

## INTERNALIZED RACISM/DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

### Why read this text...

Read this text if you are interested in why sometimes minoritized people isolate themselves from society and prefer to surround themselves with people from "their own" community. In this way you could find out how stereotyping can affect children and adolescents in schools.

### Historical Context

According to Pyke (2010), all systems of oppression (such as patriarchy) are based on the internalization of oppressive structures, which in turn are reproduced. Suppression is considered internalized when it is accepted by the oppressed. The discourse on internalized racism was dominated by white scientists in the twentieth century, which is why internalized racism is seen in terms of racist stereotypes, values, images and ideologies "inoculated" by the dominant white society (see *ibid.*: 553).

Internalized racism and double-consciousness are based on the assumption that because of their physical characteristics, their religion or other characteristics, people could be divided into groups with different values. This racist distinction among humans was invented by colonizers as a justification for exploitation, because persons who do not count as humans, would not necessarily have to be treated as such (Eze 2011: 878).

### a) Discussion

"Internalized racism" (Pyke 2010:557) is the acknowledgment and acceptance of the negative attributions of the majority society to individuals who do not belong to it. Internalized racism arises because an oppressed person accepts her/his position ascribed by others. By controlling the production of legitimate knowledge (see *ibid.* :557), what is in the interest of the oppressor is represented as correct and true, while anything else counts as false and untrue (see *ibid.* :557). This subtle indoctrination gives the oppressed the impression that their inferiority is justified (see *ibid.*:557) and that the stereotypes that exist against them are true, which is how those are unconsciously reproduced. This means that, for example, as Jennifer Lucko (2011) examines, students who have emigrated from Latin America to Spain, who were diligent and purposeful, begin to become more inactive, as in their new home they were confronted on a daily basis with the claim that this is supposed to be their "natural" Latin American behaviour. The awareness to always be seen against the background of these attributes was first described as "double consciousness" by the African American W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903 (Du Bois: 1903:83). Frantz Fanon also speaks of a "third-person consciousness" 50 years later.

W.E.B. Du Bois describes impressively how a person experiencing internalized racism and double-consciousness, is always seeing and evaluating her/himself "through the eyes of others". S(he) also always experiences a "twoness": "an American, a Negro; two souls, two

# TRANSCA

thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. "(Du Bois 1989 [1903]:3)

"Defensive Othering" (Pyke 2010:557) is a form of internalized racism in which it is suggested that the "other" can become part of the dominant group by adapting to its rules. However, this is an illusion, because as long as these attributions exist, certain individuals and groups are always made "the others". The more the oppressed identify with the ruling class, the more they accept and promote the structures by which they are oppressed by. It is therefore difficult to construct one's own identity, which differs from what has been attributed to it, since this must be done in opposition to the dominant and almost universally valid schemas and meanings that are influenced by White Experiences.

## **b) Practical Example**

This tension is evident in the descriptions of Lucko's 16-month research (2011) in the working-class district of Ciudad Lineal in Madrid, during which she was in regular contact with six families from Ecuador (Lucko 2011:220). In the schools of the children differentiation was made between the more capable and the weaker students. Lucko observed that the migrated students tended to be considered less capable, although many of them had very good grades in Ecuador. This was probably due to unreflected prejudices of the teachers. Noteworthy is the change in the students understanding of their own identity the longer they were staying in Spain and the related daily confrontation with existing stereotypes, resulting in internalized racism and double-consciousness among the teenagers. For example, a few months after immigrating to Spain, one of the students reiterated that she saw no fundamental differences between herself as a Latin American and her Spanish classmates. However, as her academic performance worsened, she gradually became more and more connected to a group of students who call themselves Latinos / Latinas and thus found access to the Latin American scene in her neighbourhood (Lucko 2011:212). This led to an othering strategy – where she, together with her group, began to differentiate herself from her Spanish peers and to see herself clearly as a Latina (Lucko 2011:224). This shift in her behaviour and identification took place only after the student left the relatively sheltered space of her country of origin. There she was seen primarily as a person rather than a Latin American, and began to live in a country where she was seen as a representative of the stereotyped constructed group of Latin Americans. Thus, internalized racism and double-consciousness, especially at the age of school children, may significantly influence their identities and urge them to adapt their behaviour and identity to the image the society has of them.

## **Thinking Further**

- What stereotypes people would have about you entering a group for the first time?
- Would that effect you and your identity? If yes, why? If not, why?
- Which internalized stereotypes are present in (which of) your students and how do those manifest in class? What is the best pedagogic method to deal with this?



# TRANSCA

## KEY-WORDS/ CROSS-REFERENCES

Reflexivity, Doing School,

## Sources

Du Bois, W.E. B. (1989 [1903]). *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York.

Can, A. (2018). Initiator Ali Can über #MeTwo und Mesut Özil. *Spiegel Online*. 29.7.2018.

Can, A. (2019). Ali Can: Privat. (21.6.2019).

Diez, G. (2018). Diese Geschichten werden unser Land verändern. *Spiegel Online*. 29.7.2018.

Eze, E. C. (2011). On Double Consciousness. In *Callaloo*, 34 (3). (877-898).

Fanon, F. (1967 [1952]). *Black Skin, White Masks*. London, Seuil.

Grosfougel, R. (2016). What is Racism? In *Journal of World-System Research*, 22. (9-15).

Lucko, J. (2011). Tracking Identity- Academic Performance and Ethnic Identity among Ecuadorian Immigrant Teenagers in Madrid, in *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 42 (3). (213-229).

Pyke, K. D. (2010). What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don't We Study it? Acknowledging Racisms's Hidden Injuries. In *Sociological Perspectives*, 53. (551-572).

**Authors:** Christa Markom & Anna-Lena Maria Christine (Austria)

The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the information contained therein.

