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editorial: how racism works: systemic injustices and the (false) promises of education

On Education

In the 13th issue of On Education we are interested in analyses of `how racism works´ in and through education. We engage with the heated debate on the role that educational institutions and practices as well as educational knowledge production in academia play in counteracting as well as distributing and diffusing racism. It examines the entanglements of education and racism by focusing on at least four areas of interest: (1) historical and epistemological racism in educational knowledge production, (2) the relationship between race and power in educational institutions, policies and practices, (3) the consequences of racism and whiteness in the (educational) lives of Black and Minority Ethnic people (BME) as well as (4) the promises and pitfalls of countering racism in education.

Keywords: discrimination, education, power, racism, structural racism, systemic injustice

Racism constitutes an integral part of contemporary societies. Although there are probably few people who would openly call themselves racist, discrimination and oppression against people marked as non-white or "other" in some way are still omnipresent across the globe. The struggles connected with being negatively judged by a dominant white society on the basis of a historically constructed distinguishing characteristic – skin color – was described in Frantz Fanon's seminal work *Black Skin White Masks* in 1952. How strong this historical racial scheme (Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 84) still is today and how it leads to killings, hate, discrimination, (educational) injustice and inequality has been brought into social consciousness by groups and movements such as Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall or Why is My Curriculum White (Sriprakash, Tikly & Walker, 2020). This gives rise to the paradox that although modern genetics has proved that races do not exist in biological-essentialist terms (Baker, Rotimi & Shriner, 2017; King & Motulsky, 2002; Rosenberg et al., 2002), race is *de facto* one of the most powerful lines of discrimination in modern societies. Racism can be found in all levels of society, affecting its institutions, ways of thinking, knowledge production, discourses, and practices – also in the field of education.

The 13th issue of On Education engages with the heated debate on the role that educational institutions and practices as well as educational knowledge production in academia play in counteracting as well as distributing and diffusing racism. It examines the entanglements of education and racism by focusing on at least four areas of interest: (1) historical and epistemological racism in educational knowledge production, (2) the relationship between race and power in educational institutions, policies and practices, (3) the consequences of racism and whiteness in the (educational) lives of Black and Minority Ethnic people (BME) as well as (4) the promises and pitfalls of countering racism in education.

In this issue we are thus interested in analyses of `how racism works´ in and through education. What is certain is that racism is not easy to counteract in and via education. It has a long and terribly successful history and therefore is deeply entrenched in educational thought and educational institutions of today's societies. What should also be clear is that racism cannot be overcome by an "individual act of will" or by "simply criticizing false beliefs." Rather, it is crucially important to "become aware of and question collectively shared perceptual schemes and behaviors" (Lepold & Mateo, 2019, p. 579, translated from German by Ed. Team; Bönkost, 2020). The overriding question underlying this issue of On Education, as urgent as it is vital, also expresses hope: Is there a way that education nevertheless may counteract the racist structures that pervade today's societies?

The Editorial Team

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