

History, Education, and Conflict Resolution in Chile.

How can education contribute to the resolution of social conflicts?

High school plays an irreplaceable role in how history is passed down from one generation to another. Despite the increased use of new technologies in education, both the history curriculum and in particular history teachers continue to form a crucial part of the production and transfer of historical knowledge. The importance of teachers stands out even more given the presence of an ongoing social conflict at the core of the material. When the conflict involves indigenous groups, as in the case of Chile, the teaching of history in its intercultural dimension can be considered a positive approach. In Latin America, intercultural education programs have emerged in order to offer indigenous youth a way to strengthen their ties to countries in which they live societies without losing their native culture. At present, intercultural education recognizes indigenous cultures as integral elements of both modernity and development. The Chilean case is no exception. The Chilean government (?) has promoted intercultural education programs in Mapuche communities' as a way to tackle the conflict in Araucanía. These programs, however, focus only on indigenous rural communities without address dominant sectors of Chilean society, which, according to experts, also play an important role in the past and present of the Chileno-Mapuche conflict.

Against this backdrop, we wondered about the development of the teaching of the history of Chile in terms of its relationship with the Mapuche people and their connection to the current conflict. Also, we questioned the relevance of history teachers to the public debate. We also reflected on the possibly small amount of exposure that young students of the Chilean elite have to the different dimensions of the conflict. Based on these questions, we designed a program called Kuykuitin (building bridges in Mapudungun, the language of the Mapuche), which sought to bring together teachers of history of elite high schools, with their teaching peers in those areas of the Araucanía stained by social and political violence.

In what follows, we first present results of some studies that have addressed the views that exist in the Chilean society about the "Chileno-Mapuche conflict". Among them, we wish to highlight a study that we ourselves conducted based on the Kuykuitin project, which guided (?) the specific selection of the teachers to participate in our program. Next we discuss details of the program. Finally, we present encouraging future projections of this intercultural innovative teaching experience.

The Chilean-Mapuche conflict and what privileged young people say about it.

Today, the region of the Araucania, where the conflict between Mapuche people, the Chilean state and the private sector has unfolded, ranks highest of all of the regions in Chile in poverty, unemployment, domestic violence and illiteracy. Its low ranking stems from the political instability and economic distrust that has come as a result of the violence between indigenous peasants, Chilean settlers, and the national armed forces. The mass media has also played a role by labeling the Mapuche social protests as terrorism, misinforming the national population and encouraging the continued growth of violence in the region. Economic consortiums that control the forestry industry in the region also own the national mass media. This relationship has fueled the conflict, aiming to protect particular economic interests while legitimizing the intervention of the state apparatus against those Mapuche communities that

resist territorial occupation. The roots of this problem, however, run deeper. National and international specialists on the topic agree that the present conflict in the Araucania is the expression of ongoing colonialism that has favored national development over indigenous rights, and that this colonialism has contributed to the escalation of violence in Mapuche territory.

In this program, we wanted to focus particularly on teachers of students belonging to a specific population both in terms of age and socio-economic status: 10th grade students of elite schools without an explicit social oriented mission. The 10th grade history curriculum contains the most material on Mapuche culture and society. We hypothesized that given their proximity to economic and cultural power, young people who belong to the elite socio-economic level in Chile are more exposed to a one-dimensional view of the conflict.

Various studies confirmed our first intuitions. The study *Percepciones de un Conflicto* conducted by the Youth National Institute (INJUV) 2014, which surveyed people aged 15 to 29 years, shows that young people from the highest socioeconomic level consider the conflict as less relevant compared to those in lower socioeconomic level. The young elite also have less contact—measured as friendship—with indigenous people. This same study shows that the subsample of young men and women between 15 and 19 consider indigenous peoples as the least discriminated in the Chilean society.

The Chilean upper class believes that the current conflict between the State and the Mapuche people is not the most important conflict in Chile, in contrast to other social classes. The study *Encuesta Nacional Bicentenario* conducted by the Pontifical Catholic University and GFK, notes that there has been a variation with respect to the former statement: While in 2006, 37% of the Chilean upper class described the conflict as an important conflict, 81% described it in this way in 2014. The young group within the upper class—18 to 29 years old in the case of this survey—considers that there is a great conflict in place when compared to the other socioeconomic levels: 69% describes it as a great conflict. Outside the scope of the conflict, it is noticeable that when asked whether they would allow a son or a daughter to marry a Mapuche, this socio-economic segment has the highest levels of rejection: 32% in the case of young people, 30% in the range 30 to 60 years, and 45% over the age of 60.

As part of our program, we conducted the first part of a comparative study among 9th graders—15 to 16 years old—in elite high schools in the city of Santiago (n = 450). Data showed us that one-third of students have no contact, in a normal month, with people from a social class different from theirs (31%). For contact, we asked them to please identify persons who were not domestic service in their homes or in their place of study, neither sporadic contacts in commercial stores. A 33% of the total of youth male and female performs activities of service to the community. In general, they are aware of the conflict between the Chilean state and the Mapuche people: 70% disagree with the assertion that it is just a minor conflict. When asked to associate the Mapuche people with a specific concept, the young people in our study chose "Conflict" with 37% of the options, followed by "Our origin" with 35%, and "Discrimination" with 15%. Regarding discrimination against the Mapuche in Chilean society, only one out of ten of the people in our study believed that the members of this native people do not suffer some kind of discrimination. Most account for the discrimination against physical appearance, socioeconomic status, and folk customs. Of the total of students, almost 20% says that they have discriminated against Mapuche people.

With regards to their history classes in high school, their general knowledge of history, and the treatment of the media in this conflict, our study also found interesting facts. Six out of ten students say that, in their opinion, their history classes do not reflect what the current

situation of the Mapuche people and their conflict with the State. Only 2% of this group of students was capable of placing in chronological order five historical facts that involve Mapuche history. The students are divided in their opinions about the treatment the media gives to the conflict. 55% of them say that the notion of conflict is due to the treatment of the media. Again, they are literally divided as to whether the Mapuche and Chileans should be recognized in the same way in society (50% and 50%). Concerning widespread stereotypes about the Mapuche, 34% of the students agree with the statement that the Mapuche always have exploited the State when asking for more and more land and territory throughout history. 31% are neither in agreement nor in disagreement with that statement. While only 15% of the students believe that the Mapuches are lazy people, 34% of them neither agree nor disagree with that statement. Only 29% disagree or strongly disagree with the assertion that the Mapuche are violent people.

An innovative perspective to mitigate conflicts: Kuykuitin.

Thanks to the Center for Latin American Studies, along with the families of the Mapuche communities of *Ranquihue*, *Ponotro* and *Primer Agua*, the municipality of Tirúa, and the Jesuit community in the region, more than ten elite schools in the Santiago were invited to participate in the *Kuykuitin* program. The program consisted in inviting six history teachers from these schools to a cross-cultural experience of eight days in the area of Tirúa in the Araucanía region in Chile. The invitation read “to reflect on the ongoing conflict in the South of Chile, sharing with colleagues working in educational communities in the area, as well as with families with whom they would live during the eight days.” After a process that included the expression of interest on the side of the institution as well as on the teachers individually, six teachers from four different schools were selected.

One of the central aspects of the experience, as we indicated, was for teachers to establish a relationship with the family that hosted them. These families were different: some were Mapuche and others not. Some had a more political stance against the conflict, and others not necessarily. Some had connections with more radical groups, and others were less connected. Some lived very attached to traditions, and others did not. These differences, were discussed in our daily debrief meetings. The teachers agreed unanimously that these encounters made them truly mindful of the complexity of the wrongly so-called Mapuche conflict that exists today in our country.

The experience of sharing the school day for an entire week with peers and students in public schools of the municipality of Tirúa also expanded teachers’ vision of the conflict. There were large and small schools. Some were located in rural environments, and others in the center of the village. Some welcomed the teachers from Santiago with open arms, and others were more reluctant. At the end of the week, the teachers in the program expressed that the school experience helped them to understand the importance of their role as educators, as channels to convey to their students a more nuanced version of the Chilean-Mapuche conflict.

Another aspect of the experience consisted of meetings with different actors related to the conflict in the territory that took place outside the classroom and the families’ homes. Among these included encounters with Mapuche staff working in the municipality of Tirúa, including its Mayor, Adolfo Millabur. We benefited from meetings with recognized Mapuche intellectuals such as Juanita Paillalef Mapuche, Director of the Museum at Cañete, Fernando Pairican, a historian, and Leonel Lienlaf, a poet. We also met with the Mapuche Association of Artisan Weavers *Relmu Witral* and with Jesuit priests who have worked for 20 years in Tirúa. Through

these encounters, we offer a variety of versions of the ongoing conflict in the territory. They were intensive talks—*nutram* in Mapudungun—in which the teachers arrived to the conviction that they should somehow engage and collaborate with those communities. Above all, the teachers emerged from the experience certain that needed to avoid merely reproducing the paternalistic dynamics that had prolonged the conflict. Instead, they wanted to support the communities, based on a newfound admiration and respect for their history, their culture, and their value based on community life.

The hopes at the end of the program,

Some teachers who participated in *Kuykuitin* were invited by the boards of their schools to share their experiences in the program in detail. The history departments of their respective schools also expressed interest in knowing more about the experience, and even other schools in Santiago expressed their interest in participating in future versions. Thanks to this positive reception in their school communities, *Kuykuitin* teachers have been able to share their experiences with students, colleagues, managers and board members, mainly in the format of forums and talks. In some cases, they have begun exchange experiences in Santiago with the teachers and students of the Tirua schools. Most importantly, teachers are aware, today more than before, of the importance of incorporating in their history classes what they have observed and learned firsthand in the southern territory.

Chile may create the best plans in favor of intercultural education. It can even design the best public policies in the education of history at the high school level, or a curriculum that treats in detail of the Chileno-Mapuche conflict. All that is desirable, and indeed urgent. Nothing can replace, however, what a history teacher can gain through an immersion experience that teaches them deeply about the nature of Chileno-Mapuche conflict. When the classroom door shuts, only the students and the teacher remain inside, no one else. In the hands of these teachers lie the future of the next generations of students. If these students become wise and empowered citizens, they will do so thanks to the encouragement of wise and empowered teachers. *Kuykuitin* seeks to promote the formation of those teachers, and through them, change the history of the Chileno-Mapuche conflict.