



# Race Ethnicity and Education

ISSN: 1361-3324 (Print) 1470-109X (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cree20>

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To cite this article: Andrew Webb & Sarah Radcliffe (2015): Unfulfilled promises of equity: racism and interculturalism in Chilean education, Race Ethnicity and Education, DOI: [10.1080/13613324.2015.1095173](https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1095173)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1095173>



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Published online: 05 Nov 2015.



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# Unfulfilled promises of equity: racism and interculturalism in Chilean education

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## ABSTRACT

In rural Araucanía secondary schools, prescriptive and formal government programs for interculturalism – designed to overcome differentials between Indigenous and non-Indigenous pupils in educational outcomes – have had limited impact. Drawing on research across four schools, this article examines how the dynamics between state-led top-down prescriptive guidelines interface with teacher practice, school objectives, and existing racializing dynamics to produce diverse educational outcomes. Drawing on in-depth qualitative research involving over 100 pupils and teachers, this article identifies two key in-school processes that work to undercut official policy effectiveness. First, state policies do little to challenge staff and institutionalized racism, thereby perpetuating the marking of Indigenous pupils as Other. Combined with lack of political will and resources for teacher training and lesson preparation, this leaves educational inequalities in place. Second, the institutional allocation of time and resources to intercultural education reinforces widespread devaluation of indigenous knowledge among teachers, educators and public opinion. Nevertheless, the study also found that in certain schools these conditions did not prevent the adoption of pedagogies that affirmed Indigenous difference and challenged the dominance of whiteness. Informed by a critical theorization of the power and unmarked nature of racial inequality, this article argues that whiteness is neither recognized nor challenged in rural secondary schools in southern Chile, despite its ubiquity and pervasive influence on curriculum, pedagogies and institutional arrangements.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 October 2014  
Accepted 23 June 2015

## KEYWORDS

Interculturalism; whiteness; racialized education; Mapuche; Chile

## 1. Introduction

In the southern region of Araucanía where educational outcomes are among the lowest in Chile, teachers working in Indigenous-majority rural secondary schools face a number of challenges. Whilst the inequitable nature of the national education system has been publically scrutinized over the past decade through a number of high profile student-led movements, less attention has been paid to regional differentials, or the racial inequalities operating therein (Montecinos and Williamson 2011; Webb and Radcliffe 2015a). Our analysis from a three year research project provides teacher- and pupil-led narratives about barriers to the creation of quality, and culturally relevant, education practices in four secondary schools located in rural areas of the Araucanía region. In doing so, we address the

structural, pedagogic and value-oriented issues that reproduce inequities in educational opportunity and attainment for these schooling populations.

Numerous studies demonstrate that the effectiveness of education outcomes depends on teachers' competencies to challenge their own biases and racist attitudes, and to learn about and understand the values, practices and world-views of ethnic minority pupils in their classrooms (Banks 2009; McAllister and Irvine 2000; Villegas and Lucas 2002; Walters, Garii, and Walters 2009). Teachers' attitudes, central to shaping pupils' normative expectations about how to behave, the validity of their knowledge, and, ultimately, what they should aspire to achieve, take on added significance in multicultural environments (Nieto 1996). As Sherry Marx (2004) notes, this is problematic in contexts where teachers define themselves in terms of a country's non-racial, normative whiteness, and fail to recognize racially-constructed power differentials in the classroom. Lack of critical self-awareness among teachers is likely to re-produce ethnocentric responses to ethnically diverse pupils' behaviours so as to privilege dominant national-majority norms (Gay and Howard 2000). Extending these studies we demonstrate the inter-play between teachers' privileging of an unacknowledged whiteness and their restricted definitions and practices of interculturalism. The absence of such practices, designed to overcome differentials between Indigenous and non-Indigenous pupils in educational outcomes, provides explanations for education inequalities in Chile.

Whiteness studies capture ways in which white dominance and superiority are ideologically reproduced across and through the public sphere, political discourses and social institutions (Giroux 1997). Unequal power relations and statuses in their socio-historic contexts have given rise to the invention of whiteness, often constructed along pseudo-biological lines, as a privileging of so-called 'whites' over populations marked as other. Racism is the presence of beliefs and practices which sustain and justify social hierarchy and exclusion premised on ascribed racial characteristics, in this case whiteness. The reproduction of racism need not draw on explicitly crude biological assumptions of superiority. New racism reworks colonial and imperialist ideas into expressions emerging from contemporary meaningful cultural and religious differences so as to mark out particular populations as Other (Barker 1981). Guided by this approach, the wider study of which this article forms a part critically examined the structural and ideological reproduction of white privilege through education, and questioned the capacity of interculturalism to reconfigure these social formations of racism (also Radcliffe and Webb 2015).

Building on literature that documents how whiteness is built into the organizational space of schools (Barajas and Ronkvist 2007, on the US) and among teacher attitudes (Picower 2009), our extensive qualitative research in the racialized (Indigenous) spaces of secondary schools in southern Chile examines the dynamics between state-led top-down intercultural prescriptive education and teacher practice, school objectives, and existing racializing dynamics produce diverse educational outcomes. Recent work demonstrates the pervasiveness of whitened privilege among pre-service teachers and the mixed results of multicultural training initiatives (Da Costa 2014 on Brazil; Solomona et al. 2005 on Canada). In the Chilean context, close observation in secondary schools of the Mapuche-majority rural areas of Araucanía confirms that state-led 'recognition' of cultural diversity, for lack of wider initiatives in teacher training and resource provision, achieves little to challenge staff and institutionalized racism or the marking out of Indigenous pupils as Other from a whitened norm, leaving in place existing educational inequalities.

## 2. Interculturalism: transcending racism?

As in European and North American multicultural initiatives, interculturalism was spearheaded in policy circles and academic investigations across Latin America in order to improve ethnic and racialized groups' rights and representation (Aikman 1997; Lopez and Kuper 1999; Meer and Modood 2012). As widely documented, both multicultural and intercultural approaches have come under scrutiny for an implicit 'integration' agenda, prioritizing symbolic recognition of difference over substantive material transformations.<sup>1</sup> Tubino (2005) notes that *functional* interculturalism initiatives are limited to

reducing or avoiding ethnic conflict but do little to challenge existing racism and patterns of exclusion. In Chile, state narratives of intercultural political reconstruction are delivered in ways that reinforce racial-cultural difference (Chiodi 2005). This literature notes how interculturalism is quickly reduced to biculturalism, binaries of overly Indigenous /non-Indigenous categories, which position dominant Western (whitened) norms against a subordinate Indigenous Other (see paragraph below). Extending these discussions, we examine schools in action to explore the processes leading to these outcomes. Our analysis shows that despite national-level policies, the nature and extent of interculturalism are not fixed from the outset, and that grounded practices associated with interculturalism come to operate in a precarious material context, and in fields of meaning construction that result in uneven and at times radically different outcomes for education.

Such insights build upon research in Latin America on intercultural education. Reforms in education and other spheres arose in the region following shifts in geopolitics and civic status during the 1980s (Lopez and Kuper 1999). Grass-root initiatives aimed to counter epistemological forms of domination, to cultivate new social relations and identities, foster more diverse cultural knowledges, and promote Indigenous politics (Gustafson 2005; Walsh 2000).

As documented elsewhere, ethnic subordination and institutional racism are not automatically challenged in intercultural schools as state-endorsed national curriculum and classroom practices perpetuate racialized exclusions and symbolic violence (cf. Gustafson 2005; Luykx 1999 on Bolivia). In the Chilean case, intercultural education has been interpreted as a politically acceptable form of 'Indigenous education' to compensate for 'deficient' Indigenous educational outcomes (Chiodi 2005), and continues to privilege a whitened norm. This empties difference of effective significance by reducing all Indigenous pupils and students to a homogenous category of Other, leaving unquestioned the heterogeneous internal meanings of 'Indigenous' or 'Afro-descendants'.

Whilst, as discussed below, racial logics continue to operate partially as a result of top-down policies, the focus on bottom-up practices in individual schools also suggests that teacher attitudes are influential in shaping the actual meaning and content of interculturalism. Evidence suggests that interculturalism is a viable mechanism for raising pupil achievement levels by providing culturally relevant content and teaching methods (Lopez and Kuper 1999). To examine the factors behind its (in)capacity to challenge inequity in the classroom requires that interculturalism be understood as pedagogy rather than solely as policy (Valdiviezo 2010, p30). We focus on teacher attitudes that facilitate or impede interculturalism (cf Zirkel 2008), examining how official intercultural programs are contextualized and offset by school-level initiatives to develop distinct forms of interculturalism in classrooms, by comparing practices across secondary schools. The comparative approach to secondary establishments thereby extends existing Chilean literature in important directions (compare Díaz-Coliñir, 1999; Ortiz 2009; Quintriqueo and McGinty 2009; Relmuan 2005). Whereas Chilean research demonstrated the devaluation of intercultural knowledges among teachers and primary schoolers, it remains to be seen at diverse secondary schools how resistance in individual institutional sites to proceduralist, nationalist models of education comprise 'broader battles over hegemony' (Mitchell 2001), and the specific practices that might comprise such transformative education. Our research in southern Chile suggests that bottom-up forms of intercultural practice emerge in varying forms across institutions and that some of these practices counter the assimilatory and integrationist impulse behind official Chilean state policy. Racial and political contexts in the Araucanía tend to produce a range of intercultural moments across school environments, which vary in their effectiveness to challenge inequitable educational outcomes.

### 3. Methods and research context

The findings presented in this article form part of broader research objectives to investigate how contested relations between ethnicity, nationhood, citizenship, and indigenous rights among Mapuche youths are worked out in educational settings. The methods selected were those which would most facilitate these ends. In-depth information regarding the social processes, attitudes and experiences of pupils and professional staff in secondary education was gathered using multiple qualitative methods

in four schools in the Araucanía during the 2011–2012 school year. All four establishments are state-funded (by subsidy or public funding), and have technical-vocational curricula offering a variety of qualifications, and have boarding facilities to house rural pupils requiring weekly boarding. With a Mapuche research assistant, we carried out 17 repeated focus groups of six to eight pupils with a total representative sample of 103 Indigenous pupils aged 13–19, together with 16 individual interviews. Researchers also undertook interviews with four head teachers, 12 teachers, and policymakers as well as textbook analysis. Pedagogic practices were ascertained via systematic classroom observations – six hours in each school, and observation-participation in activities. All methods provided insight into pupil–teacher relationships, the language used in classrooms, curricular content, and pupil responses to pedagogic techniques in schools where Mapuche pupils comprise nearly three-quarters of enrolments<sup>2</sup>.

Since most participants (teachers and pupils) denied the existence of overt racism in school environments, the specifics of how whiteness privilege is reproduced through the education system was approached by focusing on the construction of cultural differences as a form of new racism. Interviewees were asked about their views on equality, nation, educational structuring and outcomes, and other themes which provided opportunities to voice opinions about Mapuche populations and Chilean society.

The schools are located in two *comunas* – the administrative division within provinces – characterized by small-scale agricultural economies, limited commerce, and relatively poor public services. Nearly half the populations of both *comunas* are self-identified Mapuche residents. These concentrated demographics are unique to specific rural areas of the Araucanía Region, the historic territory of Mapuche populations. Some historic context is useful to contextualize these dynamics. Since the military-led forced incorporation of southern Mapuche populations into the Chilean state during the ‘Pacification’ of the region during latter half of the nineteenth century, relations between the non-Indigenous-dominated nation-state and the Mapuche have been characterized by ongoing tensions between autonomy and assimilation, between national economic development and Indigenous livelihoods, at times erupting into confrontations. While many Indigenous in this region now speak Spanish and consider themselves Chilean citizens, the issues of education, language, territory and land remain contentious and subject to debate from a variety of perspectives.

In this context a comparison of the four case study schools<sup>3</sup> with respect to their pedagogic objectives, histories, and structural arrangements illustrates how the processes outlined above come to play a role in shaping educational institutionalization in Araucanía rural secondary schools:

*School A:* An intercultural state-subsidized school, independently established by a consortium of Mapuche teachers during the 1980s (today reduced to two members), with a view to implementing an ethno-cultural education. This ethos – intended for a Mapuche, rather than an ethnically diverse, school population – still informs the teaching practice. It provides Mapuzungun [Mapuche language] classes during the first two years of secondary education and vocational training in intercultural nursing. Located 2 km from the closest town, it has a number of *rukas* (historic Mapuche homes) distributed around the paths leading to the main building, whose architecture is distinctly Indigenous with pentagonal wall structures and windows carrying the *cruz simetrica* of Mapuche symbolism. Of the 110 pupils enrolled, approximately 80% are Mapuche, and five of the 10 teachers are Mapuche. The school is under-funded, resulting in infrastructural deficiencies such as insufficient toilets, broken windows and a lack of teaching materials and classroom aids.

*School B:* Positioned just outside a small town, this state-subsidized religious school is the largest of the research sites, with enrolments of over 400 secondary pupils, approximately 90% of whom are Mapuche. As one of Chile’s longest running intercultural schools, its architecture and spaces are designed around Mapuche customs and symbolism. Administered by an NGO foundation established by the progressive Catholic Church, it was originally concerned with ethno-development in the region.

<sup>4</sup> At the time of research, there were 11 full-time Mapuche teachers (of 18) and a school-designed intercultural curriculum. The school is maintained in good condition, albeit with limited classroom materials and resources, benefitting from numerous grants and projects that supplement government subsidies.<sup>5</sup> It provides a broad range of intercultural vocations including gastronomy, nursery/kinder-garten care, and nursing, as well as a conventional training in administration.

*School C:* One km from the closest town, this state-subsidized religious school with this school now works within the national curriculum. Early intercultural initiatives in the 1990s – now discontinued – were driven by an evangelical sponsor (similar to the Summer Institute of Linguistics cf. Gustafson 2009), and teachers with intercultural expertise, who later left. Of the 240 enrolled pupils, approximately 70% are Mapuche (30% are non-Indigenous Chileans), and during our research, none of the 20 teachers were Mapuche. It has large grounds for its specialist agricultural vocational-technical training, and facilities are adequate for the Araucanía context. The school's principal mission is to prepare rural pupils for employment in agriculture, metal welding and nursery care, with two annual events organized around intercultural objectives.

*School D:* A municipal school catering for primary, secondary and adult education, located on the edge of a town. Enrolments for secondary pupils total 132, of which approximately 80% are Mapuche. The school employs 27 teachers (across all education levels), though none of those teaching secondary education were Mapuche. The school, due to be renovated after the research period was finished, is in disrepair with few teaching resources and poor heating facilities in winter. The Indigenous-majority demographics of the town are drawn on to promote a sense of the school catering for Mapuche pupils on its webpage, posters and school constructions (a *ruka*, Mapuche house). An intercultural program is provided for primary school pupils and in 2014 (post-research) was included in the pilot scheme for secondary education. It provides vocational skills in administration and accounting.

Close examination of the meaning and practices associated with interculturalism across these schools provides insights into processes resulting in Araucanía's uneven educational outcomes. Young Mapuche in Chile pursue secondary education to a greater extent than their parents were able, staying longer in school and accessing higher education (Cerdeña 2009; INE 2002). However inequities in education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous pupils continue to produce lower average results nationally for Indigenous populations (McEwan 2004). Low education outcomes in Indigenous-majority schools provide an indication of racial inequalities, but are an inadequate measure of *how* racism operates within school structures so as to perpetuate inequity.

To address this, section 4 focuses on structural restrictions that undermine intercultural policies and the ways racialized imaginaries work their way into teacher attitudes and expectations, especially in Indigenous-majority schools. Section 5 highlights the pedagogic consequences of policies and teacher attitudes by examining the content and knowledges incorporated into classroom practices, as well as the teacher–pupil relationships that are established in the schools. We document the different ranges of intercultural possibilities currently practiced in Araucanía secondary schools.

## 4. Obstacles to interculturalism in Araucanía schools

### 4.1. School- and municipal-structured impediments

Teachers working in rural secondary boarding schools face a number of challenges to ensure that quality education is provided to Indigenous-majority schools. With limited resources at their disposal, teachers often work within inadequate classroom conditions (author reference), while national policies inhibit teachers' capacity to incorporate culturally-relevant curricular content. However, teachers and head teachers are also complicit in maintaining a school environment where racism is normalized, and Chilean (as opposed to Mapuche) cultural values made hegemonic.

Working relations within many Araucanía schools are permeated by racialized hierarchies, affecting the dynamics between regular teachers and part-time Indigenous educators who are employed under the state intercultural program. 'Traditional educators' are responsible for teaching Mapuzungun (Mapuche language) classes at schools participating in the Ministry of Education's intercultural program.<sup>6</sup> These educators are, by state policy mandate, selected by Indigenous community closest to the school, yet this does not guarantee the educators equal status or equivalent salary as other teachers. Moreover, educators are employed for a limited number of hours which are inserted into the school week in ways that compartmentalize Indigenous knowledge and marginalize it into slots within the



overall teaching program (Díaz-Coliñir 2014). Interviews with teachers suggest that this top-down policy to promote intercultural dialogue is ineffective at challenging broader inequalities on the ground, except in highly uneven ways. In Schools A and B, traditional educators were given prominent roles and were well respected by the school community. By contrast, at School D the traditional educator teaching primary pupils described his experience with the secondary teachers:

I get annoyed when they [teachers] treat me in a derisory way, so I tell them that they aren't dynamic enough and that if they aren't interested in Mapuche culture then they shouldn't come to work here. (Mapuche traditional educator, male, School D)

As the quote suggests, the majority of teaching staff – most of them non-Indigenous – do not express a willingness to embrace the consequences of state policy. Yet teachers across the schools denied that racist attitudes or discrimination existed in school relationships between staff or with pupils. Teachers were however conscious of anti-discrimination legislation, which according to one teacher, suppressed overt racism.<sup>7</sup>

[Discrimination in the school] is somewhat complex because it's not an open issue. Everyone has their own ideas [about others] but now with the new anti-racism laws, everyone is careful. So no, openly there is nothing – the teachers are careful here. Sometimes a certain comment may insinuate [something discriminatory] but it's never something open. (Teacher, male, non-Mapuche, School D)

The fact that intercultural policy does not foment anti-racist work, combined with the limited implementation of anti-discrimination legislation combines to create a context in which teachers continue to harbour discriminatory attitudes. In interviews teachers candidly expressed racially-inflected narratives about Mapuche culture.

Schools in the Araucanía region do little to ensure that teachers are trained in anti-racism. In practice too, schools cannot guarantee that staff fulfil Ministry of Education guidelines on cultural awareness and experience of multiethnic classrooms. For example, School D's annual education project (*proyecto educativo institucional* [PEI])<sup>8</sup> acknowledges the district's Indigenous-majority demographics and requires teachers to 'have knowledge of Mapuche culture and experience with diverse pupils' (PEI 2009–2011: 46), technical points required for Ministry of Education approval. Regardless of this requirement, our research found that none of the secondary teachers at school D – by their own admission – matched this profile. A number of factors are important here: national teacher training does not include intercultural skills or content systematically, or anti-racism, whilst the regional Ministry of Education are not given the human or financial resources to provide on-the-job training to teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, the national curriculum designates that teachers and/or schools are free to adapt pedagogic delivery to the socio-cultural specifics of each Chilean region, without this requiring intercultural teaching experience and training. Provided the national minimum obligatory content and fundamental objectives are met, the policy apparently permits flexible implementation of intercultural pedagogies. In southern Chile however according to local teachers and ministry officials, broader structural barriers prevent this flexibility having an impact in classrooms. At present, interculturalism remains a commitment undertaken by a minority, for whom there are only permissive, rather than enabling, policies. With each school 'adapting' the national curriculum, efforts to construct a broader and robust intercultural pedagogy become precarious. As one head teacher noted, intercultural schools struggle to coordinate among themselves and remain isolated:

[Each school] works on their own, in their own way and 'runs alone'. There's no way of saying [to other schools] 'look, we have two cultures in this region so how are we going to enable these two cultures to co-exist?' We don't have that; we only have a [national] curriculum which is imposed from above with which we can barely do anything. We could, though, with local administration if local political authorities gave us that capacity. (Head teacher, male, Mapuche, School A)

Currently twelve pilot interculturalism programs exist in secondary schools across Chile; five at the time of the research. Moreover unlike primary school interculturalism, no text books or teaching aids are currently available to secondary teachers. Hence although decentralization permits adaptation, the context within which learning about intercultural practice could be shared and made routine remains one with under-resourced support networks, and low status. Consequently, head teachers and teachers

expressed the view that too great an onus was placed on them, resulting in frustration among national and regional intercultural education officials:

We still have a lot more to do to make the Ministry [of Education] say 'this is the Araucanía Region and we need to train the teachers so that they can link their institutional education projects to intercultural education. (Regional IBE office, female, Mapuche)

There's no [national] policy [for teacher training] and that's what [teachers] say to us – that there need to be courses or extra training (*perfeccionamiento*) so that they can understand what intercultural bilingual education is about. But that doesn't exist in Chile. (Technical assessor of secondary schools, female, Mapuche)

Interviews with regional educators such as these reveal a disjuncture between state-led initiatives to activate a national program for school-based interculturalism, and the minimal provision of teaching skills to implement it. The case study schools confirmed how teachers found it nearly impossible to adapt their specialist disciplinary training to match the region's cultural diversity. They pinpointed particularly the lack of adequate training and insufficient time to prepare lessons. Interviewees commented too on how institutions placed low priority on interculturalism:

The idea is that all the teachers should contextualize. But not all do; some because they aren't convinced; [others] because they don't want to put in the effort to research and how they should do it for their subject. (Teacher, male, Mapuche, School B)

I can't manage [to adapt the curriculum]; I would like to be able to, but in truth, I don't have time to be repositioning myself and finding new methodologies. (Teacher, female, non-Mapuche, School A)

One teacher noted the hegemonic perspective behind national teacher training, hinting at the erasure of Indigenous issues and forms of knowledge:

The teachers who have gone through university, history teachers, we've all received very nationalist training. So when I came here to teach I came with the national education chip inserted. But the first thing they said to me here was you need to contextualize. (Teacher, male, Mapuche, School B)

The possibilities for equitable schooling in the Araucanía are hence limited by the absence of education infrastructures to challenge assimilatory and mono-cultural pedagogic training and practices. As we demonstrate below, these institutional factors heighten racial inequity in classrooms.

#### **4.2. Teacher attitudes and normative expectations**

Owing to dominant racial stereotypes and discrimination against Indigenous people among the Chilean public, many teachers enter rural, low-achieving Indigenous-majority schools with preconceptions about pupils' capacities in education. In turn they uphold mono-cultural norms which govern classroom relationships. In this section we identify a number of teacher attitudes which downplay the importance of regional racialized hierarchies, and reproduce normative (whitened) explanations of pupil potential.

The majority of teachers expressed low expectations about education outcomes among the Araucanía schooling population, particularly in rural hinterlands. Their narratives overlooked racial factors contributing to existing inequalities, and instead took for granted pre-existing differentials between school types and rural residents. Teachers often cited the geographical isolation of Mapuche populations as the source of education inequalities. The male, non-Mapuche head teacher at School C explained that rural primary education left pupils years behind the minimum standard required to initiate secondary schooling, and blamed poor transport, teacher's lack of punctuality and short-term commitments to rural schools, and lack of teachers' dedication. Teachers at all schools corroborated this opinion, stating that their first task was to help rural pupils catch up on literacy and basic curricular content. Whilst connections between the isolation of rural primary schools and education quality exist, staff attitudes (see various quotes below) evidence the lack of critical reflection among teachers regarding the causes for Mapuche disadvantage, blaming instead the Indigenous pupils themselves.

Teachers also blamed the Chilean school choice system. According to a male, non-Mapuche teacher, as a municipal school D had acquired the reputation as the worst at secondary level in the *comuna* (provincial administrative division), thereby consigning them to accept problematic pupils



expelled from other schools who, in his words, ‘think they can come here to do whatever they like.’ In School A, a male, Mapuche teacher attributed pupils’ difficulties and poor results to the fact that their school – unlike elite private institutions – was unable to expel (or screen out) disruptive pupils since there was insufficient demand to enrol.<sup>10</sup> Teachers described their role as working to the best of their abilities within difficult conditions, yet did not reflect critically on underlying racial and socio-economic inequalities and possible pedagogic and schooling adaptations.<sup>11</sup> Such narratives naturalize the whitened privilege that exists within the Chilean education system. What our research highlighted is how powerful these norms are in Indigenous-majority schools, in an Indigenous majority region. Teachers did not recognize their racialized assumptions about Mapuche pupils, as discussed by a male Mapuche educator at School D:

I always say to the [other, non-Indigenous] teachers, I always encourage them, but some are somewhat unwilling to avoid being discriminatory and to understand the pupils. I try to convey the importance of our Mapuche culture in education, because there are so many pupils from Mapuche families. Some [teachers] don’t pay much attention.

When pressed, teachers specified that their pupils faced a number of social and cultural problems. Teachers stressed pupils’ social vulnerability and non-academic upbringing, and avoided identifying pupils as Mapuche (perhaps, as noted above, to avoid accusations of racism). Many teachers invoked correlations between rural homesteads – associated strongly with racialized Indigenous populations – and anti-education values to explain why teachers are unable to raise education quality.

Here we’re not only the pupils’ teachers, but we’re also social workers [and] psychologists, because many pupils arrive with problems and deficiencies. ... We have a high percentage of pupils with, let’s call it, high social deterioration. (Head teacher, male, non-Mapuche, School D)

I spoke with a teacher the other day and he/she said, ‘I’m trained to give lessons to normal pupils, I’m not trained to deal with those with learning problems, nor those with serious educational problems.’ (Teacher, male, Mapuche, School A)

Rural pupils were described as socio-affectively vulnerable, and reference was often made to the index of schooling vulnerability (*indice de vulnerabilidad escolar*), which provides a formula that generates extra resources in areas of social disadvantage. Head teachers frequently referenced their high ranking on this index to explain low education outcomes. Pupils were not thought to be dangerous, merely unsuited to ‘normal’ school environments and associated intellectual demands. In this way the Mapuche-majority schooling populations – in spite of teachers’ reluctance to explicitly identify the Mapuche as the primary subjects – are made into racialized subjects, whose failings are read off combinations of rurality, low achieving backgrounds, and racial difference. Unlike dominant media discourse however, teachers did not associate rural pupils with violence, noting that urban schools in the region were more likely to suffer from inter-pupil violence.

In Chile’s dominant social imaginary, the Araucanía countryside is closely associated with poverty, Mapuche indigeneity and subsistence farming. Many teacher comments described the situation of their pupils in terms of a disjuncture between modern urban whitened spaces of professional and skilled occupations and higher education, and peripheral rural, Indigenous spaces consigned to unskilled or manual work. These binary categories find echo in the geographies of Araucanía education, as rural establishments with highest Mapuche intake are technical-vocational schools, the *primary* purpose of which – as the national curriculum makes clear – is to provide skill sets for (mostly) manual low-skilled occupations. The case study schools confirm this, having an abject record of university entrance exam scores, producing fewer than five pupils with the grades to study at a state university.<sup>12</sup>

Associated with these discourses, teaching staff described rural children in the Araucanía as mal-adjusted to the requirements of academic work. In particular, teachers made associations between the financial situations of pupils’ families and home socio-cultural environments as detrimental:

The children only come to school because the parents or grandparents say they must, not because they have a mission to fulfil, like going on to further study, but because they have to go to school, and that’s the concept that the parents have at home. (Teacher, female, non-Mapuche, School A)

The parents give their children [the idea] that education is [a means] to earn a bit of money, but not about their general development, or about having better social status, or developing as a person. So [pupils] can't find any reason to stay on for four years to study when they can leave in eighth grade [at 14 years] and earn some money.<sup>13</sup> (Teacher, female, non-Mapuche, School C)

Blame was apportioned to Mapuche families and pupils, yet teachers rarely linked this situation to pedagogic methods and curricula content. Indeed, some teachers dismissed the possibility of interculturalism out of hand, arguing that it went against the wishes of pupils and families. One female non-Mapuche teacher told us,

In the majority of schools I've worked in during 17 years, many [pupils] feel ashamed of being Mapuche ... very few know their origins and wouldn't you just know it, it's the parents who don't want to teach them, so how can we be expected to rescue the[ir] culture considering that we don't have bilingual speakers here? ... Some communities which are closed off have their own school with a bilingual teacher. (School C)

Certainly, as documented elsewhere in Latin America (cf. Gustafson 2009), some Indigenous communities are suspicious of state-led interculturalism for its segregating, overly-essentialized and controlling educational experience, while others worry it detracts from children's abilities to compete with pupils studying the generic national curriculum.<sup>14</sup> From their experience, Araucanía teachers concluded that Mapuche cultural practices were in decline, that ties to an ethnic community were diminishing in households, and that Mapuche youth were increasingly preoccupied with global, rather than Indigenous, culture. In other words, these teachers reproduced the bi-culturalist understandings of cultural difference, hegemonic in Chilean state narratives (Chioldi 2005).

The only thing they'd like is *not* to be Mapuche ... they'd be happier being *winka* [Mapuzungun term meaning non-Mapuche], they feel *winka*. I think it's because they associate being Mapuche with poverty and also a bit of discrimination. (Teacher, male, non-Mapuche, School D)

The Mapuche have become more modern and haven't kept their customs. Rather, they inserted themselves into all that's Western ... they didn't know how to respect their own traditions or knowledge. (Teacher, male, non-Mapuche, School C)

Another teacher drew on the discourse of whitened privilege in Chilean society to justify the lack of intercultural activities within schools:

Over time the Mapuche culture will disappear – it will be consumed by the culture into which they [the Mapuche] integrate. ... When the young people go out to get work [will it matter] if he/she knows how to speak Mapuche? No, they need to know how to speak good Spanish. (Teacher, male, non-Mapuche, School D)

For these teachers, interculturalism is an abstract policy imposed on schools, a policy moreover that – due to their bicultural framings – appears at odds with contemporary Mapuche society. Instead of recognizing diverse and hybrid forms of Mapuche self-identification and cultural expression, teacher narratives drew heavily on dominant social imaginaries about Mapuche-majority rural school populations and the inevitability of incorporation into dominant Chilean society, which led them to view state-led interculturalism as irrelevant or a distraction. In the following section, we examine the way these attitudes translate into classroom practices.

## 5. Interculturalism in classroom practices

Having considered a number of structural and attitudinal barriers to equitable education in rural Araucanía secondary schools, this section provides evidence of how the diverse forms of interculturalism are practiced in classrooms. Literature in the US demonstrates that culturally responsive schooling, which ensures pupils' diverse ethnic backgrounds are relevant and connected to lessons – are promising strategies for raising education achievements among Indigenous youth (Castagno and Brayboy 2008). Yet the incorporation of this content does not guarantee that intercultural objectives are met (Gorski 2008). As noted by Banks (2009 – in reference to multicultural education) contextualized curriculums and diverse knowledge constructions are vital to achieve an equitable pedagogy among culturally-diverse pupils. Challenges to dominant paradigms and hegemonic knowledge constructions therefore rest on teachers' willingness and competencies to provide pupils with culturally

varied curricular content and with openness to different forms of understanding and interpreting the social world (McGee Banks and Banks 1995). We suggest that at present, this remains an unfulfilled objective in rural secondary schools in the Araucanía. Practices that are labelled ‘intercultural’ tend to be implemented and discussed in ways that rank Chilean socio-cultures above Indigenous ones. We explore how classroom practices are diversified in ways that reassert white privilege in the Araucanía.

### 5.1. Pedagogic strategies

In Mapuche-majority schools, culturally-relevant pedagogies and diverse knowledges are often absent, or taught as supplementary to the main national curriculum. To explore how content works against the effectiveness of interculturalism we focus on the relationship between what is taught and teacher disposition.

Classroom observations confirmed that teachers committed to implementing interculturalism devised pedagogic practices that were more successful at engaging pupil interest. During History, Mapuzungun, and Nursing vocational lessons, pupils were invited to draw on their knowledges and to connect them to new information, which, as one pupil asserted, contrasted sharply with instances where Indigenous epistemologies were excluded:

When the teacher is speaking about things that happened to the Mapuche, because we have a certain amount of knowledge about this, everyone re-focuses on the lesson. Generally, when they speak about other countries or things like that, we get distracted, we don't pay much attention, but when they start to talk about the Mapuche, because we know about them, we all start to give our opinion. (Female, 18, School A)

Pupil narratives suggest that developing engaging educational experiences for Indigenous youth requires that teachers be resourceful with curricular content. At School D, pupils' opportunities to engage with contextualized, epistemologically-appropriate content were absent, resulting in disruptions and lack of cooperation, as demonstrated by classroom observations:

*Religion Lesson, School D, 11:40am.* The teacher comes into the classroom and asks for quiet. A group of pupils are gathered around a wood burning stove whilst others congregate round the classroom door. The teacher hands out a work guide on ‘The family as part of my identity’ and the pupils eventually sit down. Some pupils shout at each other and the teacher asks them to respect each other. After gathering into groups, the teacher goes to each in turn to answer questions regarding the task. At this point, general disorder breaks out as one pupil leaves the classroom to answer his mobile, others move around, and another plays music on his mobile. A few minutes later the teacher urges a group sitting at the back of the class to get on with their work. They ignore her request. Some pupils tell the teacher that the final question is too difficult, to which she replies that they are intelligent and have the ability to do it. A pupil shouts once more across the classroom and the teacher responds by telling him that he is not in the countryside.

Although beyond the scope of this paper to discuss classroom management or the quality of education provision, vital connections can be made between teacher commitment as ‘agents of change’ and education outcomes (Villegas and Lucas 2002). The extent to which teachers seek opportunities to challenge social inequalities and stereotypes in the classroom impacts pupil perceptions of the meaningfulness of interculturalism. The theme of ‘the family as part of my identity’ has the potential to engage with ethnic, gendered or socio-economic inequalities, and move beyond homogenized concepts of Chilean belonging. For example, a History lesson at school B asked pupils to write an ‘autobiography’ (in first person singular) by self-identifying with a famous Mapuche personality and their accomplishments. According to the teacher, the exercise aimed to encourage a positive valuation of the Mapuche within the Chilean state. Barriers to quality education are reinforced through the lack of critical awareness among teachers regarding the reproduction of wider ethnocentric or discriminatory attitudes in their day-to-day lessons.

Even when teachers are responsive to racial inequalities in the Araucanía, reflected in a commitment to culturally-relevant curricula, difficulties remain in providing an integrated and sustained intervention on student's self-identity, as examples from teachers and pupils illustrate. In School C, a Spanish language teacher expressed dissatisfaction with her efforts to incorporate Mapuche subject matter into one of her lessons:

A short time ago, I had the idea of reviving histories, legends, something about their [Mapuche] origins, but not something already written down. When I had the idea I thought it would be great, but it didn't work out at all well. [The pupils said] 'No, my grandmother doesn't remember' or 'my father doesn't ...' whatever. But I don't think [pupils] even asked [family members]. It's then that you realize that their culture isn't reaching its potential or isn't expressed externally. I don't know what the mentality of these people is. (Teacher, female, non-Mapuche)

Teacher initiatives, in this case to make a lesson 'intercultural', prompted pupil responses that hint at the fragmented teaching of intercultural content, and the wider precariousness of anti-racist practice. In this and other lessons Mapuche oral histories were construed as 'additional' parts of an unmarked whitening teaching practice, becoming fragmented with incorporation into a solitary lesson. Given the structural and discursive contexts described above, teachers and pupils are unlikely to invest time and energy in lessons of this nature. Rather than assess why Mapuche histories and identities are so precarious for pupils, teachers explain the lack of interest in terms of their cultural deficits, or their relative poverty, as illustrated by a teacher's comments about adapting the agricultural curriculum:

It's necessary to adapt it to their reality because they all come from homes where there's only a little land and few resources. You're not going to talk to them about buying a machine that costs 600 million pesos. That's not the reality; rather, it's buying tools they can have. (Male, non-Mapuche teacher, School C)

Similarly in self-identified intercultural schools, the inclusion of non-national pedagogies and knowledges has proven difficult. Mapuzungun classes in Schools A and B came under criticism from Mapuche youth. As noted in other research, Latin American state-led intercultural programs rarely foster bilingualism systematically, and tend to subordinate Indigenous languages to the dominant culture/language (Aikman 1997; Lopez and Kuper 1999). In the Araucanía context, it is therefore significant that despite declining Mapuzungun fluency among Mapuche, and its low status in Chilean society, the rural pupils we interviewed demanded that pedagogic strategies be altered towards more contextually-relevant dialogue. School A's Mapuzungun teacher was not a native speaker which impeded her capacity to structure the class around oral-based teaching and learning. In cases such as this, schools' limited resources constrain them from hiring fully appropriate teachers to adapt pedagogies to match intercultural objectives.

In School A, interculturalism was tied to objectives of providing pupils with 'a strong cultural formation' and skills in Mapuzungun and Mapuche knowledge, according to the school's annual education plan. Introduced to alternate knowledge and identities, pupils noted the disjuncture between the school's physical appearance (Mapuche architecture, ritual buildings, and Mapuche wooden statues) and the content of teaching, a juxtaposition pupils viewed as inconsistent with the intercultural objectives of the school (Female, 16 years, School A). Pupils reject state-led interculturalism, rather than affinities to an ethnic community, and express the desire to re-create more culturally-relevant forms of education. Pupils' criticism of teacher suitability demonstrates alertness to the kind of interculturalism that they want. Mapuche youth see themselves as contributing Indigenous knowledges, particularly in contexts where teachers lack specific dimensions of Indigenous knowledge:

The teacher who we had last year, who taught us nursing, was talking with us one time and told us she didn't know how to treat [an illness] and that there was no cure. We told her that there was, and what its name was [in Mapuzungun], but she had no idea about it. (Male, 16 years, School A,)

A sub-set of teachers – almost regardless of the school's pedagogic plan – used such moments to open up their classrooms to a more horizontal exchange of information between teachers and pupils, as classroom observations and interviews confirmed. Among this group, cooperative and group learning strategies were common, as was a greater emphasis on oral work over dictation or writing. However, in most cases, individual teachers had devised these strategies on their own:

I do a lot of talking in some lessons, but in others I incorporate practical sessions. I look for mechanisms to work with the texts. Now I know where these problems with the kids come from; the primary schools ... maybe the teacher didn't understand why the kids get confused, why they find it hard to read a text, understand a sentence, that maybe they get their languages mixed up. I understand that, and though I don't know how to deal with it because I'm not an intercultural teacher. But I do give space in my classes to reinforce ideas and make conceptual maps with them. (Teacher, male, non-Mapuche, School C)

Such initiatives owe more to individual commitment and critical reflection than to the employee's school Educational Plan (PEI), or formal teacher training. Although, the teacher quoted above feels that he was not trained as an intercultural educator, and that the wider school environment does not support his efforts. At present, Chilean teacher training offers intercultural programs in only two universities, thereby limiting – the number of staff to implement top-down interculturalism across Araucanía secondary schools (and indeed beyond). Few teachers interviewed, especially non-Mapuche teachers, had connections into Indigenous communities or had developed professional collaborations with Mapuche intellectuals, educators or their allies.

## 5.2. Interculturalism as relational

Beyond the question of intercultural curricular content or the creation of knowledge exchanges between teachers and pupils, research in rural Araucanía secondary schools highlighted the importance to school attendees and employees of intercultural social relations embedded in everyday practice and weekly routines. Scholars suggest that skills, capabilities and intercultural dialogues are informally established through continuities between schools and Indigenous homesteads, creating opportunities for bottom-up intercultural initiatives (cf. Castagno and Brayboy 2008). In contrast to technocratic intercultural procedures and strategies, teachers and pupils identified as positive for their sense of valuing Mapuche culture and perceiving a constructive role for Mapuche people in the Chilean nation, a set of easily implemented – yet unevenly developed – acts of mutual recognition and respect. Equitable relationships in classrooms between teachers and pupils appeared most consistently expressed in establishments where teacher–pupil interactions challenged racism, and encouraged ethnically diverse identities in classrooms and school environments. In schools intentionally set up to achieve intercultural objectives, interactions were more sustained, whilst in other schools, individual teachers were instrumental in developing alternate intercultural relations that challenge the exclusion of ethnic diversity in these contexts.

Pupils spoke positively about a number of routine practices at Schools A and B, which engage them as Indigenous and as respected individuals. Carried out in the schools' public areas and outside the context of classroom work, these practices are not currently included within formal state policies on interculturalism in education, and appear to have arisen from the teaching staff within each school. The young people felt these practices increased their valuation of Mapuche culture and belonging. School A begins and finishes its school week with a Mapuche greeting ceremony (*Chali tun, Chali chen*) in which all pupils gather together and are encouraged to speak in Mapuzungun to wish one another well. Likewise, School B encourages pupils to address one another and teachers by the (Mapuzungun) terms brother or sister (*peñi, lamngen*), as well as incorporating greetings (*mari mari, chumleimi*) at the beginning of lessons, and Mapuche rituals each term (*Llellipun* and *We Tripantu*<sup>15</sup>). According to interviews, these practices generate a sense of community and solidarity within the school environment, and alter their perceptions of the status of Mapuzungun and local cultural practices. In particular, pupils stressed the role of teachers in transforming their personal valuation of Mapuche culture:

The Mapuche culture was just like any other in my eyes. But then I came here and they [teachers] taught me what it meant, what its origins are, and then I began to appreciate it more and more. Now I'm proud to be Mapuche. (Female, 15 years, School A)

The teachers here are always respectful, regardless of whether they are Mapuche or not, they are actively involved with [Mapuche] ceremonies ... they demand that the pupils do the same and respect everyone else. (Female, 17 years, School B)

Moreover, pupils spoke positively about these intercultural practices and the social relations they generate to alter power dynamics in the classroom, emphasizing the importance of teachers' willingness to recognize pupils as legitimate interlocutors matter. Teachers in these settings asked bilingual pupils to contribute their understanding of *Mapuzungun* to the lessons<sup>16</sup>. By distancing themselves from the pedagogic hierarchy of teacher-as-knower and pupil-as-learner, these experiences by-pass the problem of limited teacher training and allow for more open, cooperative knowledge production.



In a school with a formal commitment to interculturalism, one teacher stressed that establishing positive ethics and preparing pupils for multicultural society was a more achievable goal than the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges, which were subject to different interpretations among teachers:

The teachers place more emphasis on interculturalism, not on the incorporation of Mapuche knowledges. There is a difference ... because there are different opinions about Mapuche ways of thinking, but everyone [teachers] agrees on the values of interculturalism and we all direct [the teaching] in the same direction; respect for the other, the value of difference, tolerance, that sort of thing. We all have the same narrative. (Teacher, male, Mapuche, School B)

This teacher's quote exemplifies widespread ambivalence around interculturalism in Chilean schools currently. On the one hand, teachers and observers recognize the limited efforts underway in other spheres – homes, communities, public opinion – to shift persistent racism, hence making interculturalism a significant agenda in schools. Yet precisely because of the restricted interpretation of interculturalism in education, and the ongoing racism in educational materials and among teachers, intercultural practices and policy achieve little against structural racism and to foment anti-racist attitudes among the national population.<sup>17</sup>

In schools C and D with no formal intercultural commitment, practices fomenting intercultural relations were more limited, owing to teacher attitudes discussed above. Nevertheless, specific teachers used their personal initiatives and routine intercultural practices to minimize the gap between Mapuche and non-Mapuche attainments. Pupils at school C spoke favourably of interactions with a Mapuche teacher – no longer employed at the school – who had drawn on her personal experiences (not curriculum content) to help raise their confidence about succeeding in education:

She would say 'I'm Mapuche and I managed it – I used that information so why can't you achieve what I achieved?'. . . She said she didn't have much money for university and all that, but that it wasn't an obstacle if you prepared and valued yourself. (Male, 16 years old, School C)

Sceptical about regular teachers' views on racial exclusion,<sup>18</sup> pupils at School D spoke instead about more supportive attitudes they encountered with two Mapuche school inspectors, who spoke to them in Mapuzungun in the playground, and talked directly about the importance of self-identifying as Mapuche, thereby subverting the school's acceptance of whitening. Having got to know one inspector through chatting, one pupil reported, 'It's that he talks to us and he emphasizes this idea that we don't have to be ashamed, and to always maintain our culture.'

In less formal capacities and particularly in the absence of formal intercultural programs, bottom-up practices are capable of generating momentary interrogations of whitened privilege in school settings. However, these practices' effect in challenging inequitable education outcomes is questionable, given the broader structural and attitudinal influence of school environments discussed above. Instead, as the examples discussed above show teachers and educators do have some agency to disrupt the hegemonic status quo of Chilean schooling.

## 6. Conclusion

In rural Araucanía secondary schools, prescriptive and formal government programs for interculturalism have had limited impact due to a combination of structural and conceptual reasons and the maintenance of social hierarchies and the values of whiteness. The limited availability of intercultural professional training combined with under-resourced schools resulted in the scarcity of appropriately-trained staff. Combined with the limited staffing of regional Ministry of Education offices to support schools that have opted for intercultural status, these factors marginalize and delegitimize intercultural agendas within rural Araucanía schools. Comparing four differently-positioned schools in southern Chile also highlighted the importance of institutional and employee commitment to interculturalism, resulting in a high degree of variability in the style, content and support given to intercultural measures within the classroom.

Teachers consistently remarked on the difficulty they face in adapting curricular content to the local setting, a difficulty resulting from insufficient professional training, lack of systematic



support at a number of scales, and their limited interaction with Indigenous actors outside the school. Whether schools were committed or not to interculturalism, our research found that it was horizontal inter-personal relations based upon mutual respect and recognition of manageable difference that most conveyed to pupils and teachers alike what interculturalism might look like and imply for wider social relations. This significant original finding suggests that ground-up initiatives focused on fomenting specific routine practices of intercultural relations remain the principal transformation to existing racialized educational inequalities. The agenda of interculturalism thereby exists beyond the prescriptions set by national educational policy, and suggests that re-humanizing<sup>19</sup> relational forms of interculturalism create environments in which more heterogeneous forms of belonging and knowing are encouraged. In rural Araucanía secondary schools, our material suggests that culturally responsive teaching offering an ethos of care and the development of interpersonal relationships generate positive school practices in which pupils feel able to draw on their diverse cultural, linguistic and knowledge-based backgrounds. Close work with teachers, pupils and schools showed how this is not automatically part of schools' official commitment to interculturalism, but required personal and institutional commitments developed from the ground-up.

## Notes

1. For critiques of 'liberal multiculturalism' and 'benevolent multiculturalism', see May (2009).
2. The remaining pupils are self-identified non-indigenous Chileans.
3. In the article, we make every effort to maintain the schools' anonymity; the inclusion of certain details is necessary, despite the potential for revealing their identities.
4. 'The NGO initiated its activities by addressing school desertion levels among Mapuche women in the region, providing them with handicraft and agricultural skills that would enable them to participate in labour market.
5. According to the head teacher, the Catholic Church does not fund the school, but the school's high enrolment numbers ensure that the school remains better financed than those schools that struggle to attract enough pupils.
6. In 2014 this amounted to 12 secondary schools participating in the pilot scheme, and more extensively in primary schools (241), now obligatory in Chilean schools with over 20% Indigenous enrolments (Diaz Coliñir 2014).
7. Anti-discrimination Law 20.609 was approved by national congress in 2012, but has come under scrutiny in public media regarding its effectiveness.
8. A document required of each school and submitted to the Ministry of Education for approval.
9. An interview with a regional coordinator of the state intercultural program revealed that efforts are made by Mapuche officials to inform teachers, but expressed frustration at the lack of sustained political will, or resources at her disposal, to make more widespread changes.
10. Under the current Chilean education system, payments are made to state-subsidized private schools premised on the number of enrolments.
11. For a discussion of the racialized effects of the Chilean school choice system see Webb and Radcliffe, 2015a.
12. School B is an exception as it ranked 96th out of 201 Araucanía secondary schools.
13. Pupils are legally obliged to study to the age of 18 years, but instances of school desertion do exist.
14. Information sourced from interviews with education officials.
15. For a discussion of We Tripantu ceremonies at case study schools, see (author reference).
16. The episode was described as: 'The Mapuzungun teacher asked her, "I can't remember how to write this, Angelica [pseudonym]. Can you remember?' and Angelica said "yes, *tia* [common Chilean term for teacher, meaning aunt], it's written like this".
17. In other research we show how, despite these obstacles, the educational policy field contains advocates of this more ambitious, progressive agenda (Radcliffe and Webb 2015).
18. Schools C and D tended to de-ethnicize pupils' identities under a rhetoric of anti-discrimination. Pupils noted that the schools treated them as 'normal' Chileans (see Webb and Radcliffe 2015b).
19. humanizing pedagogy scholars challenge the notion that academic underachievement among ethnic minority students can be rectified via mechanistic forms of 'correct' teaching methods or 'pre-packaged curricula' (Bartolomé 1994; Franquiz and del Carmen Salazar 2004). They propose that asymmetrical power relations in classrooms provide a complimentary analytical lens for explaining inequalities, requiring a move from over-technical solutions towards a critical analysis of how minority students become dehumanized in relation to a normative white status.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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