critical race theory in political education

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This article addresses the question of how the critical race theory can be anchored in school political education and what conditions must be created for this. For this purpose, the first step is to look at the critical race theory as an analytical tool, before focusing on which student and teacher competencies critical race theory can promote.

Keywords: critical race theory, political education, racism, teacher competencies

Critical Race Theory

The invention of human races, which has become a constitutive feature of 'scientific' racism, took place in the Age of Enlightenment, with the help of European philosophers (Hentges, 1999). Racism is now a global phenomenon, whereby individual and institutional knowledge pertinent to racism can be found in all countries of the world, and people of all countries are being racialized during their socialization process (Arndt, 2017). This is contrary to the common notion that racism has existed always and everywhere and that racism is a fundamental anthropological constant. The Age of Enlightenment was not only an epoch that featured the declaration of universal rights and the establishment of liberty, equality, and sisterhood/brotherhood, but also the age of colonization and the enslavement of Africans by white Europeans.

It was the 'scientific' division of people into different races (white, yellow, red, black) and the hierarchization of people based on a racial construct – whites at the top and blacks at the bottom – that provided the legitimation for declaring universal rights, liberty and equality for all people in Europe and, at the same time, the enslavement of people on the African continent. In order to practice these mutually exclusive things, philosophers invented the different human races (Mosse, 2006). In addition to Italy, Great Britain, France, Portugal and Spain, the German Empire was also involved in the enslavement and murder of Africans and the exploitation of African states.

Different concepts of racism have since been theorized: biological or 'scientific' racism argues that there are different human races while cultural or neo-racism argues for distinctive categories of superior or inferior cultures as well as for the incompatibility of cultures. Culture in this context includes ascribed or de facto denominations and their daily practical manifestation, for example, religious clothing and food rules, the ascribed or de facto language, and the nationality of a person or group of persons (Miles, 1992).

When attempting to tackle racism through education, a distinction can be made between the concepts of anti-racism and critical race theory. Anti-racism assumes that racism-free spaces can be created, for example, where a group of particularly committed, reflective anti-racists stand up against racism and educate others about racism. In contrast, the representatives of critical race

theory assume that racism is a structural feature of society, so that no one (not even those who consider themselves 'left-wing' or 'centrist', are critical of racism, are racism-critical academics, people of colour, or who have 'migration background') can exclude themselves from the racism-relevant matrix or can claim to have created racism-free spaces. Rather, representatives of critical race theory assume that every person, irrespective of their social background and regardless of their intention not to be racist, possesses racism relevant knowledge. This knowledge is a result of socialization and they will spend their lives dealing with it in order to deconstruct that knowledge.

The representatives of critical race theory are convinced that while racism-sensitive spaces can exist, racism-free spaces cannot, since knowledge relevant to racism always plays a role when people meet. Moreover, representatives of critical race theory, in comparison to representatives of anti-racism, do not argue in terms of perpetrator (of racism) and victim (of racism), because in the critical view of racism everyone is affected by racism and racism damages the integrity of all persons. Therefore, representatives of critical race theory focus on individuals and social structures without claiming that they themselves are not racist or 'better' people (Mecheril, 2004).

Pupils' and Teachers' Competencies

The development of pupils' ability to be critical of racism can be achieved by setting two main objectives: firstly, pupils should acquire the cognitive ability to recognize racism-relevant content in political images, texts and speeches and secondly, they should acquire the ability to act in a race critical way and thus to divert democracy from harm. Students should understand how constructions of difference have been and are being functionalized in the past and present by asking how, when and for which purpose were or are people designated as "other and alien" beings, and what impact has that had on them or on society as a whole (Fereidooni, 2016).

These objectives for political education will make complex demands on teachers of the subject. Above all, there is the need for the expansion of their professional competence in terms of their knowledge of critical race theory to the point where they can a) critically review their own knowledge, b) impart such knowledge about structures relevant to racism to their students, and c) enable students to stand up against racism. Against this backdrop, the following question arises for the didactics of political education: what should educators of critical race theory in higher education do to prepare trainee teachers in the subject? (Fereidooni & Simon, 2020; Massumi & Fereidooni, 2017; Simon & Fereidooni, 2018).

In order to be able to criticize existing ways of thinking, speaking and acting that are relevant to racism, (prospective) teachers in political education must continuously deal with the following four questions:

- What has racism taught me even though I don't want to be racist?
- What happens in my classroom and in my staff room that is relevant to racism?
- To what extent do my teaching materials reproduce knowledge relevant to racism?
- What do I have to do so that racism occurs a little less in my professional context?

Discussing racism is a lifelong process, because learning racism happens automatically and requires no effort, but unlearning racism is an ongoing active process that is arduous.

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