

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA'S LOWEST PERFORMING COUNTRY

The Impact of Inequality and Violence among Children and Youth in Lima
and Cusco in Peru

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ABSTRACT

Measurements of learning outcomes have found that too many children in Peru are graduating from primary school without having achieved competency in literacy or numeracy (Barrett, 2009). Results show that seven out of ten elementary school pupils cannot understand what they read and about nine out of ten struggle doing mathematics at the expected level. In order to raise school performance, state policies have largely focused on improving schools' infrastructures, changing curricular designs and on trying to update the knowledge of teachers. This thesis argues that besides those factors, numerous socioeconomic issues which hamper school performance should be addressed. Among them, inequality (predominantly poverty) and the prevalence of corporal punishment toward children should be acted upon if higher school performance is desired. My argument is that most children and youth try to balance life and school. They study, work and help their families with daily chores. As this desired balance often proves to be unattainable, going to school is perceived as a burden and instills a deep sense of inadequacy among students.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to all the Palestinian children, victims of imperialist greed, hatred and intolerance. My heart goes for you all.

Secondly, to the children and youth in Peru who struggle to balance life and school. May you flourish and acquire the knowledge and wellbeing you deserve. I urge you to always remember knowledge without love for yourselves and humanity is of little value.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Educating or schooling the general population has become of increased concern for the Peruvian state. As we soon reach the target date for the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the education development goal of universal completion of primary education by 2015 has been reported to be soon a reality in Peru. Data reports show a high enrolment rate and the target number of children finishing primary education. Thus, in the achievement of the Education MDG and within a wider international context, Peru has made outstanding progress. However, measurements of learning outcomes have found that too many children are graduating from primary school without having achieved competency in literacy or numeracy (Barrett, 2009).

Many tests which worldwide measure student performance (i.e. ECE and PISA tests) have positioned Peru at the bottom of their rankings for nearly a decade. This placed Peru as the lowest performing country in Latin America. Moreover, the results were consistently corroborated by other national assessment tests. In 2012, ECE, the Nationwide Evaluation of Students (*Evaluacion Censual de Estudiantes*)¹ revealed that seven out of ten elementary school students cannot understand what they read and about nine out of ten students struggle doing mathematics at the (most basic) expected level. In fact, in second grade, only about 49,3% could hardly read at all.²

The different assessment tests' results also evidenced high degrees of educational inequality present in the country. For instance, the 2011 census showed that as many as 96,3% and 95,5% of students in two provinces of Cusco cannot understand reading material. In the provinces of Acomayo and Canas, just 1, 5% of the students could do mathematical exercises at the expected level (MINEDU 2011). In the Amazon

¹ The ECE report (MINEDU 2012) offers results from tests given to second and fourth graders. In both cases the results were dramatic.

² Amazingly, the results have not changed that much. In 2006, a study by Luis Crouch found that "...as few as 25 or 30 percent of the children in first grade, and only about 50 percent of the children in second grade, could read at all".

Rainforest, Loreto (Peru's largest region) had one of the lowest results in the nation. Only 6,3% of students achieved the most elemental and expected reading skills, and barely 1,4% achieved competency in mathematics. Alongside this panorama, the *Annual Report* of the World Economic Forum (2012) evaluated the educational quality of 144 countries. Peru occupied the 132th position.

To tackle the overall low performance of students, different educational policies were launched by the government. The policies prioritized investing in schools infrastructure and on the acquisition of technological resources. Different curricular changes were also implemented. For instance, math and reading and writing courses were given more hours throughout the month. On the other hand, much attention was given to teachers, who also had their knowledge assessed by tests. As a high number of teachers failed to pass the given tests, new policies³ addressing teachers were launched over the last few years.

It is also worth noticing that universal completion of primary school has always been only a means to the actual goal of education, which is “*that every youth should make the transition to adulthood equipped with the minimal set of competencies—including both cognitive and non-cognitive skills*” (Filmer et al., 2006: p. 3-4). With that in mind, the implications of unachieved proficiency in literacy⁴ or numeracy turn greater. Many Peruvian students are, thus, unprepared for the transition into adulthood (according to the norms and standards formal education requires), and as such may lack relevant skills in life and work later on. In fact, Peru, as many Latin American countries, has a highly hierarchical society. As such, education plays an important role in the fostering of opportunities that lead to economic and social mobility.

In the pursuit of my interest to conduct research to find the causes of low school performance, I chose Lima and Cusco as cities where my fieldwork was to take place. I believe both locations have brought a wider understanding of the situations school-

³ For example, the policies concerning courses or workshops to update teachers' knowledge.

⁴ In Peru, 98,4% of the youth is considered literate. Following UNESCO guidelines, literacy in Peru has been measured by the number of population who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on their everyday life (INEI & PNUD 2013).

going children and youth (and their teachers) navigate. Besides, both cities greatly differ socially, economically and in terms of educational results. For instance, In Cusco, less than 10% of the students attending public schools in Cusco can do basic mathematics and barely about 22% understand reading material.⁵ Similarly, poverty rates for Cusco are much higher. Cusco has the highest number of impoverished districts. Even in the better-off districts, about 25% of the population lives in poverty⁶ (INEI & UNFPA 2010).

Research Questions

In this thesis, I will first look into *what or which* various factors cause low school performance or underachievement among primary and secondary school students attending public schools. In trying to answer this question, my fieldwork findings highlight the importance of aspects inherent to school facilities and the practice and quality of schooling. Other important aspects are represented by socioeconomic issues which hamper school performance. Among them, my findings will discuss the poverty they experience and the prevalence of corporal violence toward Cusquean children.

The second question relates to what is the actual role of education for school-going children in a wider social context. To answer this question, I will first look into aspects of the education they are given in classroom contexts. Further, I will discuss and analyze the role education has in the reproduction of poverty and other forms of violence or oppression. In contrast, the role of education in surmounting well-established power hierarchies in society will be discussed. The final chapter helps to answer this question best, engaging Paulo Freire's *critical social research* which privileges agency and Pierre Bourdieu's emphasis on structure over agency.

⁵ The results were given by the Ministry of Education in 2012, in the report "*Resultados de la Evaluacion Censal de Estudiantes de Segundo Grado*". The results come from exams given to second graders and fourth graders in Cusco.

⁶ Out of 1836 districts, 310 districts are the least impoverished, with about 25% living in poverty. 29,1% of districts present poverty rates of 25% and 49,9%; 617 districts have poverty rates of 50,0% and 74,9%. Finally, 375 districts have 75% of the population living in absolute poverty. However, other studies have contradicted these numbers, concluding the actual poverty rates to be much lower (See Rojas 2012).

Theoretical framework

My research has been first guided by *a phenomenological perspective*. A phenomenological study focuses on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness (Merriam, 1998). Thus, the “lived experiences” or aspects of the lives of my research participants and what they deemed as important has been my into my main focus. By recording and describing these experiences I could later conceptualize them in a wider social and cultural context.

The theoretical framework of *critical social science* approach has been very useful to elucidate the role of education in the lives of school-going children or youth. *Critical research* aims to critique and challenge social structures or phenomena and to transform and empower (Merriam 1998: 34). In this regard, Freire’s *Pedagogy of the oppressed* has been of great value to understand the role schooling has in the reproduction of social hierarchies or, in Freire’s terms, oppression. This framework also offered the possibilities to dwell into the emancipatory power of education. During my field work, it became clear that only certain middle class and nearly all high class families could access quality education. They could afford the tuition of private schools. On the other hand, students of poverty backgrounds and their families struggled to navigate the uncertainties prevalent poverty brings. Education, thus, became a burden for many rather than a right or privilege. It is worth noticing that in Peru, higher education is seen as “an almighty power”, conducive of social and economic mobility (De la Cadena, 2000). For instance, enrollment into (public) universities is only attainable by the passing of exams which test knowledge in many different areas. No student with just the knowledge given during their primary and secondary education is capable of passing these exams. Students must pay private institutes (*academias*) to acquire the knowledge entering university requires. Similarly, nearly all institutions offering technical training or the teaching of practical skills charge monthly fees. As such, schooling alone does not accomplish the goal of preparing children and youth for transitioning to adulthood (Filmer et al., 2006). This also evidences that money is necessary for the acquisition of higher education and its future economic and social returns.

Paulo Freire championed for an education that did not replicate the culture of the oppressor, represented by the elites. About the people living in poverty (oppressed class,

in Freire's terms) he wrote: "*The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped.*" (1970: 45). This is similar to Bourdieu's notion of *Habitus*, which ultimately means internalizing a set social structure.

Schooling or formal education is seen by Bourdieu and Freire as reproducing class hierarchies and with it, domination or oppression. Nevertheless Freire asserts that the oppressed could be liberated from oppression through education and *conscientização*⁷, a process by which, realizing their oppression, they took necessary action to break free from their social and mental constraints. For Freire, a *critical pedagogy* must rid the oppressed from the oppressor, which can be achieved through a different interaction between teacher and student, in which each learns from the other.

I juxtapose Freire's *critical pedagogy* with Pierre Bourdieu's emphasis on *structure* over agency, along with the *cultural capital* notion. Bourdieu (1986, 1990) believed that children from poverty backgrounds lacked the cultural capital that would enable them to attain class mobility and change deeply-enrooted social structures or class hierarchies. For instance, they lack the private quality education others have.

In the analysis of the qualitative aspects of student-teacher interactions I have benefited from Paulo Freire's *banking concept of education*. The concept argues that students are viewed as recipients to be filled (with facts or knowledge) by teachers, in the process inhibiting their creative power (Freire 2005). The student-teacher dynamic was seen as detrimental for liberation from social oppression, an act Freire saw as possible through the poor being fully aware of the ways in which they were oppressed.

As a post-colonial society, Peru has high levels of inequality which permeate nearly all aspects of social life. In this work, I provide the colonial antecedents of inequality and its establishment through institutions, which ultimately account for its persistence. Historicizing inequality has also allowed me to establish a contextual understanding of how different access to wealth, power or resources have resulted in unequal access to quality education.

⁷ The term can be translated as critical consciousness, consciousness raising or consciousness development.

I have also found inspiration in the theory of *kinship hierarchies* or *hierarchical respect* used by Harvey (1994). This has been especially useful to sketch a possible reason to why violence toward school-going children or youth has been largely legitimized in my field area in Cusco. This concept offers a good framework to understand why children commit to help their families and accept their authority almost without question. In the undertaking of jobs or other responsibilities within their household, students' school performance is heavily affected. The underachievement at school has resulted in children being corporally punished by relatives and teachers.

The notion of *kinship hierarchies* further argues that in the southern Andes, children are taught from a very young age that they should respect their parents or older relatives' authority. Thus, harmonious kinship relations “*depend upon the recognition of this hierarchy and the assumption of the responsibilities that your particular position entails*” (Ibid: p. 69). Another theory I have briefly applied is that of “*the good child*” (*allin chicucha* in Quechua), noted by several scholars working in the Andes. The concept, introduced by Rodriguez Valle (2008), asserts that the cultural notion of “*the good child*” (in the Andean highlands) considers working a virtue and commends it (Van den Berge, 2009).

I also briefly introduce the notion of *superación* (Cueto & Balarín, 2007). To achieve *superación* or *superarse* means to do reach better socioeconomic circumstances by means of acquiring formal education. This notion is important to understand why families do send their children to school and find education relevant to their lives.

METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork Entry in Lima

The Pacific Ocean, the desert on the other side and the eastern Andean mountain range welcomed me to Lima in early July, after a prolonged absence. Before I entered my first fieldwork location and met my first research participants, I indeed had many questions and analytical perspectives in mind. These had resulted from my previous months elaborating a coherent research proposal and hypothesizing about what I would find in the field. However, fieldwork experiences quite often surpass all schemes of expectations. A swine flu epidemic had caused schools to close their doors early. As

such, fieldwork did not start with my entering the community and school I had thought of for my fieldwork; it began by formal and informal meetings with teachers and educators. Most of them were teachers from Terranova, the school where I intended to do my fieldwork. Nevertheless, I also interviewed teachers and educators from other schools when the opportunity came across. In this regard, the help of family and friends was essential, as I resorted to their contacts. After a few phone calls on my behalf, they agreed to meet me and I was able to hear about their experiences as teachers. When an academically trained observer enters the field, the training can erect an undesirable barrier between themselves and the people or circumstances they will meet (Radin 1970: 5-6). Therefore I opted for immersing myself in the experience of letting the teachers and educators I met present their own perspectives (as opposed to present an endless list of questions) and tell me about their daily experiences, challenges and satisfactions.

Classes at schools resumed after a couple of weeks and I was able to join Terranova, a primary school in Lima. In fieldwork, who you know or who you are introduced by is essential. After having contacted a few teachers from this school, they kindly introduced me to the school principal. She was understanding of my research and welcomed me into the school.

On day 1, a Monday, children wearing gray uniforms stood in rows to hear the welcoming speech of the principal, sing the national anthem and pray.⁸ I chose to join one first-grade class during fieldwork. Once in their classroom, I was introduced to the children and first sat at the back of the class. I first felt like an intruder, nearly “spying” on students and their teachers. The feeling went away after the first day. During the break, students invited me to play with them and it was our playing that broke the ice. After the school day was over, teachers remained at school for a meeting with parents and to do prepare materials for their coming class. I stayed with them, joined the meeting and met some of the parents. They were very welcoming and understanding of my research. After the meeting, I stayed longer to help teachers prepare some of the materials for the next class and to clean the classroom. The first day also I learned one of the teachers lived closed to my apartment. She and I commuted together to the school until my fieldwork finished. I believed the first day was essential, as it allowed me to

⁸ It should be noticed that these are standard activities of all public schools in Peru. They take place (predominantly) on Mondays or when the school semester starts or the school year finishes.

build rapport with teachers, parents and students. The coming days too, I would arrive and leave at the time teachers did. Teachers quickly came to confide me some of their personal but also school-related struggles after classes and so did students during certain activities, breaks or during the absence or delay of a teacher. Thus, my presence, faster than I expected, felt “natural” due to positive social relations, my participation in all possible activities and the openness of all research participants.

Community Entry in Cusco

At the beginning of September, I observed with awe from the plane the majestic snow-capped mountains of Cusco. I did not know what my fieldwork site would be and was eager to explore the city more. My husband joined me on fieldwork. Together, that sunny Tuesday, carrying our belongings, we tried to find the house of a local married couple a friend had advised us to go to. Our friend in Norway had been to Cusco before and had established a good relationship with this couple and their family. They let out a few rooms in their house. We decided to rent a room with them, despite the shared facilities (kitchen, dining room and terrace). I estimated this as wise, as we would not have to spend time finding a place to live for the remaining five months of fieldwork. Plus, the members of this family seemed kind and helpful, to the extent that they offered to introduce me to some of their friends that might know of a school I could join as a part of my field work.

The remaining hours of my first day on the field I rested. I had been to Cusco eight times before and therefore, remembered the rule of thumb: drink coca leaf tea, do not eat any heavy meal (or drink alcohol) and rest. The reason for this is that Cusco city is over 3200 meters above sea level; most travelers see their digestion slow down at this height, have headaches and find it difficult to breathe. In most cases, if rules are broken, travelers can be very sick for a few days and even have to be taken to the hospital. The next few days I went around identifying the places where school lie.

To explain further, although I come from Lima, I had been to Cusco eight times before over the lapse of ten years, mainly due to my training and background as an archaeologist and as a social science student. An acquired previous knowledge helped me surmount most of the challenges that for a completely foreign researcher may have resulted in frustration. I was very familiar with different historical, social and religious aspects and traditions which are very important to the local community. A completely

foreign researcher can be in a position to question many different cultural and social aspects encountered; yet, because I am not a local researcher but someone with much previous experience in the area, I could understand traditions, cultural syncretism and social processes in local terms with much ease.

That first week I realized joining a public school may not be as easy as I thought. After the latest government tests or evaluations to students, other institutions had been interested in assessing students' performance in various areas. Teachers had also been tested to have their knowledge assessed and some of their classes were observed. In the press, many headlines and articles had been devoted to criticize the low scores of teachers (which came from the tests they sat). The overall situation created distrust and the school principals I had so far met thought my presence or intentions might be of concern for teachers. Additionally, other principals were busy and immediate meetings could not be organized.

The second week, while I sat at a restaurant to arrange my field notes, I found a pamphlet on my table which read "Intikilla School: Volunteers are needed and welcomed!" My husband and I visited the school and met the Carla, the coordinator in charge. Carla introduced me as a new teacher at the school and gave me as a duty to help children with homework or tutoring. My husband was appointed an art teacher. I took the afternoon shift (from 14.50 to past 19.00), although at the beginning I also volunteered to teach in the mornings (8.30 to 11.30 shift). To explain further, I must say Intikilla is not a state school. Intikilla is as a non-profit school that provides extra tutoring as an addition to the education that children receive at their public schools. As such, Intikilla receives volunteers who can teach children the content of courses they did not understand at school, assist them with homework or tutor them in what they need. This is all done for free. Intikilla was founded by Angel, a Cusquean man who saw an alarming number of children in his city struggled reading, writing and doing homework. Moreover, as most of the students come from poor backgrounds, their parents and relatives work nearly all day and are often not available to the children. Further, Cusco presents a high incidence of alcoholism and absent fathers and many children lack a parental figure to resort to for educational help. It should also be noted that classes at public schools are from 8.00 to 12.45 or from 13.00 to 18.00 and that each classroom has more than 35 students. Teachers normally leave large quantities of homework to

student during the week and weekends. Intikilla thus appeared to provide students with more personalized tutoring, extra time and support to complete assignments and homework.

I found Intikilla to be a good place for my fieldwork due to the fact Intikilla receives students who come from at least ten different public schools. There were more than eighty permanent students coming every day, and about twenty five who only came a few days during a month. Attending a state school, as I did in Lima, would have undoubtedly benefited my research by letting me observe class interactions. However, Intikilla offered me a much richer inside into the daily struggles of students and their experiences. Later, for example, I found many students are corporally punished by their teachers at state schools. Had I joined a state school, my presence would have most likely stopped any teacher who was normally violent from acting this way. Students could have also been more reserved, as school breaks are short and they are often been watched. At Intikilla, I was also able to enrich my research by constantly talking to students, helping them and observing their learning difficulties. In public schools, there is a much more formal atmosphere. A *hierarchical respect* (Harvey 1995), which is predominant in families, also extends to schools. Students sit on rows and must obey and respect teachers. Teachers are only addressed by their title or last names and any breach of rules results in the punishment (corporal or not) of students. At Intikilla, punishment was not allowed. Students were welcomed to express their opinions and concerns and teachers are always asked to be affectionate, supportive and kind toward students.

Regarding facilities, Intikilla's infrastructure consists of a restored, three-story colonial house. It has several rooms where classes take place. In the first floor, a classroom with many small tables and chairs receives students attending primary school. The other two classrooms are destined for art lessons. There is also a big patio where the breaks take place. On the second floor, there is a computer room and a play room. In the third floor there is a small library and a room where secondary school students come to be tutored or assisted by teachers. My integration at the school was very easy, as most children were eager to receive help but also to get to know me. Similarly, my entry within the community developed satisfactorily. I attribute this to the fact that I was introduced to neighbors by my host family and to the fact that I was volunteering as a teacher. This is

very important in Latin America and the Andes, as trust is largely built by means of references from friends and relatives.

Many parents and students' relatives recognized my husband and me in various places. As they work at different markets (as vendors) and their surroundings at plazas and businesses (i.e. cafes, spas, souvenir shops, restaurants) in central Cusco, there were often opportunities of dialogue between us. In most instances they would approach me and my husband and conversations flowed. All these locations and contacts were important for my research, as they allowed me to understand the personal struggles of families who send their children to school. Often, I would later find, poverty and lack of formal education is an obstacle to devote quality time and help to school-going children. It is also worth noticing that central Cusco (where my fieldwork took place) is highly urbanized, although at its periphery (at a 30 min. distance ride) and further, one can meet semi-rural and completely rural areas. The former have houses built of mud and some precarious materials, and can lack electricity. Here, water from rivers but also from government water trucks is used. Many children who attended Intikilla lived near the school, however at least half of them had to walk 30 minutes to 1 hour or take a bus to get there.

Encountered Challenges

While in Lima, I was very affected by the high crime incidence in the district and neighborhood Terranova is located in. Teachers always tried to leave together, and there were many thieves and a local gang that would often steal from pedestrians. They would also break the windows of cars or even sneak into buses to steal. Additionally, the neighborhood is filled with alleys where much of the city garbage is discharged. This made finding my way into the school a very unpleasant experience. Further, the fact that a fear of a swine flu epidemic struck the city delayed my participation at Terranova School. A short holiday week added to this. After classes restarted in August, after a month there was again fear for swine flu spreading and a government mandate exhorted children from attending public schools. I had first planned to spend 3 months of fieldwork in Lima and 4 in Cusco, but after the swine flu occurrence, I decided to depart to Cusco and start the second half of fieldwork there, a month earlier.

At the early stages of my research in Cusco, it was difficult to find a school that would accept me for the months my fieldwork demanded. As I said before, this was partially due to the mistrust the repeated evaluations of pupils and teachers had created. Additionally, the high prevalence of alcoholism in the area was a challenge itself. At night and especially on weekends I ran across several inebriated men on the streets. Some of them hit and beat their wives in front of me, on the streets. In most instances, my husband and I had to step in to break the conflict. The same incidents happened among some of our neighbors. In these cases, to directly intervene was much more difficult and I became deeply uneasy.

In Cusco, several areas (usually at the end of certain street blocks) in the district and community I lived at were filled with large piles of garbage. This was also a challenge, as when leaving from home toward the school or the city center I had to pass these areas with an almost unbearable smell. Additionally, none of the houses have any heating system or isolation and sewage issues were also frequent. When winter started, I had the same struggles as many other fieldworkers before me have had, getting sick and trying to adapt to the situation.

Language

Nearly all of my research participants had Spanish, my mother tongue, as their main language. However, it should be noted that many of them also speak Quechua and has it as their mother tongue. The last two generations are predominantly bilingual. In that regard, I must mention that nearly all of my conversations happened in Spanish. I mention this because in this thesis, all translations into English (unless specified) are my translations.

It should also be noted that my literary review included authors who have published in English, Spanish and Portuguese. In the last two cases, I have also translated relevant texts to quote; therefore any possible translation errors are mine alone to bear.

It is also worth noticing that in this thesis, as I have dealt with students of different ages, the use of the word *children* will also refer to youth. Although I try to use both terms (children and youth), sometimes my quoted research participants and I have only used the word *children* to refer to both groups. I have also used the terms *public school* and *state school* as synonyms.

Methods

This thesis is the result of my seven-month ethnographic fieldwork embarked on from July to January, 2013 in a public school in Lima and in a school and a community in Cusco. The predominant method I used for the collection of data was participant observation. I also included other methods like personal interviews and formal and informal conversations.

According to Bernard (2006: 342), "*Participant observation is about getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives.*" As my focus was on public schooling and the factors that hamper school performance of children, I participated at the schools as a teacher but also in many aspects of daily life. I joined many other activities occurring in the community and interacted with people in the process. In Cusco, I joined fairs and food festivals, the celebration of local traditions, anniversaries and masses at church, public musical events, religious processions, parades, birthdays, among other activities. I also visited the local university to hear other scholars' perspectives on education and enrolled into a Quechua course. Overall, my active participation was of great benefit. I was able to meet more locals, among them several teachers. This allowed me to contrast information over the months and to gain valuable and diverse insight.

At Terranova, I first sat at the back of a class as an observer. Gradually, I interacted with the students, taking part in all of the class and school activities, even playing with pupils during breaks. This first period of fieldwork allowed me to observe classroom dynamics and some of the needs and learning difficulties pupils and teachers are confronted with. It additionally allowed me to have a closer look at the content of the study curricula, thus helping me contrast theory (the curricular goals) and practice (how school contents are actually presented). Similarly, I joined four parent meetings at Terranova. Through these meetings, I learned more about the parents of the children and their personal needs, struggles and motivations to send children to school. Parents also found it hard to be involved with the school due to work or having to care for smaller children and elder relatives.

As part of my participant observation, especially in Cusco, I had informal conversations and interactions with local and foreign people living within the community. I most often than not strove for introducing myself and my research intentions, seeking consent prior to using any of the information our conversation naturally generated. Many of these conversations expanded and corroborated my data about diverse important aspects. I also interviewed different parents (predominantly mothers) about their jobs and their distribution of time and money. In regard to informal conversations, sometimes these gained a more personal tone, as several women would report their struggles at home. In these situations, I would make notes in my journal at a different place shortly after the conversations. Some of the mothers I spoke to (and their children), had been mistreated for years by their partners before the relationship came to an end. In fact, a few mothers went to Intikilla to look for me or a known coordinator when a difficult situation came across and they wished to get advice. Besides empathy, I believe that having a common language also helped for them to open up. According to Bernard (2006: 361), fluency in the local language “*doesn't just improve your rapport; it increases the probability that people will tell you about sensitive things.*” This would not have been easy for them to do with other teachers or volunteers who are not fluent in Spanish.⁹

According to Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 15), ethnographic knowledge is heavily dependent on the presence and experience of the fieldworker; thus, the truths are grounded in the experience of the participant observer. With this in mind, at the initial stages of fieldwork in Cusco, I was uncertain if my findings regarding violence against children and youth could be extended to other children from similar backgrounds. The uncertainty went away when I joined teachers and volunteers of over fourteen different social projects in Cusco. On Fridays, many volunteer teachers, school psychologists, assistants and directors of educational projects would meet for four-hour dinners. This became a good opportunity to discuss our experiences with pupils at school; it helped me gain new perspectives and corroborate my data.

As poised by Bernard (2006: 344), a lot of the data collected by participant observers are qualitative. As such, my fieldwork took me to diligently write notes about things I saw and heard in natural settings; to photograph diverse places and situations and to

⁹ These teachers would usually teach art, help with the making of school projects, give English lessons, and assist in the computer room or game room.

record some of the consented formal interviews. However, some interviews have not been recorded because my informants did not feel at ease with it. In many cases, it was also I who understood it was socially and culturally inappropriate to record or make notes, especially when mothers told me sensitive information about their lives.

Bernard (2006: 369) asserted that “*There are situations where your expertise is just what’s required to build rapport with people.*” This is done “*to help people and to gain their confidence and respect.*” I have some previous experience working as a teacher at a private school. I believe that to volunteer daily as a teacher in Cusco was of great help to introduce me to the neighborhood and build rapport. I experienced that different people in the community identified me as a teacher. Some had seen me enter the school, or knew I was a teacher because their children and friends had commented on it. To first identify me as a volunteer teacher or “their children’s teacher” and as a married woman generated a feeling of trust that opened many conversations. I verified that, indeed, the way a researcher is presented and other qualities have important effects on those we wish to interview (Pelto 1978: 74). As I introduced myself and my research, sometimes time to meet and have longer conversations was planned. At times, my research participants and I met at their work places (a market, a shop, etc.), at a café, a small restaurant or their homes to have informal conversations. In all instances when conversation partners consented, I would diligently make notes in my journal.

All formal interviews were structured in a way that it would allow my research participants to present their own narrative, feeling and opinions about particular aspects or issues. By doing this, I learned about the challenges they face and what mattered to them and not just about what I had deemed as important beforehand (Ibid.: 81). Most of these interviews were also tape-recorded when consent was granted. When this was not possible, I would take notes.

According to Handwerker (2001), the key to high-quality, quick ethnography is to go into the field with a clear question and to limit our study to a few focus variables. In the case of my research, I had a clear question in mind and thought I had limited the variables I would study. However, reality proved to me that any research should be flexible and accommodate to its findings, as such it must respond to changing conditions (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 16). For instance, in Cusco, I was confronted with

different types of physical violence toward children (and women), both at home and at school. Thus, in this instance I found that to explore the constitution of families and violence was important to elucidate relevant causes to low school performance.

Ethical Considerations

During my stay at Terranova in Lima, after presenting an introduction letter from my university in Bergen and explaining the nature of my research, written and oral consent was given to me by the school's principal and teachers. During a school meeting, the teachers informed parents about my presence and the nature of my research, asking if they agreed to my presence at the school. All parents agreed and kindly welcomed me; I felt they valued the intentions of my work, as many offered help if needed. At Intikilla, I obtained verbal consent from the school's founder and main coordinator. I was given a physical form in which I stated how I would contribute to the school (helping children with homework, for instance) but also explaining the nature of my anthropological research and the aspects I would focus on. Likewise, parents were informed about my presence through a note which was given to each student to take home. The note was signed and given back to the founder and director of Intikilla. This, I found, have been done a couple times before, as Intikilla has received volunteer teachers (doctors, psychologists and sociologists) with other research interests. Also, during my introduction to the students, Angel (founder) explained to them the research I was about to begin and what I would write about.

In both cases (at Intikilla and Terranova), during our initial conversation, I explained that all the names of children or teachers used in my thesis would be pure pseudonyms, therefore reassuring the anonymity of names. Therefore, in this thesis, the names of the schools, school children or youth but also the names of any other research participant have been changed. Regarding the anonymity of other research participants (such as parents, neighbors and friends), I must stress that, due to the size both Cusco and Lima¹⁰ have, it is not possible to identify their exact location. In the cases of parents working in or around markets in Cusco, it is worth noticing that these markets or their surroundings shelter thousands of vendors. This makes it hard to associate any life story or episode with a particular person. In this thesis, I have not made the names of cities anonymous.

¹⁰ Lima has 43 official districts (INEI 2014).

The reason for this is that the population of both, Lima and Cusco, is quite large. Lima has several large districts on the periphery, with many urban-marginal¹¹ schools. In the case of Cusco, the city has many different educational projects or NGOs which focus on aiding school-going children and youth in various ways.

According to Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, a balanced research relationship which recognizes that participants are autonomous people willingly sharing information “*will encourage disclosure, trust and awareness of ethical issues*” (2001:94). To attain this balance and handle myself ethically, in most possible situations I have informed my research participants about the content and nature of my study. In the case of students, I explained and reminded them about the nature of my research and how I would be writing “a sort of book” about it and my findings. Further, I must mention that this thesis does not include any photos of the face of any research participant due to the sensitive nature of the information gathered.

Argument

In this thesis I argue that acute low student performance among Peruvian students has deeper causes which go beyond an inefficient state educational offer. I maintain that state policies which focused on changing the curricula and sending teachers to courses to update their knowledge and which increased investment on schools’ infrastructures failed to adequately address socio economic issues affecting students.

In my case study in Cusco, I argue that core issues to be addressed are the poverty, inequality and violence students experience on a daily basis. This must first be done efficiently in order to improve their school performance. As different studies have shown (i.e. Cash, 1993; Duarte et al., 2011; Earthman, 2002; Rivero, 2007), improving schools and increasing a teacher’s knowledge does impact learning among students but when deeper social and economic issues affect students, learning proves a difficult task.

¹¹ The term *urban-marginal school* refers to schools that are located in urban areas, but on the periphery, far from the metropolitan area. These areas are usually much more impoverished and were initially illegally occupied over the last decades by poor immigrants, primarily coming from rural areas in the Andes.

A second argument is that public education in Peru greatly contributes to structure and recreate inequality at a wider social level. I discuss how the education a student is given has the power to largely define socioeconomic positioning.

A third and last argument is that for many students, going to school is perceived as a *burden* due to the different activities they must engage in to help their families. The situation, when topped with physical and symbolic violence turns out more difficult to bear and attaining balance most often proves to be impossible. I maintain the search for this balance has resulted in diminished school performance and an overall negative attitude toward schooling.

Structure of the thesis

In this thesis, this chapter (1) introduces the educational panorama which motivated my research to further present my research methodology, analytical perspectives and main questions. In chapter 2 I introduce the different elements or components within the Peruvian Educational System (PES). Partially drawing on Harbison and Hanushek (1992) in this division, I will discuss school infrastructure, access to pedagogical and technological resources, the school curricula and teachers as important elements within schools. Upon consistently reported low student performance, government policies and investments have largely been directed toward these elements. The chapter analyzes the extent and limitations these policies had for both teachers and students. Chapter 3 is devoted to explore the ways in which socially structured inequality or hierarchies affect various aspects of the lives of school-going children. I will therefore explore the impact that poverty and ethnicity have on learning and on the actual access to quality education. In chapter 4 I pay special attention to nutritional deficiencies among students and the need that students of poverty backgrounds have for working. Further, my empirical findings will show that violence (at home and at schools) affects students' school performance and overall attitude towards schooling. The chapter, adding to the information from chapter two, argues that children must strive for balance in nearly all aspects of their life. This attempt heavily impacts their performance at school. Chapter 5 is rich in ethnographic content, summarizing some of my experiences at Intikilla in

Cusco. The chapter supports past arguments and throws light on different aspects of the lives of students. The positive impact a non-violent atmosphere, personalized academic help and the usage of pedagogical and technological resources have on students' school performance is also elicited. Chapter 6 will first capture qualitative aspects of student-teacher interactions. The main focus of the chapter will lie on the role formal education has for children and youth. To exemplify this, I capture qualitative aspects of student-teacher interactions. The chapter argues that in Peru, public education serves a purpose in the reproduction of social hierarchies or inequality. To analyze these hierarchies, I will use Paulo Freire's *critical social science* approach and Pierre Bourdieu's emphasis on *structure* over agency, along with the *habitus* and *cultural capital* notions. Chapter 7 will present the conclusions and will pose recommendations for an efficient application of state policies seeking to raise school performance among students.

CHAPTER TWO

A Glance into the Peruvian Educational System (PES)

Introduction

Various tests which measured student achievement or performance worldwide (i.e. ECE 2010, 2012, PISA 2010, 2012) have placed Peru at the bottom for nearly a decade, thus gaining Peru the title of lowest performing country in Latin America. Test scores showed extremely low student performance in the most basic levels of reading, mathematics and science. For some Peruvian cities and provinces, the results are almost scandalous, and certainly dramatic: as many as 94% of the evaluated students struggled writing, reading or solving basic mathematic exercises expected for their level or year of study. State responses to the educational crisis have mainly focused on the creation of educational policies which concern the evaluation and retraining of teachers, increased but limited investment in school infrastructure and resources, the elaboration of curricular changes and food assistance programs. With that in mind, this chapter will present the main components of the PES and discuss the way in which they influence or contribute to underachievement. My empirical findings corroborate that teachers, school infrastructure, curricular designs and access to pedagogical and technological resources do influence underachievement. Further, I discuss *why* the way in which the new educational policies were carried out had a rather low impact on raising student achievement.

Introducing the PES System

PES consists of four levels: a) Initial or kindergarten (from ages three to five), b) elementary or primary (six years of studies), c) secondary school or high school (five years of studies) and d) higher education (five or more years). In this thesis, I focus on students from ages five to fifteen attending elementary and secondary school. The school years can also be referred to as “school grades”. Besides the educational levels,

there are different components intrinsic to schools¹², if we intend to see them as educational units or learning centers in which common elements can or should be found. The first components are of material nature; they represent physical conditions which are required to receive students and instruct them. For instance, they include access to pedagogical resources and materials. The second group of components is linked to the elements which intervene in the teaching process, such as the curricula's design and educational laws or policies. The third group includes school teachers or educators as human capital (Schultz 1971). In the following sections I will discuss these components and its characteristics, according to my fieldwork findings in Lima and Cusco.

School infrastructure

Located in one of the most impoverished and marginal districts of Lima, Terranova welcomed me for the first time in August. Many students wearing gray school uniforms rushed to enter their classrooms. The school, I was told, was built due to the initiative of local inhabitants and external help. Lisbeth, a mother, told me:

Before, our children had to walk for long before reaching the closest school on the other side. Living in the middle of two districts, it was also hard to sign up our children for school without trouble: some schools would say we belonged in here, here they would say we belonged in there (the other district). Our neighborhood grew fast. For years, we asked the government to build a school here but they did not listen. Finally we decided to start doing it ourselves. Initially, the school was just made of thick wooden sticks as foundations and rush mats were used as roofs or walls. We bought desks and chairs, decorated the classrooms and the government sent teachers for our new school (...) Two years later, an Italian NGO saw the precarious situation our children had classes in and donated materials such as cement and bricks for the school to be rebuilt. They also donated new tables, desks, chairs and boards. Finally water, electricity and sewage installations were implemented and bathrooms built. Slowly this school rose up to be what you see today.

¹² This differentiation is partially inspired by Harbison and Hanushek (1992). Nevertheless, these authors divide the components in the categories of hardware, software and educators.

As Lisbeth, other parents and Terranova teachers remember how just seven years ago the school was very different. The soil floors caused dust to rise up frequently, causing teachers and students to cough often and causing some to develop allergies. During winter, many students got sick and missed school, as the big rush mats used as walls did not isolate strong winds, humidity or occasional rain. A few meters from the school, a hole in the ground surrounded by canes and rush mats acted as their toilet. During summer, many flies quickly multiplied at the school. The overall situation greatly demotivated students and teachers. In fact, some teachers were late or frequently absent and most quit their jobs after the first year. Paula, one of the teachers said:

Sometimes, drug users, drunks or gangs would wander or gather outside the school during the students' break and teachers had to scare them off. Inside, everything would dirty up so quickly... Although our payment was slightly higher than the payment of teachers working in metropolitan urban areas, we were demotivated by the lack of hygiene at the school, the poor infrastructure, the dangerous surroundings, the lack of resources and materials, the damaged chairs and tables, I felt sad, sad and insulted: it all reminded me of abandonment.

Terranova's situation is not that unique. Cueto and Balarin (2008) report other schools where parents came together to improve the infrastructure. Despite efforts to invest in school infrastructure, to date there still are public schools in precarious situations in the marginal areas of Lima and in the Andes. In Peru, 44% of schools have no electricity. Access to sewage is very limited. Less than 30% of schools have a telephone and more than 70% lack toilets (Duarte et al. 2011). The MINEDU (2006) did one of the best qualitative studies of five schools in Lima. The study shows some schools have been built with non-resistant materials and are in bad shape, presenting cracks, and damaged doors. Further, more than a third of the chairs and desks are broken, walls are stained and toilets damaged.

Different studies have found a positive association between school infrastructure and students' academic achievement (Andersen 1999, Banco Mundial 2006, Berner 1993, Cash 1993, Duarte et al. 2011 Earthman 2002, Scott 1999, O'Neill 2000, Rydeen 2009). All authors conclude that providing a student with a safe school that fits the needs of students and provides them with comfort will foster a positive attitude towards learning

and this will reflect on their performance. Certainly, these conditions are not met by all Peruvian schools. Rural schools are in more extreme situations than most schools in Lima, not just due to their infrastructure but also services. Montero et al. (2001) notes that in the Andes, most schools lack toilets. Due to poverty, some rural areas have neither potable water nor electricity. Perhaps for these reasons, the CVR¹³ noted that the deplorable physical conditions of school in the poor rural areas of Peru contributed to the development of the guerrilla group Shining Path¹⁴. The CVR concluded that “*ramshackle schools are a visible sign of contempt which must be eradicated*” ...” (Rivero 2007:83)

Pedagogical and Technological Resources

At Terranova, a common complaint among teachers and *auxiliares* was the lack of materials and pedagogical resources to be used during class. Only chinks, pens and certain markers were supplied by the government, albeit very sporadically. This caused teachers and *auxiliares* to often use money of their own to buy materials such as flip charts, bond paper, glue and markers. There was also a small book shelf where different story and science books sent by the government could be found. Terranova did not have any computer and teachers often applied creativity to produce their own pedagogical materials to make learning more visual and entertaining. Alma (teacher) said:

We, the teachers, auxiliares and students have to be creative. We cannot demand all we need from the parents; they don't have much money. Thus, many things have been made out of recycled materials and students donate their projects such as graphics or illustrations on diverse topics so that other students can benefit from them. Much more could be done if we had all the resources we need.

In Cusco, Intikilla had seven old desktop computers and Internet access several months a year. This benefited some of the secondary school students, who could resort to the Internet to look for information they could not find in books or learn from teachers.

¹³ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Comision de la Verdad y Reconciliacion – CVR). The CVR was in charge of examining human right violations, massacres, forced disappearances, terrorist attacks and other forms of violence which occurred during the 1980's and early 90's in Peru. All these acts were committed by the Shining Path guerrilla, the MRTA group and the Peruvian military.

¹⁴ Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) was a Peruvian Communist guerrilla, responsible for extreme violence against peasants, trade union directors, politicians and the general population. Shining Path began in Ayacucho, in one of the poorest areas.

Although some of the students' public schools had a small computer lab, many of the computers were old and not working. Furthermore, there had not been a good training program for teachers.¹⁵ Moreover, the schools with computers reserved them for a small group of students in the last two years of high school, offering them two hours a week at the lab. In these schools, at least four or five students shared a computer.¹⁶ This is just a small sample of the situation of many schools in the country, where unequal access to resources is a notorious feature. Public school thus can differ greatly from one another according to the city or district where they are or if they are rural or urban schools. Seemingly, what they do have in common is the “*deplorable conditions of pedagogic materials*” (Rivero 2007: 38).

Over the last decade different studies have reported students' performance to increase significantly after their schools were provided with sufficient or adequate pedagogical material and technological resources (Fuller 1987, Berry 2002, Beltran et al. 2011). Nevertheless, in Peru, less than a third of all schools have a computer lab (Duarte et al. 2011:10). At Intikilla, both the computer lab and library were essential for students. I observed that much homework could not just be done based on what their school texts books had (as content). This was paradoxical, considering most students are poor and cannot even borrow books from their schools. The access to books and computers was beneficial. It increased students' knowledge, curiosity, helped them finish homework and fostered a positive attitude towards learning. Similarly, students responded much better to learning when visual aids, math or language board games were used by teachers at Intikilla.

Study Curriculum

A curriculum is the organized or structured set of knowledge, a sum of learning experiences (MINEDU 2006) or an instruction plan for the acquisition of knowledge. Further, a curriculum is the expression of a cultural plan or content which is fulfilled by schools (Sacristán 1988). As such, a curriculum acts like a bridge between a society, its culture and the students. Students are the recipients of this socio-culturally produced

¹⁵ This was also noted as a common trait in many schools by Rivero (2007). Rivero said the acquisition of pedagogical resources should involve the training of teachers to be able to use computers best (Ibid. 193-195).

¹⁶ On the other hand, in metropolitan Lima, all public schools have at least a small computer lab and pedagogical materials such as maps, graphics or illustrations, some games and a small library with basic textbooks.

knowledge, which is regarded as valuable for their formation. The MINEDU (2006: 314-315) points out that the school curriculum specifies a) what to teach, how much to teach (the teaching sequence or order of contents) b) how to teach (sketching teaching activities, outlining methodologies) c) what, how and how much to evaluate or assess (offering assessment rules, methodologies and presenting assessment techniques).

In Peru, the study curriculum of public schools have witnessed several changes over the last years, especially after the recurring low scores of students in academic assessment tests. For instance, the hours for grammar and reading (*comunicación integral*) and math were increased at the expense of other courses' hours. Currently, the courses taught at elementary schools are: *comunicación integral*, mathematics, science and environment, social science, physical education, religion and art. The courses which are taught at secondary school are: *comunicación integral*, mathematics, science and environment, (basic) English, social sciences, religion¹⁷, physical education and art. In some schools, a native language such as Quechua is taught¹⁸.

Ferrer (2004) has analyzed the laws, policies, and decrees coming from the Peruvian Ministry of Education and concludes that these do not always favor or adjust to the real needs of the educators and users of the PES. He finds a lack of local or government-sponsored research which could allow for creative, innovative and efficient curricular designs. When research has been made, this has been narrowed and the research focus or topics often obeyed to the suggestions of international organizations (Rivero 2007)¹⁹. Even so, the scarce research within the Ministry of Education has been superficial and of dubious quality, usually done in a hasty manner. It has often lacked bibliographical, economic and human resources (Ferrer 2004). Moreover, the local academic community is consulted about new policies, educational approaches and changes shortly before they will be implemented. However, perhaps the most alarming fact is that the school curriculum has been designed and formulated without the input of teachers. Rosario (teacher) said:

¹⁷ Only Catholicism is taught, as this religion has the status of official in the country.

¹⁸ The teaching of a native language is a relatively recent initiative. It has been incorporated gradually over the last few years as part of the Multicultural Education Program (Rivero 2007). The chosen indigenous language is taught in some areas of the Andes and Amazonia where it is predominantly spoken.

¹⁹ Ferrer (2004) and Rivero (2007) highlight the participation of international organizations, such as the World Bank, who prioritizes assessing school performance and quality over the actual needs of students and educators.

They (The Education Ministry) have very unrealistic goals. Do they have any idea of what it is like to manage a classroom of 35 students, alone? And to do so having few available resources... the situation is not "ideal" for all the goals of the curriculum to be fulfilled. Our students are not "ideal" and neither are teachers.

Aurelio (history teacher) pointed out the way the curriculum was designed caused teachers to "have to run", going over the themes scheduled for the lessons in a hasty way. In fact, like him, other teachers said some important topics were treated in a very shallow, simple way, as though "*students should just have a look at them*". Aurelio also said that to manage a classroom of more than thirty students with few resources was difficult. He added:

There are different kinds of learners in every class. You must also consider students come with "problems" into class. Some are troublemakers, many face poverty, many are hit by their parents and some must work. This creates a different attitude toward learning curricular contents. If we teachers get sick, no one will replace us. It is also hard to have a "master class" and engage students when resources are missing.

Before the latest curricular changes took place, the student curriculum included courses like *philosophy* and *family economy*. Aurelio felt that to eradicate *philosophy* as a course was very damaging for students, as with it "a space for critical thinking, analysis and discovery was lost". In general, all public school teachers I spoke to felt the curricular design imposed by the government "seemed good in theory, but hardly possible in practice". Sonia (teacher) added: "*Most of it has been written listening to economists and politicians. Teachers, students and even parents have not been heard or consulted*". Teachers are the ones in charge of efficiently delivering the curricular contents (to students) and applying its guidelines. However, the educational crisis (the alarming number of low-performing students) placed an overwhelming majority of public school teachers under a very bad light. It showed teachers' lack of knowledge could not efficiently deliver curricular contents to students. The coming section will discuss the position teachers found themselves in.

The Status Quo of Teachers

One of the state's responses to students' low performance was the creation of the *Plan Nacional de Capacitación Docente (National Plan for Teacher Training)*. The training plan also obeyed to the fact that teachers had been labeled the main culprits in the educational crisis. Thus, teachers were obliged to sit exams designed to assess their knowledge. The results revealed that less than 20% of teachers were qualified (Rivero 2007: 198). Consequently, training teachers became of public concern and universities, NGOs and pedagogy institutes were commissioned to train them. These entities had to follow PEM's guidelines and their already designed *updating programs* for teachers. However, a good number of the selected teacher trainers were not qualified. They were reported to have turned the training workshops and seminars into experiences of direct and inflexible transmission of the contents dictated by the Educational Ministry. In doing so, they repeated the pedagogical model that they supposedly wished to revert (Ferrer 2004: 65). It would appear to be that the curricular changes and pedagogical approaches were elaborated as a "prescription" from the government and teachers were called to follow it. The opinion and extensive knowledge of experienced teachers in the country was largely ignored. Marta (teacher) expressed:

I'm exhausted. I feel completely tired of the things we (teachers) have to endure. I had this young examiner sit on a chair during my class. At the end of the day she told me I had to change my ways, handing me a piece of paper with recommendations on how to handle my class and how to treat students. She doesn't know how students are or need to be treated. She doesn't know a class can't develop exactly as in the schemes she has.

Rivero (2007) and Tedesco and Tenti (2002) note that little importance has been given to the hard conditions teachers must work under. They start their jobs in difficult conditions: under temporary contracts or in remote and poor places and must work without institutional support. Additionally, teachers' salaries are extremely low but their duties as teachers are many. All of them continue to work after classes, at home or school.²⁰ Rivero (2007) noted that besides teaching, many social functions are given to

²⁰ A teacher's salary can range from 750 PEN (the minimum wage in Peru) to 1500 PEN. However, a few of the benefits of being a teacher are a longer vacation time, a stable job and about six hours of compulsory work at school. Nevertheless, much extra time is needed to comply with additional duties (attend school meetings, correct homework, prepare classes, plan exams, etc.).

teachers. Besides, teaching (in public schools) is deemed as a low-prestige occupation and “*this is expressed in teachers’ very low salaries... and in the lack of support to update their knowledge, improve their work and innovate.*” (Ibid. 2007: 196).²¹

Tedesco and Tenti (2002) noted the precarious situation that teachers face. About 30% of teachers said their socioeconomic situation is worse than before. 52% of teachers said they (and their families) lived in poverty (Ibid: 70). In fact, a teacher with the highest possible salary can just cover 50% of his family’s cost of living (Rivero 2007: 202). It is also likely that the poorest teachers are working in the poorest schools (which have precarious infrastructures and lack pedagogical resources). These schools receive the poorest children and youth and teachers must care for a great number of students. All of these conditions affect the quality of their teaching and classroom management. This has caused health issues for teachers, who must use chalks to write on blackboards and raise their voice to be heard (Salas et al. 2004).

Aspects of Assessing School Performance

In Peru, a school year is divided in three periods or learning spans. The first two are known as *bimestres* and the third as *trimestre* (trimester). Teachers must grade students during each of these periods. Assessment methods at schools include written and oral exams, the evaluation of homework completion, school projects and class participation. At the same time, the school year is also divided in two periods or semesters. The first one runs from March (beginning of the school year) to mid-July. Then, there is a nearly-two-weeks holiday. After holidays, a second period begins and runs until the end of December (end of the school year).

Notwithstanding the grades given for class participation, school projects or homework, the grades resulting from the final written exams of each term have a greater value and can therefore determine if a student fails the school year or not. For the first years of elementary school the grades go from “A” to “C”. A “C” grade causes a student to fail the school year. Usually after the third year, the grading scale goes from 0 to 20. Only grades above 11 are passing grades. Anything below 11 indicates poor performance.

²¹ Rivero (2007) pays attention to the little importance that public universities give to educating teachers. Additionally, some pedagogical institutes ask very little of those who study to be teachers and grant titles without providing quality training.

An educational law passed a few years ago dictated that no student can fail the first year due to their grades. However, after the second year, any student obtaining low grades (as a final average) in more than three courses will automatically fail the year and must therefore re-take it. This is known as *repetir*. *Repetir* or “repeating” the year is a very painful process for students to undergo from young ages; many students are harshly punished by their parents. Luana (nine-year-old student) said:

Last year I almost failed third grade. Due to failing two courses, my mother pulled out my hair so hard outside the school and insulted me (...). When we got home, she slapped me and made me shower in cold water. I cried so much for disappointing her... Francisco (Luana's neighbor) was punished too. After the report cards were given and his father realized he had failed the year, he insulted him and called him «stupid beast»: he slapped him and cornered him to the wall to keep slapping him and scolding him out loud. Francisco cried so much and his father only stopped after Javier's father came by and told him that violence doesn't fix things.

Luana's story show how much stress children at schools are put under. Failing a school year is highly stigmatized, as it triggers negative responses from both teachers and parents. In December, many students came to me and said they were afraid of the exams, afraid of failing the school year and being physically punished. As I will discuss in coming chapters, low performance is also physically punished by teachers within the PES. This has also contributed to a negative perception of teachers among students. Yadira said:

I don't like going to school. Several teachers punish us... The math teacher hit us with a belt on the hand because of failing the exams. The other day I forgot to do homework and he hit me on the hands with a ruler and gave me a “zero” as a grade.

Yadira, as some of her classmates, began to tear off the notebook pages were the teacher had written a bad grade. This was done so that their parents would not find out and scold them. On the other hand, several students reported that some teachers were often late or absent and no replacement teacher was sent. Miguel said: “*In our last exam, there were questions nobody was able to answer. The teacher hadn't taught us that topic*”. The situation presented by Miguel (corroborated by his classmates) may be

related to the fact that his teacher had been missing classes. In fact, teachers' absence is a problem at schools. A study by Alcazar et al. (2006) showed that public school teachers in Peru are absent from their posts 11 percent of the time. Moreover, the absence rates in Peru's poorest and remotest communities are much higher—16 and 21 percent, respectively.²² It would seem that testing students is prioritized over delivering quality education. However, the system of assessing student performance does not necessarily secure that students have acquired all the expected knowledge for their age and met all of the goals the curriculum presents. Instead, this causes students to have a negative attitude toward schools and learning. This is reflected on the comments of students the previous days to exams. Mario (student) said in tears *"I wish I didn't have to go to school. Surely I am going to fail the exams and have to repeat the school year"* and Mena (student) added *"I study and study but I don't understand. I have failed the past math exam already; I am afraid of what will happen. Why do exams have to exist?"*

The fact that only a small number of students per classroom fail the school year could, in theory, have indicated that the majority of students had acquired sufficient knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, international and national assessment tests have continuously proven that most schoolchildren cannot perform the most basic math exercises or have the most elemental understanding of the reading material they are given. During fieldwork, parents and (especially) high school students said that some teachers took different types of bribes (i.e. gifts they asked for, money) to give them passing grades.

It should be noted that among public schools, there are also some that are better than others or lie at better off districts and people wish their kids to study there. Admittance to these schools can be difficult and cases about principals or workers taking illegal payment to give students spots at these schools have been reported over the years. There are also classes where more than 30% of the students fail final exams. Mariela (teacher), told me in these cases teachers took blame and complaints could be filled against them. To avoid this, some teachers just gave students' final exams a few extra points when grading so the average, when on paper, would be reflected as acceptable. Nobody liked to report a class where more than 30 or even 50% of students showed underachievement. However, there were also teachers that passed students by giving

²² They identified several important causes of increased teachers' absence. Among these there was the poor working conditions teachers face (such as poorer communities and infrastructure).

them extra assignments to earn these exam points, and this was done out of understanding students' situation and what failing the year would mean.

Many schools have a system of grouping students attending the same school year into different classrooms and levels. For example, if there are 160 students to attend second grade or school year, these can be distributed in five classrooms, namely Class 2A, 2B, 2C, 2D and 2E. The best students would be sent to class 2A, the second best group to 2B, and the "worst" students would be in 2E. This is done based on grades, age and behavior. From my observations, this just makes things worse for students with low academic performance or attention or behavior issues. This may happen due to the fact that when students that perform poorly are grouped together, they lose important class stimuli from better-performing classmates. Disciplines also drops, as peers influence and reinforce one another's behavior (Burke and Sass 2008). These students are also treated differently by their teachers and students from other classes. They would get labeled as "bad" students; which in turn affected their self-esteem and motivation.

The Challenge of Raising Student Achievement

In this chapter, I have introduced the educational challenges Peru as a nation faces. Low student performance has been consistent over more than a decade, placing Peru as the country with the lowest quality education in Latin America and its public school system as a failing one. To foster a future discussion about what the educational system encompasses and offers, I have presented and discussed its main components. Much of the focus of the Peruvian government has been on investing on the infrastructure of schools, the renewal of curricular designs and pedagogical and technological resources. Money has also been allocated to evaluate teachers through exams and to later update the knowledge of teachers through seminars and workshops. Through fieldwork, I have found that investing in school infrastructure and the acquisition of pedagogical and technological resources does have a positive impact on students. Students have expressed an increased sense of comfort and trust when classes took place in safer locations. Additionally, their knowledge and ability to complete homework has been positively affected by the acquisition of computers or books. However, all these investments have been rather limited (Rivero 2007) and as such, have only reached certain schools. Moreover, when pedagogical and technological resources were

implemented, there was not an adequate training for teachers to handle these “new technologies”. Regarding teachers, my findings show that their experiences and opinions, in most cases, go unheard during the formulation of new educational policies or curricular plans. This is especially damaging for the task of raising student achievement, as teachers are enriched by every-day experiences in the classroom. Teachers are deeply aware of the educational and social needs of students, of their potentials and limitations. Additionally, not only an update of teachers’ knowledge is needed. As I will later argue, traditional class dynamics reproduced by teachers, based on the presentation of information and its repetition, should be changed. It also appears that the working condition of teachers considerably affect their performance or the quality of their teaching. Further, the over-concern with testing them and their students (to assess their knowledge) took attention from other factors that must be addressed if raising student performance is a priority. As I observed during fieldwork, there are social factors that contribute to students’ underachievement. As I will argue in the following chapter, poverty and other ways of exclusion and legitimized violence students must bear should also be addressed.

CHAPTER THREE

Poverty, Ethnicity and Inequality within the Peruvian Educational System (PES)

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the inequality present in the PES and how it is reproduced and maintained by schooling or public schools. Inequality in the PES has deep roots in Peru's colonial past, where indigenous and mestizo communities faced social and economic discrimination along with political marginalization. I will discuss the unequal access to quality education Peruvian children have, focusing on the different degrees of discrimination mestizo and indigenous children from Cusco go through. Furthermore, I will discuss how poverty connects to ethnicity and how it translates into exclusion, unequal access to education and future possibilities for employment and social mobility.

Roots of Inequality in Peru

The different layers of inequality within Peruvian PES cannot be understood without first recognizing that extreme inequality emerged in Latin America as a result of colonization (Engerman and Sokoloff 1997, 2000, 2002, Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001, 2002, Gallego 2003, De Ferranti et al. 2003). In Peru, as elsewhere in Spanish speaking America, the Spanish invasion and domination was the root of current inequality. The Spanish invasion resulted in the generation of well documented social advantages for Europeans. For instance, it resulted in massive land endowment at the expense of the natives losing their land, the use of the native populations for forced labor in mining, agriculture and other activities, the access to natural and mineral resources and multiple other enterprises and economic pursuits which benefited Spanish

elites and conquistadors (Engerman and Sokoloff 2002), actions which resulted in millions of native people's deaths²³ (Cook [1985] 2004, Iziga et al. 1992).

The establishment of different institutions and laws continued to benefit the Spanish until 1821, the year in which Peru achieved its independence. Notwithstanding, extreme inequality persisted the following centuries because the evolution of political and economic institutions reproduced and reinforced the highly unequal distribution of wealth, human capital, and political influence. Moreover, a legacy of political institutions bordering on authoritarianism also spurred extreme inequality (Engerman and Sokoloff 2002). Consequently, despite their small share of the population, people of European descent living in Peru benefited from greater wealth, human capital, and political influence than did the rest of the population, and were therefore able to shape policies and institutions to their advantage (Ibid.). These circumstances perpetuated extreme inequality and arguably, the fundamental basis for economic inequality has largely remained unaltered in Peru, where being indigenous and poor go, in most cases, hand-in-hand, a situation which ultimately translates into lack of access to quality education or education at all due to implicit social and economic constraints.

Aspects of Inequality within Peruvian PES

Run, Ceci, run! repeats Carla as little Ceci runs as fast as she can to hide from her mother. She disappears from our sight. The end of the school year arrives and Ceci has failed several courses. This situation deeply upsetted her mother, Juana, who is left with two younger children and Ceci's teacher's harsh remarks. The teacher brings up Juana's responsibility for Ceci's failure at school with a concluding "children are the reflection of their parents", adding Juana didn't show up for school meetings to hear how her daughter was doing. Ceci's teacher says she rarely did any homework; she was an unfocused student, did not study for exams, had inadequate hygiene, participated little in class, failed to do school projects and had interrupted attendance. Juana responds that she did her best providing her with school supplies, feeding her, sending her to school and that Ceci had reported everything was fine at school. As I leave, I hear a group of parents by a kiosk pondering about their children's situation and join their conversation. Ana tells me this is one of the worst schools in the area, where

²³ Along with intensive human exploitation or forced labor, cruel punishment and poor life conditions, different diseases introduced to Peru and the Americas by Europeans diminished native populations. For Peru such demographic decline ranges between ten to eight million people (Cook 2004)

'teachers can be absent for several classes and no one cares. Some of them are abusive...the students don't understand their teachers...the school receives older students who failed at previous schools, students with bad behavior that influence and corrupt others...teachers demand so many things, but there is no money to be giving it away all the time, the school demands money to repair things, sometimes there is no even water, it is easier to blame it on us and our children'. Anibal, a grandfather and retired teacher expresses "if we had more money we could send our children to better schools, they wouldn't lack a thing, teachers there would be good and go motivated to work, parents and students would feel respected, valued, but at this point we feel the government cares little to improve things, all educational authorities enter to steal, thirsty for power, (whereas) the students suffer the consequences"

Field notes, Cusco

A great number of parents I encountered reflected on the causes of student underachievement. They attributed it to different reasons, as my earlier notes illustrate. This setting occurred at the end of the school year at the door of a school I passed by at my neighborhood²⁴, offering a sharp contrast to the social and educational context of children at Nortonbell, a private school I had visited an hour before, where far fewer children had failed the school year or evidenced underachievement. Irma, a teacher with experience in private and public schools, was quick to point out some of the differences she encountered, asserting that:

more school resources are given to teachers in private schools, they invest more on their infrastructure, lessons must be planned more carefully as teachers are periodically evaluated, the schools provide computers and whiteboards, chairs are not in bad shape or broken as in the public schools I have taught, water is available, bathrooms cleaner and functioning...more parents or a responsible household member attend programmed school meetings, more teaching hours are assigned, there are fewer students per classroom, but most importantly, children have more reliable families in better economic stand and in many instances parents with more than basic schooling

²⁴ This day is characterized by a long speech from the principal or a few teachers on the school's main patio's stage and a reflection of the achievements of the year. Additionally, the best students are awarded diplomas and at classrooms, teachers handed in *libretas* or report cards containing student's grades through the year and an overall assessment of their performance.

Irma was a teacher at a prestigious private school but left due to the amount of hours teaching involved, which topped to the extra hours of work outside school to prepare her classes demanded much of her time. Her classes should be highly rich in visual aids and multimedia presentations, interactive and motivational, with a carefully designed protocol from the school. The quality of her classes was assessed by more experienced educators during a random, one-time, monthly class monitoring. After marrying a wealthy man, she became a public school teacher, to follow her ‘vocation and for the better hours’.

At a public school, a normal shift lasts five hours and the additional pressure and demands of working for a private school are removed. Irma, as many others, has an understanding of the high degrees of pervading inequality socially and within schools. For her students, it means to have access to quality education or not: it ultimately relied on their families’ income and the possibility of paying for it or not, ergo seldom did the poor benefit from quality education.

Like Irma, Ivan (Terranova teacher) had signaled his discontent: “*The government must think teaching is just about chalks and blackboards.*²⁵ *They don’t think we need more materials to teach efficiently. Images, maps, banner paper, markers and much more is needed.*” Ivan and his colleagues had constant throat problems and allergies, which they attributed to the constant use of chalk and having to raise their voices in class. They had classes with nearly 35 students each and most took extra teaching hours when possible to increase their income. Most Terranova teachers admitted to be tired of having to commute for over an hour every day to reach the school, having to watch over their shoulders when outside school due to the high crime rate in the area, and the conditions of teaching and the low salary. Albeit their discomfort, they considered their job to be meaningful.

Poverty Causes School Underachievement

Different studies have discussed the negative impact inequality has for students at the public education system (Benavides et al. 2004, Benavides 2004b, Benavides 2007,

²⁵ In Lima, most urban schools now have whiteboards and markets. However, many schools at the periphery or located in marginal areas do not do so. Additionally, they highly depend on community’s organization (donating time or money for the school’s needs which are uncovered by the government). It should also be noted that for high middle-class and high class private schools, the use of interactive, intelligent, multimedia-rich boards has been implemented.

Cueto et al. 2005, Cueto 2012, French and Kingdom 2010, Rivero 2007, Valdivia 2003). According to Rivero (2007), social inequality is a conditioning factor in Peruvian education. Latin America has one of the worst distributions of income and wealth in the world (BID 1999)²⁶ and in eight out of the 24 Peruvian regions the level of poverty has increased.²⁷ In general, nearly 25% of the country's population lives in poverty²⁸. In Cusco, nearly a quarter of the population lives in poverty (INEI 2013). Similarly, different studies (Cueto 2012, Escobal et al. 1998, Valdivia 2003) show that average low student achievement in Peru is highly correlated with low socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, these studies argue that the indigenous population has fewer opportunities to attain formal schooling.

Rural and Urban: Social Landscapes of Poverty

Indeed, there are notable differences between rural and urban populations, as there are amongst schools in these areas. Noticeably, Lima has far fewer citizens living in poverty than any provincial city in Peru. In the rural areas of Peru, more than 50% of children under 15 are poor. In urban areas the percentage drops to 23%. Additionally, 83,3% of the population living in *extreme poverty*²⁹ is concentrated in rural areas (INEI 2013: 46).

There is a correlation between poverty and families where the parents have little education. Rivero (2007) found that households in poverty are characterized by at least one parent who has only achieved elementary education, unlike non-poor households, where most parents have finished high school. He points out that “educational policies should place emphasis on the social aspects of poverty and on how to overcome *the vicious circle of poverty*” (Ibid. p. 33-34, my emphasis). Drawing on Rivero, in the following section I will focus on the tangible expressions of social inequality reflected on schooling and children's futures.

²⁶ The CEPAL report (2004) also confirms that 10% of the richest top increased their wealth thirty times more than the poorest people. Plus, 18,9% of the population in Latin America lives with less than a dollar a day, which represents 98 million inhabitants.

²⁷ Paradoxically, Cajamarca, the region that generates most revenues to the country due to intensive mining from foreign investors, is the poorest region.

²⁸ In *Informe Técnico: Evolución de la Pobreza Monetaria 2009-2013* (INEI 2013).

²⁹ Extreme poverty is defined as average daily consumption of \$1.25 or less and means living on the edge of subsistence (World Bank, 6.2. 210)

About 13% of children from poor households do not go to school. Children coming from households with a single mother show inferior rates of school enrollment than those with both parents. Orihuela (2004) shows that poorer children who enroll into elementary schools are more likely to abandon formal education. Sanchez-Paramo (2006) showed the rates for school enrollment of poor, indigenous children are higher than those for the non-indigenous poor, and in general there are more non-indigenous children at schools. Certainly, students from families with higher incomes have access to better public³⁰ and private schools. As Irma (informant) pointed out, in private schools, teachers are usually better trained and organized, are provided with more aid and resources, which fosters quality teaching. Contrary to this, in public schools, especially in the Andes, teachers are unprepared to respond to what Rivero calls *the requirements and heterogeneity of the students* (2007). The following section aims to provide a clearer example of how poverty affects students and can reflect on low performance.

A Glance into Students' Households

In the casona³¹, precarious adobe walls or thin wooden walls and curtains separate one household from another. Children, still in their school uniforms, play in the patio. The barking of Tipi, Nadia's limping puppy announces my visit. Nadia greets me warmly and her mother stops her cooking to greet me too. Old pots lie at the corner alongside four kerosene-powered cooking plates. Nadia's mother cooks mazamorra, a purple corn pudding which she will sell at her usual street corner. There is a bed which I am told is shared by Nadia and her grandmother and another shared by her mother and sister. Next to a few old chairs and a table crowded with dishes, Tupperware and utensils, rests a smaller, damaged table containing Nadia's schoolbooks. A light bulb in the ceiling poorly illuminates their room. In spite of the small, old TV with poor signal broadcasting a comedy, I can hear their neighbor's arguing and some children cry. 'This is our reality, profesorcita, we are poor!' Nadia's mother says as she hands me a dish of hot rice porridge and mazamorra.

Field notes, Cusco.

³⁰ Public school also differ from one another, depending on their location, teachers and access to resources.

³¹ Old, usually colonial-style house or compound where multiple families can live.

Households in urban Cusco are diverse, according to a family's income and social positioning. There are many families living in restored *casonas* and in new houses of beautiful facades and several stories built with resistant materials (bricks and cement), and count with electricity, water and sewage. However, there are also many families that live in a rented room at precarious *casonas*, houses or compounds made of adobe and *quincha*³² walls. They both are types of housing I became familiar with through visiting neighbors and their friends. The precarious housing is something I learned to be concerned about; in fact I witnessed a *casona* collapse during fieldwork and I assume that many *casonas* would have been demolished long ago had they been in Europe, due to the risk they represent.³³

I had been asked by Elodia, Nadia's mother, to help Nadia with some homework, hence my visit. Elodia and I met on one of the streets of Cusco months before. She was sitting on a tiny bench and had two big pots by her side when my husband and I passed by and smelled her *mazamorra* and were urged to buy a portion. During my visit, Elodia told me she had not finished high school and admitted to have no time to help Nadia due to work: she needed to sell to make a living. Her husband had abandoned the family long ago to join another woman in a neighboring town. It was difficult for Nadia to do homework without assistance, as she said 'not everything is in the books'. Moreover, Nadia lacked a proper space to study or do homework.

Rivero (2007: 36) shows that in higher-income households, parents can offer better settings for their children to access to books and informative sources through cable TV and Internet, and in many cases, they hire private teachers to deepen their knowledge or acquire new one.³⁴ Seemingly, the time these parents spend with the children and their cultural baggage has a positive effect on their upbringing, contrary to what occurs with parents of low educational capital, who due to heavy work routines are not in condition to help their children in this matter. In the case of Nadia's mother this is true as well, as

³² *Quincha* is a traditional construction system which consists of entrenched wood and canes covered in mud and plaster. This has traditionally provided a safe structure but due to the many years, climate change and additions to these structures, most in current stand in Cusco are highly deteriorated.

³³ Peru is in a highly seismic area and earthquakes and shakes occur. According to IGP, Peru's geological institute, Cusco is one of the regions with the highest seismic activity (La Republica, May 21, 2013). In 1950, the city was struck by a major earthquake and thousands of houses and buildings collapsed.

³⁴ Concomitantly, he notices that those who send their children to pre-schools are generally families with higher income.

her economic situation, lack of complete formal schooling and her work on the streets made it difficult to help Nadia with school assignments. Additionally, she found it hard to pay for the extra things the school demanded from time to time. Another thing Nadia's mother complained about (as did the parents of Intikilla students) is that children *ought to* access Internet to find the answers for certain homework and that they were usually given excessive homework, especially for the weekends, a situation I myself verified. No one of the children or youth I met had a computer, and as the access to computers is frequently determined by family incomes (Manrique 2005), they had to rent them at the *cabinas de internet* or Internet rental places.³⁵

Teachers and the Way they are Perceived

Amanda (teacher) told me that she admired the enthusiasm of new teachers, as she herself was tired of being one due to the challenges of the profession: "*We always bring work to our homes, having to correct exams, notebooks and plan certain projects. Plus, most parents think we should educate and discipline their children. We are here to teach*". Amanda had lamented the bad behavior of students, lack of hygiene, and the attitude of parents who "*pass their bad habits*" on to their children. Moreover, she said she felt unappreciated, adding that "*many just become teachers to have a steady income*". According to Rivero, to be a teacher in Peru's PES is perceived in two ways. On one hand a teacher is perceived as 'everything' and a large amount of social responsibilities are given to them. In contrast, a second perception of being a teacher is that this has low social prestige, which is expressed in their rather low salaries, in the generalized idea that any person can be a teacher without a specific preparation for it, and that they lack stimulus to keep up-to-date their knowledge, to improve their work and to innovate (2007: 197). Among the parents I spoke to there were divergent opinions, as some were rather appreciative of (mostly female) teachers that even "*went out of their way to help students and advise parents*". However, in Cusco, certainly everybody talked about also knowing (mostly male) teachers that "bring shame to their

³⁵ Cueto (2012) shows that although over the past few years the country has purchased around half a million laptops from the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) program, their systems include a variety of programs, but none related directly to academic areas. He mentions that while students have learned how to use the laptops, there are no increases in mathematics or reading comprehension after at least a year and a half of their use. This seems to be a result of teachers only knowing (and many do not) how to use the laptops but not being able to integrate them fully into their lessons. Also there was no external support to schools on how to use them (Ibid.).

schools, as everybody in town knows they are heavy drinkers and that they are mean to students”.

Public and Private Schools: Outstanding Differences

Various studies have shown that despite their great heterogeneity, private schools consistently obtain better results and/or offer greater advantages than public schools (Chavez 2001, Coleman et al. 1981, Evans and Schwab 1995, Grogger and Neal (2000), Neal 1997, Rutkowski and Rutkowski 2003, Sander 1997, Sander and Krautmann 1995). Valdivia (2003)³⁶ shows that the amount of children that fails the school year at an elementary public school is five times higher than at a private school. School desertion is 25% higher in public schools and school achievement is higher in private schools.

Additionally, five other studies ((Evans and Schwab 1995), Sander (1997), Neal (1997), Grogger and Neal (2000), Sander and Krautmann (1995)), reviewed by Neal (1998) and McEwan (2000)³⁷ offer a comparative review of different studies, which find that private schooling greatly increases (up to nearly four times) the probability of graduating from high school or attending university. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to compare public and private schooling, my intention is to emphasize that children of better socio-economic backgrounds do benefit from quality education by attending private schools, which in turn offer many advantages for their present and future. This will be further explored in the final chapter of my thesis.

Language

Quechua, or *runa simi* was the main language that Inkas and the ancient population of Cusco and many other Andean regions spoke and it is currently spoken by over eight

³⁶ Valdivia also presents an intercontinental review of the literature available comparing public and private schools (i.e., from Colombia and Tanzania (Cox and Jiménez 1989), Dominican Republic (Jimenez et al. 1989), Philippines (Jimenez et al. 1988), Thailand (Jimenez et al. 1988) and India (Kingdon, 1996). Most authors conclude private schooling has greater advantages over public schools, whereas authors like Witte (1992) only found a small superiority of private over public.

³⁷ For McEwan, this might indicate that students in private schools are exposed to more privileged peer groups that positively influence student outcomes or that private schools use a different set of school inputs and policies that benefit students.

million people³⁸ in different Andean countries (Adelaar 2004). Nowadays, nearly everybody living in urban Cusco (as in Peru) speaks Spanish, the language imposed by the Spanish conquistadors. Notwithstanding a great number of people still has Quechua as their first language. It is estimated that more than three million Peruvians speak it (Valdivia 2002).

In spite of Quechua's recent growing value, many Quechua-speaking populations have for long chosen to use Spanish for the purpose of social acceptance and advancement. Luis Guzmán Barrón, academician and former rector of a Peruvian private university avowed "*To my great regret I never learned to speak Quechua. My father was born in Huaraz and my mother in Huancavelica*³⁹, and they were both *Quechua speakers...my mother did not want me to speak Quechua, therefore I did not learn it*".⁴⁰ Guzmán Barrón's situation reflects the situation of many children and youth with Quechua speaking parents. In relation to this, Cerrón Palomino argues that "*Quechua speakers seem to have taken the project of assimilation begun by the dominating classes and made it their own.*" (Adelaar 2004). Regarding this situation, growing up in Peru I have witnessed the cruelty and discrimination from mestizo children and adults toward Quechua speakers that immigrated to Lima and in general, Quechua speakers have been highly discriminated against in nearly all spheres and speaking Quechua limited their opportunities for social mobility. This can be corroborated by the INEI report (2013), which shows that in 2013 poverty affected 35,9% of people who had a native language as their mother tongue, in contrast to a 20,8% of people who had Spanish as their mother tongue.

Following the Spanish domination of Peru, Quechua has increasingly been looked down upon by the higher classes due to being connected to the indigenous, poor, subdued populations, although recently this has started to change. ⁴¹In fact, Spanish is the language of instruction in all schools in Peru; although for the last years there have been

³⁸ There are many different Quechua dialects distributed in different zones (Torero 1964, 1978, 2007). Seemingly, the language spoken by Inkan elites among themselves appears to have been Aru (Ibid.), although Quechua was wide-spread and of common use.

³⁹ These are cities in the Peruvian highlands with a great number of native Quechua speakers.

⁴⁰ This is my translation. The original text can be found in: Rivera, Cecilia 2004. "El quechua y sus hablantes: En la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú".

⁴¹ During my stay in Cusco, I realized that learning Quechua is increasingly becoming a prestige-bringing act among mestizo intellectuals. Also, Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) programs have started in areas where most of the indigenous population concentrates. In Cusco, many public schools have relatively recently begun to teach one or two hours of basic Quechua to students weekly.

efforts, in specific and small areas, to establish intercultural bilingual education programs. In spite of this, still a farther great number of children that have Quechua or other indigenous language as their mother tongue is taught at schools in Spanish under a the same curricula as children from Lima or areas with predominant mestizo population.⁴² This creates many difficulties for those students. For example, it can involve not to count with the help of their parents for school assignments if they (the parents) are not fluent in Spanish and have not graduated themselves; it also means not to fully grasp the content of classes and to leave behind important cultural knowledge.

Schiefelbein, Valenzuela and Vélez (1998) have reported case studies in Latin America and the Caribbean where school lessons which are given in a different language than the mother tongue of the attending students create a disadvantage for them. Along those lines, Beltrán and Seinfeld (2012) have gone further to argue that the PES should consider the socio-cultural characteristics of these students. Among them, their mother tongue stands as one of the most important variables of differentiation.

My empirical findings in Cusco corroborate this. Some of the parents told me they did not finish high school (and lacked formal, factual knowledge to help their children with homework) or were too busy working. Interestingly, when I met them at their work places (the market and surroundings), I observed many of them spoke Quechua to one another or the older generation but switched to Spanish to talk to their children. In the case of students at Intikilla, they all spoke Spanish. Indeed, while most of their parents had Quechua as their mother tongue, most also had not taught it to their children. This responds to several reasons, one of them being the fact that this would expose them to discrimination within the dominant elites or privileged *white* and *mestizo* social groups by associating them to a less privileged class and identity.

Ethnicity, Education and Exclusion

Race, assumed to be biologically defined and expressed in physical traits has been the cause and catalyst of discrimination in Peruvian history.⁴³ Racism in Peru can be open, like in the case of, for example, rural Cusco children who move to Lima and enter a public, urban school in a middle class neighborhood: they would most certainly be

⁴² In Lima it is also common that youngsters tease, insult and/or mock fellow students if these have a Quechua accents and there is even a TV show that openly mocks Andean immigrants.

⁴³ This can also be traced back to colonial times which followed the conquest and invasion of Peru.

teased or insulted by a few classmates due to their appearance or accent and sometimes even due to having indigenous last names. In Peruvian society, indeed, fair skin is favored and having darker or copper-like skin color or strong indigenous phenotype is undesired and subject to many discriminatory utterances, a situation I have witnessed over my many years in Peru. On the other hand, racism can also be silent: it will not necessarily be openly verbalized but it will entitle social exclusion at many levels.

De la Cadena (1998) has analyzed explicit and silent racism, arguing that legitimized social exclusions resulted from cultural features or inevitable class hierarchies. Silent racism, she argues, “*continues to abide by the historically forged Peruvian definition of race as privileged, invisible, yet innate, qualities over biology and phenotype*” (Ibid.)

In a further publication, De la Cadena (2000) defines Peruvian dominant racism as the discriminatory practices that derive from a belief in the unquestionable intellectual and moral superiority of one group of Peruvians over the rest. What is interesting is that she also discusses how education has been given “*an almighty power capable of transforming anything, especially race*” (Ibid.).

In that sense, this refers to the existence of nearly insurmountable hierarchies and cultural differences, along with the social differences created by educational achievement. All of these place indigenous people in absolute inferior positions. However, the notion that culture and education are achievable has enabled a group of Cusqueans to transform the dominant meanings of “mestizo”⁴⁴ and “Indian”⁴⁵ racial labels (Ibid. p. 5).

I found this notion particularly useful to shed light on why most of the parents and relatives of students I talked to in Cusco strongly wished for their children to finish school and proceed to enroll at an institute or university. Most believed this would get them a good job afterwards and better social positioning. The following section will discuss this further.

⁴⁴ De la Cadena (2000) offers an alternative meaning of the word ‘mestizo’, where the word identifies literate and economically successful people who share indigenous cultural practices yet do not perceive themselves as miserable, a condition linked to the (mainly used despectively) word “indian” in Peruvian society.

⁴⁵ Indian is a label that carries a historical stigma of colonized inferiority, and as such ‘indianness’ can be understood as a social condition (De la Cadena 2000).

Education: An Almighty Power and Pathway to *Superación*?

Cueto and Balarín (2007) have mentioned the importance the concept of *superación* has for families in Peru. To achieve *superación* or *superarse* means to do better than your parents or relatives in terms of education or social and financial positioning. To achieve this allows an individual to be in stand to help their family as well. During my conversations with parents at their work places, I asked two of them why they sent their children to school. Both parents introduced to me the notion of *superación*. Irmalda said:

Amanda, Alicia and Janet go to school to be able to achieve a better life(para que puedan superarse). I barely finished fifth grade and was put on the streets to work... My mother had lost her chacra (plot of land). I had them [her daughters] when I was young and they had to sleep next to potatoes, onions and carrots in the market while I sold my vegetables on a lona⁴⁶ on the ground. If I worked at night or had a cachuelo [sporadic, informal extra job] washing clothes, I would put Amanda on my back⁴⁷ as I washed so that she would be quiet and let me work, quiero que se superen (I want them to do better than me) so that they do not suffer like I did.

Equally, Justino said “*nuestros hijos tienen que conseguir superarse*” (our children must achieve a better life). These words made me reflect on the power of education to prompt class mobility. Regarding social inequality and education, Pierre Bourdieu (1967, 1990, 1997) has discussed the educational systems of industrialized societies, arguing that these systems function in a way that allows for the legitimization of class inequalities. Success in the educational system is, therefore, facilitated by the possession of cultural and higher-class habitus⁴⁸. Bourdieu also argues that lower-class students do not, in general, possess these traits, therefore their failure becomes almost inevitable. For him, educational credentials help to reproduce and legitimate social inequalities, as higher-class individuals are seen to deserve their place in the established social structure.

⁴⁶ She refers to a plain cloth or plastic woven fabric surface.

⁴⁷ In Cusco and other parts of the Andes, women carry babies or small children on their back by wrapping them up with the lliqlla or large cotton cloth which they then tight around their chest.

⁴⁸ Bourdieu’s *habitus* refers to the lifestyle, values and expectation of particular social groups that are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life and which connect to particular class preferences or tastes.

Bourdieu's empirical findings and conclusions apply to the Peruvian PES as well. As I will discuss in a coming chapter, in Peru, the school a student comes from will define future job opportunities and access to higher education. After finishing high school, middle and upper class individuals can enroll at private universities. For most poor and middle class high school graduates, however, entering a public university represents a great challenge, as the kind of education they are given within PES is far from enough to pass a public university's admission test.

Increasing Quality and Decreasing Inequality

As I have stated before, the challenge for the Peruvian PES is to increase the quality of the education offered to students, which could be done through efficient policies.⁴⁹ Along with it, the high degrees of inequality present in Peruvian society should be tackled, as this may mean reducing poverty and social exclusion⁵⁰, factors that affect students and continue to affect their performance at school.

Pritchett (2001) has pointed out that mass expansions of educational enrollment in the last 40 years appear to be uncorrelated with economic growth, which illustrates that educational expansion can take place without radically transforming inequality (Sokoloff and Robinson 2003). However, Pritchett's findings suggest that educational quality is often so low that there is no impact on development, or that the social payoff from education depends on other institutions in society (Ibid). Along similar lines, Sokoloff and Robinson argue that this could explain the disappointing impact of educational expansion on inequality in Latin America. Despite the increase in education, there are still deeply ingrained patterns of social exclusion and discrimination that are hard to break down and which prevent poor people from becoming upwardly mobile (2003). Similarly, it is not mere completion of given levels of schooling but rather what is *learned* at school that matters to increase individual earnings, national economic growth (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2008; French and Kingdom, 2010; Pritchett et al.2013) and to raise academic achievement (Cueto, 2012).

⁴⁹ Benavides (2007), Cueto (2012) and Rivero (2007) have presented comprehensive outlines of what these policies should focus on.

⁵⁰ Tedesco (2004) pointed out that in order to break the "vicious circle of poor parents-poor children" it is necessary to intervene in the moment or time "where the basic formation of the cognitive capital of people is produced. This means investing on families and early childhood" (p.863)

Benavides (2007: 470) has called Peru “a state that does not fight against inequality” referring to Peruvian educational policies that do not reflect the expressed interest of the government to fight educational inequalities. For him this resonates with what the National Counsel of Education (CNE) called an *educational apartheid*. CNE sustained that this apartheid means “quality education which generates plenty of opportunities for those who can afford it or have the fortune to live in modern urban centers”, which at the same time represents “a fictitious education, depleted from resources and which disheartens majority” (CNE 2005: 38).

Dwelling on these concepts I can answer why there was a need for a school like Intikilla in Cusco. As pointed out before, Intikilla receives students from at least twelve different public schools that are in deep need of help to do homework, school assignments, learn the contents of different courses or study for exams. Most of their parents work or one parent is taking care of the household and siblings, and poverty in different degrees is a prominent feature among their families. In fact, most students do not have access to books other than the compulsory texts the government provides. In Intikilla they receive personalized assistance that meets their needs. In some cases, this has meant to patiently teach third graders to add and subtract before I could help them learn to multiply or divide. In many others, it has meant to practice with them the alphabet and syllabic sounds again before going through several weekly reading practice sessions. In the months as a teacher I learned students can be quick learners and show immense progress, if they are given enough, focused attention and the materials and resources they need. One of the roles of Intikilla is, thus, to reduce unequal access to education for its students, by providing tutoring and the help they normally would just get in a private school or if their parents could afford the fees for a tutor or extra books and computers. The parents that send their children to Intikilla understand that this gives them educational advantages that can help their socioeconomic education.⁵¹ In this chapter I intended to show how poverty and unequal access to quality education causes low student performance. In close connection, the coming chapter will explore other aspects deeply affecting students and reflecting on their performance at school.

⁵¹ As Escobal et al. (1998) argued, education has a great importance to avoid poverty situations. Similarly, Herrera (2001) argues that finishing high school has the effect of reducing poverty in 10%.

CHAPTER FOUR

School, Families, Violence, Poverty and the Search for Balance

Introduction

As outlined before, low school performance or underachievement is the result of multiple aspects and not just inadequate pedagogic approaches or unqualified teachers. Low performance is also a consequence of durable social structures, institutions and corruption, which ultimately account for the persistence of social inequality. To further this discussion I will argue, through empirical findings, that families, domestic and school violence, poor nutrition and the need many students have for undertaking jobs after school can influence or directly cause low school performance. Toward the end of this chapter, I will argue that achieving formal education under these conditions, although desired for the purpose of social mobility, can be perceived as a burden, often instilling a deep sense of inadequacy on students and fostering fears.

The Impact of Families

For long, families have been seen as the fundamental units of society and perceived as sources of nurturing care and physical, mental, emotional and spiritual support. Families are also the earliest reference of socialization a child has (Kimani and Kombo, 2010). Unfortunately, this ideal conception of families is far from being true for most of the students attending Intikilla. That being said, before my fieldwork unfolded, not in my farthest dreams did I hold the idea that I would be paying this much attention to families. Nevertheless, through fieldwork, as I shall discuss, I learned that families can have a direct impact on a student's school performance. This made the study of families relevant to my study. In fact, most Intikilla students reported to experience or witness physical and verbal domestic violence nearly every week. My conversations with many teachers and volunteers from eight social projects (involving local children or youth) corroborated that violence was not uncommon. Most of their students too endured physical and verbal violence.

In late November, a quiet sunny morning in the *plaza* changed after a large group of marching students from public and private schools gathered along with their teachers to demonstrate against violence. Holding banners, students asked for families to be united and for domestic violence to come to an end, pledging for love and harmony. A school principal holding a loudspeaker shouted “*Families do matter!*” and “*Families do make a difference!*” Next, through a speech, the principal exhorted parents, especially fathers, to be responsible, caring, non-violent and not to abandon their families. As they marched and positioned themselves in the plaza, the students shouted phrases such as “*I learn better if you don’t hit me*” and “*violence must stop, love for the family must prevail*”. Jesus and Leonidas (teachers in the march) told me that “*many parents here resort to violence to correct or punish their children, they think they will learn that way*” and that “*fathers are increasingly abandoning their families, their absence is stronger than ever, they turn to alcohol or other women: they do not follow God’s commands*”. I found Leonidas’ words on fathers turning away from their families accurate; as I know many students from Intikilla live in mono-parental homes or have absent fathers for diverse reasons.

The Absent Father

Toward the end of the year, an art contest was organized at Intikilla. The theme was *families*, and students had nearly a week to sketch and color or paint themselves with their families on a poster board. On Friday, the drawings and paintings were displayed and students volunteered to talk about them. It was notable that father figures were absent in most family portrayals. This prompted the question of *why* students had not included their fathers in their drawings. Seven out of ten students said they did not live with their biological fathers: he had abandoned them before birth or at a young age or had remarried and left the household. A much smaller number gave answers such as “*he works in another town and is often gone, hence I did not include him*” whereas one student’s father had passed away. The paintings and illustrations reflect the family situation students find themselves immersed in. More than 50% of them have an absent father and, in fact, some of them openly resented them saying “*I will find him one day and beat him up*” for abandoning them and their mothers.

A large body of literature has linked diminished school achievement and absent fathers. The Centre for Social Development in Africa (2013) published a study of absent fathers

in Johannesburg. Kimani and Kombo (2010) present a parallel for a Kenyan context, where a great number of families have absent fathers. Both studies conclude that absence of fathers is detrimental to children, as it challenges family survival, causing a “provision crisis”. This resulted in women taking up both a reproductive and productive role. This finds parallel in the Cusquean context, where most mothers are active workers and providers and fathers are absent. Mothers work at least ten hours outside home. The situation means that children spend little time with them and cannot turn to them for help regarding school assignments. Moreover, having only a mother as a main provider (as opposed to two parents) greatly decreases the household’s income. As Adelina (a mother) said:

Since he left us for his new family, I must work all day and late into the night, I must provide. Who else will pay for food, rent, electricity and water bills? I cannot even afford to get sick. The purchase of books, school supplies or new uniforms is something I cannot even think of.

Adelina’s words evidence the precarious economic situation children are put under. The consequences of fathers’ absenteeism are not just economic. A fathers’ positive involvement can also promote better linguistic and cognitive capacities and a better attitude toward schooling (Pruett 2000). Opposed to it, father absenteeism affects a student’s performance. In studies involving more than 25,000 children, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that children who lived with only one parent had lower grades, poorer school attendance records and a higher dropout rate. The reasons for this may also stem from the emotional distress and economic pressure children with one parent can experience. Similarly, Horn (2002), Flood (2003), Biller (1982) and Popenoe (1996) concluded that children who grow up without their fathers are less successful at school and are said to suffer emotionally⁵², intellectually,⁵³ socially⁵⁴ and behaviorally⁵⁵.

⁵² Krohn and Bogan (2001) say the age at which children lose their father is significant since it influences their perception of males and females and their emotional, social and academic advancement.

⁵³ Rosenberg and Bradford (2006), Pruett (2000), Popenoe (1996) and Goldstine (1982) have also discussed the impact of fathers and fathers’ absence on cognitive ability and educational achievement. Their findings show that children with involved, caring fathers have better educational outcomes.

⁵⁴ Similarly, Schwartz (2003) found a relationship between father absence and rates of violence, arguing that fathers act as providers, supporters and models of socialization.

⁵⁵ Different studies (i.e., Anderson et.al.1999, Beaty 1995, Harper and McLanahan, 1999) suggest that criminal activity increases when fathers are absent from the home. In a Cuban context, Morales et al.

It should also be noted that *father absenteeism* or *fathers' absence* is not just physical and can occur in different ways (Mancini 2010). As such, for the purpose of this chapter, the term referred to fathers who deserted their families, who are away for long periods of time due to work, who are divorced or separated, or are absent in the home more than they are present.

Domestic Violence: A Reality Many Pupils Endure

As previously outlined, fathers' absence has detrimental consequences for students. In Cusco, many poor families must rely on a sole provider or on relatives' help. Their absence also contributes to underachievement; attendance rates drop and students' behaviors are affected, which can also affect peers at school and interfere with learning. However, my empirical findings show that in some cases, fathers' presence is even more detrimental to students than it is their absence. This was first revealed to me at Intikilla during my first fieldwork week. At a *circle of expression*, Jeremy (11-year-old student) raised his hand to talk about domestic violence:

Yesterday the phone rang and my mother picked up. It was Rosa, her friend, señora⁵⁶ Rosa invited my mother to go out with other friends. When she said to my father she wished to go out, he became enraged and said "liar, bad mother, prostitute, surely you will meet a lover and not a friend" (...) after slapping her, he pulled her hair and kicked her. My mother cried and screamed and my father said that "a good woman's place is at home with her man and children." As my mother answered back, my father pushed her to the ground and began to beat her up. I tried to stop him and he pushed me and hit me as well... I want to ask for my father to stop drinking and tormenting us at home, I want him to be a good man.

Just like Jeremy, many other students reported to experience or witness physical, verbal and emotional violence at home. In fact, they often feared to get their clothes dirty or stained, admitting this would trigger parental physical punishment. A few mothers and

(2002), through a study of children and their families, identified that children that presented aggressive behavior came from families where violence, alcoholism and child reject and neglect prevailed.

⁵⁶ Señora in Spanish means Ms.

relatives also turned to teachers to confide their stories or ask for support. One of them, Silvia, said about her husband:

Every time he drinks, he becomes another person; he beats me and now he has begun to beat our children too. He punishes them for everything, he hits them with the belt, with a rope or wire, stops them from eating, insults them, damages our things, we fear him...

Silvia had been encouraged before (by a relative) to go to the police station and report the aggression. Shortly after, she took back her words and asked for her husband to be released. This is a situation I have seen several mothers go through. Physical violence is acknowledged, contested in a way, but ultimately forgiven. Experienced teachers and a few coordinators at Intikilla have reported several similar cases albeit with discouraging results. What they noted is that when a violent father is reported to the police, he will be imprisoned at the local station for a few days to “learn a lesson”. During those days, the police would beat him up. Afterwards, the subject would be released, provided he had not caused “extreme” or impairing physical injuries to his family.⁵⁷ Then, days after, he would beat his wife or children as revenge. It also happens that convictions of physically violent fathers are not reinforced. In some cases, the carelessness of authorities (i.e. not making copies of reports and sentences) freed the aggressor (Ramos Rios 2008).

It should also be noted that many children live with stepfathers or other relatives who according to local norms are entitled to “discipline them”, that is, apply corporal punishment (Bardales, 2012). Although at a smaller rate, female relatives such as aunts and older sisters have also been reported to beat and punish Intikilla students. Angel (Intikilla founder) said “most students are physically punished at home. Sadly, households are no longer safe places”. Angel saw violence as a cycle which social laws did not efficiently act upon and added that “we can only show a different reality at school, by teaching them without violence. I believe love to be stronger than fear... they can do better than their family”

⁵⁷ For instance, when a man had hit his wife and children, causing some bruises that would vanish within a few days, this did not count as “extreme”. Thus, the aggressive father would be forgiven under oath of showing improved behavior and committing to seeing a psychologist. On the other hand, if the same man had caused them to lose an eye, broke their backs or impaired them in a way, then he (in most cases) would be convicted.

In many cases, poverty is also an obstacle in reporting violence (Diaz, 2009). Mothers stay because they need the financial support from husbands. A report issued by the Canadian Research Directorate of Immigration (2014) brought to attention that in 2013 four out of ten Peruvian women were victims of domestic violence, concluding that “*in Peru, violence (especially against women and girls) is a very serious national problem*”. Additionally, different empirical studies (Diaz 2009, Rojas Guerra 2006⁵⁸, Harvey 1994) suggest the high incidence of domestic violence I encountered in central Cusco is also present in other areas of the country, especially in those where poverty strikes.

“*Punished at School, Punished at Home*”: The Normalization of Violence from Teachers and *Auxiliares*⁵⁹ at Public Schools

Intikilla students reported to experience violence not just at home but also at their ordinary schools. Several students had been physically punished by their teachers and *auxiliares*. However, most did not report this to their parents, fearing they would also be punished by them. Alfredo, an educator who manages an educational project in Cusco, told me over lunch that “*violence at schools has been institutionalized in Cusco, to the point that not even the police, parents or authorities care enough*”. Violence at schools is perceived as a normal corrective measure in the formation of children.

William (a student) started high school last year. The transition was quite hard for William, who was in risk of failing the school year. On two occasions, he came with a leg, an arm and back bruised. The first time, William told me, with a tone of voice filled with sadness, but also courage, his experiences with teachers and the *auxiliar* at his state school. This *auxiliar* was frequently violent toward students. William narrated:

While some of my classmates and I were playing during the break, the auxiliar came and complained Michael was being too loud, saying “shut up, you dirty ass” next adding that he should learn to look decent before coming to school,

⁵⁸ Rojas Guerra (2006) encountered that in Chiclayo, the absence or abandonment of one of the parents prevailed. The children in her study had experienced extreme physical and psychological aggressions, such as beating, being burned, along with humiliation.

⁵⁹ An *auxiliar* is a person at school in charge of monitoring students and safeguarding discipline. Other functions *auxiliares* have are to record students' attendance, monitor classes with absent teachers and assisting in the case of medical emergencies.

comparing him to a dog and calling him an “imbecile”. Many of us laughed and then Michael answered back, insulting Mr. Sanchez (the auxiliar). As we laughed at this, he took Michael by the neck and shirt, saying bad words to him... he commanded him to knee and took off his belt to hit him. The rest of us were then told our parents would be called to the principal, along with us, unless we took punishment and would not behave like this again, laughing at the auxiliar. We chose to take the punishment, one by one, this time standing. He didn’t use his belt this time. He had a San Martin⁶⁰; when he started to hit me, I breathed deeply and resisted and resisted...

One of William’s legs had taken the worst part: it had slightly bled. William did not wish to report this to his family; he feared he would be punished. He said *“this is normal—it has happened a lot at school and no one defends us”*. However, he recalled a mother went once to school to complain about a teacher who pulled her son’s ear too harshly, causing it to bleed. The boy had to go to the hospital, yet the teacher remains at school.

Other students who overheard our talk began to share their own experiences on witnessing or experiencing violence at school. Different punishments were reported: some had been hit on their hands or legs with big wooden rulers, belts and *San Martins*, others had their hair or ears pulled, others were made to stand in a corner of the classroom for hours, others kicked, insulted and embarrassed. The punishments were applied for various reasons, such as not doing homework, disobeying, being loud, being disrespectful and failing at exams. Most students said they did not even wish to go to school when these things happen. Marcia, a 13-year-old student that was often punished by her aunt said:

Because most of us (students) had not completed homework, the teacher collected our notebooks and threw them into the garbage bin. She said we were lazy and dumb. Once at home, when my aunt found out, she got angry and pulled

⁶⁰ A *San martin* is a type of multi-tailed whip which is used to punish children. It is made up of several knotted thongs. These cause pain and are meant to lacerate the skin if used repeatedly. San martins were kept in many households during the 80’s and before. Nowadays they are still used and commercialized, however their use has decreased.

my hair and sent me sleep with her chickens. Punished at school, punished at home, this is my reality.

Discussing the violence students experience or witness, both at home and at schools, is relevant not just due to its high incidence. It is also relevant for my research because exposure to violence influences or causes underachievement at schools. The following section will discuss the concrete ways in which violence affects schoolchildren.

Violence as a Cause of Diminished Learning

Fantuzzo and Mohr (1999), in their review of the literature conclude that children exposed to domestic violence demonstrated internalizing and externalizing problems. External problems include aggressive behavior and misconduct. Externalizing problems include depression, suicidal behaviors, anxiety, fears, phobias, insomnia, tics, bed-wetting, and low self-esteem. Among the authors they reviewed, there was a strong agreement that children exposed to violence demonstrate impaired ability to concentrate, difficulty in their schoolwork, and significantly lower scores on measures of verbal, motor, and cognitive skills. Regarding violence at school, Vigil et al. (2012) pointed out that if teachers were trained in children's rights and positive classroom management strategies, the rates of school violence go down (Ibid: 5).

In general, a large body of literature on children who experience or witness domestic violence (Davis, 1988; Emery 182; Fantuzzo and Lindquist 1989, Fantuzzo and Mohr 1999, Kitzmann et al. 2003) supports the view that violence harms children in multiple ways. Children who experience or witness domestic violence are at risk for maladaptation in the following domains of functioning: a) behavioral, b) emotional, c) social, d) cognitive and e) physical (Kolbo et. al 1996). For instance, these children have greater academic difficulty at school and disturbance in behavior (Gayford 1975, Moore et alt. 1981, Rounsaville and Weissman 1988). As such, some children experiencing violence have been characterized as aggressive, anxious, undisciplined and underachievers (Moore et alt. 1981, Kerouac et al. 1986). They have also been said to be slow learners (Kerouac et al. 1986) and to have lower verbal and cognitive skills (Westra and Martin 1981).

These findings are important for my research. They show that violence has a profound negative impact on children. It hampers school achievement and it is also affecting peers of students experiencing violence. At Intikilla, much work is constantly being done for children who start fights with other children or have temper tantrums. Generally, I have discovered “difficult” students were victims of violence, both at home and at school. The fact that violence is so accepted, legitimized and “normalized” is very hard for many children. Low performance is highly condemned by parents and often punished, under the hope the students “will do better” next time. Paradoxically, it would seem that corporal or verbal punishment just contributes to underachievement. At Intikilla, most of these students are (also) generally unfocused, nervous and have problems finishing tasks. In turn, other students afflicted by violence are quieter and shyer.

In analyzing school and home violence in Cusco, I became aware of the different existing hierarchies that help legitimize violence against children and women. A child or a minor is nearly powerless, as they must accept their teacher or parents’ authority without questioning it. Questioning their authority or not meeting their expectations often leads to physical punishment or other types of admonition. Harvey (1994) has written about violence in a Cusquean village. She was shocked by the violent behavior of husbands and the fact that nearly all women “tolerated horrifying actions” over time, even though they complained and in many instances fought back. Harvey notes that in the southern Andes children are taught from a very young age that they should respect their parents, who should in turn protect and care for them. She argues that “*harmonious kinship relations depend upon the **recognition of this hierarchy** and the assumption of the responsibilities that your particular position entails*” (p. 69). Equally, she notes that very small children are rarely punished or chastised but once they are deemed able to understand (around ages four or five), “*they can expect frequent and often severe beatings from their parents or older siblings*” (Ibid.) In this way, she notes that such use of force within or for kinship is generally accepted as **legitimate** by adults. The beatings are, thus, an expression of a relationship of *hierarchical respect*, and, as such, they are not questioned or contested (Ibid: 69-70)⁶¹. In brief, children are brought in “*an*

⁶¹ Harvey exemplifies this through the account of people’s childhoods. In them, we learn that people cried about their painful childhood but never criticized their parents for beating them.

atmosphere of imposed hierarchy where respect is demonstrated by their parents' ability to beat them" (Ibid.).

Harvey's realization can be extended to teachers. In state classrooms, teachers are the highest authorities and to question them has earned students punishment and humiliation. It is students' lack of physical strength and the insolvability of kinship hierarchy what makes a confrontation difficult. As noted by Harvey, being a constant recipient of violence has caused many children to leave their households. Violence, in all ways and degrees, undeniably affects schoolchildren and their ability to focus and learn. This would be important to address, socially and through an efficient execution of laws and policies that prevent and fight domestic and school violence.

The Impact of Malnutrition on School Performance

In 2012, the Peruvian Ministry of Health, along with the National Institute of Health observed the following:

Malnutrition has a high impact on society, especially children's malnutrition, having not just physical repercussions but also cognitive ones that reach an individual in all the stages of their life. (...). Every nutritional problem develops, as we know, in a social, economic, cultural and demographic context.

The report reveals that in 2010 and 2011, 49.5% of the Cusquean population lived in total poverty and 20.7% in extreme poverty. Additionally, a report by INEI (2012) showed 26% of the children (under five) in Cusco were malnourished.⁶² In 2012, medical visitors came to Intikilla, as part of a medical campaign to detect and record health issues in students. Natalia (former teacher) told me they found that about 70% of the children were malnourished. Many students had dental issues and intestinal parasites. About 50% were under height for age. During our conversation, Natalia told me that malnutrition is not a problem that happens only due to parents' lack of money to provide children with food. It is also a knowledge problem. In her opinion, parents do not know what kind of foods are most appropriate for their children, and many give

⁶² The report also revealed that one in every ten pregnant women were malnourished and over 36% of them had anemia.

them a few pennies every day so that they can buy ‘something’ at school, usually cheap sweets (such as lollipops, drops, meringues and popsicles) and fat-saturated fast foods.

Poor nutrition occurs also among children in communities further away from central Cusco. There, I observed that many families base their diets on carbohydrates (i.e. corn, potatoes, rice, and noodles). These are iron deficient diets (Zavaletta et al. 1998). It can be deducted, from the high levels of poverty in the area, that many do not have a real choice. Similarly, a study by Cueto and Chinen (2000) examined the results of a program of school breakfasts in Peru. In the study area, children were not starving but were highly malnourished due to a really poor diet at home. Their study also showed that students who are given a nutritious breakfast improve not just their health, but also their short term memory and school attendance.

Malnutrition is important to address, as it has long been related to diminished learning. Numerous studies (Ancoff 1981, Beltrand and Seinfeld 2009, Cueto and Chinen 2000, Cueto et al. 1998, Simeon and Grantham-MacGregor 1989, Zavaletta et al. 1998) conclude that malnutrition has a negative impact for the cognitive skills of children. Malnourishment deeply affects their short term memory and attention span. This is also connected to the fact that malnourishment produces numerous health ailments (such as parasites, migraines, gastro-intestinal problems and anemia) that affect children’s ability to learn and focus. For example, in Peru, the most vulnerable groups to suffer from anemia are pregnant women and children less than 3 years of age who cannot meet their higher iron requirements from their diets (Zavaletta et al. 1998). Many poor school-age girls with limited food availability or scarce resources have a high incidence of anemia, parasites and early pregnancy. Some of the symptoms anemic students can experience are sleepiness or constant tiredness, lack of appetite, poor school performance and a pale appearance (Ibid.). Additionally, malnutrition causes behavioral disturbances which interfere with students’ learning ability (Ancoff, 1981).

With all this in mind, it is important to understand that the fact many children, (especially those in poverty) struggle at school can also be connected to nutritional deficiencies. At Intikilla, it is noticeable that the majority has a rather short attention span, present stunted growth and multiple dental, skin conditions and stomach issues. It

should also be noted that malnutrition has biological consequences⁶³ and that it starts even before a child is born (Beltrán and Seinfeld 2009)⁶⁴ or attends school (Cueto et al. 2007). The fact that children or youth suffer from malnutrition (and the illnesses malnutrition brings) will determine part of their psychobiological development. Once at school, these conditions affect their cognitive skills and make it difficult for them to meet the learning expectations of their teachers. A child that is hungry or sick can hardly focus. This means that to raise Peruvian children's school performance, malnutrition should be addressed even before children begin to be schooled.

Working Students

This afternoon, as I got on a bus to go to the city center, the first thing that caught my attention was the bus money collector. He was rather short and wore a gray outfit. When he asked me for the bus fare, I realized he was a child in a public school uniform. I paid, smiled and asked: "How old are you?" The question led to a short conversation between us. The boy, named Ernesto, told me he went to school in the mornings, and shortly after, he would start his usual shift on the bus. Ernesto was just eight years old. Once at the central plaza, I saw children of different ages. Many still wore their school uniforms and their backpacks. They followed tourists to try to sell them souvenirs such as lama key rings or magnets, bracelets and even clothes. Other children were stationed at different street corners and were selling clothes, art or candy. When I left the plaza close to midnight, children were still there, selling, working.

Field notes, 02.09.13

My notes mirror the situation in which some of the Intikilla students found themselves in. Many of them worked outside home during the week. As the notes illustrate, some sold candy and souvenirs to tourists late into the night. Others worked polishing shoes, selling food, or helping in family businesses such as restaurants and carpentry shops and as cleaning personnel. A smaller group had more than three different types of jobs they rotated between each week. Another group did agricultural work on weekends. These

⁶³ Jensen's review of the medical literature (2009) shows that when a child is neglected, the brain does not grow as much as it does in a child with adequate nourishment.

⁶⁴ See Beltrán and Seinfeld (2009) for a useful review of literature of the health issues malnutrition causes. For a crosscountry study, see Smith and Haddad (2000). They review literature from 63 countries in the period of 1970-1996 to throw light on the effects and causes of child malnutrition.

students travel to nearby provinces and districts where their relatives keep land. Nearly all children had to help with household chores and usually take care of one or more younger siblings. In contrast, in my field site in Lima, only a very small group of children worked. They worked in recycling activities, collecting “valuable” items from piles of garbage.

The high number of working students I encountered is consistent with what national statistics report. In 2011, ENAHO, Peru’s National Household Survey (*Encuesta Nacional de Hogares*) revealed that 1,65 million (23,4%) children and youth (between ages 6 to 17) work. From these children, 18,4% are in the 6-13 year old range⁶⁵(MINTRA 2012). ENAHO also shows that school attendance drops from 96,1% to 90, 8% if children work. In the case of adolescents, school attendance drops 20%. Moreover, it shows that a high number of working students do not finish the school year.⁶⁶

The educational outcomes of working children have been widely explored. Most studies agree that work has a negative impact on students. For instance, working has been shown to lower school attendance and causing students to drop out or not failing the school year (Guarcello et al. 2005, Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1995, Psacharopoulos 1997). In Peru, Rodriguez and Vargas (2008) found that working children have a higher grade retention or repetition than their peers who just study. Work has also been found to cause lower reading proficiency in students (Akahayashi and Psacharopoulos 1999). This is often the result of having to dedicate more hours to work than to study. Further, evidence shows that working children and youth have poorer performance than non-working peers (Heady 2003, Staff et al. 2010).

The impact of child labor for the development of cognitive skills in Peru presents important differences in rural and urban areas (Ponce 2012). Although it goes beyond my thesis’ scope to analyze these differences and the multiple consequences of work for schoolchildren; I wish to highlight the reasons *why* working does affect school performance for children or youth in my field sites. Firstly, these schoolchildren have no other choice than to work; as their families face poverty, they must contribute to the

⁶⁵ The minimum legal age to work in Peru is 14 years.

⁶⁶ The ENAHO also shows that in children from ages 6 to 13, the number of children who are behind the normal grade level for their age oscillates between 14% and 35%, depending on gender and on whether they live in urban or rural areas (MINTRA 2012).

household. This is encouraged by parents. It should also be noted that schooling brings extra expenses (Chowsa et al. 2010). They must buy notebooks, pens, pay for photocopies every month, for materials for projects and more. Thus, children must resort to different sources of work to obtain money. There are several reasons why working affects their performance at school. Students who work for longer hours have less time to study at home or do homework. At Intikilla, those who worked longer hours were not regular students and came only once a week. Going through their notebooks, I saw they had much unfinished homework, and as a result, teachers had failed these students⁶⁷. Children also come tired from work. Several Intikilla students worked from 20.00 until midnight selling candy, cigarettes or souvenirs in plazas and streets. The next day, they must wake up as early as 5.00 to help at home or help their siblings and get ready for school. In their 8.00 to 13.00 classes, it is not unusual they will feel tired and sleepy. Other students have reported work-connected health issues. Elia (8-year-old student), who worked helping his father to polish and varnish wood, had back pain and allergies caused by the work conditions and environment. Bruno (7-year-old student), who worked collecting materials from garbage piles, had skin rashes. Frank (13-year-old student) reported back pain and blisters after working in his family's land certain weekends. In some cases, children have missed school for days because they must stay at home watching over a sick relative or siblings. Besides working (outside), at home they must help with daily chores. For instance, Mariana (9-year-old student) came to Intikilla with her 18-months-old sister. Her mother was working and left her with her sister most of the day. At home she cleaned, cooked and did laundry. Janet (student) came to Intikilla with two younger siblings. She had to care for them all day. Work does place an extra burden on students' shoulders, as they must try to be good students but also "good" children that contribute to their households. My findings show both things are not often possible.

***“Juggling Life and School”*: After a Nearly Unattainable Balance**

In trying to answer the question: *why do school children show such a low performance at school?* I have realized there are at least three aspects we can focus on to get a good understanding of the situation and find answers to the posed question. The first aspect refers us to methodological and qualitative considerations involving teachers, school

⁶⁷ Peruvian teachers generally leave large amounts of homework on weekdays and weekends to students. The homework for each course is checked and graded by the teacher.

infrastructure and limited access to technological and pedagogical resources. A second aspect included factors which stem from the socio-economic contexts students are immersed in, such as poverty, inequality or exclusion. In this chapter, I have addressed a third aspect which highlights violence at home and at schools, nutritional issues and work as factors which diminish school performance.

My findings show that many schoolchildren must “juggle” work, household chores, the care of younger siblings and school duties altogether. In doing so, they must always strive for the right balance. As it occurs, this balance is hard to reach. The outcome is that children perceive school as a burden. Attending school becomes a heavy burden precisely because children have many other responsibilities and needs on the side. Moreover, to fail at tackling any of these responsibilities results in physical, emotional and verbal punishment. For these children, schools reinforce a negative image about themselves. This occurs not only for the anguish they experience or the distress and comments they get from some of their teachers, principals or parents. It also occurs due to the physical punishment they receive for their poor school performance. Failing exams, repeating a grade and failing courses resulted in corporal punishment. As such, before final exams, children came to Intikilla anxious, sad and nervous, many expressing that they “*wished they could disappear*” and that “*they were not good enough*”, in some cases calling themselves dumb or *burros* (donkeys; although in this context *burro* means “stupid”). Most children also reported getting negative feedback from various teachers. When delivering exams, some teachers even called their names and results (failing grades) out loud, embarrassing them in front of others and sometimes calling them *burros* and lazy. Some would also say “*if you continue like this, you know what will await you at home, so don’t be lazy and study*”. Also, for failing to do homework and for sleeping in class, children have been made to stand for hours or had their notebooks thrown into garbage bins. With all this in mind, it is not strange that schools represent a burden for many children.

Drawing on Rodriguez Valle (2008), Van den Berge (2009) notes that the cultural notion (in the Andean highlands) of the “good child” (*allin chicucha* in Quechua) considers working a virtue and commend it.⁶⁸ Rodriguez Valle explained:

⁶⁸ Van den Berge (2009) highlights that it is considered that in participating in work, such as agricultural activities, children acquire values and practical skills that are important for their community.

A good child works, helps in the household, listens to his parents and goes to school. For all these activities the child receives respect of the grown-ups and gets social recognition as an honest child, a good worker and a good person in general. On the other hand there exists the image of the bad child that is lazy, disobedient, forwards and bad in school.

(Rodríguez Valle in Van den Berge 2009: 18).

As noted by Van den Berge, in many parts of the Andes, children who work and help are seen in a positive light. In fact, most schoolchildren did seem to like to work. However, they could not always manage to attain balance between working, helping and studying. Due to that, they were not always considered as “good children” but were told they were “bad” and a disappointment their families. Many students reported to receive constant criticism from their parents due to poor performance. To this we must add that some students are beaten by their fathers for various other reasons and that they cannot fight the existing hierarchies that confer authority to teachers or parents (Harvey 1994). All this has instilled a deep sense of inadequacy in students and hampered their learning.

In close connection to this chapter, the coming chapter will discuss how the Cusquean students I met further strive to increase their school performance by joining Intikilla. As the chapter will explore, Intikilla provided them with alternative ways of teaching and support which greatly helped them navigate the uncertainties the weight their public schools and lives per se brought.

CHAPTER FIVE

Intikilla, an *Alternative School*

In the two previous chapters I have discussed the impact violence and various socioeconomic aspects have on students' school performance. I wish to further that discussion by answering the question *why was there a need for a school like Intikilla in the community?* In answering this question, I will throw light on different aspects inherent to its organization and activities, paying special attention to two spaces of learning and interaction present at Intikilla: the *circles of expression* and *Friday plays*. The *circles* fostered group communication, allowing children to express their opinions, wishes and personal experiences regarding various topics. Among these, violence was a recurrent theme. This chapter aims to discuss the role of the *circles* and its outcomes. Further, I will discuss the Friday plays on stage at Intikilla. The plays' storylines were chosen by students based on their own personal experiences and just the ending of these stories was purposely altered by them. I assert that there are educational, social and emotional needs which public schools and the families of school-going pupils cannot completely fulfill or neglect. At Intikilla, a non-violent atmosphere, personalized academic help, different approaches of interaction and the usage of technological resources have been able to tackle some of the emotional and educational needs of students of attending students.

Positioning Intikilla

As noticed in the introductory chapter, Intikilla is neither a state school nor a private school. Although frequently referred to as "a school", the overall activities which take place there are not common, to my knowledge, to those of any other regular private or public school in the area. Nevertheless, Intikilla does have some of the attributes of *alternative education*. Angel, founder and director of Intikilla, defined Intikilla as "A school and a social project dedicated to provide **alternative education** to children and adolescents, improving their lives by offering alternative ways of learning, living and loving". Drawing on Raywid (1988), Koetzsch (1997) Aron (2003) and Carnie (2003)

Sliwka (2008) concludes that the term *alternative education*

describes different approaches to teaching and learning other than state-provided mainstream education, usually in the form of public or private schools (...) which is based to a large extent on the individual student's interests and needs.

Sliwka's definition is close to the one given by the U.S. Department of Education, which defines an alternative education school as:

A public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education.

(U.S. Department of Education 2002, in Aron (2006: p.3)

With both definitions in mind, it is important to emphasize that Intikilla is an alternative school, which also acts as an adjunct or supplementary school to regular public or state-provided schools. Aron and Zweig (2003), Aron (2006), Sliwka (2008) and Zweig (2003) are authors which have amply reviewed *alternative education* literature. They coincide that the definition of what alternative schools encompass is quite broad, as these differ in their characteristics, methods, approaches or goals⁶⁹. Due to this, in trying to show aspects of Intikilla, I will start by describing a day at this school.

It is 14.50 and many teachers, dressed in colorful robes, welcome students with warm hugs, kisses or even a lift and loving words. Students readily run toward the different teachers. While a few are brought to the school by a parent or relative, the majority come alone or with a sibling. Some say to have walked for just a few minutes to reach the school and others about an hour. By 15.00, students with homework, school assignments or who need to study will go to different classrooms (according to age range) where teachers will provide help. Another group will have reading practice and a quieter room. An always smaller

⁶⁹ For a goal-focused classification, see Raywid (1994).

group of students without homework will go to art classes or to the computer room. At 16.00 there is a small break for those with homework and a longer break for those in art classes. Children jump ropes, whereas others play volleyball, table football, run around or play with friends. At 17.00 all students go upstairs to the “circle of expression” and sit with their “Intikilla families”. After the circle, usually minutes before 18.00, students join their “Intikilla family” in a specific classroom. Each family has to prepare for the play taking place on Friday at Intikilla’s biggest room, thus they will select or try on costumes after writing or agreeing on the play’s storyline, rehearsing acting, preparing necessary support materials, sometimes designing, coloring or painting banners or rehearsing short dances and songs for the play. At 18.40 children are served a hot beverage, pudding or porridge. After finishing they must wash their cups, take their belongings, say goodbye to their teachers and go home. As it is always dark after 18.30, some children are picked up by a grandparent or relative but most walk home alone or with neighbor-classmates.

Fieldnotes, September 2013.

The first part of my fieldnotes gives a glance into Intikilla’s philosophy. All teachers are asked to be very affectionate and loving toward students and even in contexts where a student needs to be corrected or called on, this is done with much respect, as opposed to what most of them experience at their regular schools, where students enter the classroom, sit in rows and must stand when the teacher enters or say in unison “good morning” or “good afternoon”. An American teacher said about the Intikilla greetings that *“it would not be allowed in US schools. A teacher receiving a student with a kiss and a hug, swirling him around would be just too much, that kind of physical contact would be regarded as wrong or invasive”*. In general, for some teachers it took time to become accustomed to this kind of closeness toward children, who were more than keen to receive affection and who even during breaks liked to run toward teachers to hug them or cling on to them. According to Angel (founder), it has to be this way as *“most children and adolescents do not get this kind of affection, closeness or love from their parents and state school teachers”*. Angel was aware of the high degrees of violence some students experienced, which he considered to affect not just their school performance but that *“it affects their souls and spirits”*.

Circles of Expression

The *circles of expression* (henceforth *circles*) mentioned in my fieldnotes take place four days a week at Intikilla for almost an hour.⁷⁰ In a big classroom, students, teachers and coordinators sit on cushions on the ground forming a circle. Angel or an assigned coordinator directs the *circles* and leads the discussion by introducing different topics. Students and teachers raise their hands when they wish to comment or give an opinion. During one of the circles, a visiting journalism student from Lima asked the children to describe a typical day in their lives, mentioning what or who they meet on their way to their public schools and back. Eagerly, a student named Randy rushed to answer:

I wake up at 5.30 and get ready for school. At 6, I go to the nearby store to buy bread for breakfast. After making breakfast and helping my (younger) siblings get ready for school, I help my mother with her 'mercaderia'⁷¹. All has to be carefully wrapped-up so that it remains warm long enough for the sale. After breakfast we walk to school. As we go, we pass many street dogs and the drunken men sleeping on nearby streets or over the garbage-filled street corner. As we go up the hill, we meet other neighbors and classmates. At school we have classes from 8 to 1. Some teachers are chevere (cool), some are really bad (Randy is asked why he said this). For example yesterday the math teacher pulled my ear and after, punished me by giving me twenty reglazos⁷². He called me "malcriado, bruto, bien bruto eres, nunca entiendes"⁷³ and said I had disrespected him because I had been talking in class (...). When school is over, my siblings and I visit mama at the market on the way home and get food and some coins. In 'her street' there are other caseras but also some beggars. Next I come to Intikilla. After Intikilla, I go to work for a few hours (...)

In another circle, a Monday, students were asked to tell the others how their weekend had been. Several raised their hand to participate and share. Among them there was Catalina. She narrated:

⁷⁰ This is an average duration. Some circles have lasted up to 90 minutes.

⁷¹ Merchandise or goods. In this case, it reflects to warm food in pots to be sold by Randy's mother.

⁷² A *reglazo* refers to a long, wooden ruler used by teachers to point at words on the board. In some instances, these rulers are used to hit children with them on their hand palms as a way of punishment.

⁷³ "Badly-behaved/raised (boy), ignorant/stupid, you are very stupid, you never understand"

I was hand washing my clothes yesterday in the patio and my oldest sister screamed my name from the kitchen, asking me to help her put away groceries and start cooking for the family. I told her I needed to finish washing before I could go. This angered her so much that she left the groceries, threw away the bucket which held my clothes, picked up a stick and hit me saying “you should learn next time, listen when I talk to you, learn to obey!”

Catalina showed some of the bruises, pulling up her pants, but was quickly stopped by Angel, who said she did not need to show more for us to believe in her. This prompted a new discussion upon the issue of home violence, which ended up with several students reporting to have been hit just last week by a parent, relative or teacher. After the circle, Catalina approached me to ask me for help with math exercises. After some guidelines, while sitting and solving a few exercises, she started to complain of an escalating back pain. The pain increased much and she started to cry. In this moment, I asked her to relax and lie down so I could work on her back (I am a massage therapist as well) and see if I could help relief her pain. This was also a very moving experience, as I saw she was much bruised on her back too and had an open wound on the right hip area. At the end of this particular school day, I talked to Angel during a night meeting at Intikilla. He explained that in most cases, all he or any coordinator can do is talking to the student’s family member about their aggressive behavior, get them to reflect on the situation and encourage them not to do it again. When I asked why he would not report cases such as Catalina’s to the police (or the cases I heard about that day), he said that from his experience, this had no positive results:

It is preferable action (reporting it to the police) is taken when we know or suspect a child or adolescent have been sexually abused or if the beating have been too extreme it compromised their lives. Then the police can convict the aggressor and send him to jail for a couple years. In any other cases, all we can do is to talk to the student’s family if physical violence occurs. Otherwise, things follow the regular pattern: I or a coordinator report to the police a child and/or his mother or siblings have been hit. If this is proved, the police will detain the aggressor and keep him two days at the police station’s prison. There he will be beaten up by the police and scolded for the harm and pain he inflicted on his child or partner. Once released from this temporary prison, the aggressor comes

back to his family household or looks for them if they are staying elsewhere, and beats them up again no long after.

Discussing Violence: Can a *Circle* Break the Cycle?

These cases of violence I have described above are far from isolated. Throughout my fieldwork, different students reported to be beaten by a relative and sometimes teachers or *auxiliaries de educacion*⁷⁴ (usually with belts, rulers or *san martin*) for multiple reasons. In this social context where violence reigns, a discussion of the physical, emotional or social violence taking place can have positive outcomes. However, all in all, it is still hard to measure the long-term outcomes the *circles* will have in most children in interrupting what I consider to be a *cycle of violence*. With this, I refer to the fact that domestic violence can be passed from a generation to another. In fact, ten out of ten parents I spoke to regarding family violence said they had also been harmed or mistreated (Simon et al., 1995; Kitzmann et al., 2003). Further, at least one of their parents and grandfathers had had violent behaviors. As Adelina (parent) summarized:

My grandfather was a heavy drinker who beat up my grandmother and my father; my father beat me and my siblings (...) Now I am married to a man who mistreats me and my children whenever he is drunk and I find myself quickly losing my temper when my children misbehave or cause trouble. What are my children going to learn from these examples?

Bandura (1969, 1971 and 1986) formulated *social learning theory*, a theory which argues individuals learn from one another through observation, imitation and modeling (Ibid.1971). Bandura stated that from observing others, one forms an idea of how thoughts, feelings or actions are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide or model (1969: 214). However, Bandura (1969) was clear to distinguish that children are repeatedly exposed to multiple models, among these, that of parents, teachers, other adults, neighbors, peer companions and even media. In the analysis of these other models, he concludes that it is extremely doubtful that children rely exclusively on parents as models for the diverse response patterns, arguing that:

⁷⁴ An *auxiliar de educacion* is a person in charge of monitoring or imparting discipline outside classrooms or during the absence of a teacher. The job includes many other duties such as assisting students in case of medical emergencies, controlling attendance, and organizing behavior reports, among others.

Although a family can provide general prescriptions for conduct, parental models cannot possibly serve as primary sources of the elaborate skills and modes of behavior required at different stages of social development. Complex cultural patterns of behavior are, in large part, transmitted and regulated at a social-systems level.

(Bandura 1969: 255, my emphasis)

Further, it should be noted that in *social learning theory*, *reinforcement* (understood as a person's repeated actions which can model someone else's behavior) is considered a facilitative rather than a necessary condition because there are factors that can influence what people will attend to (Ibid. 1971: 9). With that in mind, I wish to assert that the fact all students attending Intikilla either witness or experience different types or degrees of violence (on a nearly daily basis and in different settings) tremendously influence their behavior (this will be discussed in a further section), as it influenced their parents or grandparents' behavior or integration of models. This observation has relevance for my work as I have argued, in a previous chapter, that experiencing violence increases the likelihood of low school performance or underachievement.

On the other hand, as pointed out by Bandura (1969), children do learn and shape their behavior *from other models or sources*, besides parental figures. The implications this has for Intikilla could indicate that its pedagogy, along with the spaces the circles constitute, which entangles teachers, coordinators and peers can positively influence students' social behavior. The *circles* are one of the recurrent and immediate sources students have to reflect on the fact a violent behavior or an aggression should not be naturalized. This is emphasized by the reaction of coordinators, teachers and peers who upon discussion agree that violence is not positive and any individual should refrain from harming others. The reasons perpetrators usually have to resort to violence are also discussed, creating a wider understanding of the origins of violence. Moreover, children are constantly reminded that a non-violence atmosphere is preferable and about why they should not be violent toward others. Most importantly, the opinions and discussions during *circles*, which argue against violence, are matched through the example of teachers who treat students with care and respect and through constantly

reminding and reinforcing the *Intikilla rules*⁷⁵ that foster respect among peers and teachers.

Friday Plays: Reflecting and Reenacting the Past

On Fridays, different plays are performed in the biggest room of Intikilla, with the front area becoming a stage and chairs and cushions are arranged in rows to fit as many people as possible. Parents, relatives and friends are invited to come and see the plays although a rather small number actually do. Every week, a topic is chosen by Angel, and students join their *Intikilla family* during the week's course to plan and rehearse a play addressing the topic to be presented on stage on Friday. Among the topics there were, for example, street violence, violence toward women or children, ethics or values needed in society, domestic or endangered animals, environmentalism, among others. Intikilla owned many costumes, and most children were eager to wear them before and during the play. Normally, upon a group discussion, it is students who relate to the topic and happen to share a personal story to be turned into the storyline of a play. However, sometimes, the storyline can be made of a mix of personal experiences, or in rare cases, invented. Most stories did not have a happy ending. When this happened, the endings were altered. Under the question *what should have ideally happened at the end?* students suggested alternative endings that reflected their desired outcomes. The following are real stories told by students during *circles*, later turned into plays. Only their end was altered.

José's Story

José stands between his mother and step-father, scared and weeping. Looking at his step-father into the eyes, he pledges for his mother's life. The step-father turns more violent, hitting Jose and beating up his mother, threatening to kill her. He was drunk and became infuriated after hearing Hilda, José's mother, talk about him on the phone to a friend. After the step-father has left the house to continue drinking at a local tavern, José rushes to his neighbors and ask for help. Together they report this to the police, who shortly after captures José's step-father and sends him to prison. He finally admits it was a mistake to hurt his family, regretting his behavior.

⁷⁵ There is a printed set of rules (such as respecting others, not being violence, listening, being kind, etc.) placed in different locations at Intikilla to remind students of the principles Intikilla strives for.

Aurora and Marco's Story

Past midnight, Aurora and Marco, still wearing school uniforms, run across an Intikilla coordinator. No one had opened the door when they arrived home at 18.00. Having no keys, they wandered the streets hoping their parents would turn up. Aurora believes they must be in one of the taverns of Tambo, a neighbor district, and have perhaps taken Randy, their younger brother who is also missing, to the tavern. The coordinator pays for a taxi and goes with them to Tambo. After checking on five taverns in the same block, they find the parents. Loud vernacular music was played and yet the sound of chickens and pigs grunting and wandering in adjacent rooms could be heard. Marco says "mother, I am hungry and cold! We need the keys to go home... you should care more for us". The mother, intoxicated, blames their father for the carelessness. Upset, their father violently pushes her; she pushes back and blames the children, scolding them for getting her in trouble. Finally, under consent of their parents, Aurora, Marco and their brother spend the night at the coordinator's home and return home next day. Now completely sober, their parents apologize to them and reflect on their actions.

Discussing Friday Plays

Friday plays emerged not just from the interest of students to dress up and role play, but also from their wish to share personal stories rather than just opinions. Although the plays follow a story as a guideline, students rarely have set lines. In José's story, we see that his step-father shows apologetic behavior over his actions and that he is convicted for them. In reality, José's step-father continued (as to the end of my fieldwork in late January) to live with him, his mother and a younger sibling. In the case of Aurora and Marco, their parents showed no remorse about their actions and, in fact, punished them the next day and forbade them to attend Intikilla for a week due to 'getting them in trouble' with the coordinator as a witness, alleging only they were to be blamed for forgetting their shared keys at home.

Regarding the structure of the plays, I have found a parallel with them and *psychodrama*. Originally developed by J. Moreno, *psychodrama* is a therapeutic method in which participants use spontaneous dramatization, role playing and dramatic self-presentation (Blatner and Cukier 2007). The purpose of the play or stage dramatization is to gain deeper understanding or insight about a particular situation in the participants' lives (Kellerman 1992). As Friday plays, *psychodrama* is executed from within a group, it has a person directing the play and one person of the group becomes the protagonist, to then focus on a particular situation to enact on stage. Additionally, other members of the group can play other significant roles in the scene (Ibid.). At Intikilla, the groups the plays formed allowed students to act out their feelings or emotions about specific situation (many of which their parents left unaddressed), while also helping them reenact the past and reflect on ideal solutions to the far from pleasant situations they faced.

In multiple cases, students did not act as themselves during the play but opted for taking another role, for instance, acting as one of their parents. In psychodrama, this is known as *role reversal*. *Role reversal* is a technique which aims to promote empathy and understanding about a person (Blatner and Cukier 2007). For the students of Intikilla, this allowed them to see their parents not in the usual hierarchical relationship which sets them to be obedient and accept their acts or decisions, but to take their role and reflect on their outcomes. In acting his story, José, taking the role of his step-father, decided to show remorse and accept punishment as justice for the harm he inflicted. In fact, when acting, some of his words were "I am sorry, I should have not been like this. Forgive me! Bad influences made me like this..." It should also be noticed that the figurative breach in parent-child hierarchies can be done at Intikilla because an environment which evokes trust, sympathy and community support has been established. In her study of postwar reconstruction in Peru, Francine A'ness points out that the production of testimony requires an atmosphere of these characteristics, writing that:

In order to speak about the traumatic event a victim needs to feel safe. She needs to know that what happened in the past has come to an end and, moreover, that

the listener before whom she testifies is someone who will listen and in whom she can trust.

(A'ness 2004: 398)

Similarly, Felman and Laub (1992) wrote that a therapeutic process of constructing a narrative, of reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalizing its events has to be set in motion to overcome trauma by setting it as a memory in the past. Understanding these arguments is essential to understand the role and importance that the Friday plays can have for children. Although the plays have no outcomes that can be measured quantitatively, they do allow students to express emotions and feelings, deepening their understanding of the situations they were immersed in and helping them reflect on different ends and solutions to violence. This can in turn decrease the likelihood of them replicating the same violent behavior.

Lessons from Managing Violence and Disruptions

As previously pointed out, Intikilla has a non-violence policy. This means that, unlike what happens at many public schools in Cusco, neither teachers nor coordinators physically or verbally harm or punish students. Similarly, students are asked to cooperate in forging a peaceful learning atmosphere. However, several students at Intikilla were either physically aggressive towards others or disrupted their learning. In the cases where this became a constant and the approach of talking to the student and getting them to reflect upon their behavior did not work, parents were notified or students suspended from school for a couple days or up to one week, expecting they would reflect on their behaviors and not repeat them. The insight I gained from these cases is that students are hardly ever violent or present disrupting behavior for no reason. As I will show, the behavior of these students was deeply influenced by the situations they experienced at home. Their behavior had been, in several cases, assumed to be the result of a medical condition, which dangerously took attention from the family situations they were experiencing.

Mateo's Case

When I spoke with a parent or relative of children with high degrees of misconduct, about four of them (out of seven) alleged their children had been diagnosed as hyperactive, as too *nervous* and acted like they did because they were mistreated by a parent (usually fathers) or a step-parent. For instance, Mateo's mother said of her husband that he "*makes the boy nervous all the time*" and that "*he is always finding a reason to punish him*". Other parents said their children needed *tratamientos* (medical treatment) or medicines to control their hyperactivity but that lack of money did not allow it.

Mateo (age 10) would often start fights with other students at Intikilla, sometimes randomly hitting them, causing teachers to come and stop the fight. Mateo then would kick and push teachers away. Also, he would often leave his class to go to other classrooms where students were working on projects or were having a meeting with their *Intikilla family* to play, talk (of random topics), read out loud or tease others, disrupting the class and annoying students.

Through Mateo's mother and some coordinators, I learned he had been diagnosed with ADHD (attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder) and had been prescribed medicines for this condition. Although he did not take these medicines as frequently as prescribed due to his parents' financial constraints, they seemed to affect him significantly. In fact, Mateo's mother attributed his behavior to them, saying "*the medications are to be blamed; I am not even sure if they really help him or just make him worse*". Mateo had come bruised up to Intikilla in several occasions. If he or Lila, his little sister, got their clothes dirty, they would cry much, afraid of their father's reaction.⁷⁶ Also, the fact Mateo was not doing well at school prompted his father's rage more often.

On November 13th during a *circle*, the theme was *dreams and wishes* and students were free to stand and make an out loud wish, to what the others would say "may it be so!" Mateo and Lila stood up and wished for their father to stop drinking and beating their mother.

Two days later, Mateo's mother came to Intikilla and dropped off Lila. After seeing me, she came closer to greet me and I asked about Mateo. After a long pause, in tears she

⁷⁶As Mateo and Lila, most children at Intikilla reported to be scolded and sometimes hit by their parents if they dirtied or damaged their clothes.

told me he was temporarily at his aunt's house being taken care of, as last night his father had hit him due to trying to defend her when he hit her. As Mateo's aunt did, I too encouraged her to report this to the police, offering help to do so, but she declined, alleging that "*the police won't take this seriously... they won't help... plus, I do not want to harm my husband by reporting him*". Later that day, while talking to a neighbor who is a police officer, I was told that a witness's testimony was needed before the police could convict or punish anyone. Similarly I was told that many women have taken back their accusations and begged their husbands were released, returning home with them.

Rosa's Case

In nearly all settings (such as *circles*, classes, *Friday plays*), Rosa (age 10) did not seem aware of the situations going on and the kind of roles the participants in them had. If someone talked on stage about a serious matter, she would interrupt to speak out loud about how it related to her life, to the point she could interrupt (a person's talk) ten times or more. Equally, in nearly every class, she overlapped most conversations going on. She had a hard time remaining still and focused on any given task for more than five minutes, constantly going from one classroom to another, interrupting ongoing work and, as a classmate of her expressed "*loudly saying things out of the blue*", a situation which gained her the nickname of "*the crazy one*". Rosa had a younger sister who had lessons in a different classroom. Rosa felt a strong wish to check on her a couple times a day "*to see if she is doing fine*".

Because of Rosa's neglect of doing homework and overall behavior, her mother was notified. At Intikilla she explained that Rosa "*es una chica demasiado nerviosa*" (is a very 'nervous' girl) and had been diagnosed with hyperactivity by a psychologist last year. When I asked why she thought Rosa was *nerviosa*, she said "*it is her father who makes her nervous*". Soon I learned her father was a drug addict who consumed cocaine when Rosa's mother was pregnant with her. When drugged, he would have hallucinations or rage attacks. This greatly affected his family, who witnessed his episodes. Sometimes he would go missing for days, until one day he would return home, sober or drugged, early, in the evening while Rosa and her sister were alone at home or in the middle of the night to disturb them. Due to her apparent unawareness and restlessness, Rosa had been prescribed medication. She did not take it because her

family could not afford the long-term treatment. Instead, she was given chamomile tea (*Matricaria recutita*) or valerian tea (*Valeriana officinalis*), common local folk remedies known to promote muscle relaxation and help with anxiety or sleep disorders.

Rosa and Mateo's cases illustrate my argument that violence has a deep impact on children and on their performance at school. Their behaviors correlate to the family situations they were experiencing and it is not unlikely ADHD, restlessness and nervousness, for them, are not just psychological or circumstantial medical condition but the result of exposure to violence. These cases serve also to prepare the arena to discuss the role Intikilla has in including children of different backgrounds.

'Teaching Springs Possibilities': A Discussion of Intikilla's Role

I realized what I really wished was for these children to have a better chance in life, to achieve freedom from the constraints they were born within, to achieve happiness. After much pondering, I realized helping or guiding their learning process would be more beneficial to them than, as many projects do, just handing out notebooks and clothes. I have the strong belief that teaching creates possibilities; educating the mind, supporting their learning and showing them an alternative way of living, where they receive acknowledgement, support and affection, where they are listened to. Although this might not change the world, it does make a difference (...)

Angel (founder)

Earlier, I have posed the question "why was there a need for a school like Intikilla in Cusco?" Upon examining different aspects which constitute Intikilla and based on the empirical evidence gathered during fieldwork, I argue that Intikilla addresses specific educational, social and emotional needs which public schools and the families of the attending students cannot completely fulfill or neglect. To support this argument I will discuss the three main functions I have identified:

Educational support provision: As previously discussed, most students, after the nearly five hours of daily teaching at public school, are left without further direct support or assistance from parents and state school teachers. This is reflected in their

(circumstantial) inability to fulfill school assignments, do homework or poor comprehension of school subjects. As it has many teachers, Intikilla offers personalized educational help and small student groups (a ratio of 4 to 5 students per teacher). This can target the needs of students, as integral educational support is given if, for instance, a student struggles with reading comprehension, if he or she has been assigned homework which requires further (or any) research, usually beyond students' textbooks, to be answered, or if there is a particular topic a student wishes to grasp or understand. A teacher then sits by the side of the student and guides their learning process in a collaborative effort to find answers. It is essential to show students that they can also learn independently, by providing them with the right books and materials or pointing at specific texts.

Family and community help functions: Nearly all parents are busy, primarily due to their jobs, having to care for other (usually younger) children and their households. Most jobs demand long work hours and are essential to provide their families with a source of income. By sending their children to Intikilla, parents make sure they will be assisted in doing homework or assignments they cannot help with, while experiencing a safe environment, as opposed to leaving their children at home, alone, or free to wander around, taking care of themselves. Additionally, parents that do not count with the cultural capital, in the form of finished high school studies or higher education, and are therefore not able to help their children turn, to Intikilla to fulfill this role or function. In the case of misbehaving children, parents are contacted and advised on what can be done to improve their situation. Also, during the *circles*, great reflexivity is fostered upon a series of social and ethical issues, and although I cannot quite measure the long-term outcomes or effectiveness they might have,

Social-emotional support to students: The quality of interpersonal relations between students, teachers and coordinators has allowed many students to open up and share deep concerns, daily struggles or quotidian events. The trust which is established through these relations, which oppose traditional public school hierarchies or student-teacher distances, has had positive outcomes. For instance, students who were sexually abused were able to open up and upon an Intikilla coordinator reporting it to the police and their aggressor was convicted. Most students endure high degrees of emotional abuse at home or even at school, where they are insulted, punished, silenced or regarded as worthless, thus harming their self-esteem. At Intikilla, on the other hand, students'

opinions are highly valued and in fact encouraged; teachers follow the principles of treating students with respect and affection, not just assisting with homework or learning but also asking about their days and hearing what the students wish to share every day. This creates a positive impact and within my fieldwork months, I saw at least five students positively change conflictive behavior or quiet students become more open and participative.

It should be noted that although Cusco does count with *alternative* schools (i.e. Montessori, Steiner schools), these, as it happens with other private schools, are costly schools and only families with high incomes and resources can send their children to them. Therefore I sustain that the role Intikilla has for its attendees and their families is of great value: it shortens the breach caused by social inequality, which deprived and continues to deprive poor students from quality education, which in turn, as previously discussed, will enormously impact their futures.

CHAPTER SIX

Education and the Reproduction of Inequalities

“The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.”

— Plutarch

Introduction

In previous chapters I have addressed the different elements within the PES and the various circumstances in the lives of students which inevitably contribute or lead to low performance. Regarding the elements of the PES, I discussed the importance of teachers in delivering curricular contents to students and the difficulties that teachers experience. To round this discussion, in this chapter I will analyze qualitative aspects of student-teacher interactions. Peru has been referred to as the country with the lowest education standards and quality. Through classroom ethnographies, my findings will show that the methodology used by teachers in class vastly consists of repetition, request for obedience and the transmission of facts (curricular contents). As such, these teaching practices are not conducive of reflexive thinking or autonomy to inquire or create. Success at school therefore largely relies on memory to (almost literally) repeat previously taught facts. The chapter will discuss *why* the public PES, conceived this way, most often favors the reproduction of social hierarchies and inequality.

Approaches to Teaching: A Copy-and-Repeat Teaching Method

It is an early morning at Terra Nova. The history teacher is absent and his students were left drawing and playing, just as it happened on Tuesday. Two hours later, Maja, the Spanish language teacher arrives and after greeting us, begins to copy on the board grammar rules and examples of their usage. She says ‘I would prefer to dictate you the rules and examples, but then I get to know that you don’t copy the words as you should, making gruesome spelling mistakes’. She waits for students to be finished copying, and then copies more of her notes on the board, additionally writing some exercises. Ronny, a student, asks: should not the word sapato on the board be spelled zapato (shoe)? Maja

denies this. A minute later, Ronny raises his hand again, saying he did not understand the lesson 'that well', asking for help to start doing the exercises. Maja responds with a 'try, and if you can't, go over it at home, how is it that the others can do it and you can't?' I approach Maja to ask if she would like me to help Ronny and tell her he was right about the spelling of zapato, to what she smiles hesitant and pull a dictionary out to check. She tells me "well, yes, it is zapato, but it does not matter. Don't bother helping Ronny. What difference does it make? You know, Ronny's father is heladero (ice cream street seller); his mother is empleada (maid/domestic helper), his sister sells jelly in front of the school. What future awaits him? Soon he will be selling ice cream too or polishing shoes for pennies. He doesn't need to be good at Spanish, he needs to be good at math, adding and subtracting..."

Fieldnotes

My field notes serve to introduce a dynamic I witnessed during the many classes I sat through during fieldwork, a dynamic several educators and teachers considered normal. The curriculum and the schedule planned for a course was interpreted by many as topics to be presented to students before quickly rushing to the next. Copying on the board or dictating the lessons and waiting for students to finish or do exercises or work, sometimes given a rushed explanation of the topic and leaving them with much homework had become the accepted pattern. After all, teachers also did not have much time. The fact that the classroom had around 35 students and one teacher did not make things easier.

When four children of different school years asked me for help with recently taught concepts and topics in math and Spanish language, we all sat at a table and I explained one-by-one the concepts, solving with them some exercises and letting them solve half on their own. This brought to my attention that they had not grasped previous concepts they needed to know in order to move with ease to new concepts. I asked if they ever asked their teachers for help. They said no. The reasons were diverse, such as "classmates call you stupid or ignorant if you raise your hand and ask, they mock you", "the teacher would say you haven't paid attention", "the teacher doesn't know how to

explain the concepts”, “sometimes the teacher is absent several classes and when he returns, he explains too fast anyways”.

Consistently during my time in Lima, I observed many students did not grasp the concepts they were being taught. Sometimes these concepts are expanded over the week with the purpose of having students learn as much as possible. For example, in a math class, after the first lesson, many exercises would be written on the board for students to solve them. The teacher would then just work on grading the homework of students from other classes, or would just leave the room while students solved exercises. The issue was that more than 60% of the class had no clue of what they were supposed to solve them. Thus, upon returning, the teacher would notice many had not solved the exercises and get upset. Ramon (teacher) said that in those cases, students are usually given more exercises so that they can practice at home and improve. He added:

The problem is also that some students are late and therefore miss the first hour. Those who are here have no excuse, though. I tell them “sons, you all have brains like the others. How come the students at the other school where I work can solve the exercises and you can’t? Study at home some more”. Then, because I care, I give them more exercises as homework.

Ramon did notice something important. At most public schools, when a student is late, (even for a few minutes), they will be punished. For instance, some will not be allowed to enter the school and have to stay outside, on the street, and wait for an hour or two before they are allowed to enter. In other cases, they can wait the hour or two, standing at the school’s main patio. After this, they would be scolded; their delay is recorded by the auxiliaries and they can finally join their classrooms. This results in their missing more teaching time. Besides this, there are qualitative aspects in teaching which cause students to get bored and rarely challenged. Mirta (student) said: *“We have already had this class before. Look, we were also left similar exercises. In the holidays we had to solve one hundred equations. Now we are back and it is more of the same.”* As Mirta, other students said to be *“bored and tired”* of some lessons. Indeed, as noted by teachers, the curricular contents aim to “consolidate” the knowledge students are supposed to acquire through classes. This implies the repetition of concepts or going back to them after a while. For some students, the problem is that revisiting old concepts

is not done with any new twist or challenge. In spite of this repetition, a large number of students still struggled to understand. This is reflected in their answers (such as *I did not solve the exercises or did homework because I don't know how*) or in their homework. In fact, most students try to do homework. Many of them do it wrongly. Eva (teacher) said:

At this school, when students fail to do homework or do it wrongly, although we (teachers) give them (written) bad grades or marks on their notebooks, in our registries we often help them, giving them extra points. Without that extra help, many would have problems. You have to understand their background and know some simply cannot do better. Look at them. Some are poor. Some come dirty, untidy, others even have lice. I know some of their parents...anyways; many of these children are not here to learn; they just care to pass the year.

I found some parallel to this in the findings of the research team of the Education Ministry. They reported that “apathy is a characteristic of many teachers, who are unmotivated (and say): I have no difficulties, because I do not try hard enough; these kids won't learn anyway” (MINEDU 2006: 432). Further, I realized how it is possible that children graduate from school without mastering elemental competences or knowledge. In most of my interviews with teachers, they admitted to have helped students. This is indeed done to help them pass the year but also to avoid complaints. As Norma (mother) told me, there have been instances where many students fail the exams. In these cases, the blame can fall on teachers and not on students. Teachers then are reported and usually a new exam can be designed for students. Thus, teachers often strive for having just a small number of students that fail. Those cases, which cause students to repeat the year, according to Norma are “*extreme cases, where the student has to be really bad and has been absent, also showing no interest for school*”.

Aspects of the Teaching of English

It is also worth noticing that the pattern of repetition is profoundly ingrained in most classes I attended. An excerpt from my field notes will illustrate this best.

Alejandro (teacher) starts his English lesson for sixth-graders by announcing today they would learn present time verbs. He begins to copy a long list of verbs and writes their meaning in Spanish. His students are given time to copy all of these verbs and their meanings. After, he says "Now we will do as usual. I read the word and you repeat." Promptly, all students reply, repeating in unison after Alejandro. After this is over, students must make drawings on their notebooks to illustrate each verb.

English lessons in Peru are not implemented in all public schools. English is taught mainly to high school students twice a week for ninety minutes. However, especially in Lima, many elementary schools are implementing lessons. In most cases, parents must pay a small amount of money. Alejandro's way of teaching English was very similar to that of other two teachers at Terranova. It is also a way I recall to have experienced during my time at public schools in Lima whilst growing up. In all of the sessions I observed, students were not taught how sentences can be structured. The emphasis was placed on writing and repeating rather than speaking the language and constructing coherent sentences to express themselves. For example, a student would learn the verbs *to walk, to eat, to study and to sleep* but not sentences such as *I walk to school or I eat at home with my family*. Additionally, homework consisted on writing each verb at least twenty times on their notebooks. Further, the teachers I met were not fluent in English and mispronounced many verbs and words.

In the past, I worked as an English teacher at a private institute for a brief period. There, the way teachers taught their classes was completely different. Not only did they use graphics and other resources and even would mimic the verbs so the students would discover the meaning themselves (instead of copying the meanings); the repetition of words was only a class aspect. The purpose of repeating words had to do with exposing students to the sounds and ways the words must be pronounced. Additionally, through examples, students would learn how to construct sentences with the verbs. After giving additional vocabulary, they learned that by joining a subject, a verb and an object or nouns they could construct their own sentences. They were encouraged to try this and read their sentences in groups. Games were also planned, and songs listened to in order to teach and stimulate. The results obtained were often positive. I had wondered if this kind of teaching would also be good with children of poverty backgrounds. Later during

fieldwork, a teacher named Jane arrived and tried a similar method of teaching with a group of fifteen Intikilla students. The results were very satisfactory. Certainly, the group size was also of great help, but also the fact that this type of methodology engages children and encourages them to “produce” or create their own sentences and speak and participate. This is something the “*copy and repeat*” methodology of many schools does not place emphasis on.

Students Who Struggle with Reading and Writing

From my first day at Intikilla, I was very alarmed by the fact that many second and third graders had problems reading and writing the most elemental sentences or words. I first noticed it when I look into their notebooks to help them do homework. Angela and Arturo were the first students I tutored. In their reading and writing (*comunicacion*) course, their homework consisted on copying many times the new words they learned. Angela and Arturo had misspelled many words. In other cases they had written wrongly and the words looked like scribbles where the meaning could hardly be figured out. Similarly, reading was a struggle to them. When trying to read a story, they could not match all the written words to their actual sounds.

It is surprising that over the months at Intikilla, other teachers and I noticed that teachers correcting or evaluating homework had given students good marks in most cases and said nothing about the many misspells and even worse, scribbles. In fact, some teachers misspelled and copied words on the board. Then students would copy them many times on their notebooks (as part of their homework), misspelled as well.

This critical situation took me and other teachers to try a different approach. We would have to start teaching them the alphabet and syllables again. Most did outstanding progress very fast and were able to read much better. It is also worth noticing that among the students that read and write with just a few difficulties, the vast majority per se do not completely understand the content or meaning of *what* they read. This is expressed in the fact that most of them cannot answer the questions they get in *reading comprehension* classes, called *lectorcito* by some of the children. These classes were given more hours as a part of new state policies seeking to improve students’ performance in this course. The class’s homework consists of reading different texts from the book they have been given. The book includes different questions and

exercises related to the text. Notwithstanding the value of this approach, I observed most students in second, third and partially fourth grade struggle with this. These findings are relevant because they show the way classes are conducted does not promote coherent learning. The fact that teachers can overlook the difficulties of their students and do not tackle them has inevitably affected students. Thus, when they reach higher school years, even if the majority learns to read and write, they reach these levels without mastering many other essential knowledge and competences.

Lessons from a History Class

I was able to observe two different history classes at Terranova. The way the classes were structured only differed in the fact that one of the teachers introduced the topic before copying. In each of their classes, both teachers dictated to students, reading from their notes. After students were done copying, a description of the historical events the class focused on followed, with teachers often re-reading their notes. Very few students made questions and the way the facts were presented was very unilateral, without any further analysis being done. For instance, a teacher would say “*the war was started by our neighbor country; this was done to own more land and rights over the ocean*”. However, the reasons why the access to a wider coastline and a land full of resources are valued were not discussed or further explored.

From different sessions of class observation, my impression was that most teachers considered education as a process mainly consisting of filling up the minds of students with information. In this process, the ability to foster curiosity, to promote independent thinking, analytical capacities and creative had been lost. As such, when students were going to sit exams, they were greatly concerned with memorizing taught facts as accurately as they could. Moreover, great indifference had developed among teachers. Many did not believe they could have a great impact on a student’s life or development.

Further, in distinguishing qualitative aspects of teaching sessions in class, it is worth noticing that ultimately students interiorize the teaching approaches they are taught. As such, they have learned it is mostly their memories and ability to repeat facts, follow procedures repeatedly and achieve results (as in math class) that matters. The following section will throw more light on how they cope with exams to pass and respond to

teachers and parents' expectations. Inevitably, as I have shown in a previous chapter, failure to learn (or memorize) is also connected to punitive practices.

Teaching to Test and Passing Exams to Go Forward

Exams are good to observe some of the classroom dynamics and what knowledge teachers or the educational system value. At Intikilla and Terranova, I got hold of some exams students had written. I noticed that most exam questions largely tested memory. Whereas a math exam included a list of problems to solve, in most cases, getting the right answer mattered more than the procedure. A history exam nearly always included questions that demanded very factual answers. They did not ask for any analysis or admitted to different possibilities as an answer. In fact, after analyzing ten exams, I observed the same pattern. For example, there was an over concern with memorizing dates, names and places. (i.e. *When did the Tarapaca battle take place? Write the day and year. Who was Andres Caceres? Where was he born?*).

A science exam asked students to accurately reproduce the laws and properties they had copied from the board. While comparing exams of same-class students, it amazed me that those who did an almost precise transcription of what the teacher copied got the highest score and those who created examples of their own to illustrate these laws got fewer points.

When observing Intikilla students study for oral exams, I noticed many of them were keen on memorizing, letter by letter, fragments of what they read on their books and notebooks, that in spite of admittedly ignoring the meaning of some of the words or not grasping the concept. They repeated these phrases many times. Paulo, a student aged 14, told me *“that’s what our teachers want, if you do it this way and say exactly what they wrote or what the book says, then you will pass the course with a good grade”*. Indeed, many teachers at public schools correct exams based on how factual and text-book like the answer is.

In this situation, where studying has become synonymous with memorizing and where failing exams or school year have become physically and emotionally punished, many children have discovered clever ways to pass exams. Some girls write information or notes on their legs and cover it with their skirts; others write on their posterior forearms or back of bracelets, others keep a small folded paper sheet with the needed information that may pass around to others. A few students have a system with peers useful for multiple choice exams (exams where you are given four possible answers and must circle one of them). After being asked by his classmate, a student could touch a different body part to give an answer (i.e. touching the head meant A, a nose scratch meant B). The punishment for being discovered cheating at school is quite severe. A student can have their exam completely annulled or be taken to the principal and even face suspension. For instance, at Intikilla, Nilton and Andrea (students) told me that many students get away with cheating. However, they recalled an occasion where this was not the case. One of their classmates was physically punished by the teacher, who hit him with a stick on his back and reported him. He was ordered to stand at a corner for the remaining exam time. The next day his relative in charge also slapped him (publicly) upon being called at school to meet the principal. Andrea tells:

El Paco (her classmate) did not come to class for a few days after they discovered his cheating and called his parents. Failing this exam meant that he failed another course, maybe repeating the year (...) when he returned, he was bruised up; he surely fue molido a palos (was beaten up).

I reflected upon how naturally and how much the expression *molido a palos* and its variations (“*le dieron con palo*”, “*le cayo palo*”) has been used by students during my fieldwork. The expression literally means “*completely crushed by sticks*”, referring to be beaten up with a hard and large wood stick but also belts or fists. Moreover, most children had stopped reporting the violence (physical or not that went on at school by teachers or other students) to their parents or relatives, believing that doing so would just get them in trouble. Admitting punishment by some teachers would imply they did something wrong (for the school authorities or teachers’ eyes) in the first place, which would in turn infuriate their parents. In some cases, they would be punished twice, at school and at home. I spoke with Marta, a school teacher that criticized the physical punishments some of her colleagues, mostly males, inflicted on students. Marta asserted:

Students do not understand with blows. They need words. Unfortunately some teachers do not think about the harm they do, some even cheat on their wives, drink alcohol in cantinas or at parties and then next day go to work and pick on students or do not prepare classes. They do as little as possible at school.

She added that “*there are good teachers that do care; sometimes it is not all about the grades and obedience but about forming better men and women*”. Marta’s words reflect what an increasing number of children notice every day, that many teachers do not care and have little motivation to work. It is important to notice that there are exceptions. However, a large number of teachers discontent with their teaching conditions or other circumstances (life conditions, students’ learning needs and backgrounds, etc.) neither benefit students nor stimulate their learning processes.

Are Students Empty Vessels? The Banking Model of Education

My ethnographical findings regarding pupils, their teachers and their focus on the transmission of facts can be best discussed from a *critical social research* perspective. Paulo Freire (2005) criticized the *banking concept of education*, in which students are viewed as an empty vessel or recipients to be filled (with facts or knowledge) by the teacher, in the process inhibiting their creative power. The scope of action of this dynamic extends to students “*only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits*” (2005: 72). This student-teacher dynamic was seen as detrimental for liberation from oppression, an act Freire saw as crucial and possible through the poor being fully aware of the ways in which they were oppressed. This was to be attained through a different education, as presented in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire’s magnum opus.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed appeared in 1970, the same year Bourdieu and Passeron’s *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* was published. Freire and Bourdieu start out from similar places: domination. Freire, however, uses a word with a more revolutionary connotation: oppression (Burawoy 2010). Freire promoted an education that did not replicate the culture of the oppressor, represented by the elites. About the oppressed class, he wrote:

The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their idea is to be

men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity (...). But their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression.

(Freire, 1970: 45)

This is similar to Bourdieu's notion of *Habitus*, which ultimately means internalizing a set social structure. Schooling or formal education are seen by Bourdieu and Freire as reproducing class hierarchies and with it, domination or oppression. Nevertheless Freire asserts that the oppressed could be liberated from oppression through education and *conscientização*⁷⁷, a process by which, realizing their oppression, they took necessary action to break free from their social and mental constraints. For Freire, a critical pedagogy must rid the oppressed of the oppressor, which can be achieved through a different interaction between teacher and student, in which each learns from the other. Thus, teachers must too be educated. This means that teachers must acquire a completely different teaching approach. A system which prioritizes repetition of facts and their storage in students' minds would be changed for one which in turn should foster critical thinking. Learning to question and being opened to question are essential aspects of this new pedagogy.

The Role of Public Education

During one of my visits to the Universidad San Antonio Abad in Cusco, I asked a group of students I had met during a symposium if it was difficult or not to have been granted admission to the university. From their answers, I learned that, prior to university; they all had gone to public schools. Rafael (student) recalled:

When I finished secondary school, I was determined to pursue my dream of studying veterinary at university. With my savings, I paid for the very costly admission exam. The experience sent me back to reality. Almost nothing of what I had learned at school all these years was useful. I felt I knew nothing; my score told me I was a really bad student. A year after, with some family help, I was

⁷⁷ The term can be translated as the development of critical consciousness, consciousness raising or consciousness development.

able to sign up at an academia. Almost two years after, I finally passed the entrance exam.

Likewise, Rafael's classmates had to enroll to an academia⁷⁸ and study for one to up to three years to acquire the required knowledge to be able to pass the exam and be admitted. It is worth noticing that thousands of high school students from public schools in the country wishing to attend university come from poor and low-middle class families, which together represent the 98% of the population (BID 2013). To pass the entrance university exams requires higher knowledge and preparation. Preparation requires an investment of both time and money, investing on books or paying monthly tuitions to *academias*, private teaching centers that prepare students in the myriad of subjects they will be tested on during university entrance exams. Further, a university exam includes several analytical questions and questions challenging verbal and mathematical reasoning and understanding. A student attending a public school, especially in urban-marginal areas or areas with greater concentration of poverty is rarely taught that. Additionally, a great number of students cannot afford paying for the university entrance exam (for some, it can be as expensive as a full month salary). In these cases, finding quick employment or short-duration technical studies that lead to employment becomes a priority. These jobs most often provide very low wages and demand long hours. In short, under these circumstances, much of the youth end up in a subordinate position. This happens mainly due to their lack of academic qualifications and credentials. This situation draws parallels with Bourdieu's notion of schooling as symbolic domination. In the following section, I will explore Bourdieu's views on education to throw light on how the education system aids the reproduction of social inequality.

Formal Education and the Reproduction of Social Hierarchies and Inequality

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990 [1970]: 167) argued that the role of education and schooling is to reproduce domination. This is done, for example, by academic

⁷⁸ Academias are institutes where students are taught by a usually highly qualified staff of teachers, the different courses they will be tested at during the university exam. They are private and students must pay an enrollment fee and a monthly amount or tuition.

qualifications which privilege and hide the cultural capital inherited by the dominant. By completely delegating the power of selection to the academic institution, the privileged classes are able to appear to be surrendering to a perfectly neutral authority the power of transmitting power from one generation to another. Thus, masked under the perception of being universal, public education creates restrictions for the dominated classes. They further added:

Schooling secures the active participation of students and teachers in the pursuit of credentials that entails the learning of legitimate culture, while obscuring the reproduction of class domination that is the effect of such participation. Securing participation is education's technical function (inculcation) while obscuring class domination is its social function (class selection).
(Ibid.,p. 164-7).

The hardship many students wishing to study at public universities face does not stop them from trying. When I asked the group of university students why they had wished to enroll into university, the answers pointed out that “*a man or woman who studies can have a better life.*” Some of them specified this meant that with a university education “*one can get a good job, work, money and provide for oneself and the family. You won't have to suffer to make a living like your parents did*”. Others pointed out that the social and economic benefits join the reward of doing what one loves. Mauricio (student) said “*studying can transform your life. A university title can bring many opportunities*”. These students, as they families did, greatly praised the value of education, as they believed education to be a liberating force which fostered social mobility.

Against arguments like those of the university students, Pierre Bourdieu wrote:

Through its formally irreproachable verdicts, which always serve the dominant classes, since they never sacrifice the technical interests of those classes except to the advantage of their social interests, the School is better able than ever to contribute to the reproduction of the established order (...). The mobility of individuals, far from being incompatible with reproduction of the structure of class relations, can help to conserve that structure, by guaranteeing social stability through the controlled selection of a limited number of individuals, and so giving credibility to the ideology of social mobility.

(1990: 167).

In their book *Reproduction* (1990), Bourdieu and Passeron dispel the illusions that schooling can be a vehicle for actual social transformation. Indeed, for them, the cases where individuals from poverty background achieve higher education and positive social mobility would just be very few exceptions that will overall not affect inequality and class hierarchies. They believed domination could only being countered by creating universal access to the cultural achievements and privileges that the bourgeois society or elites enjoy. Paulo Freire, on the other hand, sees in this “*the perfection of domination*”. These two views are antithetical approaches to the same problem: the way in which education reproduces domination (Burawoy 2008).

My findings note that domination resulting from class hierarchies occurs since someone is born. In Peru, as I discussed before, a great number of the population live in poverty; further, extreme poverty is especially present in some rural areas. Similarly, acquiring class mobility and detaching oneself from prevalent racial labels involves the acquisition of higher education. The acquisition of higher education most often requires that students count with a material, social and cultural capital. In cases where poverty in different degrees is present, is exactly that poverty which becomes an obstacle to achieve higher education and class mobility.

Based on my experience and time spent navigating through the PES, both as a student, a teacher, and later on, after years of reflexive distance, a researcher last year, I argue that the PES in Peru fosters and maintains high levels of social and economic inequality in the country. This is done through schools and schooling practices. In addition to not delivering quality education to students throughout the country, the PES has positioned itself in many instances as an obstacle and a burden, especially for the poorest people in the country.

Undoubtedly, children that have access to private education of at least a regular quality level or those that benefit from private education at the most expensive and prestigious schools in the country possess more opportunities to reproduce their social positioning and the advantages these bring. For instance, a student in the last years of Peruvian high school learns mathematics, social science and basic English. However, with the way and knowledge students are taught at public schools, it is impossible for them to be accepted at any public university or have basic English communication skills. A student in one of

the best twenty private schools of Lima, for instance, is already fluent in English and can master it at an academic an academic level, in addition to learning French or German. These students also have classes involving business management, accounting and economics, where they learn to develop businesses of their own, managing budgets and human resources through the development of school projects. Mathematics, as English, is taught at a high level, which would give them high SAT scores that can grant them access to international private universities. Readings of international finance and social journals as well as financial newspapers are part of the term courses and suggested reading. Students at these schools can also rely on paid private tutors if needed. It goes beyond the scope of my thesis to illustrate the multiple ways in which the curriculum elaborated for public schooling differs from that the wealthy or affluent have access to, both in design, content and actual practice, however the above example sought to name a few of the differences to illustrate my point. These differences, of course, extend also to teachers, school infrastructure, and so on. Further, the network they form among wealthy classmates and their well-positioned families has secured in many cases high paid job positions after school or university.

According to Noam Chomsky (1995), mass education was *designed to turn independent farmers into docile, passive tools of production*. Like Freire (2005), he argues that a lot of the educational system is designed for obedience and passivity, thus preventing people from being independent and creative. This is reflected in the way classes are structured not just in Peru, as my findings show, but in other countries and contexts. Chomsky argues that the goal of education should be to produce free men, not commodities, moreover signaling the degradation, oppression and violence of the industrial capitalist system, which not only dehumanize people but was radically reducing their intellectual level. In Peru, where poverty and being indigenous go, in most cases, hand in hand and where most students who drop out of school do it precisely due to poverty (Lavado & Gallegos 2005; Cueto, 2004), it is inevitable to point out to the fact that the lack of academic credentials can limit social mobility. Lack of formal, higher education most often leaves physical labor, technical jobs and other low-paid jobs as a certain option. In that regard, Bourdieu and Passeron asserted:

In a society in which the obtaining of social privileges depends more and more closely on possession of academic credentials, the School does not only have the

function of ensuring discreet succession to a bourgeois estate which can no longer be transmitted directly and openly. This privileged instrument of the bourgeois society which confers on the privileged the supreme privilege of not seeing themselves as privileged manages the more easily to convince the disinherited that they owe their scholastic and social destiny to their lack of gifts or merits, because in matters of culture absolute dispossession excludes awareness of being dispossessed.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990 [1970]: 210)

For Bourdieu and Passeron education is undoubtedly a form of domination and academic certification becomes the vehicle to justify and transmit its domination (1990: 209-10). This symbolic domination instills a deep sense of inferiority in the dominated who see themselves as unmeritorious or inadequate, as opposed to privileged classes see themselves.

My students and their parents did not possess the *symbolic capital* (i.e. prestige and honor) or *cultural capital* (i.e. a good education, academic credentials) Bourdieu (1984) acknowledged as advantageous in society. As I discussed in chapters 3 and 4, as a result of the high degrees of inequality in Peru, students face a myriad of problems in trying to attain a balance between life and school. Notwithstanding these difficulties, they, and most of their parents believed schooling could become their way out of poverty and limitations.

Education as a Transformative Force: Toward a Post-Colonial Education

Bourdieu (1990) would have argued against positions like the one expressed by students about the returns of education and the possibilities it fostered. He had stressed that the success stories about poor or middle class people getting an education and succeeding in life by changing their social position are planned exceptions by dominant classes to create the illusion that everybody has the same chances in life to overcome social constraints (Ibid: 167). As education is the vehicle of class reproduction and therefore, dominance of the elites toward lower classes, Bourdieu considered education to have no power in changing social structures and to contest domination.

I would like to argue against this assertion by exploring a key concept Freire (2005) named a requirement for education to be an emancipatory force from oppression. In contrast to Bourdieu, Freire stresses the importance of giving native populations an education which was simultaneously new and anti-colonial and not just an extension of the culture of the colonizer. Conceived this way, education was the vehicle to overcome their condition. How do we then create this anti-colonial education? For Freire it would emerge from critical dialogue between teachers and students and it meant to listen to the voices of the oppressed to find solutions, with them, to the problems they had. Schooling this way should serve to generate inquires and critical consciousness that upon reflection would find solutions.

In the Peruvian case, such an education would imply to prepare a generation of children and youngsters to strive for equality, justice and inclusion. Family hierarchies which legitimize violence (Harvey, 1994) at home and at schools, legitimizing the corporal punishment of children would properly be addressed if not removed. Similarly, such an education would seek to address the high degrees of inequality that find roots in colonial times. In a classroom context, the conceptions of teaching should aim not to transfer knowledge but to create the conditions for its production (Freire, 2004).

Bourdieu and Passeron's emphasis on structure over agency (1990) differs from Paulo Freire's emphasis on agency and the possibilities an anti-colonial education brings to change social structures or oppression. Overall, although Bourdieu offers a valuable framework to analyze how inequality is reproduced through the education system, I believe that Freire's approach gives a better opportunity to identify the high degrees of inequality present and created by the education system. Most importantly, it gives a better opportunity to contest the social and economic inequalities. The students I met undoubtedly strove for succeeding at school but the obstacles they encountered, such as poverty, violence and a low-quality education system, unable to address their needs, deeply affected their lives and school performance. As such, equality or even the extension of the culture and privileges of upper classes may not be the answer to their struggles. Benavides (2007) noticed that in areas of poverty, an equal allocation of resources did not make a substantial difference to students. This is because students of poverty backgrounds require material and social investments to be bigger to tackle the effects caused by nearly five centuries of inequality. To that I can add that not

everybody has the same needs and will necessarily wish models which esteem from bourgeois culture are extended to them. An anti-colonial education thus can give valuable tools to contest inequality. Such an education would have into consideration students' rich cultural past and the elements that their culture deem as important, while fostering critical thinking to efficiently contest the mechanisms I have before argued caused, foster and maintain inequality.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has explored the various factors which influence and cause low performance or underachievement among primary and secondary school students attending public schools in the areas where my research took place. As I outlined in the introduction, different national and international academic assessment tests have consistently placed Peru at the bottom of all ranks, thus regarding it as Latin America's lowest performing country. The results showed that an alarming number of children have difficulty attaining the most basic math and reading comprehension skills. In this work, I have explored and analyze the reasons why, despite more than a decade of launched state policies, student performance has not been raised.

The first question I posed sought to know exactly which factors influence low performance among students. In trying to answer this question, my fieldwork findings showed there were two important aspects to look at in order to find coherent answers. The first aspect involves the quality of a school's facilities, curricular designs and teachers' teaching approaches. The second aspect refers to socioeconomic issues which hamper school performance.

In chapter 2 I discussed that public education in Peru presents many variations across the country. As such, for instance, rural and urban-marginal areas in the country are known to have the poorest schools and the lowest-quality education. Many of these schools are in precarious situations. This used to be the situation of Terranova, the school in Lima where my initial fieldwork took place. In chapter 1 in this thesis, I argued that the physical conditions of a school, such as a poor infrastructure can greatly affect school performance.

Besides the impact poor school infrastructures have, I have shown that a poor or limited access to pedagogical and technological resources inevitably affects students and teachers. At Terranova, teachers must resort to their own money or resources to be able to present classes in a more didactic way to students. On the other hand, the same situation has generated a different response in many other teachers, who care much less

and do not believe their teachings can significantly impact a student's life and school performance.

A second aspect hampering school performance is embodied in socioeconomic issues. In chapter 3 I have explored the multiple ways in which socially structured inequality or hierarchies affect various aspects of the lives of school-going children. To do so, I first focused on the colonial origins of inequality in Peru (chapter 3).

Inequality has its roots in the Spanish invasion of Peru, which commenced in 1532. Upon the domination of the native populations of Peru, Spanish conquistadors and elites were able to place themselves at the top of social hierarchies. The native populations lost their lands to Spaniards. Moreover, they were forced to work in mining, extracting minerals and resources to quench the Spanish thirst for gold and silver. Consequently, the native population was greatly reduced as a result of centuries of abuse and force labor in mining and other activities. It was not until 1821 that Peru finally achieved independence. Notwithstanding the declaration of Peru as an independent country, different degrees of inequality continued to exist and be reproduced. Poverty is, therefore, highly connected to ethnicity nowadays. Colonial institutions, which remained strong over time and are present today, account for the persistence of social inequality and exclusion.

Understanding inequality is relevant because it has placed students of poverty backgrounds in their rather disadvantageous positions. My research findings show that poverty acts like an obstacle for students wishing to achieve a quality education. It ultimately translates into exclusion, unequal access to education and future possibilities for employment and social mobility (chapter 6). Inevitably, in its persistence, high degrees of inequality continue to prevent poor people from becoming upwardly mobile (Sokoloff & Robinson, 2003).

In chapter 4 I first paid attention to violence within families and at school. A high number of absent fathers have affected school-going children in several ways. For instance, the income of their families was diminished and mothers had to increase their hours at work to cope with financial obligations. I have argued that poverty often leads students to take jobs that can provide an extra source of income. This can be exemplified by the Cusquean students of Intikilla who worked, in addition to attending school and complying with family obligations.

Furthermore, the effects of working on students' school performance were explored and analyzed. Overall, working under the circumstances students are immersed in mainly results in their physical and mental exhaustion. In spite of that, students continued to attend their state schools and admitted to believe in the importance of formal education. My findings also acknowledge violence, especially in the form of corporal punishment, as an important factor which hampers school performance. The fears and pain caused by physical punishment (at home and at schools) affects students' school performance and their overall attitude towards schooling. Many students from Intikilla were often scolded and hit by their parents and teachers. This was done, for example, if they failed to get good grades, pass exams or comply with school obligations. As noted by Harvey (1994), *family hierarchies* especially present in the Central Peruvian Andes have legitimized violence toward children. I have built on Harvey's findings to show that the same kind of hierarchies is present at schools. As such, teachers scold and punish students in diverse ways and students cannot always contest to the punitive practices of teachers. I, however, do not claim my findings regarding violence in Cusco can necessarily extend to other areas in the country. As I have noted in the first chapters, public education at schools greatly differ and the location a school has (rural, urban, marginal, in provinces or main cities) do matter.

Building on my findings presented and discussed in chapter 3 and 4, I showed that children try to balance nearly all aspects of their life and school. Responding to the demands of teachers at school and the expectations of their parents, along with attending the need for working to aid their families are part of this attempt. I argue that precisely this attempt to balance all factors and circumstances has affected their performance at school. Students are rarely close to attain a balance between life and school. This inevitably instills a deep sense of inadequacy on them, as they must endure punishment and scolding when their attempts prove unsuccessful. Thus, school is perceived as a burden to bear.

In chapter 5 I have summarized some of my experiences at Intikilla in Cusco. The chapter supports past arguments and throws light on different aspects of the lives of students. I argue that raising students' achievement is possible when methodological and pedagogical approaches are changed. At Intikilla, a non-violent atmosphere, personalized academic help and the usage of pedagogical and technological resources have been useful to raise students' performance and aid their learning processes.

Toward the end of this thesis I have captured qualitative aspects of teaching and student-teacher interactions (chapter 6). My findings showed that the methodology used by teachers in class vastly consists of repetition, request for obedience and the transmission of facts (curricular contents). This closely resembles what Freire (2004) called “*a banking model of education*”, a teaching model that focuses on the transmission of facts to be stored in students’ minds, as if these were “empty vessels”. A consequence of this teaching model or approach is that it is not conducive of reflexive thinking or autonomy to inquire or create. Success at school therefore largely relies on memory to (almost literally) repeat previously taught facts. I argued that, conceived this way, public education or schooling most often favors the reproduction of social hierarchies and inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Students of poverty backgrounds would later in life find difficulties to achieve higher education. In that regard, it should once again be mentioned that also in Peruvian society, higher education most often leads to social and economic mobility. Besides, it allows an individual of indigenous traits to overcome racial labels (De la Cadena, 2000). Nevertheless, the low quality education they received, characterized by teaching approaches which privilege copying, memorizing and repeating act as yet another impeding force to access higher education.

In conclusion, throughout this work, my empirical findings have noted that although over the last years the Peruvian government has launched different education policies, curricular plans, and focused on investing on the infrastructure of schools, other important aspects remained to be addressed. Among these, my work has shown that violence, along with high degrees of inequality, should be tackled. Inequality fosters and maintains high degrees of poverty among people, while privileging a smaller group of the population. It ultimately defined who received quality education and who did not, and with it, who was better positioned in society. If violence and inequality could be coherently addressed, school performance would most certainly be raised and schooling would not be experienced as a burden among students.

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