BolivianExpress

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Magazine

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EDITORIAL

Traveling is an immersive act of learning. Suddenly, as we struggle to find a grocery store, get on the right bus or ask where the bathroom is in a new language, the mass of knowledge that lets us operate so easily in our hometowns becomes clear – because when we travel we often have to learn something new to accomplish even the most basic task. Maybe that's why learning is such an appealing theme for this month's intrepid team, which set out to understand different ways of learning in La Paz, El Alto and beyond.

One of our writers this month decided to delve into the world of teaching indigenous languages in Bolivian schools – a requirement that gained steam with the Morales' government – and the challenges, and resistance, that schools face when trying to bring languages like Aymara into the classroom. Traveling up out of La Paz, through El Alto, across the **altiplano** and toward Lake Titicaca, we also tour the campus of one of Bolivia's indigenous universities, which brings together students from rural communities and teaches a curriculum designed to value and expand indigenous knowledge.

If knowledge is power, then the more we know the more powerful we become - and the more in control of our own destinies. That's the idea behind a program called Niñas Autoras de Su Vida, an alternative education project for girls who are at risk of dropping out of school. From teaching money management to a workshop where girls design a personal logo, the program strives to make learning a fun, and empowering, project.

This month's adventures also led to the Centro de Adiestramiento Canino, high up on a hillside in the Obrajes neighborhood of La Paz, where police work daily with dogs, teaching them how to identify explosives and track down missing people. The dogs are enthusiastic pupils and valued companions whose finely tuned senses of hearing and smell allow them to do jobs well beyond human possibility.

Finally, one of our intrepid writers took it upon herself to explore the variety of things one can learn in La Paz through classes and workshops open to anyone. From yoga to crystal healing to tango, it was an at times uncoordinated venture into what the human body and mind are capable of at 12,000 feet above sea level.

Languages, ancient traditions, and the at times mysterious mini-bus signage system – every day can be an education in La Paz and El Alto. Looking out over Illimani's three snow-capped peaks, as cable car cabins pass silently overhead and pedestrians jockey around markets stalls, I feel certain that we are in one of the world's most spectacular classrooms. ×

N.B. Several Spanish and Aymara words are marked in **bold** throughout this issue
Their meanings can be found in our glossary

By Sara Shahriari

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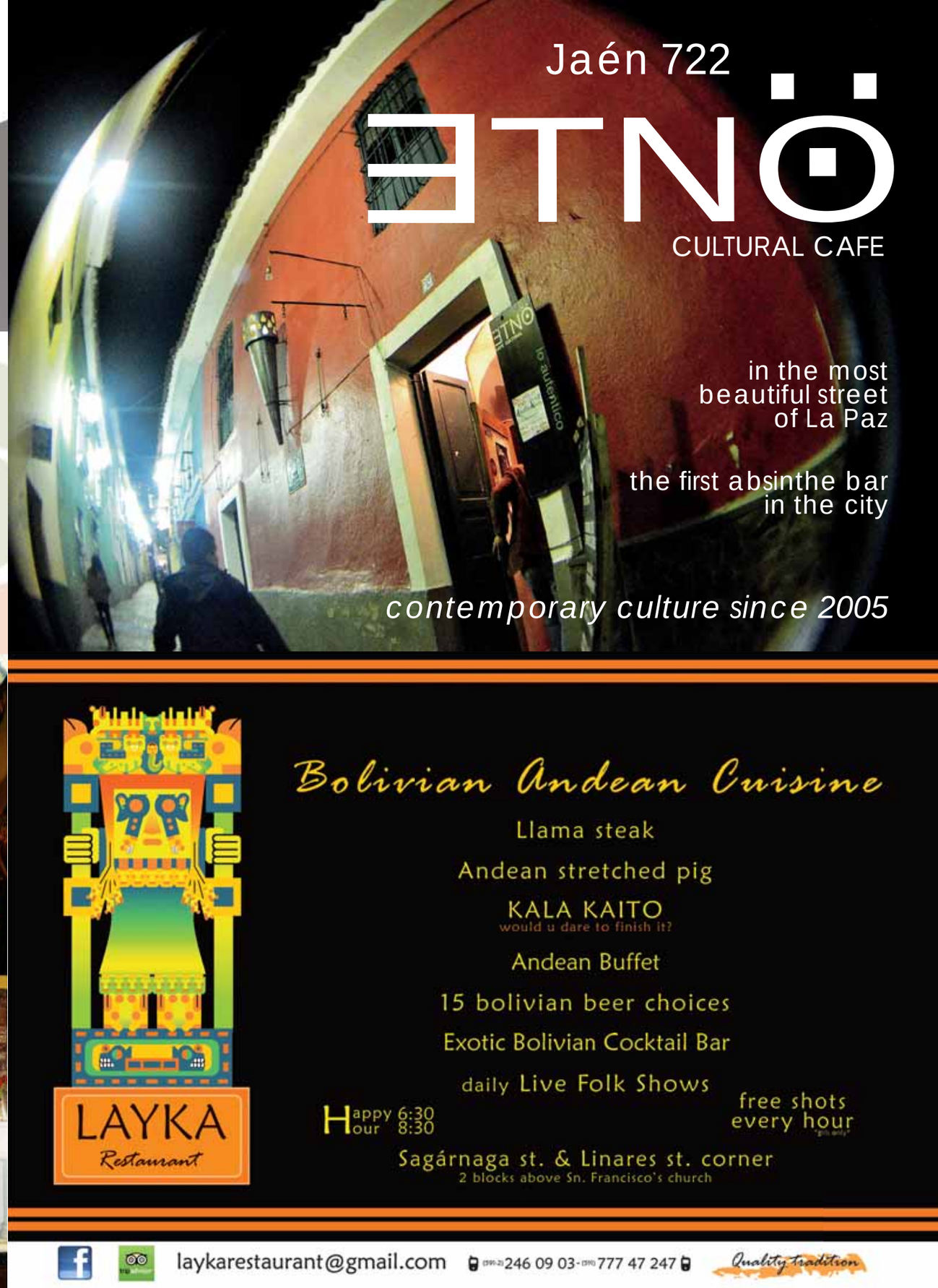

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Quality tradition

Learning to Learn with ICTs

INTERNET CENTERS AND THE HIJACKING OF HOMEWORK

TEXT AND PHOTO:NADIA BUTLER

'Could you research Simón Bolivar for me?'

I'm looking after my family's Internet Center in El Alto, and a high school student is brandishing the silver coin with which he hopes to purchase my highly valuable research skills.

"No. I already have my High School certificate," I say.

The boy looks perplexed. Why would I risk losing a client to one of the many other Internet places nearby that would be more than happy to oblige?

"There's a computer over there," I say. "You're welcome to sit down and do some research, and if you need any help, I'm right here."

"Can you print it for me?"

I sigh and print off his investigative research project, wondering if I shouldn't have just done it myself. He plays a violent war game for the remainder of the fifteen minutes his 50 centavos will buy.

According to the Bolivian Census of Population and Housing 2012, only 9.45% of Bolivian homes have Internet access. Schools are only just beginning to be connected to the Internet in fulfillment of a pre-election pledge by Evo Morales in 2010. As such, businesses that provide Internet access to the public for around 2Bs (USD .30c) an hour, serve the function of school library--a service most schools do not have--and a place for young people to connect with friends, both online and in person.

'WE DOWNLOAD THE INFORMATION, PRINT IT, SO THE WORK IS ALREADY DONE. THEY COPY IT INTO THEIR EXERCISE BOOK, THEY HAND IT IN, AND THEY GET THEIR MARK'

I'm the annoying foreigner who refuses to do people's homework.

Disgruntled, the boy sits down at one of the computers and types "Simón Bolivar" into the Google search bar. The first hit is Wikipedia. The boy clicks on the link, highlights the text and copies it into a Word document.

After school each day, students race each other to the Center to secure a computer next to their friends, and amid the hubbub of hollering sweaty teens, employing virtual machine guns to brutally murder one another, I feel my inner grandma shout, "Don't you have anything better to do? Go outside and kick a football or something!"

As someone involved in one of these businesses, my concern is to what extent Internet Centers contribute to learning, and to what extent they hamper it.

In a bid to find out, I asked Rusvel, who completed his high school degree last year, what happens when my young clients present their research projects to the teacher.

"The oldest teachers think we do it all ourselves because they don't know, but the younger ones know."

He explains how he used to simply print off articles found on Wikipedia or a site called "El Rincón del Vago," where completed assignments can be downloaded on any topic. He would copy them by hand into his exercise book and present the transcription in class as his own work. Some teachers became suspicious.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

"They know the student writes everything a bit wonky, forgets to use accents. If we copy it perfectly, the teacher knows it's too perfect and says, 'You've copied this from the Internet,' and he takes some marks off."

But even when teachers are aware of the powers of the Internet, there are still low expectations of what students are capable of. In many cases there continues to be an emphasis on rote learning and not on creation or critical analysis.

"They just have to copy it into their book by hand," says Guichi Samo, who visits the Internet Center with his children to help them with their homework. "By copying it out, they're reading it, and at the same time they're memorizing a bit. We download the information, print it, so the work is already done. They copy it into their exercise book, they hand it in, and they get their mark."

But moves have been made to change things in this regard. In 2010, the Morales government enacted a new Bolivian Education Law that focuses on "promoting scientific research for scientific and technological progress." The new law also allows for flexibility in the school curriculum. It allows teachers to adapt the content of their lessons to focus on research that is relevant to the local environment, explains Roy Villca, who is a chemistry and physics teacher at a local high school. It also allows them to incorporate new technologies in an innovative way.

Roy, for example, is using a software package in his chemistry lessons in which students can create 3D molecular structures. But teachers need to have the training, resources and motivation to use technology effectively.

In recent years, the government has been working to make information and communication technologies available to all teachers and students. The Director of Colegio Nuevo Amanecer Fé y Alegria, Edgar Aru, told me how in 2012 each of the teachers at his school received a laptop as part of the "One Laptop Per Teacher" initiative. Last year, each final year student around the country was provided with a laptop to be used in the confines of the school.

The new law also aims to train teachers with "a scientific outlook and the ability to use research methodologies and techniques," as well as "the ability to incorporate the use of new information and communication technologies into education." All teachers have been trained in the use of the new laptops, and the Ministry of Education created a website that provides online courses for them.

The government and some NGOs are also promoting initiatives to incorporate information and communication technologies (ICTs) into the classroom, but at the very grassroots level, some teachers are devising innovative ways of their own to use new technologies to motivate their students.

"Some of the younger teachers have Facebook and Twitter pages," says Rusvel. "And sometimes they say, 'I'm going to give you homework and you absolutely have to do it that day, even if there's a roadblock or a festival. If you can't come to school, take a photo of your exercise book and post it on Facebook and I'll know you did it.'"

Victor, a final year student and frequent visitor to the Internet Center, tells how some teachers are trying to use social networks to make learning fun.

"Most students access social networking sites, and I've seen that teachers are trying to use them as teaching aides. For example, the teacher goes on there and posts, 'Who can tell me what happened in the Chaco War?' And the students respond. It's a way of studying, shall we say, but it's fun."

So what of Internet Centers in all this? As more and more schools are connected to the Internet, and as more Bolivians gain access to it at home or through mobile devices, perhaps the Internet Center will cease to become such an important and highly frequented place for young people. And as teachers become more knowledgeable and adept at incorporating ICTs into learning in innovative ways, the hope is that students will find themselves wanting to do their own research, rather than asking others to do it for them.

But I find myself wondering, if the Internet Center were to die, what would the kids do after school?

Perhaps they would go outside and kick a football, like in the old days. ×

CHANGING THE FACE OF EDUCATION

Long-suppressed indigenous languages are now fundamental in Bolivian classrooms

TEXT:PHOEBE ROTH
PHOTOMONTAGE: ALEXANDRA MELEÁN A.

On an unusually cold and miserable Wednesday morning, I wander the streets of El Alto in search of Colegio Amauta, the starting point of my investigation. Splashing my way through streams in the roads and shivering from the bitter **altiplano** wind, I am guided by a kind, elderly **alteño** who leads me to the school, hidden on a quiet road in the Ciudad Satélite neighbourhood. He stops at a small terraced house with white gates and green hedges—this unassuming building is the school I am looking for.

The head mistress leads me into a tiny classroom where ten eager faces smile at me. The children, no older than seven, greet me with an hola señorita and a wave. It is 11am and these children are being taught Aymara by their teacher, Clarissa Zapana. Colegio Amauta is a colegio particular, a private school with a friendly and bustling atmosphere, authentically shabby interior and small class sizes—10 students compared with the usual 45.

In this school, almost all of the teachers are of Aymaran ethnicity, according to the headmistress, Beatriz Alvarez Ordoñez, who openly talks to me about the importance of Aymara in a school like this. 'In the context we have here in El Alto, the majority of people come from Aymara cultures', she says. 'So it's important that children learn Aymara, to communicate with their grandparents, for example.'

CHANGING THE STANDARD OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION

This private school has taught Aymara throughout its 30-year existence, but the teaching of indigenous languages in Bolivian schools has not always been accepted across the country. In fact, observing this class of eager students, it is easy to forget that not long ago official Bolivian policy dictated that everyone speak Spanish in school, and indigenous languages were heavily suppressed. The education reforms of 1994, however, introduced more fun-

CONTINUES ON PAGE 14

ding for schools, which improved teacher training and curriculum whilst promoting bilingual education. But the bilingual requirements remained vague until the government, under President Evo Morales, enacted additional reforms in 2010, when clear requirements were set for multilingualism in schools.

The 2010 Avelino Siñani–Elizardo Pérez Law, named after two historical figures who also tried to better education for the indigenous population, covers many facets of education in Bolivia. It makes revaluing indigenous cultures, languages and knowledge a cornerstone of the Bolivian educational system. The law also names trilingualism as one of the Bolivian education system's goals: students are encouraged to learn an indigenous Bolivian language and a foreign language in addition to acquiring proficiency in Spanish. As well as the promotion of language learning, Morales' government invested more into teacher training than the previous reforms had, according to Dr. Mieke Lopes Cardozo of the University of Amsterdam.

But it's not always easy to bring a language into official school curriculum—or develop standardized assessments. Ordoñez explains that 'There are specific Aymara teachers, but there isn't a marking scheme to grade Aymara like they can grade other subjects, [such as] social sciences, English and other languages. What needs to happen is for the Aymara teacher and another language teacher to sit down together and come up with a way of grading the students they have.'

At Colegio Amauta, I also spoke to Clarissa Zapana, an Aymara-language teacher, who told me about her teaching method. 'What I mainly teach the pupils are greetings, through using flashcards with the Aymara words and phrases written on, and then I repeat the Spanish translation aloud', she says. Zapana then explains that written Aymara is very difficult, and so is the grammar, so the children mainly learn on an oral, repetition-based method.

> 'Language is an identity. It reflects the culture you are from. So if you don't speak the language, how can you understand your culture?'
> —Juan de Dios Yapita, Aymara—language professor

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

The meaning of language goes far deeper than daily communication. Juan de Dios Yapita, an Aymara and Spanish professor at the Spanish Institute on 20 de Octubre in La Paz, says that learning Aymara couldn't be more important. 'Language is an identity', he says. 'It reflects the culture you are from. So if you don't speak the language, how can you understand your culture?'

Speaking to Walter Gutierrez Mena, the head of interculturality and multilingualism at the Ministry of Education, I receive an insight into the governmental view on languages as part of education in Bolivia. Mena explains that Bolivia is one of the only countries in the world that has laws governing indigenous languages in schools. 'Indigenous languages strengthen the identity of Bolivians', Mena says. 'Spanish allows Bolivians to physically communicate with each other. And foreign languages allow them contact with the world.'

At the same time, Mena acknowledges that not everyone is on board with these changes. For example, some parents don't want their children to learn indigenous languages at school, as they don't think they are worthy. 'As a consequence of colonisation, there are people that reject their heritage. There are people that say, "I don't want to learn an indigenous language, I want to learn a foreign language, like English or French."'

Leonardo Favio Mollo Conde, who works at the Vice Ministry of Decolonisation, talks about the not-so-distant history of the repression of indigenous languages in the country. 'They made it obligatory to learn Spanish', Mollo Conde says. 'Obligatory to forget Aymara. It was a synonym for backwardness and barbarism.'

But now, speaking Aymara is fundamental to the survival of the culture itself, Mollo Conde says. 'The youths in El Alto, they consider themselves Aymara, but so many of them neither speak nor understand the language. They identify as Aymara, but they can't even understand their mother or their grandmother. It's a question of identity.' However, today Mollo Conde is hopeful. 'These laws have forced the revaluation of indigenous languages', he says. 'Because of that, the future looks promising.'

LA PAZ LEARNING

OUR INTREPID REPORTER SAMPLES VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AROUND THE CITY

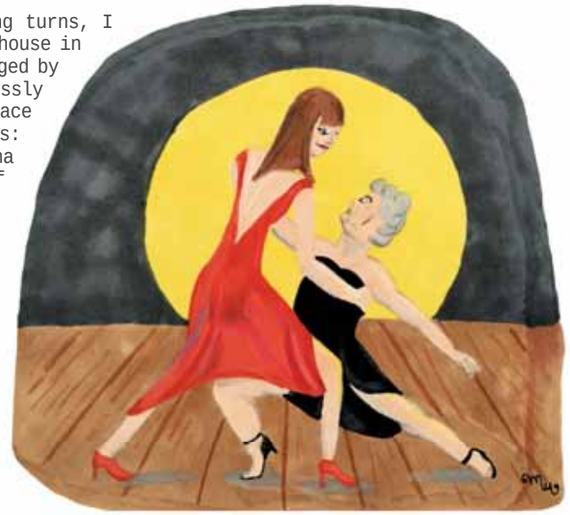
TEXT: EMILY CASHEN
ILLUSTRATION: MAURICIO WILDE

YOGA

As someone who once pulled a muscle while reaching for the TV remote, it's safe to say I was apprehensive about my first yoga class. But five minutes into the session, I was pleasantly surprised. I felt supple, nimble, agile even. Flash-forward fifteen minutes and I had morphed into a contorted mass of limbs on the gym floor, in absolute purgatory. Like a bewitched painting in an episode of Scooby-Doo, my eyes flicked around the room and my head remained perfectly still as I subtly attempted to copy the moves from my neighbours. The next half-hour was a blur of Spanish anatomical vocabulary and physical discomfort. As our instructor transitioned with ease into our final position, I choked with indignation. A headstand. A headstand in my first yoga class. The horror, the horror. I promptly bought myself a post-yoga Burger King, and thus ended my brief foray into healthy living.
Megacentre, **Avenida Rafael Pabon, Zona Sur**

TANGO

Following 40 minutes of fervent map-consulting and wrong turns, I finally arrived at Casa Argentina—just six blocks from my house in the Sopocachi neighbourhood—for a night of tango. Encouraged by the infectious enthusiasm of the teachers, the effortlessly chic and black-clad Ismael and Carolina, I took my place in the beginners' group. We started with the very basics: practising walking forwards and backwards. While Carolina made this look effortless and seductive, I found myself questioning my most basic motor functions. Eventually, having regained my ability to walk, I felt my confidence growing. As if by celestial punctuality, just when I felt I had mastered the basic principles, I was partnered with scrupulous and outspoken fellow-student Manuela. My attempts to lead the dance were met with much eyebrow-raising and surly disdain, and with a mere 'no, no está bien', my delusions of tango proficiency were coldly crushed by my uncoordinated partner. Undeterred by Manuela's eye-rolling and chorus of tuts, I approached the next moves with gusto, and even received a 'super!' from my final partner of the night. Whether this was conveying genuine enthusiasm or sympathy for my ineptitude remains a mystery.
Casa Argentina, Avenida 6 de Agosto 2535



CRYSTAL HEALING

At a painfully early 9 am last Saturday morning, I arrived at the La Paz School of Reiki for my first crystal healing class. As the fresh-faced instructor, Daniel, took one look at my bleary-eyed and dishevelled appearance, he could tell that his crystals would have to work overtime to cure my self-inflicted suffering. Sheepishly, I took my place amongst the bright-eyed species of health-conscious youth. Nestling into an inviting mound of pillows and inhaling the musky incense, I felt I had entered a woodland retreat, oblivious to the early morning bustle of the streets below. Exquisitely arranged on the wood-panelled floor were a colourful array of crystals, the most eye-catching of which—the bolivianite—was to be the focus of the workshop.

Found only in one mine in the Pantanal region of southwest Bolivia, this distinctive crystal is one half deep amethyst, the other a warm golden citrine. As Daniel explained to the enthralled class, the amethyst element represents femininity and creativity, while the gold tones represent masculinity and rationality. Taking four of these bolivianite gems each, we spent the next two hours reconciling our creative and rational aspects by holding the crystals on different body parts and meditating. Wishfully, I placed all four stones on my forehead, my monster headache pushing the crystals' healing properties to their very limit. Alas, this was too great a demand for the bolivianite. I left the class enlightened and educated, yet with my hangover regrettably intact.
Calle Jaimes Freire 2945, between Calle Riardo Mujia and Calle Muñoz

Name: La cumbre sport
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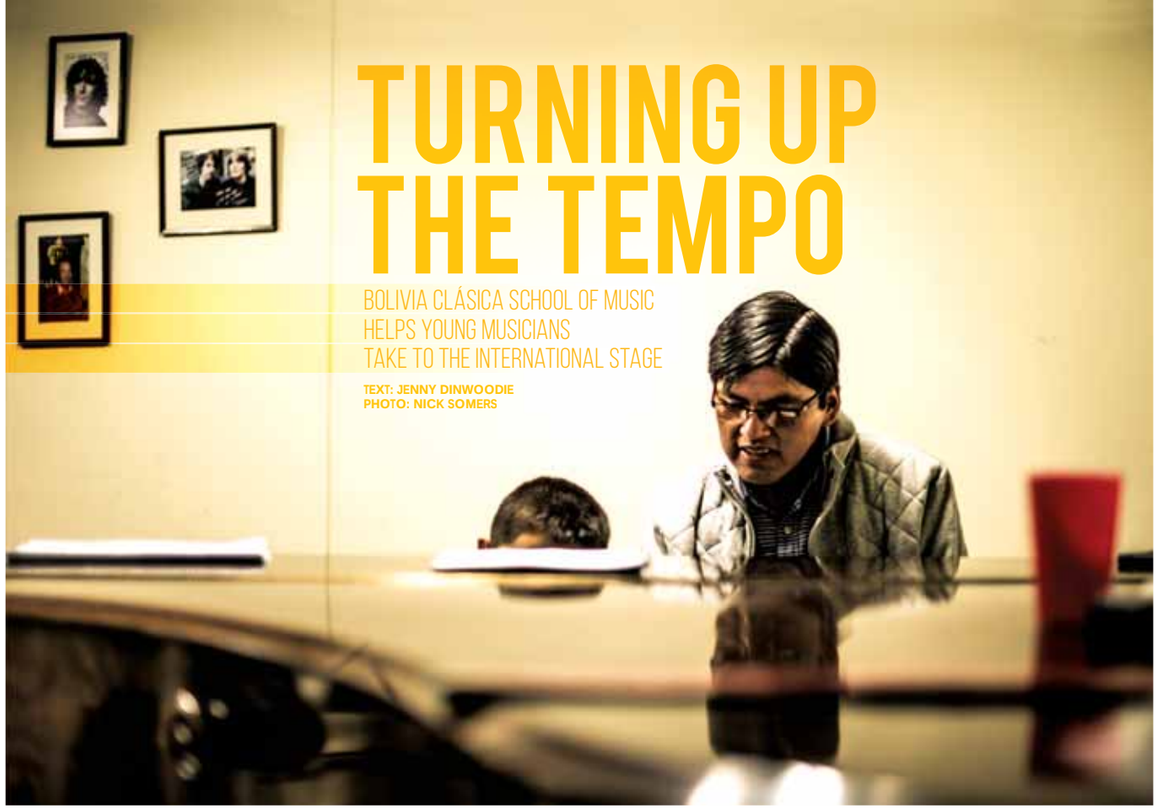
PHOTO: NICK SOMERS



TURNING UP THE TEMPO

BOLIVIA CLÁSICA SCHOOL OF MUSIC HELPS YOUNG MUSICIANS TAKE TO THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

TEXT: JENNY DINWOODIE
PHOTO: NICK SOMERS

Even before the clarinet had reached his lips, I knew I was about to witness something special. It was his confident stride down the middle of the audience, his collected composure in those agonising few seconds of silence, and the assured smile he flashed the pianist when ready to begin. The music sang with sensitive expression and insightful character, controlled with a technical mastery indicative of years of experience. It appeared to provoke within him a movement so captivatingly fluid and contagiously energetic that I had to stop myself from swaying along for fear of colliding with the shoulder next to me.

His name is Lucas—a 16-year-old clarinetist and concert soloist for Bolivia Clásica School of Music.

Unique among Bolivian music institutions for its grand vision, Bolivia Clásica strives for artistic excellence. Pianist Ana-María Vera founded the school in 2011 after relocating from the United States to La Paz. Since then, it has endeavoured to empower young, eager students to use the language of music as a tool for personal and social transformation. The hope is that once these young Bolivians become professional musicians in their own right, the country—long overlooked on the global concert circuit—can become a destination of choice in the world of classical music.

A violin screeches next door as Armando Vera, brother of Ana-María and musical director of Bolivia Clásica, explains the circumstances that demanded its creation. 'I worked for over ten years in various institutions and conservatoires in Bolivia, and in each one I encountered the same problem', he says. 'The people heading them have absolutely no interest in high-quality music education. Their only concern is the security of their own positions. Too much ambition from students or overseas musicians is seen only as a threat to stability.'

Dissatisfied, Armando chose to push the boundaries. Alongside teaching at the National Conservatory of Music in La Paz and the Instituto Eduardo Laredo in Cochabamba, he attempted to form his own elite orchestras. But it was only when he was able to freely engage with his own endeavours that he began to appreciate the damage that can be caused in the formative years of early childhood. 'The kids from these institutions had not only technical flaws', Armando says, 'but psychological issues to do with low self-esteem.'

Bolivia Clásica began to experiment with a quartet system in an attempt to rebuild confidence, rehearsing and performing with just four musicians, as opposed to an orchestra which can include up to 100 members. The idea is that each player is vital: if one doesn't function, then the group doesn't function. But when the group excels, each player is responsible. Armando asserts that they learn 'not to hide but to lead . . . It is quartet players that will form the building blocks of the orchestra.'

Bolivia is currently without the platform necessary to launch its young musicians into the professional world, so those who can must travel abroad. 'Students would come up to me and beg for help to secure a scholarship', Armando recollects, 'because there's just nothing here for them.' Lucas, as an example, is hoping to apply to a conservatoire in Philadelphia, and has already spent two summers studying in the United States. However, leaving Bolivia just isn't financially viable for the vast majority. The answer then? Start to bring the classical music world here to La Paz.

Through Bolivia Clásica, professionally renowned musicians travel to Bolivia to work with the students and their teachers. Their major event is the biannual festival, which most recently welcomed internationally acclaimed violinist Jamie Laerdo to the modest venues of La Paz. But smaller projects are also running continuously. It was, for example, a one-week exchange that brought Kevin Schaffter, an American clarinetist and founder of the charity MusAid, to the stage alongside Lucas.

MusAid was created in order to enhance the capacity of music programs in underresourced parts of the world, 'so Bolivia Clásica is the perfect match', Kevin explains. 'Their whole philosophy is based on building local capacity here in Bolivia, and ours is to give them the tools necessary for this self-sustainability.' In 2016, Kevin hopes to return to La Paz with seven teachers and a luthier to conduct a 12-day teacher-training workshop.

I ask Lucas what it was like to rehearse and perform with Kevin. 'He saved my life!' Lucas enthusiastically exclaims with beaming eyes and a wide smile. Confused, I ask him to expand a little. Lucas explains that his greatest fear before any concert is the dreaded prospect of a faulty reed—'He gave me two whole boxes! He really saved my life!'

But there's little doubt that this exchange is in every sense mutual. In return for imparting their skills and knowledge, visiting musicians are gifted the inspiration of Bolivia's determined youth. The Bolivia Clásica website boasts a whole host of glowing testimonies. English cellist Guy Johnston highlighted the spirit of the students as a 'reminder of what it is to fall in love with music again'. Similarly, Matthew Hunt, who worked with Lucas during a 2012 festival, said that he had 'never seen so much raw energy, imagination and passion'.

'STUDENTS WOULD COME UP TO ME AND BEG FOR HELP TO SECURE A SCHOLARSHIP, BECAUSE THERE'S JUST NOTHING HERE FOR THEM.'
— ARMANDO VERA, MUSICAL DIRECTOR OF BOLIVIA CLÁSICA

With such potential, I probe as to what's next. 'I used to listen to how a clarinetist played with an orchestra behind and wondered what that sensation would feel like', Lucas remembers. 'Now I know that this is how I want to make a living, playing all over the world.' As for Bolivia Clásica, current discussions with the Ministry of Education suggest the promise of schools in remote rural areas, whilst ultimately the hope is to expand into other creative arts.

'My sister and I have always thought big', jokes Armando. In my opinion, it's that very quality that is to be praised above all else. For Bolivia, Bolivia Clásica enhances its distinct international artistic identity; for aspiring young musicians, it is a source of hope and empowerment.

INTRODUCING...

TEXT: PHOEBE ROTH
PHOTOS: NICK SOMERS and PHOEBE ROTH

NAME: CAROLINA
AGE: 9

What's your school called?
It's called Max Paredes School and it's really close to here (20 de Octubre)

What's your favourite subject and why?
Natural sciences, because I love nature and animals!

Who's your favourite teacher? Why?
My ICT teacher, because I like the lessons and playing on the computer!

Do you play any sports at school or after school?
Yes, for example..running and ball sports in PE class. All of them are during school though.

Do you have any other hobbies?
Erm..listening to music. I like Shakira!

Do you read too?
Yes, I like reading Mafalda (comic books)

What do you want to do when you're older?
I want to be a vet when I'm older because I'd like to help animals!

NAME: MARIO
AGE: 17

What's your school called?
Cumbre High School

Do you like it? Why?
Yeah, because I've got good friends on my course. More than anything because of that.

What subjects do you take?
Languages, maths, physics, chemistry, humanities and a bit of arts.

What's your favourite one?
Physics

Do you do any sports?
Yeah, at school I play football, and after school, tennis.

Do you have any other hobbies?
Yeah, I play guitar too. Umm.. that's pretty much it!

What do you want to do after leaving school?
I'm thinking about studying civil engineering straight after school, at university here in La Paz.

NAME: LUZ
AGE: 14

What's your school called?
Liceo La Paz

What's your favourite subject and why?
P.E. because its really active and I like football, basketball and volleyball.

Do you like school? Why?
Yeah I love it! Because that's where I learn, and I've met all my friends there.

Do you have any other hobbies?
Yeah, I listen to music and I like going online to look at pictures of different hairstyles to try out!

What do you want to do after leaving school?
I'd like to be a hairdresser or a chef, I think they're both cool.

BACK TO THEIR ROOTS

Bolivia's first indigenous university takes a step outside of the classroom, but just how far?

TEXT AND PHOTO: JENNY DINWOODIE

Imagine the serene expanse of Lake Titicaca rippling just metres away. Its distant shores are distinguishable from the sky thanks only to the thin green layer of hills that rise a little here and drop a little there. Here you sit, nestled among tall green trees whose shadows flutter on the ground, a cluster of buildings dotting the horizon. This idyllic image is not, in fact, the perfectly picturesque weekend retreat, but the campus of Tupac Katari Indigenous University.

Founded in 2008 as one of three institutions that form the Indigenous University of Bolivia (UNIBOL), Tupac Katari is the first higher education institute designed specifically for the Aymara communities of the **altiplano**. At present, there are roughly 800 students enrolled in the available degrees: Agricultural Engineering, Industrial Food Engineering, Textile Engineering, Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science. Each degree has a unique curriculum that focuses solely on the resources available to the Aymara people. The understanding is that upon completion of their studies, graduates will reinvest their knowledge back into their communities.

This is the first time this educational model has been applied in Bolivia, but similar steps have been taken in Perú, Ecuador, Chile and Colombia to respect and preserve the livelihood of indigenous peoples. All of these countries are engaging somehow with the question of an alternative system of higher education; a separate, indigenous university. The challenge here is clear: how do you harmonise the knowledge and practices of indigenous people with an essentially Western institutional model?

'When I was at university,' says the current professor of plant sciences at Tupac Katari, 'I had no option but to study in the city. We were so far away from the arable land that everything had to be done in the classroom. But here, the course is very practical and the majority of lessons are conducted outside.' This ensures absolute relevance, he says, not only for the students, but also for their communities.

I peek my head into classrooms filled with agricultural machinery and brush past students dressed in ponchos, **polleras** and **abarcas**. I attempt to listen in complete bafflement to lessons given in Aymara. This certainly doesn't feel like an average university open day.

'We are very happy to have watched the University develop,' says Damilo Kamtari, who is in his fifth year of Textile Engineering, 'we've grown up with it. We were selected by our communities to come here so we can help them grow. They have all the raw materials they need, but are lacking in the knowledge to best utilise them. That will be our role.'

UNIBOL is again unique in this sense: each community chooses one candidate to represent them. A local governing body named Fondo Indígena filters the recommended candidates who are then considered for admission to the university. Each branch of the Indigenous University of Bolivia has its own tailor-made selection criteria. The south eastern Guaraní branch, for example, chooses candidates for a unique program of study, one that focuses on the Forestry of the Amazon region, Fisheries Science, and Gas and Petroleum Engineering.

By designing a university system that serves the specific needs of local communities, the Bolivian government hopes to strengthen a larger process of decolonisation and supposedly subvert the Western educational model. It's no coincidence, then, that the campus on the **altiplano** is named after Tupac Katari, an indigenous rebel leader who raised an army of 40,000 against the Spanish in 1781.

Rapid developments in the Tupac Katari campus promise further advancements to the courses on offer. I must have spotted at least three different construction projects during my visit that will become laboratories and technical classrooms. 'Not only this,' adds the professor I spoke with 'but there is an entirely new Campus to be built in Warisata.'

What the UNIBOL institutions are lacking, however, is national kudos. They are still in their infancy and are yet to be considered with the same regard as the more established, private universities. 'Graduates of Tupac Katari will need the support from external organisations when trying to find jobs', the professor tells me. 'Having political links in the area, for example, would make it much easier.'

Whilst the priority at Tupac Katari is definitely technical expertise, there is also a core academic program that is compulsory for all students of UNIBOL: the study of indigenous history. More than to add diversity and breadth to the courses on offer, this program is seen as essential for the students to build an identification with their own ancestry. The idea is that by learning the story of their ancestors, graduates of UNIBOL will approach indigenous social issues in the future with insight and respect.

It is inevitable to borrow some aspects of the Western education model for the progression of UNIBOL and the communities it serves; aspects such as progressive research and studied history that converge here with traditional thinking on a localised scale. Scholar Luciano Pedota refers to the creation of indigenous universities as a 'dialogue of knowledges'; a harmony between tradition and modernity.

Perhaps this is not the complete reconstruction of Bolivia's education system that Morales had envisaged, but the birth of a hybrid institution. Only time will reveal with what success Tupac Katari and its sister universities fulfil the potential for an original education system.

THE CANINE CLASSROOM

MEET BOLIVIA'S FOUR-PAWED POLICE FORCE

TEXT: EMILY CASHEN
PHOTO: NICK SOMERS

The command rings out around a modest training centre in Obrajes and four police officers hastily stand to attention. Beside them, with their two front paws raised in a solemn salute, are their canine companions.

Our first four-pawed professional readies herself for the morning's opening drill. Under a shaggy mass of thick white fur is Memo, a veteran of the Centro de Adiestramiento Canino here in La Paz.

'Our dogs are a part of our family'

Despite her imminent retirement in May, this sprightly Old English Sheepdog hasn't lost her agility in her twilight years. As she tears around the obstacle course with ease and precision, her experience is clear.

'It's very difficult to say goodbye to dogs like Memo who have served us for many years,' Major Walter Laguna tells me, 'Our dogs are a part of our family.'

As I look around the Major's office, this fond sentiment is echoed in the room's decor. The grey walls are brightened by portraits of the academy's star dogs - a diverse line-up of German Shepherds, Rottweilers and Labradors. But taking pride of place amongst the myriad of framed accolades stands the imposing black-and-white image of a young officer and his canine partner.

'Sergeant Villanuevo Sánchez Cerro was killed alongside his dog Thempes whilst alerting the rest of their squadron to an ambush set by Che Guevara's guerrilla insurgents,' Major Laguna tells me. 'They saved many lives that day. The event showed us just how important police dog work can be.' While the incident occurred almost 50 years ago in April 1967, it certainly lives on in the collective memory of the officers.

Since its creation in 1965, the Centro Nacional de Adiestramiento de Canes has provided invaluable support to Bolivia's police force. Here at this modest complex, perched on the edge of a cliff in Obrajes, you can find the country's most valuable four-legged professionals. Each of the 16 dogs at the centre have one infallible gift that sets them apart from their human counterparts: their keen sense of smell.

Dogs can learn to recognise and remember over 10,000 different smells', Lieutenant Pabón tells me as he prepares an elaborate exercise for the dogs' morning training. Today's focus: explosives.

With the final touches in place, Lieutenant Pabón enthusiastically beckons me over to inspect the fake crime scene. Before me are five identical motorbikes, but, as I am shown in a theatrical demonstration, one of the bikes is rigged with 'explosives', while another is stocked with dog treats as an olfactory temptation.

First to take the test is Mike, a stocky chocolate Labrador. Mike's permanent grin seems to stem from the constant stream of encouragement he receives from his equally cheerful handler, Officer Calamani. Determined and inquisitive, Mike inspects each motorbike with care, lingering at certain stops and often retracing his steps, as though aware of the responsibility of the task.

Then, satisfied with his decision, Mike lies down in front of the offending bike and watches Calamani expectantly. His handler approaches him slowly, with one hand hidden behind his back. Using his free hand to momentarily distract Mike, Calamani swiftly whips his hidden hand from around his back and drops a brand-new tennis ball in front of his dog.

'The activities are just like games for the dogs', Lieutenant Pabón tells me, watching me somewhat bemused as I fawn over the triumphant Mike. 'When they complete a task, they get their toy as a reward. That way they are always happy to work.'

This reward-based method of training is clearly effective, as each dog completes the exercise without putting a paw wrong. Even for Rocky, an excitable and easily distracted young German Shepherd, the promise of a new bone to chew is motivation enough to stay on task.

As each of the handlers break their stoic composure to lavish praise upon their dogs, the close bonds between the pairs are apparent. Flitting from duo to duo, I amass an extensive collection of personal stories from the proud dog handlers. Officer Usnato, who has been working with the same Golden Retriever for three years, happily recalls how his dog was declared national champion at an anti-explosives course in Cochabamba.

Eager to tell me of the centre's successes, Lieutenant Pabón recounts how last year the dogs worked together to successfully find a missing 7 year old girl who had gotten lost in the woods. And not to be outdone by these grand achievements, Calamani draws me aside to show me how Mike can open his cage by himself.

Despite these great success stories, the centre has suffered some unfortunate setbacks in recent years. In 2012, it was based beside a river which flooded during a heavy storm, killing six dogs and damaging the complex beyond repair. As a result of this tragic flood, the team moved to their current location in Obrajes, which while adequate for now, lacks the open space that the dogs require.

The activities are just like games for the dogs. Today's focus: explosives

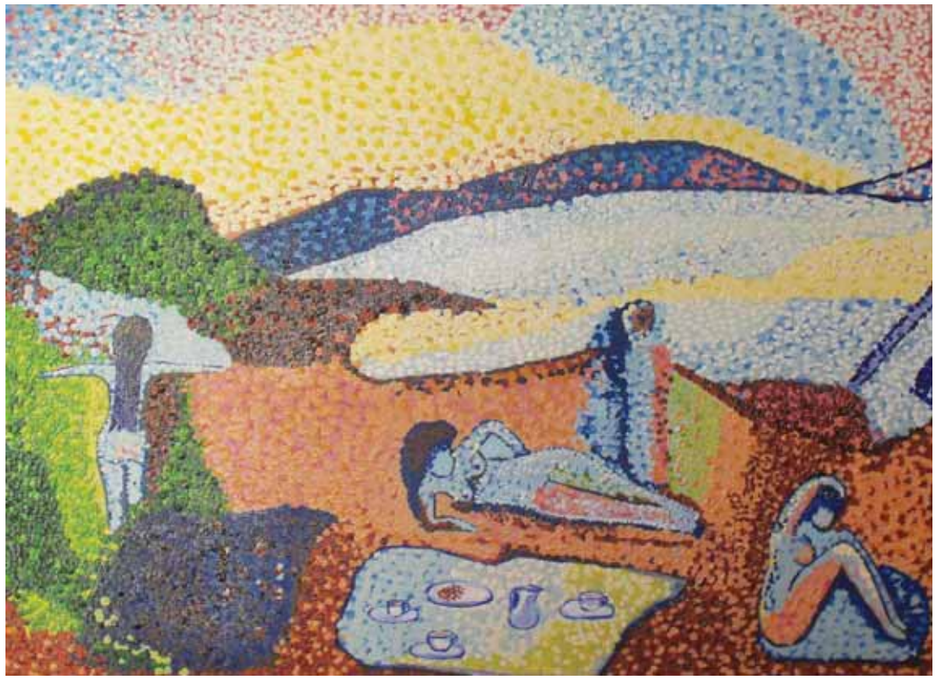
But Major Laguna remains optimistic. 'This year the centre is celebrating its 50th birthday, and the local government has promised us a new complex near the Pura Pura forest, where we will have much more space for our training.' As the boisterous Rocky races around the obstacle course, in a caramel blur of fur and paws, I can't help but think this will be a much-deserved upgrade.

UNRESOLVED CURIOSITIES

Transforming what is simple, and searching for that which doesn't want to be forgotten.

TEXT: ADRIANA MURILLO
ILLUSTRATION: MARISOL SOLIZ

Where does a story begin? In a workshop on narrative literature taught by the writer Adolfo Cárdenas in 2012, the master told us that we only had to open our eyes and ears, because on every corner, and in every person or in every thing there is a story to be told. Perhaps the hardest part is just putting something down on paper. Cárdenas recommended we keep a notebook at our side to jot down ideas, and that later some would transform into plots – that's where a story is born.



Our class began with 20 students. Six months later only four remained – a miscellaneous group. Alvaro Vásquez has a degree in international commerce and customs, and is devoted to reading and books. 'When I write something, it's like stepping out of my regular life, and entering into another. It's something like the secret worlds that children have.' Another classmate, Daniela Murillo, was a high school student in 2012, and says this workshop helped her decide which subject to later study. She is now a literature student at the UMSA. 'Writing is a joy for me and once I began I couldn't stop – it's become one of the most important parts of my life.'

Writing stories may seem like a great idea to a lot of people, but many are shy and reluctant when it comes to sharing their ideas. My classmate Marisol Soliz began to write for herself as a teenager, but it took more than 25 years before she moved to publish or make her work public. 'At first I wrote only for myself. The hardest part began when I decided that those stories which were only mine, and were mingled with fiction, had to become understandable for other people.' Marisol is a sociologist, mother, wife and lover of painting - and great food.

In my case, the idea of telling stories had been floating around in my head for years, but before this workshop I didn't know how to begin. One of the most important things was exploring every detail, transforming what is simple, and searching for that which doesn't want to be forgotten or to disappear.

In the end, each story created is the result of situations that are real but exaggerated, memories consciously or unconsciously modified, and ideas that little by little connect with everything that came before, and that take form based on corrections or attempts to apply narrative techniques learned in the workshop.

After six months this final group of four had about 20 stories completed. Cardenas, after seeing all this hard work, made a proposal that surprised us: that we choose the best stories and publish a collection.

Today, it seems publication is finally at hand, and 'Inquietudes resueltas' ('Unresolved Curiosities') will be on bookshelves this month. It's a project that required patience above all. We waited three years to publish this book and now that it is about to come out we are so pleased to share the result of a unique experience with a great teacher.

GLOSSARY

POLLERA	A wide pleated skirt traditionally worn by cholitas
ABARCAS	Flat sandals made of leather or rubber traditionally worn by cholitas
ALTIPLANO	The high plains of the Bolivian Andes
ALTEÑO	An inhabitant of El Alto
COLEGIO PARTICULAR	Private school

GIRL HERO

Bolivian volunteers join a global social action movement for girls' education.

TEXT AND PHOTO: ALEXANDRA MELEÁN A.

Education is a universal human right, yet obstacles like poverty, sexual exploitation, child labor, cultural paradigms and geographic isolation often prevent girls from beginning or completing a formal education.

Global social action campaign and documentary film Girl Rising advocates the power of education, giving a voice to nine girls from developing countries: Cambodia, Haiti, Nepal, Ethiopia, India, Peru, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan.

"Look into my eyes," says Amina from Afghanistan in Girl Rising, "Do you see it now? I am change."

This documentary film has inspired people like Viviana Rodriguez, who is a Girl Rising Ambassador in Bolivia, to create education campaigns around the world. In 2013, Rodriguez created Niñas Autoras de Su Vida in La Paz, an alternative education project for girls ages 9-19 who are vulnerable and at risk of dropping out of school. The goal is "to support girls who have been victims of human trafficking, domestic violence, rape, suffer from early pregnancy, or have been homeless," she says, "leading them to drop out of school or never enroll."

Although Rodriguez hopes to work with a wide range of girls in vulnerable situations, currently, Niñas Autoras de Su Vida works with girls from the Marcelina Children's Home, a refuge for vulnerable children that belongs to the Alalay Foundation. From photography classes to workshops on graphic design and entrepreneur-

ship, the girls in the Marcelina Children's Home, receive an alternative education from Rodriguez and her team of volunteers on a weekly basis.

"Our dream is to transform an old school bus into a classroom with seats, a chalkboard and a library. In this way, we hope to reach girls from other communities as a mobile project," Rodriguez says.

In the future, Niñas Autoras de Su Vida aims to extends its reach to Quechua-speaking girls from Potosi, who are living on the streets in La Paz. These Potosinas can rarely speak Spanish and run a greater risk of becoming victims of sexual exploitation or human trafficking. In December, Rodríguez worked for the first time with a group of Potosinas in the city, organizing drawing and math workshops in different plazas throughout La Paz.

At present, however, the program works with volunteers such as Pamela Vargas Fuentes, a psychologist who leads group activities with the girls, from icebreakers to name games to exercises in imagination. "The group dynamic generates an environment that motivates learning and awareness of real issues," Vargas said. "These girls have an amazing capacity to love and are open to learn, grow and improve."

'Our dream is to transform an old school bus into a classroom with seats, a chalkboard and a library. In this way, we hope to reach girls from other communities as a mobile project,' Rodriguez says

Another volunteer, graphic designer Vivian Tapia, hosts a "personal logo" workshop so that the girls "will create a visual element that reminds them to accept and love themselves, identifies their strengths and weaknesses and shows what makes them unique. "Like the best logos out there," Tapia says, "these girls can also stand out and be different." The workshop serves as a tool for self-awareness and acceptance, or a path to self-discovery.

Communications expert Blanca Gonzales also volunteers with Niñas Autoras de Su Vida, teaching practical financial skills and facilitating an interactive money-spending game. Gonzales divides the girls into three groups and hands each group 1,450 fake bolivianos. The girls must then choose whether to buy fake clothes, food, movies or cars that are available for purchase. After the shopping round, each group analyzes its spending habits, paying close attention to what the girls spent money on and to how much they saved.

According to Gonzales, "most of the girls are self-conscious enough to use money to cover their basic needs, education, and save for emergencies." However, Rodriguez was "surprised to see some girls buy clothes and shoes instead of milk, water or food."

By the end of the workshop, the girls are invited to think about personal finances and how they will make enough money to support themselves when they leave the Marcelina Children's Home.

All of these skills contribute to what Niñas Autoras de Su Vida hopes to accomplish, which is to provide an alternative education for girls who are outsiders to the formal education system. Girls with traumas, for example, who have suffered from domestic violence, rape or early pregnancy and require individual and specialized attention. The goal is for these developing women to continue learning and overcome their past.

"Our team has largely grown through word of mouth and social media. Each volunteer brings a volunteer," Rodriguez said. "Some of the girls in the group are enthusiastic about eventually becoming volunteers, too." For them, the program is an opportunity to learn how to create a flexible curriculum and provide real-life skills to real girls in the city.

"They are not professors or pedagogues," Rodriguez says, but that's not a problem. "Each volunteer simply teaches the way they would have liked to be taught."

To support the project and become a volunteeer, contact girlrisingbolivia@gmail.com or send a message to: https://www.facebook.com/girlrisingbolivia

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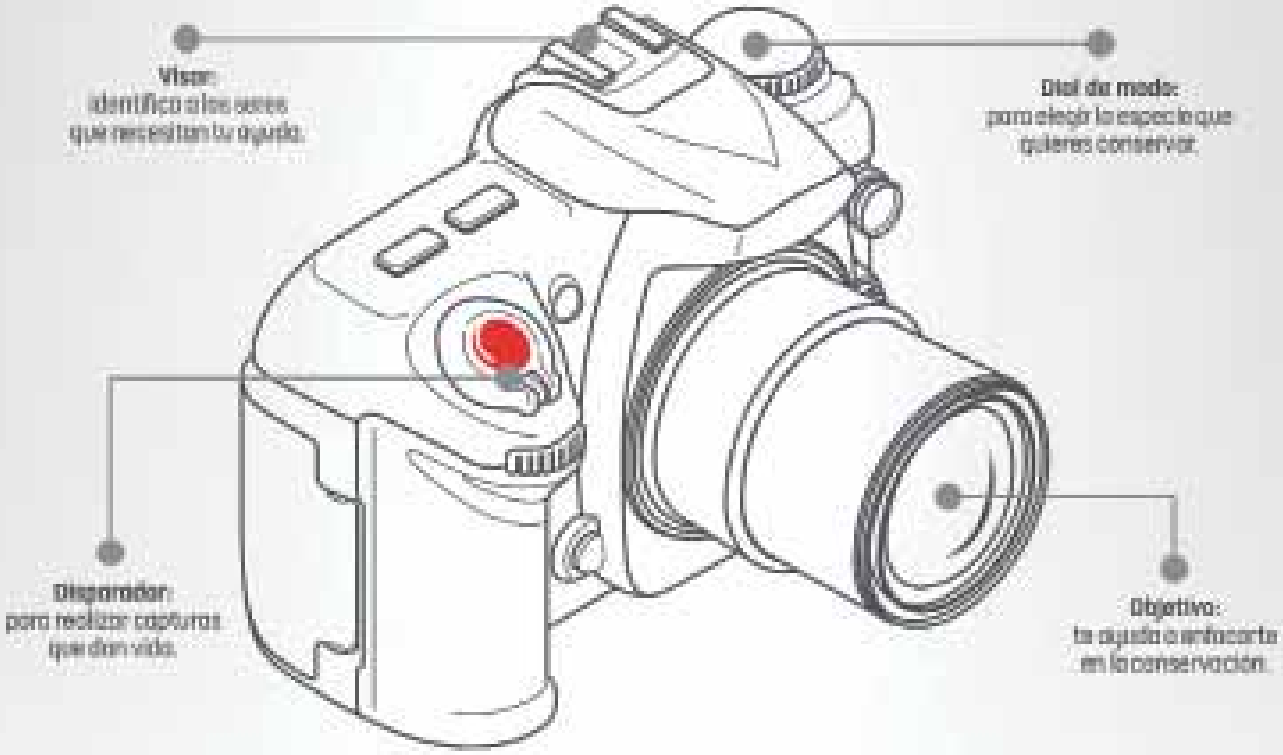

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