



TUTOR

Teachers' upskilling aiming at a holistic inclusivity in learning

Specialisation One

Strand One:

Introduction to culturally, racially, and
ethnically diverse classroom



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This reading provides basic knowledge on the topic of racism. Students encounter racism in many contexts, whether they themselves are affected by individual racism or the media reports on racism. Teachers are called upon to recognize and perceive racism in its overall social dimension in its diverse and sometimes subtle manifestations, to name it and to take a professional stand against racism within the scope of their educational function, tasks, and possibilities. Dealing with racism is an important building block in prevention and ensures education as well as the ability to speak and act in this area. The first step is to analyse how racism is defined and used, how it originated and developed, what forms racism takes and what function and effects it can have.



1.1. Introduction to racism as a social phenomenon and its contextualization within various systems relevant to the students

1.1.1 Racism and intersectional discrimination as omnipresent aspects of society

What is racism?

Racism is a form of **group-based misanthropy** that assumes that certain groups of people - often defined by ethnicity, origin, religion, or skin colour - are inferior or superior to other groups. It manifests itself through discrimination, devaluation and exclusion and goes far beyond individual prejudices: racism is a historically grown, structurally anchored power relationship that runs through social norms, institutions, and everyday practices.

A central term in discourses critical of racism is *race* - italicized to make it clear that this is not a biological category, but a **social construction** for maintaining hierarchies.

Racism is closely interwoven with the idea of *race*, ethnicity, and cultural affiliation. These categories were established in particular in the context of colonial and imperialist power relations and legitimized by pseudo-scientific theories that classified groups of people hierarchically. The aim was to justify exploitation and unequal treatment.

In his prison writings, the Italian philosopher and political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) analysed how power in modern societies is maintained not only through coercion, but also through consent. He coined the term **cultural hegemony** to describe how dominant social groups embed their ideas of "normality" and "truth" so deeply in culture, language, education, and the media that they are rarely questioned. This cultural dominance leads to **social inequalities appearing natural or inevitable** - and alternative perspectives are marginalized or made invisible. In this sense, racism also acts as part of a hegemonic system: it is not only reproduced through direct discrimination, but also through **seemingly neutral norms and ideas**. In this way, racism is conveyed as a seemingly natural order - with the result that disadvantaged groups also (unconsciously) support it.

Social crises such as pandemics often reinforce racist narratives. This became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic when anti-Semitic conspiracy theories became virulent once again. These tie in with old patterns of scapegoating and illustrate how deeply racist and anti-Semitic thought patterns are anchored in historical and current societies (see Gerstenfeld, 2020).

The following excerpt from the UNESCO Declaration on Ethnic and Racial Prejudice (1978) illustrates how racism is defined in international human rights discourse - not just as individual misconduct, but as a multi-layered social phenomenon with far-reaching

political, social, and psychological consequences:

UNESCO definition of racism

The UNESCO Declaration on Ethnic and Racial Prejudices (1978) defines racism in Article 2 as follows:

1. *Any theory that asserts that racial or ethnic groups are inherently superior or inferior, implying that some have the right to dominate or eliminate others who are assumed to be inferior, or that bases value judgments on racial differences, has no scientific basis and is contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity.*
2. *Racism encompasses racist ideologies, biased attitudes, discriminatory behaviours, structural arrangements and institutionalized practices that lead to racial inequality, and the erroneous notion that discriminatory relations between groups are morally and scientifically justifiable; it is reflected in discriminatory provisions in laws or regulations and discriminatory practices, as well as in anti-social beliefs and actions; it hinders the development of its victims, perverts those who practice it, divides nations internally, hinders international cooperation and creates political tensions between peoples; it is contrary to the fundamental principles of international law and consequently seriously disturbs international peace and security.*
3. *Racial biases, which are historically linked to power inequalities, reinforced by economic and social differences between individuals and groups, and still attempt to justify such inequalities today, are completely unjustified.*

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Historical origins and functions of racism

Racism is not a modern phenomenon. The classification of people along *racial* lines has been used to legitimize colonialism, slavery, and economic exploitation. Such ideological patterns have had an identity-forming effect over extended periods of time and are institutionalized in legal systems, educational systems, and social value systems.

These patterns continue to have an effect today - for example, when groups are ascribed supposedly positive characteristics such as diligence (e.g. Northern Europeans) or negative ones such as laziness. These stereotypes appear harmless but contribute to the maintenance of racialized hierarchies.



Racism as a system

Racism not only manifests itself in open hatred or violence, but often also in subtle forms - for example through stereotypical attributions, derogatory looks, or structural discrimination in everyday life. Whether we are looking for accommodation, in the workplace or in the education system, our perception and behaviour towards others is never neutral, but is always shaped by social norms, cultural interpretations and traditional power relations. As anthropologist Mary Douglas puts it: "*The social body determines the way in which the physical body is perceived*" (Douglas 1996, p. 69). What we see - and what we do not see - is therefore intricately linked to social categories and attributions of meaning.

In modern societies, racism often manifests itself in a systemic form. This means that it is **not primarily an expression of individual prejudice, but is embedded in social structures, institutional procedures, and political decision-making processes**. In areas such as education, the labour market, healthcare or law enforcement, racialized groups often experience unequal treatment - regardless of personal performance or behaviour. For example, minority children are disproportionately likely to attend underfunded schools or be disadvantaged in the transition to secondary education. In the area of law enforcement, *people of colour* are disproportionately affected by "racial profiling" in many countries - i.e. police checks based on external characteristics.

Systemic racism **often** has an **invisible but lasting** effect. Because it works on an institutional level, it remains difficult to grasp - and is therefore easily overlooked or denied. This makes it all the more important to make these structures visible, question them critically and change them in a targeted manner. This requires not only individual sensitization, but also political and institutional reforms.

Activist movements such as *Black Lives Matter* play a central role in this context: they make structural inequalities publicly visible, create awareness of deeply rooted discrimination and demand concrete changes - for example in the police, in the education system or in the representation of marginalized groups in public spaces.

Social levels of racial discrimination

Racism can occur on several levels:

- **Individual racism:** overt or covert derogatory statements and actions - from insults and microaggressions to violence.
- **Social racism:** Stereotypes and negative images that are reflected in the media, popular culture, or everyday discourse.
- **Institutional racism:** Structures and rules of institutions (e.g. schools, police, administration) that systematically disadvantage certain groups.

- **Structural racism:** Deeply rooted social inequalities - visible, for example, in the underrepresentation of racialized groups in politics, education or the media.

At European level, the systemic dimension of racism was already addressed in 2000 by the European Council Directive 2000/43/EC. It obliges the Member States to prevent and sanction discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin in all areas of public life, including education (European Council, 2000).

In its Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025, the European Commission recognized that racism in Europe exists not only in the form of individual discrimination, but also on a structural level - and that systematic efforts are needed to change this. Among other things, the action plan calls for more institutional awareness, data-based action, participation of racialized groups and a clear political mandate to promote equality (European Commission, 2020).

Cultural affiliation and religiousization

A particular form of racialized discrimination arises along religious lines. In Europe, for example, this can be seen in the fact that Christian traditions are anchored in the state and considered "cultural normality", while other religions - such as Islam - are marked as "different" and not belonging (see Brunner 2011). This creates mechanisms of exclusion if, for example, holidays, dress codes or religious practices are not taken into account or are deemed inappropriate.

Anti-Muslim racism is being propagated in Europe by right-wing populist movements in particular and is increasingly being taken up by established political actors. As a result, many European Muslims - regardless of how central Islam actually is to their lives - feel alienated in their own country. The affiliation of Muslim people to European society is systematically called into question. In many cases, it is not the religious practice itself that plays a role, but the social attribution: Muslim people experience themselves as "different" primarily because they are denied belonging (cf. Nduka-Agwu & Hornscheidt 2010).

This mechanism is similar to **anti-Semitism**, in which Jewish people are also marginalized or marked as "not belonging" regardless of their religious beliefs. The rejection is not based on concrete beliefs or practices, but on projected ideas. It is particularly paradoxical that the justified fight against anti-Semitism is occasionally instrumentalized to legitimize anti-Muslim resentment - for example, when Muslims are generally associated with anti-Semitism.

Anti-racist educational work that deals with anti-Muslim racism takes into account the diversity of Muslim relationships to Islam and to Muslims worldwide - including the possibility of leading a non-religious life. It avoids generalizations and critically reflects on groupings. Both criticism of anti-Semitism and anti-racism require a self-reflective



approach that also questions one's own internalized prejudices and assumptions of normality.

In this context, the perspective of "religiousization" is also central (see Brunner 2011): It describes how religion is socially charged as a social category - either as culturally integrable or as foreign and dangerous. The decisive factor is whether an assumption of racialization arises through religiousization - e.g. Muslims are imagined as "different" in principle - or whether it is a social devaluation of religious practice. If, for example, Christian rituals are considered "tradition", but Muslim rituals are considered threatening, a double standard is created.

This dynamic becomes particularly visible when only one religion is granted the privilege of being considered neutral or "normal" - for example through state holiday regulations or school practices. This seemingly neutral norm can have a discriminatory effect if other religions are systematically excluded.

Intersectionality and racism

Racism rarely occurs in isolation. It overlaps with other forms of discrimination such as sexism, classism, or ableism. A Black woman with a disability, for example, can be disadvantaged on the basis of several characteristics at the same time. The term intersectionality describes these overlaps and makes it clear that discrimination must always be understood in the interplay of different social categories (see Nduka-Agwu & Hornscheidt 2010).

Women with marginalized cultural or religious affiliations are often particularly affected - because equality measures often focus on individual characteristics such as gender or origin and thus overlook complex multiple discrimination.

Religiously motivated racism often intersects with other axes of discrimination such as socio-economic status, gender, or sexual identity. Categories such as "Muslim" or "Orthodox Jew" are linked to certain ideas of education, modernity, or gender roles - which can lead to stereotyping, social control, or exclusion (see Nduka-Agwu & Hornscheidt 2010; Brunner 2011).

Such intersectional overlaps make it clear that discriminatory structures cannot be viewed in isolation - they interact and reinforce each other.

Education as an amplifier of racist structures

Educational institutions reflect social power relations - and often reproduce them. School is not only a place where knowledge is imparted, but also a place where values and identity are formed. This can lead to silent mechanisms of exclusion - through low expectations, a lack of representation or discriminatory narratives in the classroom.



One example is the treatment of Roma and Sinti, the largest ethnic minority in Europe. Their perspectives receive little attention in the education system, with many learners being labelled as "uneducated" or "unable to integrate". The Roma communities were (and are) often grouped together under the discriminatory term 'gypsy' - a term that is deeply linked to racist stereotypes and is now clearly rejected by those affected (see End 2012; Central Council of German Sinti and Roma 2020). These attributions have a concrete impact on their educational opportunities - for example through segregation or unfair performance assessments.

Anti-Muslim racism is also evident in everyday school life: Muslim pupils are often marked as "different", confronted with demands for integration or portrayed as a threat to "Western" values. Such experiences reinforce feelings of exclusion and have a negative impact on well-being at school.

These examples illustrate how deeply racism can be embedded in institutional processes - often without this being visible at first glance. Discrimination not only manifests itself in overt rejection, but also in subtle mechanisms such as low teacher expectations, stereotypical content in textbooks or a lack of representation of marginalized groups in the curriculum.

Education as a lever for equality and participation

Education is not only a place where social inequality is reproduced but can also be a central lever for change. It offers the opportunity to question stereotypes, shed light on historical continuities of discrimination and promote alternative, fairer narratives.

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Teachers play a key role in combating the mechanisms described above: they create educational spaces in which students either feel seen and valued - or in which they feel excluded. An educational practice that is critical of racism requires reflection on one's own assumptions and the willingness to actively question structural discrimination - in the curriculum, in language, in the design of lessons and school culture, but also by questioning discriminatory patterns in the school system.

Successful education can be a tool for emancipation. Schools can contribute to the dismantling of stereotypes by empowering students to critically understand the historical and contemporary dimensions of racism. Inclusive curricula that make the perspectives of marginalized groups visible help to break down dominant narratives and promote a deeper understanding of social diversity.

Furthermore, education can inspire students to stand up for social justice. By learning to become socially engaged and involved in their community, young people can actively contribute to reducing discrimination - both in their immediate environment and in a global context.



Current data

The EU-MIDIS II study conducted by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2017 collected data from 25,515 people from various ethnic minorities in 28 EU Member States. Around half of the respondents who had experienced discrimination cited their skin colour as the main reason (FRA 2017, p. 15).

According to the 2023 Eurobarometer survey, over half of respondents stated that discrimination was widespread in their country. In particular, discrimination based on membership of the Roma community (65%), skin colour (61%) and ethnic origin (60%) was perceived as particularly common (European Commission 2023).

The report "*Being Black in the EU*" (FRA 2023), which analyses the reality of life for people of African descent in 13 EU countries, provides an in-depth investigation. The results are alarming:

- 45% of respondents report racial discrimination - a significant increase compared to 39% in 2016.
- Only 9% of those affected report such incidents - an indication of low levels of institutional trust and a lack of protection mechanisms.
- More than half of those surveyed stated that their last police check was based on "racial profiling" (police checks without suspicion based solely on external characteristics such as skin colour or origin).
- Many of the interviewees reported psychological stress and a persistent fear of renewed violence.

These figures make it clear that racist discrimination is an everyday reality for many people in Europe - combined with the feeling of not being recognized or sufficiently protected by society.

A parallel debate concerns the use of language and the attribution of others: Many *People of Colour* feel hurt or dehumanized by terms that they themselves have not chosen, but which are used in the media or everyday life to mark them as "different" or "foreign". Such linguistic practices reinforce the feeling of not belonging and point to the deeply rooted discursive dimension of racist structures.

International responsibility and civil society engagement

Combating racism and promoting equality requires not only national strategies, but also international cooperation. Organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO have played a significant role in this for decades. For example, in its Declaration on Race and Racial Bias (1978), UNESCO explicitly rejects all forms of racialized superiority and calls for global efforts to combat discrimination in all areas.



At the same time, civil society actors - especially grassroots movements and non-governmental organizations - have a crucial role to play. Through education, protest, documentation, advice, and political engagement, they work to ensure that racist structures are named, questioned, and changed in the long term. They help to bring international agreements to life and demand compliance with human rights principles at national level.

The combination of institutional commitment and civil society pressure is crucial to effectively combat systemic racism - in education, administration, politics, and everyday life.

1.1.2 Racism-related systemic hurdles and barriers in education

Despite its potential to combat racism, education is often not a place of justice in practice - but one of the **reproduction of social inequality**. In particular, students who are racialized or ethnically marginalized face systemic barriers that significantly limit their educational pathways and opportunities for participation.

Inclusion requires more than individual openness - it requires a **critical understanding of the structural conditions** that hinder participation. The barriers that racialized students face are not merely the result of individual prejudices but are deeply inscribed in institutional routines and political frameworks.

Systemic or structural racism describes discriminatory effects that do not result from conscious intent, but from historically grown, institutionally entrenched structures. It is not individuals who are specifically discriminated against - but **procedures, norms and routines that often unintentionally reinforce social inequalities**.

Typical challenges in the education sector:

- **Unequal treatment in the case of linguistic diversity:** Students with a first or family language other than the language of instruction often do not receive the necessary linguistic support to participate in lessons on an equal footing. This not only has an impact on language acquisition, but also on their overall performance assessment and educational biography.
- **Grading and expectations of normality:** Assessment standards are often based on an implicit "normal case" - for example, students with English as their first language and no history of migration. These assumptions of normality mean that students who do not meet these expectations are systematically rated lower - not because of their abilities, but because they deviate from the norm (Gomolla & Radtke 2000).
- **Selection and segregation in the school system:** In Ireland, in second level, dividing children into classes based on academic ability i.e.; streaming means children deemed as only having ability to take common level subject are less likely to gain access to

higher level subjects due to early selection - a structural disadvantage. This is also true so of restricted timetables and so on.

- **Exclusion of parents:** The participation of parents in school decisions can be made more difficult by language barriers or institutional procedures (e.g. majority voting without consideration of minority perspectives).
- **Discriminatory resources:** Textbooks, resources, and teaching materials are often based on a homogeneous, middle class, white student body. As a result, social diversity, migration histories and perspectives of racialized groups are either distorted, stereotyped or not represented at all. This leads to a lack of representation and can reinforce internalized exclusion. Hentges et al. (2014) already impressively show how school materials and teaching language reproduce social power relations and often unconsciously perpetuate racist patterns of interpretation. These findings are still relevant, as current studies also show: the FRA report "Being Black in the EU" (2023) shows that many *students of colour* experience a lack of representation and respectful depiction in curricula and textbooks - a factor that can have a negative impact on their sense of belonging and participation in school (FRA, 2023).

Despite existing legal foundations - such as EU Directive 2000/43/EC, which is intended to ensure equal treatment regardless of racial or ethnic origin - structural hurdles still exist in practice (European Council, 2000). Access to quality education, fair performance assessments and the representation of marginalized groups in the school system are particularly affected.

Even if many of these mechanisms are structural, this does not release individuals from their responsibility. On the contrary: only through critical self-reflection and targeted pedagogical action can teachers help to make these barriers visible - and actively contribute to their removal. Because: **structures work through people - and can also be changed by people!**

Schools and teachers that promote critical thinking and integrate perspectives that are critical of racism create the conditions for students to actively engage with stereotypes and social exclusion. When the stories, perspectives and experiences of marginalized groups are made visible in the classroom, this not only strengthens the sense of belonging - it also enables all learners to better understand social diversity. In this way, education can not only break down existing barriers but also strengthen individual agency and promote social engagement and solidarity.



1.1.3 Historical and current migration processes and associated social and political developments

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states in Article 1:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
(United Nations, 1948/2015).

However, despite this principle enshrined in international law, racial discrimination, ethnic inequality, and exclusion are a reality - especially in the context of global migration movements.

Historical migration movements not only show mutual enrichment, but also that migration was often accompanied by exclusion, violence, and discrimination. Forced migrations or colonial conquests were characterized by racialized enemy stereotypes and thinking in hierarchical categories.

With the emergence of the modern nation state in the 19th century, the idea that an **ethnically "homogeneous" nation** was the ideal increasingly developed. The construction of national identity was closely linked to racialized and ethnicized distinctions e.g. Catholic, white, GAA playing, Irish speaking versus English speaking etc.

The **colonial era** and the two **world wars** profoundly changed global migration movements. Millions of people were uprooted, enslaved, or forced to flee. In these contexts, racialized ideas were specifically used to legitimize violence, disenfranchisement, and exploitation. These narratives continue to have an impact today - for example in the form of systemic discrimination or in entrenched narratives of belonging and "otherness".

The construction of *race* and its role in migration discourses

As already shown in the previous sections, racism is not a natural, but a historically evolved and socially anchored power structure. It is based on the social construction of *race* - i.e. the idea of dividing people into supposedly biological groups based on external characteristics such as skin colour, language, or origin.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, pseudo-scientific theories had a significant impact on these ideas. Researchers such as Carl von Linné or later the representatives of craniology created **racial classifications of people** that were seemingly based on "objective" criteria such as skull size or skin colour. These classifications served to justify hierarchies: Those who were considered "white" were considered civilized and superior - other groups were dehumanized or constructed as "backward".

Social Darwinism, a popular explanatory model of social inequality in the 19th century, was the latest to spread the idea that social differences could be traced back to natural, quasi-biological differences between people. One of the best-known proponents of this

theory was the British philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who attempted to apply Charles Darwin's findings on biological evolution - in particular, the principle of "*survival of the fittest*" - to human societies. According to Spencer, in a "*natural order*", those who were the most efficient or adaptable prevailed. In this logic, poverty, illness, or social exclusion were not seen as the result of political or economic structures, but as the "natural" consequence of a lack of ability. This legitimized social inequalities and relativized social responsibility for disadvantage. This way of thinking had far-reaching consequences: It became the ideological basis for racist and classist policies, for the exclusion of people with disabilities, for discrimination against women and queer people - and served as pseudo-scientific legitimation for colonial oppression, forced sterilizations or eugenic programmes.

There is scientific evidence today: There are no scientifically tenable biological "human races". Differences such as skin colour, hair structure or eye shape are superficial and located within a single human species. What we perceive as "racial" is socially constructed - and anchored in cultural, historical, and political contexts.

Mary Douglas and other cultural anthropologists emphasize that our perception of the body - and thus also of differences - is shaped by social categories. Or as Seshadri-Crooks (2000, p. 5) writes: "*We believe in the factuality of differences in order to see them.*" The categories "white", "black", "brown" etc. seem self-evident to us - but they are not. They are based on cultural attributions that have arisen in certain historical contexts.

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In nationalist societies, migration is often staged as a threat to the "ethnic order". Depending on their origin, migrants are seen as less capable, unwilling to integrate or culturally incompatible. These narratives continue to shape politics and the public sphere to this day - for example when it comes to questions of citizenship, security or belonging.

This overlooks the fact that migration also generates resistance, transformation, and community. Many migrant communities have contributed significantly to building today's societies - culturally, economically, and socially. However, these contributions are often rendered invisible in dominant narratives.

International and European reactions

After the Second World War, the international community increasingly turned against racist ideologies. **UNESCO** and the **United Nations** published declarations rejecting the concept of *race* as biologically unfounded and outlawing discrimination.

"All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock. They are born equal in dignity and rights, and all form an integral part of humanity."
(UNESCO 1978, Article 1)

"The global fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is a priority for the international community." (UN Durban Declaration)



The **European Union** also **responded to the challenges** of discrimination in the context of migration and ethnic diversity: Directive 2000/43/EC created a legal framework to ensure equal treatment and combat racism at institutional level - regardless of residence status or origin (European Council, 2000). In its EU Action Plan against Racism 2020-2025, the European Commission emphasizes that racism in Europe does not only exist on an individual level but is deeply embedded in structures and institutions. Among other things, the action plan calls for a better data basis, greater participation of racialized groups and the promotion of racism-critical education (European Commission, 2020).

Education plays a key role here: it can either reinforce existing prejudices - or be a tool for critical thinking, historical awareness and the promotion of equality, in particular by including marginalized perspectives critically examining colonial history and racism and promoting the participation of all students - regardless of origin or status.

1.1.4 Intersections of racism-related challenges with other forms of oppression

Racism rarely works in isolation. In reality, it often overlaps with other forms of social inequality. This overlapping discrimination, also known as **intersectionality**, means that individuals or groups are disadvantaged in multiple ways.

The concept of intersectionality makes it clear that discrimination is not one-dimensional. Depending on *race*, social background, gender, disability, religion, or sexual identity, it has different - and often cumulative or even reinforcing - effects. In the school context in particular, this can significantly restrict the participation opportunities of individual learners.

Example: Intersection of racism, classism, and xenophobia

Students with migration or refugee experience who belong to ethnic minorities and at the same time come from low-income families are particularly at risk of multiple disadvantages. Typical challenges in this context are:

- Language barriers that lead to students being placed in lower ability groups regardless of their intellectual ability.
- Economic burdens that restrict access to tutoring, extracurricular activities or learning materials.
- Stereotyping that negatively influences expectations of school performance and behaviour.
- Xenophobic attitudes, which can take the form of bullying or exclusion by classmates.

For example, a student with an immigrant background and racialized characteristics is assumed to be less capable in subjects such as English or history. At the same time,



financial restrictions lead to a lack of individual support. This creates chains of disadvantage that reinforce each other.

Example: Intersection of racism and sexism

Girls and young women who belong to racialized minorities are also affected by multiple experiences of discrimination. Possible manifestations:

- Stereotypes such as "loud", "unruly" or "aggressive", which lead to disciplinary measures more frequently for racialized girls than for their white classmates.
- Culturally shaped role expectations, such as the assumption of care work in the family environment, which has a negative impact on school performance and learning time.
- Hyper sexualization or increased control of their appearance, which can lead to increased visibility, devaluation, and self-doubt.
- Attributions of collective responsibility: Muslim students - especially boys and young - are often confronted with security debates, accusations of anti-Semitism or integration issues. Not only is individual behaviour attributed to them, but they are also under general suspicion on behalf of an entire group. The associated discourse can create pressure, conflicts of loyalty and a feeling of a permanent obligation to justify oneself.

For example, a female student who is perceived as a *person of colour* is sanctioned more severely than her white classmates for the same behaviour - such as speaking aloud in class. This not only reflects racist attributions, but also sexist expectations of "conformist" girl behaviour.

Example: Multiple discrimination against teachers

Teachers, especially working-class women *of colour*, also experience various forms of discrimination in everyday school life:

- Racism in the college, for example by excluding them from leadership roles or belittling their professional competence.
- Classism when teachers from low socio-economic backgrounds have less access to resources or professional networks.
- Tokenism when they are exclusively assigned issues of "cultural diversity" or "discipline" instead of having their professional expertise recognized.

An example: A qualified Spanish teacher is passed over for the management of a school project despite many years of experience - in favour of a white colleague with fewer years of professional experience. The decision may be based on racist and classist assumptions about competence, appearance, or social fit. The result: missed career opportunities and limited influence on school development.



Intersectional discrimination often has a silent but lasting effect. Only by consciously analysing the interplay of different axes of power does it become clear how profound the impact of some barriers is - and how important it is to reflect on educational structures, routines, and assessments from an intersectional perspective. Only in this way can educational institutions fulfil their responsibility for equal opportunities.

Reflection questions

- What ideas of 'normality' and belonging have you been taught during your own educational career - and to what extent do these possibly influence your perception of students today?
→ In particular, consider implicit curricula, cultural narratives or dominant perspectives that you have encountered.
- Where and how do you possibly perceive forms of structural or institutional racism in your school practice - even if they are not explicitly named or visible?
→ Think, for example, of selection mechanisms, assessment criteria, communication with parents or representation in textbooks.
- To what extent might you - consciously or unconsciously - have stereotypical assumptions or socially mediated attributions towards certain groups of students?
→ Reflect on how these may affect your expectations, feedback or interactions.
- Does your lesson design consider the perspectives and experiences of students who may be affected by racial discrimination or religious exclusion?
→ Think about the extent to which these perspectives are visible and valued in your lessons.
- How can an intersectional perspective - i.e. the consideration of several intersecting dimensions of discrimination such as *race*, gender, religion, or socio-economic background - enrich your pedagogical approach and practice?
→ What challenges and opportunities does this present for anti-discriminatory educational practice?



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1.2 Uncovering and understanding invisible structures in a multiethnic, multicultural context

1.2.1 Explicit and implicit (associative) attitudes

To understand how invisible structures of attitudes and biases unfold in multiethnic and multicultural contexts - often even when they are well-intentioned - it is helpful to distinguish between explicit and implicit attitudes. Every person carries both forms within them.

Explicit attitudes are conscious beliefs and feelings towards people or groups. They can be positive or negative and are expressed in opinions or actions that a person expresses freely and openly. In the school context, this can mean that someone consciously favors or disadvantages certain students - e.g. because of their origin or language (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

Implicit attitudes are unconscious associations that are automatically activated and can influence our behaviour - even if we do not intend or notice this. They sometimes contradict our own conscious values and beliefs (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

How do attitudes develop?

The formation of attitudes - i.e. our conscious and unconscious attitudes towards people, groups, or topics - is a complex process. Both explicit and implicit attitudes arise through the interplay of personal experiences, social norms, and cultural patterns of interpretation. Different psychological mechanisms are at work here: cognitive evaluations and associative learning processes.

Explicit attitudes are formed through conscious reflection, through rational analysis of information and experience. If people have sufficient cognitive resources (e.g. time, concentration) and motivation, they evaluate characteristics of a person or a situation in a targeted manner - and form a conscious attitude from this. An example: If someone learns that a colleague has been volunteering for refugees for years, this knowledge may lead to a positive explicit attitude towards this person. Such assessments can often be well justified and expressed linguistically. However, explicit attitudes are not only shaped by the individual but are also socially embedded. Social expectations or social desirability can influence how people formulate their attitudes - or whether they express them at all. Explicit attitudes are also relatively easy to reflect on, question and change, for example through new experiences or targeted information.

Implicit attitudes, on the other hand, are formed automatically - often through repeated, unconscious associations between certain stimuli and positive or negative meanings. They are not formed through deliberate thought, but through learning experiences in everyday life, through media images, stories, schoolbooks, or observations. For example,

if you repeatedly see people of a certain ethnic group associated with crime in films or the news, you may unconsciously develop a negative implicit attitude towards this group - even if you consider yourself to be unprejudiced. Typical stimuli that activate implicit attitudes are characteristics such as *race*, language, body shape or clothing. These social cues are so powerful because they are linked to culturally established stereotypes and norms - such as the idea that thin people are disciplined or that *people of colour* are less capable. Implicit attitudes are therefore less consciously accessible and cannot be directly controlled. They can be spontaneously activated by certain triggers (e.g. images, language, context) - without the person concerned realizing it. This is precisely why it is important to take them seriously as potential influencing factors in educational activities.

Excursus: How can implicit attitudes be measured? - The implicit association test (IAT)

In addition to the question of how attitudes arise, it is also crucial how conscious and unconscious attitudes can be recognized and recorded in the first place. While explicit attitudes are relatively easy to access via surveys or self-reporting, this is much more difficult with implicit attitudes - precisely because they often elude conscious perception.

A key instrument for measuring such unconscious attitudes is the Implicit Association Test (IAT). It was developed in psychology to make implicit prejudices and stereotypical associations visible - even if a person is not aware of these attitudes or would not express them for social reasons.

The test measures the strength of associations between certain concepts (e.g. skin colour, ethnicity, religion) and evaluations (e.g. "good" or "bad"). The basic assumption is that the stronger two concepts are mentally linked, the faster they can be processed together. Participants work on a computer-based task in which they have to assign words or images that appear on the screen to certain categories - for example, terms such as "joy" or "misery" to "good" or "bad", or photos of faces (e.g. black and white people) to corresponding groups.

In one run, for example, "white" and "good" are assigned to one key, in another "black" and "good". Faster reactions in certain combinations indicate stronger mental connections. The so-called IAT score results from the reaction time differences between these conditions. A significant difference indicates a stronger implicit association - such as an unconscious preference for one group over another.

The IAT is based on the idea that certain links in our thought structures are activated automatically - even if they are beyond our conscious control. Because the test requires quick decisions, it addresses involuntary, unconscious evaluations that people often cannot control - even if they contradict their own attitudes.

Despite its widespread use, the IAT has methodological limitations that should be considered when interpreting it. The results are context-sensitive and can vary depending

on the test design, the stimuli used or the subject's current mood. It measures the relative strength of associations but says nothing about why a bias exists or whether it manifests itself in behaviour.

The IAT is not a "personality test", but a research tool. It is not suitable for diagnosing or evaluating individuals, but above all for sensitizing people to unconscious thought mechanisms and for reflecting on socially learned stereotypes.

Consequences of implicit biases for school and teaching

Implicit biases - unconscious, automated assumptions about certain groups - influence the behaviour of teachers and school stakeholders in many ways. Even if they do not intentionally discriminate, their attitudes can still have a significant impact on learning environments, assessments, and social dynamics in the classroom. They affect, among other things:

- **Attention and perception:** Teachers pay more or less attention to certain students - for example, due to their outward appearance or linguistic expression. This is reflected in eye contact, reaction times or the frequency with which they speak (cf. Kirwan Institute, 2018).
- **Assessments and feedback:** Implicit assumptions can influence how performance is assessed - not only in grades, but also in the way in which feedback is given. Those who are perceived as "less capable" often receive less differentiated or encouraging feedback (cf. Harber et al., 2010).
- **Selection of content:** The decision as to which topics, books, stories, or perspectives are given space in lessons is also influenced by unconscious preconceptions. For example, perspectives critical of racism or marginalized perspectives are often ignored (see Kirwan Institute, 2018).
- **Discipline and sanctions:** The effect of implicit biases in the assessment of behaviour is particularly serious. Numerous studies show that students who are racialized or perceived as ethnic minorities are sanctioned more frequently and more severely - even for comparable behaviour (cf. Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015).

These mechanisms affect teachers as well as school leaders or administrators - and have a long-term impact on the educational careers of affected students.

Implicit assumptions can lead to students being unconsciously judged differently based on attributes such as race, gender, or language. Non-white or multilingual students are often less likely to be given the same opportunities to demonstrate their abilities - for example, through fewer opportunities to participate, a lack of targeted support or lower expectations. Studies also show that racialized students are more likely to receive harsher disciplinary sanctions than their white peers for identical behaviour. This

disproportionate discipline can lead to exclusion through suspensions or expulsions - with significant long-term consequences for their educational biography.

Implicit biases are not just individual errors in thinking - they become entrenched in school routines and contribute to institutional discrimination. This can be seen, for example, in biased teaching language that conveys stereotypical images, in unbalanced representation in the curriculum or in seemingly neutral school structures that unintentionally reproduce existing inequalities.

Conclusion: Even if implicit biases are "invisible", they have real and far-reaching effects - for the educational opportunities of students, for their identity development and for social justice in the education system as a whole.

1.2.2 Reflections on the discrepancy between one's own implicit and explicit attitudes and stereotypes.

Our explicit and implicit attitudes often contradict each other - even without us being aware of it. The same is true for teachers in educational institutions, especially in multicultural and multiethnic classrooms. For example, a teacher may believe in fairness but unconsciously hold negative stereotypes about a particular ethnic group, leading to unintentionally biased behaviour. **Cognitive dissonance** - the psychological discomfort of having contradictory beliefs - can occur when a teacher's implicit and verbal views are at odds with each other. Increased cognitive attempts to understand information that might help resolve these competing beliefs are often a result of this discomfort¹. Acknowledging these tensions allows teachers to think more deeply about themselves, which is essential for managing biases and fostering an inclusive classroom.

Reflection and visualization of implicit biases

Regular **self-reflection**, such as keeping logs of classroom interactions, can help teachers recognize moments when their behaviour does not align with their explicit beliefs.² In addition, **feedback from colleagues** or **observing students' reactions** can reveal discrepancies in behaviour, leading to a deeper exploration of implicit biases. Tests such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT)³ can also help uncover implicit bias and help educators become aware of potential conflicts between their beliefs and actions. **Continuous professional development**⁴ on diversity and inclusion is also important.

1 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022103108001145?via%3Dihub>

2 <https://schools.utah.gov/ulead/uleadfiles/reports/topicoverview/Three%20Steps%20to%20Address%20Implicit%20Biases%20and%20Improve%20Equity.pdf>

3 <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/germany/takeatest.html>

4 A list of some resources, tools and books can be found here: <https://>



Teachers should pause and reflect on how their own worldview impacts interactions with people and places that are different and how their own belief systems evolve.⁵ Resources such as workshops and courses can equip teachers with the knowledge and tools they need to effectively deal with bias and create an equitable environment in the classroom. Another method that may seem obvious, but should not be ignored, is **sharing ideas and spending time** with people who are different from you. This can lead to breaking down biases and misconceptions and getting tips from them on how to deal with certain situations in a multi-ethnic classroom.

According to the Maryland State Education Association, educators can take the following steps (after taking the IAT) to explore and address unconscious bias:

1. **Reflect on your own biography:** Think about your upbringing, early life experiences and formative institutions. Ask yourself: What values and images was I taught? Which stereotypes have I consciously or unconsciously adopted? Being aware of your own influences is a first step towards consciously confronting biases.
2. **Search for alternative interpretations:** Question your initial reactions in educational situations: Are there alternative points of view? What explanations could students give for their behaviour? An open, questioning attitude can help to break through stereotypical ways of thinking.
3. **Read and learn:** Read texts that make other perspectives visible. Create a personal list of topics in which you suspect uncertainties or biases - and broaden your perspective with literature that sheds light on these aspects from the perspective of affected groups.

In summary, teachers can create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment by understanding and resolving the conflicts that arise between implicit and explicit attitudes. This includes being aware of potential biases in decision making and taking proactive steps to reduce their impact. Teachers can use tactics such as encouraging equal participation of all students, facilitating open conversations about diversity, and routinely reflecting on their own teaching practices. In conclusion, teachers who want to create an inclusive classroom climate need to recognize and resolve the tensions between implicit and explicit attitudes. Through self-evaluation, reflection and professional development, teachers can better manage their biases and ensure that all students are treated fairly.

Reflection questions

5 <https://www.nafsa.org/ie-magazine/2020/8/4/strategies-counteracting-unconscious-bias-classroom>



- In which school situations have you possibly experienced - or noticed yourself - that your reaction or assessment did not fully match your conscious beliefs about fairness and equal treatment?
 - What role could implicit attitudes or stereotypical associations have played in this?
- What personal experiences, cultural imprints or social contexts could have influenced your implicit attitudes towards certain groups?
 - To what extent has your own biography possibly shaped unconscious patterns of perception?
- What specific strategies or tools could you use to regularly reflect on your implicit attitudes and reduce their impact on your pedagogical practice?
 - Think, for example, of methods such as collegial feedback, self-evaluation, IAT or structured reflection events in the team.

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1.3 Ethnicity - *race* and the conceptualization of the "other "

1.3.1 "Binary opposition" as an amplifier of hierarchies and privileges

The concept of "binary opposition" shows how deeply rooted ideas and beliefs can emerge and contribute to the reinforcement of discrimination and social injustice by privileging one definition and marginalizing another.

People's perception of reality in the world is intricately linked to language.⁶ Pairs of related terms or concepts that are opposite in meaning are referred to as "binary opposition". This corresponds to the historically evolved system of our thinking, which is organized and structured by the contrast between two opposing concepts such as good/evil, hot/cold, rational/emotional or right/left. For example, the binary concept of gender (male and female) is not a natural, biological given, but a social construct that has been shaped by historical, cultural, and religious influences (Morgenroth, 2021). This binary view of gender is so deeply embedded in many societies that it often seems natural or unavoidable.

Examples:

- In the binary opposition of "masculine" and "feminine", the masculine is often characterized as strong, rational, and dominant, while the feminine is seen as weak, emotional, and subordinate. This dichotomy supports patriarchal structures and justifies the social, political, and economic subordination of women and denies any identities in between.
- In colonial contexts, the binary opposition of "civilization" and "savagery" served to justify colonial rule and to portray the colonized as inferior (Gherlone & Restaneo, 2022).
- The so-called binary between "Black" and "white" skin colour plays a key role in racism research (see Spivak, 1988). It is argued that established and perceived binary dichotomies have maintained and legitimized the social power structure in favour of the white majority/supremacy. For example, *people of colour* are still perceived as inferior to whites, and the binary opposition of white and black is constantly re-established in the discourse of racism. The Black Lives Matter movement has brought the outrage and pain of the ordinariness, ubiquity and murderous consequences of racism against PoC in the US to the wider world and

⁶ See also the TUTOR introductory course, Unit 1.1, The power of language



has brought the discourse of white privilege and white-positioned people associated with racism against PoC to a wider public and mainstream media.⁷

Through the hierarchical arrangement of binary oppositions, the "other" side can easily be portrayed as inferior, stigmatized, and marginalized. Categories are formed on the basis of which power is unequally distributed in society. Groups that have power are privileged, i.e. they are given (better) access to resources, power, and social advantages. Groups that are considered less valuable in the hierarchical order are oppressed, systematically excluded, or disadvantaged, e.g. through political or economic underrepresentation or fewer educational opportunities.

Binary oppositions play a significant role in the creation and maintenance of power structures resulting from perceived identities, social roles, and hierarchies. Powerful instruments for maintaining and consolidating these structures are the aforementioned language and performativity, i.e. the behaviour, norms and practices of individuals, groups and institutions. The reproduction of inequality is evident in various social institutions such as education, business, and politics, where systemic barriers prevent marginalized groups from achieving the same success or recognition as their privileged peers.

The repetitive mechanisms described above create a sense of naturalness, normality or even inevitability of social hierarchies; superiority seems to be "innate" or at least "earned". Once something has become the norm, it is more difficult to question and break it.

1.3.2 About racist microaggressions and the cumulative effects on those affected

The term microaggression was coined in the 1970s by the US psychiatrist Chester Pierce (see Pierce, 1970). He used it to describe every day, subtle and often unconscious statements or actions that devalue or exclude members of marginalized groups - often without being explicitly offensive. Pierce was quick to point out the psychological impact of these seemingly harmless remarks.

In contrast to macroaggressions - i.e. open, clearly identifiable racist or misanthropic acts - microaggressions are more complex. They usually take the form of casual remarks, questions or gestures and are effective precisely because of their everyday nature. They may seem insignificant to outsiders or the person committing them, but they can leave a deep mark on those affected.

Racist microaggressions are aimed at supposed differences based on ethnic origin or *race* - in other words, racialized social attributions. A typical example is the question to a non-white person: "Where are you from?" - often followed by: "No, I mean really." Such a

⁷ The Black Lives Matter movement was triggered by the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer, which was captured in a harrowing video lasting 9 minutes and 29 seconds.



question implies that the person is not "really" part of the majority society - even if they were born and raised there. Other examples are: Surprise at "good English", commenting on hair, skin colour or names, or being left out or passed over in group or classroom situations. Non-verbal behaviour can also convey microaggressions - for example through posture, evasive behaviour, or lack of eye contact.

Such microaggressions may seem trivial when viewed individually - but their cumulative effect is considerable. Those affected do not usually experience them once, but regularly - over months, years, or decades. They are constantly reminded of being "different", of not quite belonging or of being questioned. This permanent psychological stress is also described as "racial battle fatigue" (see Smith et al., 2011).

Studies show that persistent microaggressions can lead to the following consequences, among others:

- social withdrawal,
- chronic tension or anxiety,
- reduced self-esteem,
- long-term mental and physical health problems (Nadal et al., 2014).

There is also a risk that pupils or students who regularly experience microaggressions will hold back their performance to protect themselves from further exclusion - or leave the education system altogether.

Racist microaggressions are therefore not a minor matter. They do not occur in isolation, but in their frequency, duration, and contextualization - and are an expression of structural inequality. For teachers and educational professionals, this means that it is essential to critically reflect on their own communication methods and institutional routines - and to actively pay attention to how language, behaviour and expectations can influence students. This is the only way to create a discrimination-sensitive and supportive learning environment for all.

1.3.3 Analysing ethnic minorities as the other: racist or ethnic labels, stereotypes and biases

Identity is an expression of a fundamental human need: the desire for belonging, social recognition and self-positioning in the world (Butler 1990). This need is also strengthened by belonging to groups that, on the one hand, convey esteem and, on the other hand, experience esteem both from their members and within the community.

An essential component of identity is differentiation: the "we" is also created in contrast to a "you". As long as this differentiation is not accompanied by devaluation, it is not problematic per se. However, it becomes problematic when the 'other' is constructed as inferior, alien or threatening - for example through stereotypical attributions, prejudices, or discriminatory narratives (see Hall 1997).



Such devaluing attitudes arise in particular when affiliations are experienced as fragile or are not socially recognized. Whether, how and which groups are devalued depends, among other things, on individual socialization experiences, socio-economic factors, and the dominant political discourse.

Context-dependent markers of devaluation

Which characteristics are used for demarcation and devaluation varies depending on the social context:

- Cultural racism and Islamophobia dominate migration-related debates.
- In other contexts, ethnicizing attributions, sexism or anti-Semitism may be in the foreground.

Ethnic or racist labels in particular have an identity-creating effect - for the majority as well as for the minority. They construct a seemingly clear "inside" and "outside": an "ethnic majority" is set as the norm, while an "ethnic minority" is marked as a deviation.

Stereotypes and labelling of minorities

In social discourse, groups that are perceived as ethnic minorities are often devalued through repeated and sometimes historically evolved labels (see Wodak, 2009). This applies not only to ethnic origin, but also to characteristics such as language, religion, culture, or skin colour.

These labels serve to reproduce stereotypes and social bias - they stabilize existing power relations and legitimize the position of the dominant social groups (see Assmann, 2013). The effect: people who are considered "different" or "not belonging" experience exclusion or marginalization - often subtly, but sustainably.

Understanding positive racism

Definition Positive racism refers to stereotypes that ascribe positive characteristics to people based on their ethnicity or nationality. While these stereotypes may appear to be complimentary on the surface, they can be harmful and reductive. Affirmative action racism, like any form of racism, involves making assumptions about people based on their *racialized* or ethnic background, rather than recognizing their unique characteristics and abilities.

Examples:

Assumptions about ability: the assumption that all Asians are good at math or that all African Americans excel in sports. These stereotypes ignore individual differences and can put undue pressure on people to conform to these expectations.



Cultural generalizations: the belief that people from certain cultures are inherently more hardworking, polite, or artistic. While these traits are positive, attributing them to an entire group based on ethnicity can lead to unrealistic expectations and diminish personal achievements.

Why it is harmful

Pressure to conform: individuals may feel pressured to live up to these positive stereotypes, which can lead to stress and anxiety if they do not naturally conform to these expectations.

Ignoring individuality: positive racism overlooks personal differences and reduces people to a set of generic characteristics, which can be dehumanizing and disregards their individuality.

Reinforcing other stereotypes: even positive stereotypes can reinforce the overall framework of racist stereotypes, which includes negative assumptions. This dichotomy can perpetuate a cycle of bias and discrimination.

Backhanded compliments: What looks like a compliment may give the impression that the person in question is valuable primarily because they fit a positive stereotype, rather than being valued for their unique qualities and accomplishments.

Ethnopluralism as the new racism

One particularly powerful narrative is so-called "ethnopluralism", which originates from the New Right. This ideology claims that different ethnicities and cultures are of equal value but must remain spatially separate from one another. Any form of mixing within a nation state is seen as a "threat" to cultural identity.

This idea is used to legitimize racist discourses - for example, to reject refugees, migrants, or people with a family history of migration. Even people who have lived in a country for several generations continue to be "migrantized" and marked as "others".

Conclusion: The systematic construction of "ethnic minorities" as "the others" contributes to the maintenance of social hierarchies. It manifests itself in language, the media, political debates, and everyday actions - and can only be questioned and overcome by critically examining the underlying mechanisms, power relations and stereotypes.

1.3.4 Exploring the complexity and fluidity of identities within social constructs

Identity is not a fixed, natural, or neutral concept. Rather, it is a social phenomenon that is shaped both by overarching social developments and by individual experiences and actions. Identity is a dynamic process that is constantly changing and reshaping itself through the interplay of various factors - such as intersectionality, cultural narratives, and collective memory. It is constantly negotiated in different social contexts and is subject to continuous change.



A central concept for analysing this complexity is **intersectionality**. It describes how different social categories - such as ethnicity, gender, age, sexuality, and social background - overlap and influence each other. Depending on these intersections, individuals experience different forms of privilege or marginalization. Identity is therefore not experienced one-dimensionally but is created through the interplay of multiple affiliations (see Crenshaw, 1991).

The volatility of identity is also reflected in the fact that people emphasize or de-emphasize different facets of their personality in different social situations. For example, a person's behaviour and self-perception towards colleagues and superiors in the workplace can be very different to that in their private life. Identity is therefore context-dependent and is constantly being renegotiated. This changeability is further reinforced by the fact that the underlying social categories - such as ethnicity or gender - are not themselves stable. They are created through social negotiation processes and are dependent on historical and cultural contexts. One example of this is the development of the concept of ethnicity, which has changed over time, with certain groups being categorized differently depending on social power relations and norms (Hall, 1996).

Another crucial factor influencing the construction of identity is **collective memory**, a concept introduced by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and further developed by Aleida and Jan Assmann. It refers to the shared memories of a group that are preserved and passed on by social institutions such as the family, community, or state. These memories are not purely individual experiences, but are shaped by cultural narratives, social norms, and institutional practices - and thus contribute significantly to the formation of collective and national identities. National holidays, monuments, and school textbooks are examples of how certain interpretations of the past are emphasized while others are suppressed. However, collective memory is not uniform. Different social groups can have different perspectives on the past. This can lead to contradictory ideas of national identity and illustrates how multi-layered and conflict-laden identity constructions can be (see Assmann, 2011).

1.3.5 The terms "migrant" and "ethnic minority"

The definitions of the terms migrant and ethnic minority are complex, as they can be interpreted differently depending on the legal, social, or cultural perspective.

The **term "migrant"** often refers to people who leave their country of origin - for economic reasons, due to conflict or in search of security and better living conditions. In political and media discourse, it is often associated with people from the Global South who move to wealthier countries in the Global North. This association often goes hand in hand with negative attributions, such as low socio-economic status, "integration problems" or an alleged burden on the host country (de Carvalho, 2023).



In contrast, the **term "expat"** is usually used for people from Western or privileged countries of origin who move abroad for professional or personal reasons. These people are often seen as flexible, educated and cosmopolitan - their mobility is not questioned, but celebrated. This distinction shows a clear power imbalance: People from the global North are perceived as "citizens of the world", while mobility from the South is associated with threat or deficits.

For example, a Polish person moving to France could be described as a migrant, while the same person in Egypt would be seen as an expat. These conceptual differences show how strongly evaluations of migration are shaped by racialized and classist power structures (see de Carvalho, 2023; Boulter, 2017).

The concept of "**ethnic minority**" is not neutral either. It refers to power relations in which certain groups - mostly non-white or non-Western - are constructed as "different" in comparison to the dominant majority society. The attribution of minority status is not only based on quantitative figures, but above all within the framework of a majority-centred world view.

This perspective can lead to certain cultures or practices being romanticized or exoticized - for example through the aesthetic appropriation of traditional clothing, music, or food. At the same time, however, the real social and political struggles to which these groups are exposed - such as poverty, discrimination, or lack of access to resources - are often ignored or made invisible (Mohanty, 2006).

The dynamics described are reflected in everyday language, in the media and in political debates. They influence how institutions deal with ethnic minorities, what expectations are formulated towards them and what social positions are ascribed to them. The media, for example, often reproduce stereotypical images of migrants or ethnic groups - either as a "problem" or as a "colourful enrichment", which greatly distorts the realities of life (see Boulter, 2017; Mohanty, 2006).

Reflection questions

- To what extent do you encounter binary thought structures (e.g. male/female, normal/different) in everyday school life - and what effects could these have on your students?
- Have you observed or (unconsciously) expressed racist microaggressions yourself? How could you react or intervene more sensitively in such situations?
- What (conscious or unconscious) images do you have of ethnic minorities? Where might these come from - and how do they influence your pedagogical attitude?



- How do you experience your own identity in terms of gender, ethnicity, language, or social background - and how does this change depending on the context?
- What terms do you use in everyday school life for pupils with a migration background - and what might resonate linguistically?
- How could you create spaces in your classroom where different identities are visible, valued and not stereotyped?
- In which school structures (e.g. parental work, curricula, grading) could unconscious hierarchies and discrimination have become entrenched?

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1.4 Enculturation and definition(s) of culture

1.4.1 Insights into definitions, developments, and social effects of culture

Definitions of culture

The term culture is used in various disciplines and social contexts - from anthropology and sociology to everyday communication. This diverse use often leads to a certain vagueness or "dilution" of the term.

The origin of the word lies in Latin: *colere* ("to cultivate", "to cultivate") as well as *cultura* and *cultus* originally stood for the agricultural cultivation of arable land. This root refers to a basic idea that is still contained in many understandings of culture today: culture encompasses that which has been created or shaped by humans - in contrast to natural conditions.

In the modern sense, culture goes far beyond material cultivation and refers to all forms of individual and social organization of life, for example through knowledge, language, art, norms, or rituals. The Encyclopaedia Britannica lists "language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals and ceremonies" as central components of culture.

The understanding of culture varies depending on the discipline:

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Anthropological perspective: Edward B. Tylor is considered to be one of the first to systematically define culture. He described it as *"the complex whole comprising knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and all other skills and habits acquired by man as a member of society"* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). This definition focuses on the breadth of human practices and their learned nature.

Sociological perspective: The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) understands culture as *"the shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understandings that are learned through a process of socialization"* (CARLA, n.d.). The focus here is on the shared, learned, and social component of culture.

Psychological perspective: The cultural scientist Geert Hofstede defines culture as *"the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from another."* He emphasizes the role of cultural imprints in thinking, feeling and behaviour as well as their cognitive and emotional dimensions.

These definitions show: Culture is multi-layered, dynamic, and deeply embedded in social processes. It comprises both material and immaterial elements, arises through interaction and shapes our thoughts and actions in a fundamental way.



How culture develops and evolves: Enculturation and exchange

Culture is a dynamic system characterized by human interaction and exchange. It arises and develops continuously through various processes:

Social interaction and cultural formation: Culture is essentially a social construct. Through social interaction, people learn and preserve the norms, values, and practices of their own culture. This learning process is known as enculturation. It begins early, for example in the family, continues in school, peer groups and the world of work and lasts a lifetime. People negotiate cultural meanings and reinforce them through communication and shared experiences. For example, family traditions are passed down through generations and at the same time adapted to changing circumstances.

Cultural practices and shared experiences: Cultural practices become visible and alive in collective experiences. Celebrations, rituals, and ceremonies are expressions of cultural belonging and offer individuals the opportunity to affirm their cultural identity. National holidays or religious festivals bring communities together and create a framework for collective memory, connection, and self-positioning.

Exchange and cultural adaptation: Cultural exchange happens through encounters - be it in everyday life, through migration, trade, or global media. When people from diverse cultural backgrounds interact, they exchange ideas, customs, languages, or technologies. This process can lead to cultural adaptation, where new elements are integrated into existing cultural frameworks. One example of this is the culinary fusions in cosmopolitan cities, where new food cultures develop from different traditions of origin.

Identity and cultural dynamics: Interaction and exchange also have an impact on the identity of individuals and groups. Cultural identity is not a fixed construct, but changes through firsthand experiences, social expectations, and social contexts. Depending on the situation, a person can identify as European, Irish, or a member of a certain religious community. These context-dependent attributions show the hybridity and changeability of identities in a networked world.

Continuous learning and unlearning: Cultural development does not only mean appropriation, but also critical reflection and change. When dealing with new perspectives, it may become necessary to question, adapt, or discard one's own cultural patterns. This learning and unlearning are crucial for maintaining a vibrant, sustainable culture. Especially in the context of migration and globalization, it becomes clear how important it is to constantly review cultural norms and remain open to change.

Why culture is important

Culture has a profound influence on the life of the individual and on coexistence in society. It acts as an invisible network that structures values, norms, communication and belonging. Its significance is evident in several key areas:

Identity and belonging: Culture creates identity - it helps people to understand who they are and where they belong. Shared cultural values, traditions and symbols create a sense of familiarity and social inclusion. People often find comfort, orientation, and a sense of



"home" in their cultural affiliation - especially in times of uncertainty or change. *"Culture is a means of locating oneself in the world."*

Behaviour and social norms: Culture has a considerable influence on what behaviour is considered "normal". It defines social norms, role models, forms of politeness, moral concepts, and taboos. These rules not only govern everyday life, but also shape institutions such as education, law, and politics. Culture is both visible (e.g. in clothing or greeting rituals) and invisible (e.g. in attitudes towards authority or gender roles).

Communication: Cultural influences affect how we speak, listen, remain silent, nod, or laugh. Language, tone of voice, non-verbal signals, conversational behaviour, and the way we deal with closeness and distance differ depending on the culture - which can lead to both enrichment and misunderstandings in intercultural encounters. A conscious understanding of culturally influenced communication patterns is therefore central to education, international cooperation, and peaceful coexistence.

Innovation and social progress: Cultural diversity is a source of creativity, new ideas and perspectives. When diverse ways of thinking come together, innovative solutions to problems, artistic forms of expression and technological developments emerge. The exchange between cultures has always been a driving force for progress - from science to pop culture.

Exclusion and inclusion: culture can connect people - or divide them. Shared cultural characteristics create a sense of belonging, but at the same time cultural differences can lead to stigmatization or marginalization. Cultural norms often implicitly define who is considered "normal" or "different" - and can thus contribute to the exclusion of certain groups (e.g. through racism, ethnocentrism, or cultural prejudice). It is therefore important to understand culture not as a rigid system, but as an open, dynamic structure that can be questioned, negotiated, and changed.

Cultural diversity, subcultures, and social milieus

Culture is not a homogeneous block, but a complex network of diverse forms of expression, social affiliations, and symbolic systems. In addition to overarching cultural orientations - such as national, religious, or linguistic affiliations - independent cultural configurations develop within each society. This diversity is reflected both in so-called subcultures and in class- or milieu-related differences.

Diversity and subcultures: The influence of African-American culture on musical genres such as jazz, blues and hip-hop has not only shaped the US musical landscape but has also established new forms of expression worldwide. Such cultural mainstreams are flanked by a large number of subcultures that stand out from the majority culture through their own aesthetic styles, language codes, values, and social practices. These include youth cultures such as punk, goth or hip-hop, LGBTQ+ communities, religious subgroups, and digital scenes.

Subcultures not only offer spaces for creative development, but also for identity formation, social support, or conscious demarcation. Marginalized groups in particular use them to articulate affiliation, resistance, or visibility. Their existence illustrates the



dynamic plurality of social culture - as something lived, negotiable and often also resistant.

Class cultures and social milieus: Socio-economic differences also create cultural diversity. The realities of life in a high-income milieu with access to golf clubs, opera subscriptions and trips abroad differ significantly from those of a working-class family, whose everyday life is characterized by different leisure practices, forms of communication and values. Such differences manifest themselves in so-called class cultures or social milieus.

These cultural characteristics are more than just economic statistics - they are lived experiences with specific symbols, routines, and self-images. They not only influence lifestyle, but also perceptions of normality, success, and education.

The simultaneous existence of the most diverse cultural forms of life makes it clear that culture is not a uniform system, but a multi-layered, often contradictory mosaic. Subcultures, class cultures and alternative affiliations make this inner differentiation visible. Anyone who wants to teach cultural education must not only recognize this diversity but also understand it in its interaction - as the basis for an inclusive understanding of education that is sensitive to discrimination.

Cultural dynamics in everyday life: communication, belonging and misunderstandings

Cultural diversity is not only reflected in structural or institutional differences, but also in everyday behaviour, forms of communication and individual self-positioning. These cultural subtleties influence how people talk to each other, how they perceive each other - and how belonging or exclusion is experienced.

Communication as a culturally shaped practice: Cultural influences affect how we speak, listen, remain silent, or make eye contact. Speech styles, tone of voice, non-verbal gestures, conversational techniques, and the way we deal with closeness and distance differ greatly between cultures. In intercultural encounters, these differences can lead to enriching perspectives - or to misunderstandings. A conscious understanding of such communication patterns is therefore central to education, international cooperation, and respectful coexistence.

Belonging and fluid cultural identities: Cultural identity is not rigid, but context-dependent and dynamic. Many people today move between several cultural spaces. Depending on their social environment, a person can identify as European, Irish, Muslim or the daughter of a migrant worker family. This fluid identity is an expression of cultural change and intercultural spaces of experience. It shows that belonging is not an absolute state, but a situationally negotiated feeling.

Misinterpretations of cultural behaviour: In everyday school life, but also in other areas of society, culturally influenced behaviours are often misunderstood. A young person who regularly wears jogging bottoms may be perceived as disrespectful - even though their behaviour may be motivated by pop culture or limited economic resources. Such misinterpretations show how important it is to consider cultural expressions in their social and material context instead of judging them too hastily.

Cultural exaggeration in public discourse: In social discourse, culture is often used as the sole explanation for behaviour. If, for example, school performance is generally attributed to "cultural background", other decisive factors are overlooked - such as access to resources, individual life situations or structural discrimination. These abbreviated attributions contribute to the reproduction of prejudices and underline the need for a differentiated, context-sensitive understanding of culture.

A reflective approach to cultural dynamics in everyday life therefore means recognizing cultural influences, taking diversity seriously - and at the same time not losing sight of the social conditions in which cultural forms of expression arise and have an impact.

1.4.2 The role of teachers in culturally diverse classrooms

Diversity as a pedagogical reality

In today's globalized society, classrooms are increasingly culturally, ethnically, and socially diverse. This heterogeneity presents teachers with particular challenges - but also offers opportunities for enriching, inclusive learning. An appreciative and supportive learning environment is achieved when teachers show cultural sensitivity and actively and consciously shape the way they deal with their students' different enculturation experiences. This is not only about imparting knowledge, but also about actively promoting a common classroom culture that recognizes differences, appreciates diversity, and creates shared values.

Culturally sensitive behaviour: Three dimensions of professional behaviour

Culturally sensitive behaviour describes the ability to respond appropriately to cultural differences and similarities - with empathy, respect, and pedagogical reflection. It is about designing learning processes in such a way that they are connectable and meaningful for all students. According to Kumar, Zusho and Bondie (2018), incorporating culturally relevant content in the classroom also promotes student motivation and learning success. When their experiences, perspectives and life realities become visible in the classroom, a deeper understanding and greater participation is created.

Cultural self-reflection: Cultural sensitization begins with a critical examination of one's own background and possible (unconscious) biases. Teachers reflect on their values, norms, and patterns of interpretation - and recognize that they too are part of cultural systems. This awareness forms the basis for perceiving and classifying other cultural perspectives and dealing respectfully with difference.

Cultural competence in action: Cultural competence encompasses knowledge about cultural norms, communication styles, family structures or religious practices - as well as



the ability to apply this knowledge effectively in everyday school life. Teachers with cultural competence design teaching methods, materials, and interactions in such a way that they are accessible, relevant, and respectful for students of diverse backgrounds (Gay, 2002).

Relationship-building and appreciation: Cultural sensitivity goes beyond knowledge and reflection: it encompasses an appreciative attitude that is evident in interactions with students. A culturally sensitive teacher understands diversity as a resource - they react empathetically to multilingual expressions, integrate cultural celebrations into the classroom or shape relationships with students who move between diverse cultural worlds.

The role of the teacher in enculturation and class culture

Teachers act as cultural mediators in heterogeneous classes, creating an inclusive learning environment. In doing so, they play a key role in enculturation - in other words, in developing a shared classroom culture in which all pupils feel recognized, safe and a sense of belonging.

Promoting a sense of belonging through class culture: In the school context, enculturation means negotiating values, rules, and manners together - this creates a culture of cooperation in which diversity is not an obstacle but a learning opportunity.

Culturally relevant pedagogy: Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) describes her concept of "culturally relevant pedagogy" as teaching that responds to students' cultural experiences. It makes it possible to preserve cultural identity and be academically successful at the same time. Kumar, Zusho and Bondie (2018) affirm that such teaching strengthens motivation and learning success because it is experienced as meaningful.

Design of learning spaces and visibility of diversity: An inclusive classroom is characterized by the symbolic and substantive visibility of diversity - for example in the selection of teaching materials, through multilingual labels, wall design or the celebration of cultural events. This design sends a clear message: every background counts.

Participation and joint value development: Central values such as respect, tolerance and solidarity should not be imposed from above but should be developed together with the pupils - for example through class agreements, morning circles or project work. Such processes promote identification and social cohesion.

Didactic measures to promote inclusion

An inclusive classroom is not created through attitude alone, but also through concrete measures in everyday teaching:

Develop rules and norms in a participatory way: At the beginning of the school year, define rules together with the class that promote respectful interaction and diversity - this strengthens the sense of responsibility of everyone involved.

Pluralize the curriculum: An inclusive curriculum takes cultural diversity into account - in text selection, perspectives, and tasks. This not only makes content visible, but also the realities of life.

Establish reflection as a learning process: Reflection promotes intercultural learning. Journals, discussions, or creative projects encourage people to question their own experiences - including the teacher.

Dealing with conflicts interculturality: Misunderstandings are normal in diverse classes. It is crucial that students learn strategies for dialog, empathy, and conflict resolution.

Professionalization through further training: Cultural competence can be learned - and requires constant further development. Further training, peer counselling and team exchanges help teachers to reflect on and further develop their attitudes and methods.

Conclusion: Teachers as facilitators of cultural participation

In summary, it can be said that culturally sensitive behaviour and conscious enculturation are cornerstones for successful learning in heterogeneous classes. Teachers who exemplify respect and inclusion, promote shared values, and create spaces for diversity shape school as a place of participation. In this way, they enable students to live their identity, develop their potential, and feel capable of acting in a diverse society. The inclusion of culturally relevant content - as emphasized by Kumar, Zusho and Bondie (2018) - forms a sustainable basis for this and shows that diversity is not an add-on, but the foundation of pedagogical professionalism.

Reflection questions

- How do you personally define the term "culture" - and to what extent has your understanding expanded or changed as a result of different perspectives?
- In which everyday school situations (e.g. parent work, conflict moderation, choice of teaching materials) have you encountered cultural misunderstandings - and how did you deal with them?
- How can you as a teacher contribute to the development of a common classroom culture without levelling out cultural differences?
- What aspects of your own cultural background influence - consciously or unconsciously - your pedagogical actions? Where do you see blind spots?



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1.5 Understanding and strengthening students' cultural identities

1.5.1 Identity development in migration societies

Identity formation is a dynamic process in which a person begins to understand who they are, how they see themselves and what place they occupy in society. This process usually begins in childhood and intensifies in adolescence. However, identity is not to be understood as a static variable but is constantly renegotiated in interaction with the environment.

The development and representation of identity is intricately linked to social, cultural, and societal factors. Both internal and external influences have an impact:

- Internal influences include aspects such as social gender, ethnicity, race, appearance, sexual orientation, personal interests, and life experiences.
- External influences result from family, friends, religion, school, media, the geographical and political environment as well as access to education and participation.

In culturally and socially diverse societies, many young people develop their identity at the interface of diverse cultural affiliations. This is particularly true for children and young people with a migrant background, who often find themselves in a field of tension between their culture of origin and their host culture. School is one of the central places where these negotiations take place.

Migrant identities in generational comparison

The question of how identity develops over several generations in the context of migration plays a key role in understanding belonging, participation and educational processes in a pluralistic society. This reveals different challenges, but also resources that vary from generation to generation:

First generation: First-generation immigrants were born in another country and often migrate for economic, educational, or refugee-related reasons. Their identity is often intricately linked to their country of origin. The challenges they face include language barriers, social exclusion, legal uncertainty and adapting to a new social system. They are often under pressure to adapt while maintaining their cultural origins.

Second generation: The children of these migrants usually grow up, were born or socialized in the country of arrival. Their identity development is often characterized by the experience of a mediating, multi-layered belonging - a life between diverse cultural reference systems. They balance between the cultural expectations of their families of origin and the social norms of the host country. It can happen that particularly traditional values are preserved or even reinforced within migrant families - often more so than in the country of origin itself. This effect, which is well documented in migration research,



can be interpreted as an attempt to protect cultural identity in exile, to maintain a sense of community or to distance themselves from perceived social exclusion (see Vertovec, 2009). They often feel connected to their parents' culture of origin as well as identified with the majority society - but are not always fully accepted by both sides.

Third generation: Members of the third generation usually experience stronger roots in the host country. The connection to the original culture of origin can become weaker, but often remains through family traditions, language, or names. At the same time, this generation is not automatically free from experiences of exclusion, for example through racialized attributions or structural discrimination.

Forced migration and identity

Forced migrants, refugees and asylum seekers form a special group. Unlike voluntary migration, their path is usually not self-determined, but forced by threats, persecution, or natural disasters. The loss of their homeland, caregivers, language, and safe spaces has a profound impact on their self-image and emotional anchoring. Many experience ongoing insecurity due to unclear residence conditions, legal barriers, or social prejudice. Their identity development is often characterized by loss, traumatization, and the need to make a new start - with effects on participation in school and psychosocial well-being.

1.5.2 Performative alienation and dealing with identity conflicts at school

Identity is not only formed but also presented - often depending on the respective social context. In the migration society, many students experience a tension between the need to belong and the desire to live out their cultural identity authentically - a tension that, according to El-Mafaalani (2020), arises from the paradoxical logic of integration: The more someone participates, the more visible the difference becomes. This tension can lead to a phenomenon known as performative alienation.

Performative alienation refers to a phenomenon in which people publicly distance themselves from a certain group, ideology, or identity (Gertenbach, 2020), for example to conform to dominant social or school expectations. Students adapt their appearance, language, or behaviour to avoid attracting negative attention, to avoid prejudice or to signal belonging.

This adaptation can offer protection in the short term, but harbours long-term risks: The ongoing denial of cultural or linguistic elements can lead to an inner conflict of identity, accompanied by feelings of inauthenticity, psychological stress, and social withdrawal (Mecheril, 2018). Pupils who repeatedly receive negative feedback about their cultural expressions or family background - whether from classmates or educational staff - are particularly affected. This often occurs in the area of tension of implicit norms that are effective in schools without being openly expressed (Terkessidis, 2017).



Performative alienation not only has short-term emotional effects but can also have long-term effects on students' self-concept and social participation. Possible consequences include an inner identity conflict, reduced self-esteem, and emotional distancing from the school context. On a social level, performative alienation can also put a strain on relationships with peers or contribute to the reproduction of cultural stereotypes. If cultural forms of expression remain permanently hidden, there is a risk that cultural diversity will gradually become invisible in the school environment - with the risk that a standardizing, supposedly homogeneous school culture will become entrenched.

This results in important tasks for the school environment: Schools should create spaces in which different identities are not only tolerated but actively recognized and addressed. This can be supported, for example, through open class discussions, project-oriented work on biographies of origin or multilingual materials. It is crucial that pupils experience this: I am allowed to show who I am - without fear of devaluation or exclusion.

An inclusive school climate that sees difference not as a deficit but as a resource helps to prevent performative alienation. Teachers play a key role in this - through their attitude, their didactic decisions, and their willingness to self-reflect. Promoting an authentic self-image among students is an essential contribution to educational equity and equal opportunities.

Clarify terms: (im)migrants vs. expats

To understand identity processes, it is also worth taking a look at the terms themselves. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a migrant is any person who moves their place of residence across a national border or within a country - regardless of legal status, motivation, or length of stay.

In social perception, however, there are strong differences between the terms "migrant" and "expat". The latter is usually used for privileged Western professionals and has a more positive connotation. This linguistic difference points to existing power relations in the evaluation of migration and also influences how migrants perceive themselves and are perceived.

Identity development in migrant students is therefore a complex, context-dependent and often contradictory process - characterized by multiple affiliations, social attributions, and internal negotiations.

The performative alienation does not only arise in the individual experience of the students but is also caused or reinforced by the structural framework conditions of the school. The decisive factor is whether cultural diversity is made visible and recognized or ignored and devalued at school:



Curriculum and representation: When cultural diversity is not considered in curricula, materials and examples, many students feel invisible or marginalized with their backgrounds. A purely Eurocentric educational canon can reinforce the feeling of having to "fit in" to be recognized as a full member of the classroom community.

Attitudes and expectations of teachers: Implicit assumptions or stereotypical expectations towards certain groups can lead to pupils bending themselves to meet (supposed) demands. A deficit-oriented view of migration or multilingualism reinforces the feeling of having to be ashamed of one's own origin.

Language policy and school practices: Strict language regulations that only allow English in everyday school life can force multilingual pupils to hide key parts of their identity. Inclusive language practice, on the other hand - for example, by recognizing languages of origin in projects or in the classroom - sends a signal: Multilingualism is a resource, not a deviation.

Structural recognition of diversity: Schools that specifically promote diversity competence, enable safe spaces, and make cultural forms of expression visible in school festivals, working groups or class projects send a strong signal against performative alienation.

Teachers can therefore actively contribute to students being able to live their identity - by creating an environment in which difference is not seen as a risk, but as part of learning together.

1.5.3 Perception, attribution, and interaction: identity in the field of tension of school relationships

Identity is not formed in isolation, but in relation to others. In schools, which function as social microcosms, the way in which pupils see themselves and how they are seen by others plays a significant role in their development, well-being, and educational success.

Influence of perceptions on interactions

The perception of classmates, teachers or school structures is often shaped by cultural influences, social narratives and - often unconsciously - stereotypical attributions. These have a direct impact on social interactions. It becomes particularly problematic when students are ascribed to certain groups based on external characteristics such as name, skin color, accent, or clothing. Such patterns of perception can lead to preconceptions about performance, behaviour, or affiliation - with direct consequences for school experiences.

Stereotypical attributions can affect both students with a history of migration and members of socially disadvantaged groups. Teachers - although mostly well-meaning - are, like all people, subject to implicit cognitive distortions, so-called "implicit biases".



These can lead to students being addressed, evaluated, or supported differently depending on the ascribed group - for example through lower expectations, selective attention, or stronger sanctions (Ghavami et al., 2020).

Such mechanisms have lasting effects: Students who feel that they are given less credit not only lose motivation, but sometimes internalize these attributions, which can have a negative impact on their self-concept and academic performance.

Complex identities and social inclusion

Many students have multiple affiliations - for example, as a Black Muslim woman with refugee experience or as a queer young person from a non-academic home. These complex, overlapping identities - often described in terms of intersectionality - influence how people experience belonging, exclusion or participation.

If schools do not recognize this complexity, educational offers run the risk of ignoring the realities of many students' lives. For example, young people with multiple marginalized identities often report a lack of representation in the classroom, experiences of discrimination or the feeling of "not finding themselves" - which can have a negative impact on their emotional well-being and learning behaviour (see Crenshaw, 1991; Azmitia & Thomas, 2015).

1.5.4 Pedagogical perspectives: How teachers can open up identity spaces

The educational mission in a migration society not only includes imparting knowledge but also enabling identity work. Teachers who actively recognize cultural diversity create spaces in which students can show themselves as whole persons. The following perspectives show concrete ways in which this can be achieved in everyday school life.

Representation in the classroom and in teaching materials

A central element for the recognition of cultural diversity is representation: students must find themselves and their life realities reflected in lesson content. This applies to texts, images, names, and contexts as well as the selection of perspectives, authors, or historical examples.

If, for example, only white European authors are read in literature classes or historical narratives are presented exclusively from a Western perspective, this implicitly reproduces a cultural hierarchy. The conscious integration of literary, scientific, or historical voices from diverse cultural backgrounds, on the other hand, sends a signal: Your story counts - you are part of this learning space.

Multilingual materials, the use of languages of origin in the classroom or the thematization of transcultural experiences also contribute to making diversity visible (Gogolin, 2008; Auernheimer, 2012).



Shelters and dialogical formats

Safe spaces are places where students can speak without fear of discrimination, ridicule, or sanctions. This is particularly important for young people whose identities are marginalized in multiple ways (e.g. students of colour, LGBTQ+ young people, young people with refugee experience).

Dialogic formats such as storytelling circles, intercultural workshops or autobiographical writing events promote listening, understanding and reflection. They enable encounters at eye level and help to develop empathy and a change of perspective. What is important here is that these formats must be moderated, protected, and accompanied with an appreciative attitude.

Recognition and appreciation as a resource

Identity is closely linked to the feeling of recognition. When students experience that their experiences, languages, traditions, and approaches to the world are taken seriously, this strengthens their self-confidence - and thus their motivation to learn and participate. Instead of treating differences as a "problem", they should be used as a resource, for example in the form of diversity of perspectives, language skills or cultural knowledge.

This approach also corresponds to the "funds of knowledge" model (Moll et al., 1992), which assumes that students bring valuable knowledge with them from their families and communities - even if this is not always visible in the traditional educational canon. Teachers who recognize this knowledge and integrate it into the classroom strengthen the bridge between lifeworld and school.

Practical approaches: Biographical writing and language portraits

Biographical writing is a proven method for giving students space to reflect on their origins, their experiences, and their view of the world. In diary formats, letters, family stories or autobiographical texts, they can express their self-image, process identity-forming events and experience themselves as self-effective.

Language portraits and other visual methods make it possible to visualize and appreciate the linguistic repertoires of pupils. Such an approach not only allows for the creative representation of individual multilingualism, but also for reflection on language use in different contexts - e.g. at home, in class or on social media. Julia Ricart Brede (2014) uses practical examples from secondary school to show how teachers can use simple means to record their students' multilingual resources and integrate them productively into their lessons. The resulting representations - for example in the form of color-coded language cards - provide a basis for conversations about language biographies, identity and belonging and thus promote awareness of linguistic diversity in the classroom.

Intercultural project work, for example on festivals, cooking cultures, clothing or media, can also open up spaces of identity if it is not exoticized but designed on an equal footing.



An interactive methodological proposal for identity reflection

The question of one's own identity is particularly relevant for young people - especially in culturally and socially diverse learning environments. Teachers can address this topic using dialogical and creative methods to open up spaces of identity and promote self-reflection.

A possible teaching unit: **"Who am I - and who can I be?"**

The aim is to give students the opportunity to reflect on their social roles, affiliations and also the expectations placed on them.

Suggested steps:

1. Start with an impulse quote (e.g. from Max Frisch: *"I am not what I am. I am what I make of myself."* (Stiller, 1956) - discussion about external attributions and self-images.
2. Reflection sheet "My identities": Students write down various aspects of their identity (e.g. gender, language, religion, hobbies, family, social roles).
3. Anonymous card question: Students write on a card which role or characteristic they often emphasize in everyday life - and which they tend to hide.
4. Exchange in small groups: Where do they experience recognition? Where do they have to "adapt"? Where do they feel free to express themselves?
5. Creative realization: e.g. collages, self-portraits, identity poems or scenic representations.
6. Final round with feedback: What have I learned about myself? What would I like to live or express differently in the future?

Didactic added value:

This unit combines cognitive, emotional, and social approaches. It strengthens self-awareness, enables a change of perspective, and creates a framework for mutual appreciation - particularly important in classes with diverse biographies.

1.5.5 Religion, worldview, and ideologies: Making identity dimensions visible in the classroom

Religion and belief systems are a central source of identity formation for many people. They offer normative orientation, emotional security and a social network that creates a sense of belonging. Particularly during adolescence, religious traditions enable young people to develop a coherent self-image - for example through moral orientation, spiritual practice, or role models within religious communities. Religious educator Friedrich Schweitzer emphasizes that religion plays "a central role in the identity



formation of young people", as it supports both personal self-assurance and social orientation (Schweitzer, 2014, p. 473). Especially in pluralistic societies, religious education offers spaces for individual search for meaning and dialog between different world views.

Religious beliefs and practices also contribute significantly to personal and collective identity. By participating in shared rituals and committing to common values, individuals strengthen their sense of belonging to a community. This communal aspect of religion can play a particularly key role during adolescence. Religious educator Friedrich Schweitzer (2014) emphasizes that religion offers young people both orientation and space to come to terms with their own identity. In his analysis, he points to the special potential of religious education to combine individual self-assurance and social integration - especially in pluralistic, secular societies.

Particularly in adolescence - a phase of self-discovery and search for meaning - religious beliefs often have an identity-forming effect by helping to develop a coherent self-image (cf. Schmid, 2010). Participating in religious rituals, experiencing shared celebrations, or belonging to a religious community make a significant contribution to strengthening the feeling of security, stability, and a sense of belonging.

These processes do not take place in isolation but are always embedded in social negotiations: Who is considered religious, which forms of faith are considered "normal" or "foreign", and which forms of expression are socially recognized are subject to a certain ideological imprint. Religion is therefore not only a personal confession, but also a socially effective category of belonging - or exclusion.

In pluralistic societies, it is also evident that religious affiliation is often intertwined with other identity characteristics - such as ethnic origin, skin color or social status. For example, Muslim students may experience their religion not only as part of their self-image, but also as a marker that is assigned political, media or discriminatory attributions in public (Kiefer & Froese, 2021). This entanglement of religious affiliation with social marginalization can lead to ambivalence, insecurity, or performative alienation.

Secular or political worldviews also act as an interpretative framework for identity formation. Whether liberal, conservative, or activist attitudes - ideologies structure the view of society, influence political participation, value orientation and the understanding of justice or community. Ideological orientations therefore also come together in schools and become visible - explicitly or implicitly - in lessons: in the selection of topics, in normative settings or in the (non-)thematization of social lines of conflict.

Religious and ideological beliefs have a direct impact on school culture, classroom climate and interactions between students and teachers. For example, they influence which topics students find relevant or unpleasant, how discussions about ethics, gender roles or



family models are conducted, or how students position themselves in group work, sports lessons, or projects.

School is not a value-free space - so it is all the more important to manage these areas of tension sensitively.

Teachers are responsible for ensuring that students can live and articulate their religious and ideological identities - without fear of exclusion or devaluation. This includes the following strategies:

- **Open dialogue:** Religious and ideological topics can be discussed and reflected upon in moderated class discussions. A framework of mindfulness and respect is crucial here, which does not problematize difference but makes it understandable.
- **Promoting shared values:** Values such as empathy, justice, solidarity, or shared responsibility can be strengthened as a common basis across religious or ideological differences.
- **Representation in the curriculum:** The deliberate selection of teaching materials, examples and perspectives that make different religious and ideological references visible sends a signal: Diversity is part of our reality - and our learning.
- **Create safe spaces:** Classrooms must be places where students do not have to hide their religious practices (e.g. clothing, fasting, prayer). This requires teachers to take a clear stance against discrimination and exclusion - as well as a school policy that actively considers religious diversity.

When teachers integrate these aspects into their teaching and pedagogical approach, they contribute to a democratic, inclusive school culture that is open to dialogue - in which all students experience that they can belong with their religious or ideological identity.

1.5.6 Intersectionality as a challenge and opportunity for schools and teaching

Intersectionality describes the interplay of several social categories such as gender, ethnicity, religion, social origin, disability, or sexual orientation, which do not have an additive but overlapping effect on life experiences and social participation (Crenshaw, 1991).

Pupils with multiple marginalized identities - e.g. as Black girls with refugee experience or queer young people from non-academic households - often experience everyday school life as contradictory. On the one hand, they are expected to participate, learn, and develop; on the other hand, they are often confronted with norms that hide or devalue the reality of their lives. The combination of various disadvantages can have cumulative



effects: lower expectations, gaps in representation, discriminatory comments, or the feeling of always being "different".

Teachers are also part of this field of tension. As with all people, their perception is influenced by social conditioning, stereotypes, and their own positionality. Without targeted reflection, there is a risk that intersectionality is not recognized or misjudged - for example, when disadvantages are interpreted as individual failure instead of structural inequality (Riegel & Brandes, 2021).

An intersectional approach to education requires a deep understanding of structural power relations - and the will to critically question school routines. This can include, among other things:

- **Curriculum work:** Which perspectives are included? Which are missing? Where can diversity not only be addressed, but actively made visible?
- **Use of language and materials:** Are terms, texts, and images sensitive to discrimination? Are multiple affiliations addressed respectfully?
- **Space for experience:** Are there protected forums in which students can talk about the interplay of their identities? Are these voices heard - even beyond "theme weeks"?

An example: A Muslim schoolgirl with a headscarf who comes from an educationally disadvantaged family and identifies as queer brings with her experiences that can only be adequately understood intersectionally. She not only needs recognition as a person of faith, but also protection from queer-hostile comments, support with family role conflicts and a pedagogy that takes her lifeworld seriously rather than pathologizing it.

An intersectional view not only changes the perspective on disadvantage - it also opens up new opportunities. Because those who recognize diversity in its complexity can make educational processes fairer, more relevant, and more humane. School thus becomes a place that does not demand uniformity but recognizes diversity as a social reality.

It is not just big structural changes that are needed, but often small, everyday gestures: a teacher who respects different pronouns; a project that talks about poverty in a non-deficit-oriented way; a classroom in which both Ramadan and Pride are visible.

Intersectional pedagogy challenges teachers - but it also offers the opportunity to rethink school as a space for empowerment. It is based on an attitude of self-reflection, openness, and social responsibility.



1.5.7 Language education and translanguaging: Language(s) as an identity resource in the classroom

Language is more than just a means of communication - it is a carrier of identity, belonging and cultural knowledge. Multilingual biographies in particular show that language does not function in clearly separate systems, but is lived as a dynamic, situation-dependent repertoire. This also applies to pupils who grow up with several languages and whose use of language changes flexibly depending on the social context, interlocutor, or topic.

The term **translanguaging** describes this practice: multilingual people consciously or intuitively draw on their entire linguistic repertoire in communication without adhering to the strict separation of individual languages. In contrast to classic concepts such as code-switching, in which languages are clearly separated from one another, translanguaging understands language as an integrated system that is used flexibly and context-sensitively (Gantefort & Maahs, 2020).

Translanguaging allows students to use their linguistic resources creatively and express their identities in a complex way. If, for example, a student formulates content in English, incorporates terms from Urdu, this is not a "deficiency", but a sign of linguistic competence and cultural polyphony.

In the school context, translanguaging is much more than a method - it is a didactic approach that takes the linguistic reality of many pupils seriously. It overcomes the dominance of monolingual standards and creates space for different modes of expression. Studies show that translanguaging supports learning processes, improves text comprehension, increases cognitive depth, and leads to more inclusion, especially with complex topics (Gantefort & Maahs, 2020).

By having their language skills recognized, pupils experience a strengthening of their self-esteem and a greater sense of belonging. This is particularly true for student whose language of origin often remains invisible in regular lessons or is even perceived as a deficit.

Translanguaging teaching does not require a complete reorganization of the school system, but it does require a rethink:

- Teachers can encourage students to think or write down difficult tasks in their strongest language first - even if the final product is required in English.
- Multilingual materials (e.g. bilingual books, glossaries, or word lists) help to make content more accessible and deepen semantic understanding.
- Language portraits or language diaries promote awareness of one's own language use and offer space for reflection.

- Group work can be organized in such a way that different languages can be used and explained to each other - this not only creates cooperative learning, but also linguistic solidarity.

The teacher's attitude is crucial here: they must see multilingualism as a resource and move away from a monolingual understanding of norms. Translanguaging requires openness, trust, and a willingness to relinquish control - in favour of a learning environment that makes living language biographies visible rather than suppressing them.

To ensure that translanguaging does not remain an individual strategy for individual teachers, but becomes structurally effective, educational policy support is also needed. Curricular requirements, performance assessments and examination formats must provide space for linguistic diversity. Teacher training and further education should treat multilingualism as the norm - not the exception. However, as Koch-Priewe and Krumm (2019) emphasize, there is often a tension between the pedagogical desire for multilingual teaching and the institutional reality. Despite the recognition of multilingualism as a resource, it is often marginalized in everyday school life - not least due to curricular requirements, examination formats and linguistically one-sided success criteria. Sustainable promotion of translanguaging therefore requires not only individual willingness, but also structural reforms.

Conclusion: Translanguaging is a powerful pedagogical approach that not only promotes language skills but also strengthens identity development and social participation. When students experience that their languages are welcome, they also experience: I am welcome - with everything that makes me who I am.

Reflection questions

On identity development and representation

- Where in the classroom do I enable students to bring in their origins, languages, or cultural perspectives - and where not?
- How do I react when students "pretend", withdraw or avoid cultural forms of expression?
- Am I aware of how I myself (co-)determine social norms - for example regarding clothing, language, or behaviour - in the classroom?

On perception, attribution, and performative alienation

- What implicit expectations do I have of certain students - for example, based on name, pronunciation, family background or appearance?
- Have I ever observed performative alienation - and how did I react to it?



- What (unspoken) ideas of normality characterize my classroom? For whom could they be exclusionary?

The role of pedagogical guidance

- How do I deal with controversial topics such as religion, gender roles or political opinions in the classroom? Do I create spaces for diversity - or do I avoid certain topics out of concern for conflict?
- To what extent do I perceive religious or ideological identities as a relevant pedagogical dimension - and how do I make them visible (or invisible)?

On intersectionality and language practice

- Do I recognize multiple marginalized identities in my teaching (e.g. queer, racialized, educationally disadvantaged students) - and what pedagogical consequences do I draw from this?
- How do I assess my students' linguistic expression - as a deficit, a challenge, or a resource?
- To what extent is my teaching practice still characterized by a monolingual habitus - and what could I do to enable or promote translanguaging?

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