultural norms which were
previously assigned to each gender.” Therefore, coeducation also needs to involve the implementation of a critical pedagogy in order to truly address boys’ and girls’ rights within education.

Other measures to address equality of access include the legal protection of pregnant girls’ permanence in education; under the new legislation it is now prohibited to expel girls for becoming pregnant, previously a common practice in Bolivia. Whilst it is important that pregnant girls have the opportunity to remain in school, showing a definite move to social justice through redistribution and addressing rights to education, it is only half the story. It overlooks rights within education because many factors within schools related to the hidden curriculum may cause girls to feel unwelcome in the school. Teachers’ attitudes and expectations will play an important role in dictating these girls’ rights within education.

4.5 Curricula materials

Having reviewed the ASEP curriculum I believe the conceptualization of gender equality in the curriculum is limited. Under the ASEP reform the curriculum for secondary education is divided into four categories. According to the central curriculum gender equality falls under Community and Society. A review of this document shows that whilst there are some elements to help work towards gender equality, there is little guidance for teachers on how to implement these ideas.

In Community and Society, the subject area ‘Language and Communication’ introduces the use of male and female authors and an analysis of gender in propaganda. Both these ideas may help broaden the possibilities girls can imagine for themselves after school, seeing the role of women as integrated into society, as well as considering the importance of how these roles are portrayed in modern media. The curriculum also talks about reinforcing social justice and gender equality (Ministerio de Educación, 2011) this is only interpreted as talking about the role of women in the liberation. Whilst this is clearly important, this could be much broader and so it is a limited way of reinforcing social and gender justice. The curriculum also talks of reinforcing the gender relations seen in indigenous communities, as part of their discursive emphasis on complementarity. For example, when talking about physical education, the curriculum says “practicing games from the indigenous communities, emphasizing relevant gender roles and relations of the region” (Ministerio de Educación, 2011).

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20 Science and Technology, Community and Society, Thought and the Cosmos, and Life, Land and Nationality.
However, the equality of gender roles in indigenous communities is questioned (see above and Chapter 1) so the emphasis on traditional gender roles may serve to further marginalise girls and women, rather than creating greater gender justice. Many times the curriculum talks of ‘reflecting on gender’ without giving any idea of how this may be done. This will be reliant, then, on the training provided to teachers to capacitate them to implement a gender-responsive pedagogy for gender equal classrooms. A revision of curricula materials to be free from gender bias is unlikely to be beneficial unless there is a corresponding change in teachers’ attitudes. If effective measures to train teachers are not introduced by the government, this will continue to rely on teacher agency to create gender equal classrooms.

Finally, the ministry officials all stressed that the theme of gender equality will be developed as a transversal in secondary education; however, they were unable to provide me with specific details. The ICHCR gender specialist expressed deep concern that the government proposed to introduce gender equality as a transversal in education:

“It scares me when they talk about transversals without first understanding it [...] Much of the time, transversals are everything or nothing [...] Therefore, this idea of transversality is only going to be effective when they have worked on positive actions previously for women [...] But in education, we never reached an understanding because they thought that the idea of gender is imported from the West” (P5).

This suggests a fundamental lack of understanding regarding gender equality amongst government officials. Aikman et al. (2005) discuss how the processes behind the development of the curriculum and the decisions taken are just as important as the content. If gender equality is an unfamiliar concept to the policymakers then it is unlikely that gender equality will be fairly represented in the agenda. My experience talking to both ministry officials and teachers reflects this; they spoke a lot about transversals but I did not feel their understanding of the term was very profound. The government talks about transversals on a discursive but not practical level and the teachers’ understanding is the same; their knowledge of the term reflected the presence in the agenda but I did not see them address gender equality as a transversal in the classroom.

4.5.1 A note on textbooks

Textbook content may comprise an important aspect of the hidden curriculum within schools to reinforce gender stereotypes. Although the MoE proposes to develop new textbooks under the ASEP reform, this had not been done at the time of research. In fact, very little exists in the way of official textbooks at all; instead teachers use whatever course materials they can find to structure
their lessons, whether it be old textbooks or resources from the internet. Textbooks developed in partnership with UNESCO and UNICEF for the LRE, which did include some level of gender-responsive pedagogical material, have been withdrawn and banned by the current government for being too neoliberal (Education and Emancipation expert, Dutch Embassy, P7). Given that the repertoire of textbooks is rather extensive, and the brevity of this research project, it was not possible to conduct a textbook review. However, a recent study carried out by the CBDE (Arteaga, 2011) of textbooks from 8 schools around La Paz shows that from an analysis of 1168 pages there exist only 81 non-sexist phrases demonstrating the absence of equality and equity. Furthermore, the investigation showed there were more images of horses in textbooks than women (P8).

4.6 Teacher Training

Teacher training often plays an important role in perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes (Leach, 2000), and conversely, in creating a gender equal environment. Teachers themselves are the product of the patriarchal society and gendered interactions, yet they are the actors responsible for delivering the curriculum (Aikman et al., 2005) and shaping the classroom environment. In order to break the cycle of social and cultural reproduction it is important to impart a gender-responsive pedagogy so it is essential teachers receive training which helps develop an understanding of gender equality issues.

With teachers framed as the soldiers of change in the current government discourse, as the actors responsible for initiating the process of social justice, teacher training needs to be central to the MoE’s agenda. During my fieldwork I asked teachers whether they had received any training about the ASEP reform, to ascertain if the training addresses the idea of gender equality in schools. However, none of the teachers I spoke to had received any training. A recent article from the MoE states that teacher training on the new reform has reached 56,000 teachers,\(^1\) has covered 2 months of the new curriculum, and that training will continue into the new year (Ministerio de Educación, 2012a). Despite the limited training, the government still proposes to implement the curriculum from 2013. With the reform still in development and yet to be properly implemented, it is hard to say just to what extent gender equality will be included in the teacher training, the curriculum and resources but the tentative measures for teacher training do call into question to what extent teachers are truly seen as the ‘soldiers of change’ or is this a way of shifting responsibility from the government?

\(^{21}\) The most recent statistics available from 2010 show that there are 137,817 teachers in Bolivia (Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 119)
4.7 Concluding remarks

This chapter showed that despite the long history of women’s marginalisation in Bolivia, the government has deemphasised gender equality within the ASEP reform. Whilst the LRE had a strong message on gender equality, the discourse in the latest reform is less clear. Furthermore, the delay in transferring what is laid out in the discourse into practice leaves the Bolivian education system with a sense of waiting. The government attributes this delay in implementation to the need to reach a consensus with the teachers’ unions (Director of Regular Education, P9). However, the representative from the urban teachers’ union in La Paz I interviewed is adamant that the teachers’ unions across the country have rejected the reform either entirely or in part and, as such, the reform will fail (P17). There is a long history of teachers’ union action in Bolivia as they battle for effective reform and the teachers’ unions in Bolivia have a relatively great negotiating power (Lopes Cardozo, 2011). My limited knowledge suggests to me their strength lies more in blocking change than effecting change, however, without getting them on board with the ASEP reform, I feel the teachers’ may be successful in blocking the MoEs efforts.

A discourse analysis of the ASEP law shows how much of the rhetoric on gender equality in the LRE has been removed. The reform emphasises the aspects of gender-neutral language, complementarity, depatriarchalisation and equality of access, yet these are limited interpretations of gender equality. What the ASEP law has achieved is a higher prevalence of gender neutral language to embody gender equality. The concept remains highly discursive and comprises just a very small part of what the ASEP reform sets out to achieve. With a strong discursive emphasis on indigenous rights and multiculturalism, I feel measures to create gender equality will tend to be overlooked. Until measures are implemented to introduce gender equality in the classroom through textbooks, course materials and teacher training it is difficult to say just how effective the government’s agenda on gender equality may be. In the meantime, too much emphasis is placed on access to education to demonstrate gender equality in the education system and justify the current discursive weight assigned to gender issues.
Chapter 5 - Teachers perceptions of Gender equality and education policy discourse

The purpose of this thesis is to give an impression of teachers’ perceptions of and actions towards gender equality in Bolivia and how this relates to both Bolivian society and the education policy discourse, as analysed in Chapter 4. Having already established the research context (see Chapter 4), this chapter, then, will answer the questions “What are secondary school teachers’ perceptions of gender equality?” and “Does the education policy discourse influence teachers’ perceptions of gender equality?”

5.1 Teachers’ Perceptions of Gender Equality

For the most part the teachers reacted positively to my research and emphasised how important this topic was, and yet their knowledge and awareness of the issue varied.

When asked whether gender equality was important for Bolivia, all of the teachers I spoke to stated that they felt it was, although a small number felt that it was a Western idea which, for better or worse, had been brought to Bolivia. The importance of gender equality for the teachers I spoke to is mainly based on the strong tradition of *machismo* which can be seen in Bolivia and in Latin America as a whole. When asked about the importance of gender equality for Bolivia, one teacher said;

“it’s very important, gender equality is very important because if we talk about equality this also includes the idea of what it is to participate, to be part of something, and not that there is just equality in one aspect. If there is to be equality, it must be in everything” (S2, P23).

This statement, seen in relation to the historical context of women’s marginalization, highlights the importance gender equality needs to be given in the government’s agenda; gender roles in Bolivian society are still clearly defined and children are raised with distinct ideas of the male and female duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, women are given less importance in society and are seen to be inferior to men; when speaking on what gender equality means, one female teachers said, “gender equality means that they take me into account; I have rights, I have obligations so they need to consider me, they should consider [women] but they don’t,” (P15). In order to delve further into this question regarding teachers’ perceptions of gender equality I have divided their views on gender equality into three main categories: gender equality in the school, gender equality in the home, and gender equality in society. I have chosen to group it in this way because, as seen in Chapter 3, the school and the family are important structures for social reproduction, as conceptualised by
Bourdieu (2001). In this context, I feel it is also important to consider the role played by wider society. Without understanding these mechanisms at work in the family and society, it is impossible to understand the processes of social reproduction (see Chapter 3). Not only are these the 3 ‘structures’ which teachers perceive as central to the reproduction of social norms and gender inequalities, they are also the 3 structures which will have formed and influenced teachers’ perceptions of gender (in)equality.

5.1.1 Gender Equality in the School

In order to gain an impression about teachers’ perceptions of gender equality in schools I will first analyse teachers’ attitudes towards both male and female students and whether they believe schools to be gender equal for the students.

- Teachers on access and gender equality

Access to education and girls’ and boys’ equal rights to education is a principal area of focus regarding gender equality and education. Legally in Bolivia all children have the same right of access to schools. The tendency to equate equal access to gender equality is reflected by teachers’ knowledge of gender equality as an issue and the idea was often raised in response to gender equality in schools during interviews with teachers. Despite the emphasis given by the government to equality of access, teachers are aware that there are still hurdles to be overcome in order for this to be achieved; whilst all children have the legal right to education, the reality may be different. Particularly in rural areas, sons have a higher status within the family and the importance of girls’ education is not recognised; it is often thought sufficient for them to learn to read and write. One teacher said, “in the countryside girls are accustomed to the fact that the family does not let them study, or rather, that they don’t give them the possibilities” (S1, P53). Furthermore, although state education is free there are many costs incurred through sending children to school, to pay for materials, clothes, transport etc., so if parents do not have enough money to send all their children to school then they will often chose to send the boys and the girls stay at home to help around the house (teacher, S1, P25).

Another idea frequently raised by teachers in relation to gender equality and access in Bolivia is the fact that single sex schools are banned under the current legislation and all schools need to be coeducational, as demonstrated by the case of Colegio Bolivar (see Chapter 1). This is closely linked to the idea of gender equality in the mentality of teachers and the educational authorities. When I spoke to the Director of Regular Education he said:
“There has been this vision [in Bolivia] that men are better or superior to women and certain areas of work and study are designated for women and others for men; it’s a true machista, patriarchal spirit with respect to women. However, little by little it is being recognised that men and women […] are equally capable, despite their particular differences. But it is difficult to remove this idea from society so the fact that some girls are now attending a boys school represents a type of defeat over the male sex” (P9).

This quote shows how coeducational schools are seen to equate to gender equality and that the admission of these 10 girls into a traditionally all-boys school is perceived as a step towards gender equal education. Whilst I believe this can be seen as progress towards gender equality in Bolivia I would argue there are many other factors to consider before this can be seen to represent gender equality in education, as this overlooks rights within and rights through education. Furthermore, it will still be several years before the genders balance out within this and other such schools and in the meantime these girls are exposed to a strongly patriarchal environment, further calling into question whether they will receive equal rights within the school. As seen in Chapter 3, there are various different mechanisms at work within schools which replicate social norms and reproduce gender discrimination and inequalities.

❖ Teachers on the classroom and gender equality

Overall, teachers stated that the pupils interacted well in schools. The ombudsman from Cochabamba involved in the Colegio Bolivar case thinks coeducation is a good thing so that the boys and girls “are not afraid to be with children of the other sex” (P1). This view was supported by the teachers:

“Before there were boys' schools and girls' schools. Then, the boys sat together talking on one side and the girls on the other in the same course. But now they mix, they have learnt how to engage [with each other]” (Female teacher, S1, P14).

But a teacher from S2 specifically highlighted how girls and boys do not sit together. My classroom observations also show a strong gender divide in this area, with boys sitting together and the girls sitting together, even to the extent that there was a “boys’ side” and a “girls’ side” in the classroom, and the boys’ presence dominated the classroom whilst the girls remained more marginal. This is an example of how social reproduction occurs through the hidden curriculum in schools which, I believe then calls into question the benefit of coeducational schools in this context and indicates how, by bringing girls into patriarchal environments, this may perpetuate gender inequalities rather than promoting gender equality.
It is important to look at opportunities within the schools for boys and girls in order to analyse rights within education. The majority of teachers stated that all students, both male and female, have the same opportunities within school, however, this does not necessarily mean that they have the same capacity to make use of them. In reality, the hidden curriculum and societal expectations dictate to what extent boys and girls are able to exploit these opportunities. I believe that whilst boys and girls in schools in Bolivia may have the same right to opportunities there are still many barriers to rights within education which make it harder for girls to achieve their goals. This is exemplified by an interview with a female maths teacher at S1:

“We, as people, can go against society and go after what we want. And if we don’t start to really search and find what we want so that we can have opportunities but rather we leave it so they can pressure us or let them tell us ‘you, no, you cannot, you have to stay here’ it will be the same as now, that more opportunities exist for men than are given to women” (P56).

This reference demonstrates how it is harder for women to achieve their goals because society and institutions try to limit their possibilities. In a machista society such as Bolivia, this is deeply entrenched and such practices often go unnoticed. As one female teacher said “they have the same opportunities, yes. It is just that [...] we [women] are so accustomed to this mistreatment so many girls maybe feel lesser, to such an extent that it is normal” (S1, P19). This perspective was again reiterated by the CBDE representative I spoke to; “sexism is so ingrained, the taboos are inherited from past generations so that most of us do not even realise [they’re there]” (P50). One manifestation of this difference is highlighted in the report De Verdad, No Somos Iguales: Educación No Sexista y Antidiscriminatoria (Arteaga, 2011) which shows how during the recreation time in schools the boys appropriate the playground to play football and the girls are left relegated at the sides. To give another example, S2 has a total of 370 students – 280 girls and just 90 boys – however out of the 17 class presidents 10 are boys and only 7 are girls. In an environment where girls clearly outnumber the boys, it is still the male students who take positions of power and dominate the school environment.

Since the introduction of the LRE, officially there is no longer a division of boys and girls in the curriculum in terms of the subjects they study for, or rather, there is no gendered curriculum. This is an important step towards achieving gender equality in the education system because it is a step towards breaking down gender stereotypes and represents a recognition of the significance of rights within education. In this sense, it can be said that girls and boys have the same opportunities within education. In an interview from S2, the teacher expressed how, when these changes were introduced under the LRE, “the boys started to make cakes and the girls started to learn about electricity so there you can see in a concrete manner, clearly, that there has been a change in roles
and the opportunity for both girls and boys to be equal” (P29). However, during the course of a student focus group in S1 the students said their lessons had been streamed in some subject areas. Whilst they said this was only in their final year of primary school (aged 12-13), this does serve to show that, despite legislation stating otherwise, the practice of separating classes based on gender continues in some schools to this day. Therefore, whilst the need for this gender equal practice is recognised in the education law, boys and girls are not benefiting from democratic participation, showing representational justice has not been achieved and translated to a gender-responsive pedagogy within (some) schools.

- **Teachers on gender equality for teachers**

Finally, I wish to end this section on teachers’ perceptions of gender equality in schools by looking at gender equality for teachers themselves; another important aspect of gender equality within schools. One area where gender discrimination might be expected is in subject teaching; some subjects are traditionally seen as ‘male’ and ‘female,’ generally the social sciences are perceived as female and the natural sciences as male. During the course of the data collection I spoke to two female maths teachers and neither of them felt they had been subject to discrimination for the fact that they are women teaching a traditionally male subject. However, one did recount the following experience:

> “When one does one’s years of work in the provinces [...] we leave the city and there some of the directors, more than anything, are looking for men to make up the football team. So maybe then, yes, at some point when I went to the provinces I was discriminated against and they said “I want a man, I do not want a woman” despite the fact that you are a professional, he is more interested that you are a man not a woman so you can play on the team, not your profession” (S1, P56).

Whilst she felt that this was a more general discrimination against her sex, it is possible that the head teacher was also gender stereotyping and discriminated against her for being a woman in a position for which he had expected a man. This represents one example of societal stereotyping against women preventing gender justice: Bourdieu (2001: 94) has shown how parents and teachers often “direct [girls] ‘in their own interest’ girls away from certain careers regarded as masculine [...] whereas they encourage their brothers to choose them.” The idea of the family influencing gender roles and (in)equality will be examined in the next section of this chapter, by looking at teachers’ perceptions of how these stereotypes are embodied within the family.
5.1.2 Gender Equality in the Home

Besides the school, the family is the most important institution to give us formation as children. Social reproduction theory shows how the influence and the attitude in the family and the home towards gender equality can be very important. One of the main impressions I gained of teachers’ perceptions of gender equality was that whilst they mainly believe schools to be gender equal, they feel it is in the family where gender inequality is created.

Many machista traditions are perpetuated within the family. From a young age, the family environment teaches children that there is a place for women and a place for men: “girls to be in the kitchen and boys for the world outside” (teacher, S1, P20), whereby preference is given to the boy(s). Girls are expected to help around the house, cooking, cleaning and washing, whilst the men do not help in any way; teachers believe it is this, more than anything, which shapes gender attitudes in the children. The teachers in this research all felt it was very important to work with the families in this area to change attitudes regarding gender roles in the home, in the belief that it does not matter how gender equal schools are if the children return to gendered households at the end of the day. This indicates teachers think the family is a more important site of social reproduction than schools and the education system. In other words, the change towards gender equality has to start at home.

An interview with one teacher from S1 reflects the general attitude of the teachers I spoke to:

“Outside of the school, in the personal life of every pupil, exists the family. The family has traditions, beliefs, and we cannot change the family because it is separate, so it is there, maybe, that you notice the inequality more because the women are always cooking, washing, ironing and the men just come home to eat; there’s no equality” (P14).

This supports the idea that whilst teachers believe schools to be gender equal, the society continues to be machista, and this attitude comes from the family. Moreover, whilst the teachers continue to hold this belief, it is unlikely that any changes will be implemented to improve gender equality in schools. This attitude towards the family reproducing gender inequalities and perpetuating stereotypes extends into the hierarchies of the MoE, with the Director of Regular Education stating that “in the family there still exists a machista vision, a patriarchal vision of the world” (P9).

Interestingly, however, the Manager of Gender, Generations and Social Justice at the MoE expressed quite a distinct opinion regarding the interrelation of the family and the education system: “with my little boy I teach him a lot about equality, including for women, but his teacher thinks the distinction of gender roles is very important. So regardless of what I teach my son, his teacher is responsible for un-teaching him everything that I have taught him [about gender equality]” (P10). This ministry worker, then, sees schools as playing a greater role in social reproduction than the family. This shows not only how different people perceive the interrelation between the family and the school or
teacher, but also how this is a cyclical relationship, with both the family and the school acting as sites of social reproduction.

The unequal distribution of housework is an important issue for the female teachers and there is a strong belief that it is the women themselves who reproduce this attitude. One male teacher commented that, “there are still certain behaviours which the women themselves encourage so that machismo, or the man, is more highly valued than the woman” (P11). One example often given of this is how the mothers oblige the girls to serve their brothers; “to the boy they say, ‘son, you don’t have to help in the kitchen because you are a boy’ and to the girl they say, ‘you have to come and help me in the kitchen’ (teacher, S2, P27). During a focus group in S1 I asked how many of the students performed household tasks every day to which 3 out of 17 boys answered yes whilst all 15 girls in the class answered yes. This idea of gender roles is then imparted to the children at every level of family life; not only are girls expected to help their mothers around the house but they are given dolls and kitchen sets to play with whilst the boys play with cars, the boys can go out and play in the streets but the girls are kept inside; “son, you can go out’ but to you they say it is dangerous because you could get pregnant” (male teacher, S1, P20). Similarly, another teacher highlighted how “we always value the girls less and give more importance to the boys, from a young age. If a boy falls over, a little boy, what do we say? ‘Little man, little man boys don’t cry.’ Whereas to a girl who falls over, ‘it doesn’t matter, cry little girl, it’ll make you feel better’” (Female teacher, S1, P22). This clearly shows the role families, but particularly mothers, play in reproducing machista attitudes and gender inequalities, as perceived by teachers.

These attitudes instilled from the family are then reproduced in the schools. Girls are brought up helping around the house so when the teacher needs a task to be done they are eager to help, one teacher said “there are girls who are always ‘me, me, I will do it, I will fetch it, I will do it,’ and it’s because at home they are like this too, since they are little they have to do everything” (S2, P26). Once again, in the classroom the girls are quiet, well-behaved and do as they are asked because this is how they have been socialised whilst the boys are disruptive and dominate the classroom as they would dominate the home. In this way they dominate the teachers’ attention in the classroom and, as such, it is clearly possible to see the way the children have been brought up in terms of gender roles, and therefore the social inequalities, reproduced in the school environment.

We can see, then, as one teacher said, “the students themselves are products of a family model and, on the interior of the family, at least in Latin America and especially in Bolivia, there are many machista characteristics” (P17). Teachers believe, therefore, that change has to come from home; “the values of gender equality have to start from the home because in education, we cannot change
the perspective of these families. Maybe we can orientate but there is little that we can really change” (teacher, S2, P29). Another teacher from S2 emphasised how only once work has started with the families, in the home, work can begin in school. MoE officials say they plan to work with families but had no clear idea of what this would involve or when this might start. It does, however, show that the MoE, too, perceives the role of the family as important. It is important to remember here that teachers themselves are not only parents but they are also products of this same system and are likely to carry these attitudes into the school environment, consciously or not. It depends, then, on their agency to employ a gender-responsive pedagogy in the classroom.

These gender stereotypes also affect parents’ attitudes to their children’s education; greater importance is given to the boys’ education. In one interview the teacher related a specific experience of hers;

“I had a case where, a father had a son and a daughter here in the school and he said ‘I give him everything him, he has to study,’ but to the girl he said, ‘if you fail I will not bring you to school anymore, you can stay in the house to clean, to iron and look after me’ giving preference to the boy” (P 56).

Priority is clearly given to the boy’s education. In another interview, speaking generally of parents’ attitudes a male teacher said, “the boy, he has no choice but to graduate from high school. If it is a girl, [the parents’ say] ‘ah don’t worry my daughter,’ […] but the boy has to graduate. The boy comes first” (S1, P20). These two examples both demonstrate how parents’ attitudes may differ in relation to girls’ and boys’ education, but in both cases to the detriment of the girl. These both exemplify how it may be the family structure which creates social reproduction.

The teachers’ belief that it is the family that influences gender equality can be seen to be embodied by the events at Colegio Bolivar earlier this year but, furthermore, it shows how the institution of the school reflects the patriarchal society which exists in Bolivia. The fact that it was the families, specifically the mothers, of the male students at the school who protested against the admittance of the 10 girls shows how deeply machista Bolivian society is. A protest march of 200 mothers was enacted in opposition of the girls entering the school (Camacho, 2012) and 6 parents were prosecuted for their violent behaviour (Erbol, 2012). Many reasons have been given for the exact cause of their objections: some say it is because the parents rejected the girls altogether for the fact of being females entering a boys school; others believe it to have been so that the school, currently in its 99th year, could reach the 100th anniversary as an all-boys school, after which they would permit girls to enter. However, the most frequently stated reason is that it is because the girls’ families did not stand in line to register, even though the girls’ parents tried to queue with everyone
else but were rejected by the other parents. This suggests the main reason they objected was due to a sense of injustice, however, it does appear that machismo and tradition also played a role, prompting parents to force the girls’ families out of the queue. During the negotiations it was disclosed by several national newspapers that the parents had said they would accept a small number of the girls to attend the school assuming they cut their hair and dressed as boys (La Patria, 2012; El Universo, 2012). This suggests that their gender did play a greater role that the earlier statement would lead us to believe.

5.1.3 Gender Equality in Society

Having examined teachers’ perceptions of the relationship between gender equality and the family I will now expand on this idea to look at the relationship teachers’ perceive between gender equality and society. In order to do so, I will look at the opportunities boys and girls have once they leave school, or their rights through education, as well as teachers’ perceptions of Bolivia as a machista society.

Teachers perceive the idea of gender equality as a struggle between the school and society. They recognise the importance of the education system to act as a vehicle of change but emphasize that this needs to be in conjunction with societal change, whereas at present gender equal education is in conflict with society. As such, the interplay between society, teachers and the hidden curriculum is very important. Teachers emphasize that schools are gender equal but the influence of society on both the children and the teachers means that this cannot be the case. At present, the machista society seen in Bolivia continues to limit opportunities for women after they leave school, “If they had the same opportunities we would be able to see [women] as professionals in other areas but that’s not how it is, it’s generally men in those cases” (teacher, S1, P15). The machista tradition in Bolivia means that it is still the man who is in charge in society and women are expected to fulfil a more submissive role, thus limiting the rights through education available to girls.

Teachers and ministry officials spoke of the difference between after school opportunities for girls and boys particularly in relation to the urban/rural divide. In rural areas, community expectations of girls are much stronger in the family and they experience more pressure to get married and have children; “women only have to be [in school] until 6th grade when they know how to read and write and from then on they stay at home to cook, to care for their siblings, or the animals, and it is only the men who have to finish their studies so they can go to the army or university” (Ministry Official, P11). In the urban setting, where girls are more likely to finish school and have the opportunity to go into a profession or go to university, the careers they follow are still highly gendered. “In nursing;
it is mainly women who study nursing, you find very few male nurses. In the police, the majority are men, few women” (S2, P29). This gender division in the workplace is confirmed by statistics published by the National Institute for Statistics; for example, 5.7% of working men are employed in construction compared to 0.11% of women whereas private homes employ 1.32% of working women and only 0.13% of men (INE, 2011).

Not only does society limit opportunities for girls once they leave school but it plays an important role in shaping teachers’ perceptions and attitudes. Similarly, the unequal opportunities girls and boys have on leaving school may be shaped by the teachers’ attitudes to them within the school environment, which, in turn, are shaped by society. Ultimately, “the education system is a reproductive system of society” (CBDE representative, P8). This idea that education reproduces societal inequalities relates to the work of Kabeer (2005) and Leach (2000) who argue that education often reinforces rather than reshapes gender relations, creating a process of social reproduction. In this way, the lack of opportunities for girls once they leave school can be seen to demonstrate the level of gender inequality in schools; society can act as a test of how gender equal the schools are. One teacher from S1 recognised this; “the test is when our adolescents have left school and the different activities they select” (P13). Until the schools successfully implement a gender-responsive pedagogy, it is probable the hidden curriculum will continue to limit the opportunities girls perceive for themselves in society at large and therefore limit the possibilities for gender equality.

5.2 Teachers Perceptions of Gender Equality in Relation to the Policy Discourse

Having analysed teachers’ perceptions of gender equality, I will now look at how these perceptions relate to the government’s agenda on gender equality as embodied by the ASEP education reform. To analyse teachers’ perceptions of gender equality in relation to the education discourse I will first look at how they see the ASEP reform compared to the LRE in relation to gender equality, as well as their understanding of gender equality in the latest reform.

5.2.1 The ASEP reform and the LRE

Following my analysis of the two education reforms, I wanted to ascertain whether teachers felt that the discourse of gender equality was more visible in the ASEP reform or the LRE. Based on my data, I believe some teachers do recognise a greater discourse of gender equality in the LRE. This was
especially true for those who had trained at the norma\textsuperscript{22} under the previous reform, who felt that the thematic of gender equality was well covered during their teacher training. For example, one teacher said “I can talk a lot about the previous education reform; there were specific modules, content, which spoke about how to incentivise the students to learn about gender equality” (S2, P29). Another teacher described how “each teacher had to speak [about gender equality] in the classroom in one form or another, for example regarding the correct definition, doing examples with the students about how we’re all equal, that women as well as men have the same capabilities” (S1, P56). Furthermore, gender equality was integrated both as a transversal and into the subjects by means of the curriculum, as an art teacher from S1 explained: “In my subject, for example, we reclaimed female artists; so, for example, I would say ‘look, it’s not just men’” (P53). This shows how gender equality was integrated at many different levels in the LRE, however, this working knowledge of gender equality seems to have been lost except for where teachers’ use their strategic agency to continue these measures in the classroom. At present gender equality within the ASEP reform remains at the discursive level without being brought into practice.

5.2.2 Gender equality in the latest reform

Since the ASEP reform was introduced in December 2010, teachers have had nearly two years to familiarise themselves with the content of the latest education law.\textsuperscript{23} The vast majority of the teachers I spoke to are against the latest education reform. They do not feel teachers were included in the elaboration of the law and they do not feel it addresses the critical problems seen today in the education system, restricting their agency in this process. Given that the government policy establishes teachers as the ‘soldiers of change,’ key actors in their quest for social justice, it is important to recognise that teachers do not feel they were included in the reform process. Therefore, further to overlooking the importance of training in the new reform in order for teachers to fulfil their role as agents of social change, the government did not incorporate their perceptions within the reform. This highlights the struggle which exists between structures and agents so, having been established as soldiers of change, Bolivian teachers are simultaneously suppressed by the structure within which they are agents, thus limiting their agency.

Gender equality is not seen by teachers as one of the central elements of the reform, nor do they believe that it should be one of the most important points. I do believe, however, that their

\footnote{\textsuperscript{22} The name given to teacher training institutes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{23} I want to highlight the fact that the knowledge the teachers I spoke to of the ASEP reform had been gained through information gathered on their own initiative; as mentioned in Chapter 4, most teachers’ have yet to receive training and information about the reform from the government nor have the schools received any materials about the reform.}
perceptions of gender equality generally do reflect what is stressed in the education policies. The knowledge of the reform in relation to interculturality is much deeper so maybe if gender equality had been given more prominence in the discourse their knowledge would be better. Teachers’ knowledge of gender equality demonstrates an awareness of the ‘buzz’ words, such as transversals and access, as used by the government but many of these elements remain to be put into practice. Two years after the reform was implemented, there are still no textbooks, no curriculum guides and little teacher training.

- Gender equality and Decolonization

Whilst the problem of gender equality is not high among their concerns it is connected to one of the central problems teachers raised with the reform; that of decolonization. The idea of decolonizing the education system is central to the ASEP reform, to break away from the hegemonic neoliberal model and the colonial legacy, and establish a Bolivian education system. In order to do so, the government proposes to draw on the indigenous cultures of Bolivia and put their cultures and traditions at the heart of the curriculum and the schooling system, through inter- and intra-cultural education, using the ideas of cosmovision\(^24\) and complementarity. Teachers believe that by doing so, the government is taking Bolivia a step backwards; in a sense, they are stopping scientific knowledge at the point it was 500 years ago and overlook the importance of scientific discoveries made in the Western civilizations. Decolonization is also seen as taking Bolivia back into the past and undoing advancements which have been made in women’s rights:

“Now, women are more or less taken into account, they have greater participation [than before], but with this law, if we talk about decolonization we would have to take a step backwards, we would be participating in something in which women were never taken into account for before. Women were the lowest, the men above.” (S1, P15)

The rhetoric of decolonization uses the indigenous idea of complementarity and *chachawarmi* to represent gender equality in education. For some teachers, this demonstrates the importance of gender equality in the education discourse, “yes, [the reform] includes gender equality. There is a part of this law which talks about interculturality and this idea of *chachawarmi* in the [indigenous] cultures” (S2, P26). However, most teachers I spoke to strongly believe that complementarity is not the same as gender equality. In fact, they do not believe the indigenous cultures to have been gender equal at all. One teacher from S1 said, “if we look back at the past, at our history, our cultures and our ancestors there has never been gender equality” (P15), whilst another teacher from S2 said, “[the government’s agenda] is a very Andean vision and in the Andean culture gender

\(^{24}\) The term used to refer to a world vision based on that developed by pre-hispanic groups in Bolivia.
equality does not exist, rather some of the indigenous groups are very machista” (P29). This difference in conceptualization of gender equality demonstrates the confusion which exists among teachers about the definition of gender equality as well as the value of legislation in changing society.

- Gender parity

The EFA initiative now recognises that measuring access to education overlooks rights within and through education, making it an insufficient tool to measure gender equality in education. However, since gender is a social construct and discrimination or equality based on this are difficult to evaluate (Wilson, 2003), gender parity is by far the easiest and clearest measure available. The Bolivian system continues to rely on the idea of gender parity, of ‘50-50,’ to conceptualise gender equality. The use of complementarity reflects this, as does the importance accorded to equal access and coeducation as evidence of gender equality in the Bolivian education system. Several teachers spoke of this negatively: “in the parliament they say ‘we’re going to achieve gender equality between the members of parliament. As such, each party is obliged to nominate 10 women and 10 men,’ for them this is gender equality, nothing more” (teacher, S1, P53). This emphasis was confirmed in an interview with a teacher working as a consultant at the MoE: “we are working now to achieve gender equality in all aspects, in all the new laws which say that on all sides you have to be able to see the inclusion of women and arrive at an equality of 50-50%” (P11). It is clear to see then, how gender equality is embodied as gender parity in the government’s agenda. The fact that equality of access is emphasized by teachers whilst other aspects important to gender equality are overlooked may show how the political discourse does influence teachers’ perceptions of gender equality. It is important to recognise, however, that the continued emphasis on access to education within the international education agenda and the EFA initiative, may also influence teachers’ perceptions.

There are many factors involved in creating gender equality in education and whilst the government continues to envision gender equality from this perspective it will be almost impossible to change the status quo. Furthermore, it will be difficult to change teachers’ perceptions of gender equality in the education system, because, as products of the patriarchal society in Bolivia, they themselves are part of the process of social reproduction. This will limit their agency and the likelihood they will employ strategic actions for gender equality in the classroom.
5.3 Concluding remarks

This chapter set out to answer the questions “What are secondary school teachers’ perceptions of gender equality?” and “Does the education policy discourse influence teachers’ perceptions of gender equality?” Firstly, I believe this chapter shows that teachers’ perceptions of gender equality are highly complex and wide ranging, and are intrinsically interconnected with the family and society. Teachers’ knowledge of the idea of gender equality is such that they believe schools to be gender equal, focusing on ideas such as equality of access and equal opportunity of participation. Furthermore, this importance of parity in education is highlighted by the case of Colegio Bolivar. The events at Colegio Bolivar do reaffirm the teachers’ belief that society and the family play an important role in gender equality and, whilst this is certainly true, I feel there is too little emphasis placed on the role of the education system. The concept of gender equality is entering the consciousness of teachers but it is still not practiced in schools at all levels; this is examined further in Chapter 6. Until then, the hidden curriculum will continue to play a role in schools to reproduce and perpetuate social inequalities.

Secondly, the influence of the policy discourse on teachers’ perceptions of gender equality naturally varies for each individual teacher and forms part of a reflexive process (Hay, 2002). I believe on the whole that their lack of certainty about the definition of gender equality and their role in creating it reflects the government discourse on gender equality; the issue does not feature highly in the education reform and therefore it is not a central issue considered by teachers. However, the use of complementarity to embody gender equality in the reform was largely not perceived favourably by the teachers I spoke to, as they do not perceive the indigenous cultures as gender equal.

Teachers included in this research are keenly aware of the need for drastic reform measures in the education sector overall, although they do not necessarily agree with the measures the government is trying to introduce. The importance of parity among teachers in relation to gender equality is reflected in the ASEP reform which embodies gender equality principally in terms of parity, through equality of language and equality of access. The MoE officials I spoke to were all aware of the problem of gender inequality in schools but within the overall agenda it is given little prominence compared to the LRE. This shift in focus at the discursive level is reflected by teachers’ knowledge of gender equality.
Chapter 6 - Teachers’ actions towards gender equality in secondary schools

In the previous chapter I focused on teachers’ perceptions of gender equality within the school, the family and society and how these in turn relate to the governmental discourse on gender equality. Yet, as seen within the theoretical framework, teachers’ actions play an important role in schools, through their strategic or intuitive strategies. In this chapter, then, I will analyse the role of teachers’ actions within the school environment in order to answer the questions “What role do secondary school teachers’ actions play in creating gender equal classrooms and schools?” and “How do teachers’ attitudes reflect their stated perceptions of issues surrounding gender equality?”

6.1 The role of teachers’ actions in creating gender equality

I will first look at the role teachers’ actions play in creating a gender equal environment within the school.

Teachers’ knowledge of the importance of gender equality and the subtleties the question entails vary substantially (see Chapter 5), and teachers’ actions towards gender equality are similarly varied. Overall, teachers believe that they are acting in a gender equal way, treating boys and girls alike, and that gender equality can be seen both within the school and the classroom. However, given that society in Bolivia continues to be patriarchal and machista it is therefore difficult to imagine that teachers are able to leave their preconceptions outside the school; as one teacher said to me “how can it be otherwise, we are products of the same system” (S1, P17). Furthermore, whilst society remains unequal for men and women then the schools will frequently serve to reproduce this (Leach, 2000; Kabeer, 2005; Subrahmanian, 2005). This, then, creates a hidden curriculum within the school in which teachers’ actions may have a positive or negative effect on the students, depending on their personal agency. Various different elements contribute to the hidden curriculum (see Chapter 3) of which teachers’ expectations of their students, classroom seating arrangements, classroom content and teacher interactions and school management all relate to teachers’ actions. Teachers’ expectations have an important influence on students’ future aspirations (Kabeer, 2005) thus acting to reproduce or deconstruct social norms (Bourdieu, 2001). These, then, will be examined in the second half of this chapter but first I will explore the remaining actions which are the focus of this chapter.
6.1.1 Classroom content

Teachers’ language use and lesson content are important in terms of how the hidden curriculum may relate to gender equality or inequalities. Given the gendered nature of the Spanish language (see Chapters 3 and 4) teachers’ classroom language may have a powerful impact on students, playing a role in social reproduction through the hidden curriculum. The Director of Regular Education highlighted his awareness of this, of how “this patriarchal machista criterion reaches down even to academic Spanish language whereby even if there are 100 women and just one man amongst them, we would have to refer to them as ‘todos’ [masculine]. So now we are trying to break [this tradition]” (P9). This demonstrates the government is aware of the effect of gendered language and believe it is essential to change this to achieve gender equality. As seen in Chapter 4, non-gendered language has been integrated into the education law, however, whilst this change has been made on paper it signifies little until it is implemented in the classroom. During my classroom observations no teachers implemented gender neutral language, suggesting that this idea has not yet filtered down from the discourse to the classroom level. At present, then, teachers continue to use intuitive strategies. As I was unable to obtain any information on the content of teacher training programmes, it remains unclear whether this will be included. I believe the fact that the government has still not implemented widespread practical training for teachers on the subject of gender equality shows a failure to support their statement that teachers are the soldiers of change in the move towards social justice in Bolivia, since without the appropriate training, gender equality in schools remains dependent on individual teachers’ agency and their strategic actions to introduce gender equal measures.

In several interviews, teachers mentioned transversals and their importance for creating gender equality within schools. However, I did not observe teachers introducing the concept of gender equality in the classroom as part of the lesson. Although I conducted a limited number of classroom observations, the fact that I did not observe this gender-responsive action suggests teachers may not be using their strategic agency to create gender equality in education, despite their stated emphasis on transversals. On the other hand, I did not observe any teacher use an example which reinforced gender stereotypes which is an element often mentioned in relation to the hidden curriculum and gender equality. However, the above mentioned study by the CBDE (Arteaga, 2011) shows that these stereotypes do still exist in textbooks used in schools (see Image 3 for an extract from the investigation).
This shows that whilst the teachers I observed may not have actively used gendered examples in the class they still exist in the materials being used. As seen in Chapter 4, teachers are largely responsible for selecting their teaching materials and so the fact that this investigation, then, found non-gender equal textbooks still in use suggests this is not something the teachers are contemplating before they pick their resources.

In my observation of a Philosophy and Psychology lesson in S1, the teacher had introduced an element of SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights) education into the subject; for the past 2 weeks the students had been responsible for an egg to take care of as their ‘baby.’ The students were grouped off in pairs of one girl and one boy and then in class they discussed ‘How being a parent has changed my life.’ At the start of the class the teacher asked them to sit in their groups but after some disturbance the class separated into girls and boys because they felt more comfortable sitting that way. The overall level of engagement in this activity in the class was low, however, the girls were more invested than the boys whose behaviour during the class was disruptive and the teachers struggled to control them. When asked to reflect on their experiences the boys spoke of the financial responsibility of having a family whilst the girls focused on the emotional and physical experience thereby reproducing traditional gender roles. This could have been a great opportunity to address gender roles and social stereotypes however the teacher did not use their agency in this opportunity to deconstruct traditional gender roles. This, then, was an intuitive action by the teacher which reproduced social expectations in the classroom.
6.1.2 Classroom environment

Most teachers I spoke to clearly stated they see all students as equal that their gender does not play a part in the classroom; “‘who can translate this sentence,’ I ask, and the boys and girls have an equal right to raise their hand and translate” (S1, P14). Although the teacher thinks this action reflects gender equal behaviour, I argue, this does not speak to the students perception of their ability to answer the question. Research has shown there is often a gap between what teachers believe and the way they act (see Younger et al., 1999), so that whilst teachers believe their actions are strategic and contribute to a gender-responsive pedagogy in the classroom, in fact they are acting intuitively to reproduce social norms. It ignores the idea, discussed in Chapter 5, whereby although girls and boys theoretically have the same opportunity to speak in class, the hidden curriculum may mean that they may not perceive this right in the same way; girls may feel less confident about class participation, thereby failing to address rights within education.

Classroom organization has been shown to be another factor which contributes to the hidden curriculum within schools. Research in international development and education has shown that the traditional classroom layout in which desks are arranged in rows reinforces societal structures and socialisation processes to the detriment of girls (FAWE, 2006). Bolivian classrooms maintain this traditional layout and the girls group together, normally to one side of the classroom allowing the boys to dominate the space. During the course of my classroom observations, only one teacher (S3) rearranged the tables so that the tables were grouped together with a mix of boys and girls in each group, thus stimulating interaction and participation from all. Whilst this is a strategic action by this one teacher to implement a gender-responsive pedagogy, the failure of the other teachers to consider the layout of their classroom, their intuitive action, hinders greater gender equality in the classroom. However, the classroom observation described above also shows that the students themselves are resistant to this type of action, and thus also contribute both to the hidden curriculum and social reproduction within schools.

Within Physical Education (PE) classes, naturally, the concept of the classroom arrangement does not apply. Curriculum divisions based on gender often mean girls are excluded from sports classes entrenching gender equalities within the education system (Aikman et al., 2005). Although the Bolivian education system has no such official division, my observations of sports classes in all the schools I visited show that boys are still much more dominant and engaged in sports classes than the girls. Generally, the physical education class consisted of a game of football or basketball played by

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25 Although this research comes from another context – research in various African countries – the outcomes are still applicable here. Despite Freire’s work on critical pedagogy originating in Brazil, I have unfortunately have not been able to find similar research on gender-responsive pedagogy produced in Latin America.
the boys and in which the girls did not participate. This behaviour appeared to be accepted by the PE teachers, both male and female. The CIDEM representative I interviewed confirmed this view: “the boys play football and the girls watch. Girls are not practicing any form of sport because there is no space [to accommodate their needs]. So, discriminations towards girls are being maintained and accepted as normal” (P65). Interestingly the new ASEP curriculum does recognise the need for gender equality in PE: “the development of physical activities in order to promote the practices of good relations, gender equality, inclusion, respect, interest, security and trust,” (Ministerio de Educación, 2011). However, whilst gender equality is included in the discourse here, the curriculum fails to give teachers any indication of how to achieve this; the need for a critical pedagogy is recognised but is not, at present, introduced on the ground in the schools that I worked in. There is a need for teacher training to capacitate teachers to act as the soldiers of change as they are established by the government policy. In the meantime the fact teachers do not engage the female students in the sports lessons represents another intuitive action by teachers towards gender equality.

6.1.3 Teacher interactions and school management

The way teachers’ interact may shape the students’ perceptions of the reality of gender relations as well as their possibilities for the future; these interactions comprise an important aspect of the hidden curriculum, as discussed in Chapter 3. In Bolivia, teaching is still regarded as a female profession and there are more women than men working as teachers. Despite this, the male teachers tend to take a more dominant position within the school; they still are more likely to occupy the positions of authority and on a day-to-day basis the women occupy the caregiver role. In the schools I visited the women are in charge of organizing the supplies in the teachers’ room such as tea, coffee and sugar and provide empanadas or biscuits. In my time spent in the 3 schools there was only one occasion where a male teacher provided the break-time snack (which his wife had made). This represents a further effect of the hidden curriculum which may negatively influence the students’ ideas about gender equality and gender roles. Leach (2000) has also shown how female teachers are more likely to be given the non-teaching tasks, such as organising social events, whilst men are responsible for the curriculum. Similarly, all the various teachers’ syndicate representatives I met across the different schools were male, despite the fact that women far outnumber men in the teaching profession.

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26 pastries
Whilst there are more women in positions of authority within the education system than would have been seen previously, it is still often felt that men can perform positions of authority better than women (CIDEM representative, P65). This mentality is applied within schools to the position of head teacher, despite the fact that there are more women in the teaching profession. Out of the two schools I visited in La Paz, S2 has a female head teacher and I found the teachers in this school to be generally more positive about gender equality in the school, particularly regarding teacher relations. The presence of female teachers in positions of authority represents a positive move towards gender equality and will hopefully positively influence the mentality of the students in the school.

Finally, I want to highlight a specific event which was brought to my attention in the course of the interviews. I have already mentioned in Chapter 2 how the head teacher of one school prohibited my presence in the school and how I believe that this, at least in part, stemmed from an undervaluation of the problem of gender equality in schools. In the course of a second interview with a teacher from this school he told me of an incident which occurred in the school some weeks previously where the head teacher, on seeing a boy with long hair had said “what are you thinking? You look like a woman” (P53). Not only is this an example of poor behaviour by an educator towards the students, it is also a clear example of a teacher’s act of gender discrimination; humiliating the boy in front of his companions and doing so by saying it is bad to look like a woman. This gender discrimination shows how intuitive actions can reproduce social expectations and norms.

6.2 Teachers’ attitudes in relation to their stated perceptions

The second half of this chapter will analyse teachers’ attitudes towards their students and how this reflects their stated perceptions of gender equality. Leach (2000) and Kabeer (2005) have shown that what teachers think their students will be able to achieve on leaving school is reflected in their attitudes to the students in the classroom. As seen in Chapter 5, teachers have different expectations of what their students will be able to achieve on leaving school – opportunities are much more limited for girls than boys – despite the fact that the girls study harder and often achieve better grades. These expectations are likely to transmit to the students themselves, limiting the future they can imagine for themselves, and will also influence teachers’ actions.
6.2.1 Girls vs. Boys

Most teachers see girls as the better students on the basis that they are tidier, more dedicated, responsible and do the work as asked, not necessarily because they are more academically brilliant. One teacher, who overall had a good knowledge of gender equality, stated that:

“the girls are more dedicated. As our system is based on dedication and development, the girls are the ones with the dedication to make their homework nicely done and complete. The boys are more critical, they don’t want to do homework, ‘why do we have to do homework’ they say, because they already understand it. And when they sit an exam obviously the more reflective and critical people have a greater advantage to people who memorise. Of course, it serves the girls well to be dedicated because most girls are disciplined and organised. That’s the difference between boys and girls” (P53).

This shows just how ingrained gender stereotypes are in society and how teachers are not necessarily even aware that they have these preconceptions, thus acting intuitively rather than strategically. The teacher comments on the difference in learning styles and work patterns between boys and girls but by doing so he essentially says boys are smarter than girls. This perception of boys as more intelligent is likely to be transmitted to the students, as part of the hidden curriculum, and influence the female students’ perception of their substantive rights within the classroom (FAWE, 2006).

A wider investigation by CBDE supports the idea that girls are seen as the better students, based on their behaviour rather than their abilities, the following are quotes from a selection of interviews conducted in the course of the investigation: “‘the girls are the better students,’ ‘the girls have fun in moderation,’ ‘the girls are more responsible with their parents,’ ‘the girls are more controlled by their parents,’ ‘the girls are not intelligent’. It is interesting to see how the perceptions show that the schoolgirls are the better students but at the same time ‘they are not intelligent’” (PIEB, 2012). These attitudes and expectations from teachers create a hidden curriculum and may result in an unequal learning environment in which the girls feel comfortable participating (or excelling) in the class. This then creates a process of social reproduction, hindering progress towards gender justice.

My classroom observations show that the girls are indeed the more dedicated, hardworking students and that in class, the majority of the teachers’ attention is taken up by some of the boys who are noisy, disruptive and pay little attention to the class, leaving the girls (and some boys) to continue working without the teachers’ assistance. It also meant that in some cases little ‘teaching’ was achieved at all. A study conducted by Stanworth (cited in Francis 2005) shows how this dominance of the boys may also contribute teachers’ perceptions of their students and therefore
their actions towards them. This male dominance provokes teachers to see the boys as having greater potential, thereby raising their expectations of what the boys will achieve after school.

Meanwhile, the dedicated attitude of the female students is likely to stem from the fact that they are more accustomed to doing as they are told since, as I discussed in Chapter 5, girls are raised at home to do as they are told. In addition, a study conducted by Francis (2000: 108) in British secondary schools suggests that girls are more studious because “girls feel they have to be better than boys in order to compete on the same terms in the job market.” This supports the idea discussed in Chapter 5 that whilst boys and girls do have the same opportunities, both in school and society, girls have to work harder to achieve them. Similarly, another female teacher spoke of how she encourages her female students not to let societal stereotypes dictate what they demand of themselves through positive reinforcement to combat social stereotypes: “the machista society means they tell us “no, no you cannot do this” but we women feel capable so I make sure I tell the girls, ‘no, we can, we want to’” (S1, P15). This one example shows a teacher’s independent strategic action to try to break down the social gender stereotypes and encourage girls to go after what they dream about.

6.2.2 Teachers as agents for gender equality

Some teachers were more aware of the role their actions play in creating gender equality and the need to avoid gender stereotyping. This recognition of their role includes the need to share classroom tasks equitably, instead of automatically giving cleaning jobs to girls, such as rubbing the board down. There is a willingness on the girls’ behalf to perform these tasks and be chosen, as described by a teacher in S2 “there are girls who are always ‘me, me, I will do it, I will fetch it, I will do it,’ and it’s because at home they are like this too, since they are little they have to do everything” (P26). Another teacher from S2 spoke of how teachers’ actions can encourage gender equality “by not saying ‘you can’t do this’ or rather, giving [the students] ample opportunity in any activity” (P27). These teachers show an awareness of the need for a gender-responsive pedagogy to combat the hidden curriculum within schools and use their agency to create elements of gender equality in their classrooms. These teachers both trained in the normal under the LRE, so their knowledge may be a result of the capacity building in issues relating to gender equality introduced under this reform. Giroux and Penna (1979) cite Lortie to show that generally teachers maintain the “pedagogical influences accepted by them during their pre-college and college schooling.” Whilst this helps demonstrate how teachers maintain positive behaviours instilled during their teacher training it also

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27 I refer to a British context having been unable to find similar research conducted in Latin America.
explains how teachers trained under a less inclusive system may struggle, consciously or not, to overcome these attitudes and influences. Moreover Lortie’s investigation (ibid: 32) suggests teachers lack “significant criteria to shape, guide or evaluate their own work” indicating an inability to judge to what extent they create a gender equal classroom environment, thus producing intuitive rather than strategic strategies, potentially perpetuating the process of social reproduction. Ultimately, though, it represents a fundamental failure on the part of the government to provide adequate training to teachers on how to create gender equality within the school.

6.3 Concluding remarks

Overall, teachers’ actions can play a very important role in creating gender equality in schools. If the children are taught in a gender equal environment in school then the hope is that when they grow up they will instil these values in their children and gradually society will change. This is a long slow process which cannot occur overnight. Furthermore, society influences teachers’ attitudes towards their students which, in turn, influence their actions towards their students. The hidden curriculum continues to play an important role in the education system in Bolivia today and impacts gender equality in society at large. As one female teacher said “to achieve [gender equality in schools] from within this context is one of the most challenging parts of the role of an educator” (S1, P14). I came across behaviours which show teachers to be truly working in a gender equal way as well as teachers who are replicating and perpetuating the social stereotypes which shows the extent to which teachers’ awareness of gender equality varies, as do their actions which are, at times, both strategic and intuitive. This serves to emphasize the need for a coordinated message on gender equality from the government to help introduce gender-responsive pedagogy in schools. Teachers’ lack of awareness of what gender equality is and their role in creating it within the classroom can also help explain their understanding of the need for a focus on gender equality in the home rather than at school, as they are not aware that they are creating a hidden curriculum within the school.
Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This chapter will draw together the various themes and findings from this thesis in order to answer the central research question of “What are teachers’ perceptions and actions towards gender equality in secondary schools in Bolivia and how does this relate to the education policy discourse?”

This thesis has shown that various historical and contextual factors affect gender equality in Bolivia, with mechanisms in place to relegate women to the margins of mainstream society. Given women’s low social status in Bolivia and the role of schools as sites of social reproduction, it is important that measures are introduced to recognise this within education in order to create gender justice, yet this is overlooked by the current education discourse.

7.1 Gender equality in the Bolivian education policy

The current government has revised the education discourse to incorporate ideas of social justice, with indigenous justice at the heart of the agenda. The idea of gender equality is still incorporated, albeit to a lesser extent than under the LRE of 1994, in which gender equality formed a guiding principle. The main ways the reform addresses the concept of gender justice is through the use of gender-neutral language, complementarity, depatriarchalisation, and equality of access. Complementarity is used in the reform to unite the concepts of indigenous rights and gender equality however, without recognising the MoJ’s de-hierarchization of gender relations in indigenous communities. Specific emphasis is given to equality of access and rights to education which, given the small gender gap at secondary level enrolment, reflects favourably on the government’s agenda. However, whilst important for gender equality, these measures fail to truly address the mechanisms of gender inequality at work within schools, which may limit rights within and through education. To create gender equality in schools it is crucial that these rights are met as well (Wilson, 2003).

This thesis has used rights to, within and through education to provide a framework for looking at social justice. Fraser (2005a, 2005b) identifies the processes of recognition, redistribution and representation as central to the achievement of social justice. If the Bolivian government hopes to achieve social justice through the education system it is important all three of these aspects are addressed within the ASEP reform. Tikly and Barrett (2011) apply these concepts to social justice within education through relevance, inclusion and democratic participation respectively. For now I will discuss inclusion and relevance and return to democratic participation later. Redistributive justice as inclusion in education, or rights to education, is well covered by the government’s
education agenda in relation to gender equality. The few barriers still in place preventing equal access to education are mainly related to familial or societal pressures for girls. So whilst several measures have been taken to ensure legal equality of access to education, the dimensions of relevance and democratic participation, which I interpret in this context as giving an equal voice to every child, are less well established.

Despite the discursive changes, little has been done to implement the reform since its initial introduction. This reflects the broader problem this government has bringing the discursive into practice. Chapter 4 shows that some limited measures for gender equality are broached within the ASEP curriculum, however, until curricula materials are produced and the discourse is translated to practice it is impossible to comment on whether this will achieved. Furthermore, if teachers are to be the key agent of social transformation, the government needs to ensure they are given appropriate training to introduce gender-responsive pedagogy in schools. As teacher training in the new curriculum has, to date, been limited I was unable to ascertain if this is recognised. Therefore, I believe that at present neither of these issues to secure relevance in education are being addressed by the government’s current efforts, thus failing to secure redistribution for gender justice. Furthermore, with interculturality central to the education agenda, I question just how much weight will be given to gender equality within these new materials. If the new curricula materials produced under ASEP overlook gender-responsive pedagogy, then girls rights within education will continue to be insufficiently addressed.

7.2 Teachers’ perceptions

The government cites the education system as a central battle ground in the transformation for social justice, with teachers as the ‘soldiers of change,’ so it is important to look at teachers themselves as agents, their awareness of gender equality, and how they perceive their role in creating gender equality in schools and in the classroom.

Access to education is central to teachers’ interpretation of gender equality in education. On the whole, they perceive gender equality as an important issue in Bolivia and are aware of the potential role of the education system in creating change, but perceive this potential as restricted. Instead they stress the family and society, as the sites of reproduction for social inequalities. They also see wider society as playing a role in perpetuating gender discrimination and limiting the opportunities available to women after school. Overall teachers see the attainment of gender equality in Bolivia as a process which can be achieved through education, but only with the cooperation of the family,
stating that *machismo* and gender stereotypes within the home must be broken before gender equality can be achieved. However, social reproduction theory shows that both the school and the family are important sites for this process (Bourdieu, 2001), so, in emphasising the role of the family, teachers fail to recognise their agential role in reproducing or redressing gender stereotypes within the school.

The events at Colegio Bolivar in February 2012 demonstrate the conflictive relationship between the school and families, as perceived by Bolivian teachers. These events show that *machismo* is still ingrained within Bolivian society, thus supporting the idea that the family and society play important roles in social reproduction. However, it is important to not to take for granted the treatment students receive in schools. To this day, many teaching practices remain unchanged and educational inequalities continue to exist.

Teachers in this research do not see gender equality as one of the central changes needed in the education system and show deeper knowledge of interculturality in the reform. I believe in this way teachers’ knowledge of education agenda reflects the discursive weight given to interculturality and therefore, although they spoke of the importance of gender equality, it received less emphasis. Furthermore I felt the teachers often spoke the rhetoric of gender equality without necessarily understanding the mechanisms at work within schools via the hidden curriculum, or rather, their role in breaking this pattern.

### 7.3 Teachers’ actions

Finally, by looking at teachers’ actions we can address teachers’ agency in creating gender equality in the classroom. Whilst the teachers stated that they treat all students the same, regardless of their sex, my time in Bolivian schools questions the extent to which this is true. The fact that Bolivian teachers themselves are products of the male-dominant society would suggest it is hard for them to deconstruct these attitudes within the classroom.

Teachers are aware of the importance of the concept of rights within education but not necessarily of their agential role in relation to this and the mechanisms in place which influence the students. This failure to address rights within education will continue to influence rights through education, as attitudes and expectations are transmitted through the hidden curriculum, thus contributing to a process of social reproduction. Returning to the dimension of democratic participation as representation for gender justice; without gender-responsive pedagogies in the classroom, the hidden curriculum will continue to inhibit girls’ involvement in the classroom.
Whether acting consciously or not, using strategic or intuitive strategies, teachers’ perceptions and actions are largely dictated by the society of which they form a part. Without the appropriate training in gender-responsive pedagogy, many teachers remain unaware of how their actions are dominated by the social and political institutions. In the meantime, teachers’ attitudes and expectations will continue to limit girls’ rights within and through education, hindering progress towards social justice. The road to gender justice is always going to be a lengthy process and as teachers’ actions come to truly reflect their ideas of an egalitarian education system, this will help considerably along the path.

7.4 Reflections

This thesis sought to examine teachers’ own perceptions of gender equality in order to both ascertain their awareness of gender (in)equality as an issue within schools as well as what they see as the central cause and mode of reproduction. This, hopefully, helps provide a greater understanding of where these teachers position themselves as agents, and the agency they apply to create gender equal classrooms. Lopes Cardozo (2009) highlights the need for greater understanding of the complexities of teachers’ identities and the different educational or societal roles they play in Bolivia. By looking at teachers’ perceptions of gender equality in schools whilst seeing them as (potential) agents of change this is what I hope to have begun to achieve with this research.

During my time in Bolivia I gained an enormous amount of respect for the teachers and the job they perform, whilst battling daily in the face of adversity. Conditions for teachers in Bolivia are tough; their salaries are low, the school infrastructure is poor, and many hold down several jobs in order to make a living. Sadly, teachers are too often accorded low status in spite of the important role they play. By establishing teachers as soldiers of change, the government may be trying to correct this, however, at present, they are failing to support this and there are still many structural impediments which prevent teachers from truly fulfilling this role.

Whilst I admire the vision of the Bolivian government to create an alternative development model, in this complex multifaceted context, this often requires ignoring other voices. The focus on interculturality overlooks concerns of parents who would rather their child learns Spanish, to say nothing of the complexity of developing teaching materials and teacher training in multiple indigenous languages. Teachers are concerned that the emphasis on indigenous languages will disregard the importance of ‘foreign’ languages in an increasingly globalized world. More
importantly, perhaps, teachers fear it will ignore the importance of recent technological advancements. In forging their own ‘Bolivian’ education system, then, the government has perhaps marginalised other issues important for social justice.

7.5 Future considerations for research

To date, research into the Bolivian education system mainly focuses on interculturality. My research has shown issues of gender (in)equality to have continued importance in schooling in Bolivia and yet the area remains under-researched. The fact that I was unable to find research into girls’ behaviours and opportunities or gender-responsive pedagogy from Latin America shows how this area tends to get overlooked. I hope this research will contribute to future discussions in this field.

The focus of this thesis has been primarily on rights to and rights within education as perceived and acted upon by teachers. I found social justice theory, particularly conceptualised into rights to, within and through education, a useful way to reflect on gender justice in schools and the Bolivian discourse on social justice. A research project which focuses more on girls’ rights through education in Bolivia would be interesting, to obtain a clearer view of the dialectical relationship between education and society in reproducing/redressing gender roles.

Given the opportunity to conduct this research again, I would hope to obtain more focus groups with students and classroom observations, to gain a clearer perspective of the realities on the ground for male and female students. The emphasis placed on teachers as agents and their perceptions of gender equality, naturally implies a range of varying perspectives and reflexivities.

As the government continues to develop and unroll their education agenda across the country, it will be interesting to examine this area of research further, to see if the Bolivian government supports their rhetoric of teachers as soldiers of change. Through an examination of teacher training programmes and curricula materials as they are implemented, it would be possible to see how committed the government is in supporting teachers in their transformational role. More research within the schools in this area as the ASEP reform is implemented could throw interesting insights into the reality versus the rhetoric.
Bibliography


Appendix 1

Example of Interview guides (teachers)

Bolivian education policy discourse, including ASEP reform

Do you think the latest education reform is important? Why?
¿Piensa usted que la reforma es importante? ¿Por qué?

What do you believe are the main objectives of the reform?
¿Qué piensa usted son las objetivos principales de la reforma?

Do you believe there are any important issues which aren’t included in the reform?
¿Piensa que hay problemas que no están incluidos en la reforma?

What do you think are the most important changes needed for equality in Bolivian secondary schools?
¿Qué piensa usted son los cambios más importantes para crear la igualdad en colegios aquí?

Do you think gender equality is an important issue in secondary schools? And for society in general?
¿Piensa usted que la equidad de género es un problema importante en los colegios aquí? ¿Y por la sociedad en general?

Do you think this reform does anything to achieve gender equality in schools?
¿Piensa usted que esta reforma hace algo para lograr la equidad de género en colegios?

Do you think this reform includes gender equality?
¿Piensa que la reforma incluye la equidad de género? ¿Cómo?

(If teachers trained recently) was gender equality in the classroom stressed whilst you trained at the normal?
Cuando estaba usted en la normal, ¿los docentes hablaron con ustedes sobre la idea de equidad de género?

Has the ministry of education made attempts to raise awareness of the reform in schools?
¿El ministerio de educación ha hecho esfuerzo para hacer conocido la reforma en los colegios?

Education system

What does gender equality mean for you? In schools? In society?
¿Qué significa para usted la equidad de género? ¿En los colegios? ¿En la sociedad?

Do you think gender equality is something important in Bolivia?
¿Piensa usted que la igualdad de género es algo importante en Bolivia?

Do you think gender equality is a Western idea?
¿Piensa que es una idea del mundo Occidente?
Do you think the education system here is gender equal?  
¿Se puede ver la equidad de género en el sistema educativa aquí?

Do you think Bolivian society is gender equal?  
¿Crees que la sociedad Boliviana muestra igualdad de género?

Do you think gender equality in the education system can create gender equality in society at large?  
¿Piensa usted que una enfocada en la equidad de género en la educación pudiera crear equidad de género en la sociedad en general?

Do you think all children have equal access to schools? Are there any barriers? (Legal, financial)  
¿Piensa usted que todos los jóvenes tienen equidad de acceso a los colegios? ¿Hay barreras? ¿Legal? ¿Económico?

Do you think parents think it is equally important to educate their sons and daughters?  
¿Cree usted que los padres ponen la misma importancia en educar sus hijos e hijas igualmente?

Do families support and motivate their children equally?  
¿Cree usted que los padres se apoyen y motiven sus hijos igualmente?

How does the curriculum address the idea of greater gender equality?  
¿Cómo plantea la idea de equidad de género en el currículo?

Perceptions and actions

Do you believe girls and boys receive equal opportunities in school?  
¿Piensa usted que los varones y las mujeres reciben las mismas oportunidades en la escuela?

Do you think boys and girls receive the same opportunities after school?  
¿Piensa que los varones y las mujeres reciben las mismas oportunidades cuando salen del colegio?

Can boys and girls achieve the same after school?  
¿Piensa que los varones y las mujeres se pueden lograr lo mismo a través del sistema educativo?

How do the boys and girls interact in the classroom?  
¿Cómo se relacionan los varones y las mujeres en el aula?

What is the role of the teacher in creating gender equality in the classroom?  
¿Cuál es el rol del maestro/a en crear la equidad de género en el aula?

Do you think it is important that women are represented in the school management?  
¿Cree usted que es importante que las mujeres estén representadas en la dirección?

How do you prefer to arrange the desks in your classroom?  
¿Cómo prefieres arreglar las mesas en el aula?

How do you decide where the children sit? Or do you let them decide for themselves?  
¿Cómo elige usted donde sentían los jóvenes? ¿O es que deciden por sus mismos?