

## Self-Directed Activity

Strand One Unit 3: Ethnicity – Race and the conceptualisation of the Other

### Reading:

#### **Analyse Ethnic Minorities as the Other**

This reading uses the example of ethnic minorities to describe how binary oppositions shape perceptions and inequitable power dynamics in classrooms by influencing the way students are perceived, treated, and feel in the classroom.



## Analyse Ethnic Minorities as the Other

The following mechanisms serve to marginalise and exclude ethnic minorities by viewing them as fundamentally different from the dominant group:

### 1. Categorisations

- Social construction of identity: Racist or ethnic labels are socially constructed terms that categorise people, for example, on the basis of perceived ethnic or cultural differences. These terms are not neutral; they are tainted with connotations and historical baggage that influence how people are perceived and treated. For example, terms such as "foreigner", "migrant" or racist expressions are often used to label certain groups and individuals as outsiders due to their origin, culture or ethnicity, even if they have lived in a country for generations.
- Reinforcing boundaries: Such labelling reinforces the boundaries between the dominant group and ethnically devalued groups and creates a clear demarcation between "us" and "them". This demarcation helps to maintain the social hierarchy by defining who belongs to the "dominant society" and who does not. In nationalist and right-wing discourses, for example, the devaluation of certain groups legitimises the "(re)invigoration" of a "people's identity" imagined as white, Christian and patriarchal. In this way, these labelled groups are seen as permanent outsiders, regardless of their contribution to society or their desire for integration or inclusion.
- Dehumanisation: Labelling can also contribute to the dehumanisation of ethnic minorities by reducing people to a single, often negative characteristic. This reductionism robs people of their individuality and complex identities and makes it easier to justify discriminatory treatment. For example, labelling all people of a particular ethnic, religious or cultural group as 'dangerous', 'uncivilised' or 'inferior' devalues their humanity and makes them more vulnerable to abuse.

### 2. Stereotypes

- Simplification and generalisation: Stereotypes are highly simplified and generalised ideas about a group of people. They are often based on a limited understanding of the culture, behaviour or characteristics of the group. Stereotypes about ethnic minorities can include the idea that they are "lazy", "unintelligent" or "violent". These stereotypes are not only inaccurate but also harmful, as they shape the expectations and behaviour of the dominant group towards groups that are devalued because of their ethnicity, religion, culture or skin colour.
- Perpetuating the cycle of inequality: Stereotypes serve to justify the unequal treatment of minorities by creating a narrative that they somehow deserve their lower status. For example, the stereotype that certain ethnic groups are inherently less able can be used to justify discrimination in employment, education and other areas of life. This perpetuates a cycle of inequality in which the stereotype leads to discrimination, which in turn reinforces the stereotype.
- Impact on self-perception: Stereotypes can also influence the self-perception of social minorities. When people are constantly confronted with negative stereotypes, they can internalise these beliefs, leading to a phenomenon known as 'stereotype threat', where they fear confirming the negative stereotypes about their group. This

can lead to reduced self-esteem, lower ambitions and even poorer performance in various areas.

### 3. Prejudices

- Preconceived judgements: Prejudices are preconceived judgements or attitudes towards a group based on their ethnicity, culture, religion, skin colour or gender. Unlike stereotypes, which are generalised beliefs, prejudice is more about the emotional reaction - often negative - towards a group. Prejudice can lead to hostility, fear or mistrust towards minorities and further reinforce the idea of the "other".
- Institutionalisation of prejudice: When prejudice is embedded in social institutions - such as the legal system, the education system and the media - it contributes to systematic discrimination. For example, racial profiling by law enforcement agencies is an expression of prejudice that assumes that racialised minorities are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour. This institutionalisation of prejudice not only affects the lives of these groups, but also reinforces the wider societal perception of them as 'the other'.
- Social and psychological impact: The experience of being the target of prejudice can have serious social and psychological consequences for members of devalued groups. It can lead to social isolation, mental health problems such as anxiety and depression and a sense of alienation from society. Over time, these effects can intensify and lead to long-term disadvantages in various areas of life.

In order to challenge and dismantle these dynamics described here, it is crucial to recognise the constructed nature of labels, stereotypes and prejudices, to reject simplistic categorisations of people based on race, ethnicity, origin or gender and to combat them at both an individual and institutional level.

For teachers, understanding labelling, stereotyping and prejudice is essential to creating an inclusive and supportive classroom environment. The following aspects are important to address:

- Raising awareness of stereotypes and prejudice: Setting boundaries or drawing lines between "us" and "them" can lead to the formation of stereotypes and prejudices. These attitudes can manifest themselves in the classroom, both in the students and unconsciously in the teachers themselves. For example, if students of a certain ethnic group are constantly treated or perceived as different or "other", this can reinforce negative stereotypes and lead to their devaluation and rejection.
- Understanding the causes: Stereotyping and prejudicial attitudes are often due to underlying issues such as insecurity or damaged self-image, where individuals or groups devalue others in order to restore their own sense of identity or achieve social inclusion. For example, students who feel marginalized or lack self-confidence may unconsciously devalue others in order to feel better about themselves or to fit into a group.
- Influence of socialization and political discourse: Teachers should consider how students' attitudes are shaped by their socialization, socioeconomic status and the political discourse they are exposed to outside the classroom. For example, cultural

racism and Islamophobia may be prevalent in the media or political discussions, which can affect how students perceive and interact with peers from different backgrounds.

- Addressing discriminatory attitudes in the classroom: To actively address and counteract discriminatory attitudes in the classroom, opportunities can be created for students to explore the origins of prejudice and its impact on individuals, look at situations from different perspectives, encourage critical thinking about stereotypes and promote empathy.
- Promoting inclusion and respect: Especially against the backdrop of the existence of social minorities, it makes sense to convey the value of diversity and the importance of recognizing the unique identity of each individual at school. By fostering an inclusive environment where all students feel recognized and valued, teachers can counteract the negative effects of segregation and promote a sense of belonging. This is not just about overt discrimination, but also about tackling subtle forms of exclusion that may arise from cultural or ethnic differences.