What (Can) Students Know?

Epistemic injustice, recognition, and German schools

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Children typically spend at least ten years of their lives attending school. During this time, school acts as the central place for them to acquire knowledge, conceptualize their social experiences through appropriate terms and make their own perspectives audible outside the family. They thus find themselves in the middle of the dichotomy between teaching and learning; surrounded by multiple collective knowledge resources that form the basis of this dichotomy. Yet children in general, and pupils or students in particular, are largely overlooked in the discussion of epistemic injustice initiated by Miranda Fricker (2007). Fricker's theory primarily focuses on marginalized adults who, in the continuity of structural injustices, are also prevented on an epistemic level from being recognized as knowers and from making their experiences intelligible for themselves and others. However, if we take into account the fact that children collectively become the target group of injustices, for example through physical and psychological violence, child poverty or child pornography, the question arises as to whether they cannot also be understood as a social group in their own right, who are important as subjects for theories of epistemic injustice on the basis of their group membership.

Based on the assumption that children, or in the school context, students[1], can be understood as a separate social group, I propose in this paper that students, as a result of their studenthood, can experience both testimonial and

1 For the purposes of this study, students are defined as all learners between the ages of 10 and 18. Normally, this age range includes the transition to secondary schools up to the potential university entrance qualification. The consideration of epistemic injustice among younger learners of primary school age would also be relevant in the fields of education, the healthcare system, and in the reporting of violent situations, but cannot be sufficiently addressed in this paper.

hermeneutical injustices. This marks an important distinction of multiply realizable epistemic injustice; including one that is not considered by Fricker. On the one hand, students, who are marginalized because they are marked as different from the dominant culture due to, for example, racialization or religious affiliation, can be treated in epistemically unjust ways because of their respective marginalization. This is a form of epistemic injustice well researched but not yet applied to students. On the other hand, students are additionally affected by epistemic injustice qua being students. This is a form of epistemic injustice that goes beyond the framework Fricker provides. It is important to consider both categories on the basis of which epistemic injustice can occur because it highlights nuances in the situatedness of students as epistemic subjects. *All* students can experience epistemic injustice, but they are not all exposed to it to the same extent. Furthermore, aspects of Fricker's theory show that the epistemic harms that subjects suffer as a result of their marginalization or their student status can adequately be regarded as a form of misrecognition. Accordingly, in cases of epistemic injustice, students are not recognized as full subjects because their status as knowers is restricted in social interactions. The connection to theories of recognition is particularly important because it reveals the structural level of epistemic injustice, which is not sufficiently taken into account in Fricker's own discussion.

To substantiate the central claim of this paper, I will begin to illustrate how marginalized students in Germany can experience epistemic injustice and incidents of misrecognition using examples of race and religious affiliation. Yet, a closer look at the school environment suggests that misrecognition is inherent in the school system and that students can therefore experience incidents of misrecognition not only through their marginalization but also through their status as children (or students). At this point, the question arises as to whether there can be epistemic injustice that does not necessarily occur through marginalization, but rather on the basis of being a student. By including students, or children, as a separate social group, new possibilities open up for conceptualizing not only the epistemic status of children more clearly, but also their general social status, and thus embedding it in the discourse on social justice. Finally, I consider what specific changes can be made to the institution of school in order to counteract the epistemic injustices and misrecognition that are continuously reproduced there. To this end, principles for a more epistemically just school are proposed that rethink outdated school patterns, create new spaces for recognition and epistemic justice, and suggest

a concept of epistemic modesty that does justice to the epistemic potentials of children and adults alike.

1. Dealing with (marginalized) students in German schools

"Education is less a solution than a problem in its own right,"[2] writes sociologist and educator Aladin El-Mafaalani in his book *Mythos Bildung* (2020: 55). El-Mafaalani is referring here to the widespread but empty promise of equal opportunities in the German school system. The myth of equal opportunities suggests that existing social inequalities do not have an impact in schools, or that schools can even absorb and compensate for them. Instead, performance and effort are the keys to educational success (cf. El-Mafaalani 2020: 55). The fact that this assumption is more illusion than reality is hardly disputed in critical educational research (cf. Weber 2005; Fereidooni 2011; Karabulut 2016; Helmchen 2019; El-Mafaalani 2020). "The education system does not offer equal opportunities – even for equal performance" (El-Mafaalani 2020: 57). Reasons for the asymmetrical relationships in German schools are outlined below using the example of the school as an ideological state apparatus, as an educational institution, and teachers as one of the main pillars and mediators of the construction and reproduction of norms and discrimination in everyday school life.

1.1 Ideological: The naturalization of a capitalist order through school

The naturalization of differences and inequalities (Rommelspacher 2011: 26) also takes place in German schools, for example, when religious symbols such as headscarves are banned for teachers on the grounds that state institutions must reflect the separation of religion and state, but allowing crosses to remain hanging in courtrooms and ministries (cf. Spiegel 2021). Or when some children's lunchboxes are devalued and stigmatized in the schoolyard, while other eating habits are considered normal (cf. Hirose 2011). Often, it is not only characteristics and attributions of individuals that are used to mark them as different. Such marking can also take place on the person themselves. For example, when people are singled out in the classroom and portrayed as different because of their appearance or religious affiliation. Othering as a problem of

2 Unless explicitly stated, all translations of German are by the author of this text.

recognition also affects social participation and material conditions. Othering is a process that is related to social and societal relationships of dominance and subjugation and distributes social positions and the associated access to social resources and privileges (cf. Riegel 2016: 58).

It is important to emphasize here that these exclusions are always related to the social value of people. This means that all injustices and their associated ideologies, such as fascism, racism, or sexism, which take place on the basis of social groups, must always be located in the context of capitalism.

Thus, the asymmetrical distribution of socioeconomic resources is legitimized by the naturalization of social inequalities and the implied social value of people. Louis Althusser describes how schools, analogous to other state institutions, contribute to maintaining the central mechanism of exploitation and oppression in capitalism: "In other words, school […] teaches 'skills', but in forms that ensure *submission to the dominant ideology* or mastery of its 'practice'" (Althusser 1970: 112). By qualifying school learning through subject-specific content taught in class, the 'rules' of interaction with one another, and the consolidation of social status not only for the reproduction of their labor power, "but also simultaneously a reproduction of their submission to the rules of the established order," the ideological order of capitalism is directly reproduced (Althusser 1970: 112). The ideological order of the school here means:

> Which norms, values, and attitudes students […] adopt, but also how the knowledge imparted is applied and how everyday interactions in school are structured, all of this is controlled by open and latent mechanisms in the school, since the school rewards conformity and, if necessary, enforces it with […] psychological violence. (Brandmayr 2017: 188)

Of course, the way in which a capitalist society—and, consequently, schools as preparation for this society—is not based on solidarity, participation, and the fair distribution of goods, but rather on the exploitation of entire social groups and the accumulation of wealth is not an official guideline that schools use. Rather, following Brandmayr, ideological values are primarily conveyed in schools through practices: Through the individualization of learning success, the idea of equal opportunities, the appeal to efficiency, personal responsibility, and self-optimization, the teaching of rules of conduct, and the hierarchization of content, "formal and informal ways of presenting what is possible, desirable, or prohibited" are established (Brandmayr 2017: 199). Those who do not conform to these practices are very likely to fail at school. Through the

ideology conveyed in school, students are thus taught implicitly – rarely explicitly – that their social value depends on the production of their labor power and that their respective labor power is already predetermined by their social status within an order. The reality of a social order based on exploitation is naturalized and normalized (cf. Brandmayr 2017: 189). Whether students exploit or are exploited after graduating from school is therefore largely determined by the framework conditions of the school.

Althusser (1970) also describes how the subject is integrated into "the economic relations of production" (Brandmayr 2017: 189). From the moment they enter kindergarten, children are assigned to social classes and integrated into the social order between the state apparatuses of school and family. This order becomes visible at the latest when they reach middle school age: "At around the age of 16: an enormous mass of children 'fall' into production: the workers or small farmers. Another part of the school youth continues on" (Althusser 1970: 128). Who 'falls' and who is allowed to remain in the state apparatus of the school is, of course, not determined by chance. Althusser continues: "Every group that 'falls' along the way is practically imbued with the ideology that corresponds to its role in class society: the role of the exploited" (Althusser 1970: 128).

The place that each person occupies in the social order is also conveyed in terms of its content. According to Christine Riegel: "Ideas of normality and knowledge dominate, which are subject to the ethnocentric, racialized, heteronormative, middle-class, and ableist orders of meaning and difference of Western capitalist relations" (Riegel 2016: 85f). This cultural hegemony, as Riegel describes it, is reproduced, for example, through the content of the framework curriculum, the composition of classes and the teaching staff, spatial barriers, and the subjective standards of teachers. Misrecognition and incidents of epistemic injustice are virtually a given.

1.2 Institutional: Segregation and hierarchization

Contrary to what the assumption of equal opportunities in schools would suggest, the German school system is based on segregation and hierarchization. What Althusser already made clear in his statements on school as an ideological state apparatus and the associated social order of submission and "falling" (cf. Althusser 1970: 128) is particularly well reflected in the German

school system. After a four-year primary education[3], the system differentiates into several forms of secondary schooling.

The basis for the division into different types of schools is the meritocratic model, i.e., division according to a performance principle. "Here, we speak of equal opportunities when 'every person is positioned in society according to their abilities and achievements'" (El-Mafaalani 2020: 61). According to this model, the best-performing students should be in the Gymnasium and the worst-performing students in the Hauptschule[4]. The assessment of who can be classified as better or worse performers is based on the subjective assessments of the respective teachers. These are often influenced by negative attributions to certain social groups. In other words, how students are assessed by their teachers is not independent of the assumptions that teachers have about their students.

An example of this bias is a study by Stefan Hradil at a primary school in Wiesbaden, Germany. There, only 76% of children from the lowest educational and income group with an average grade of 2.0 received a recommendation for the Gymnasium, while children from the highest educational and income group with the same average grade received such a recommendation almost across the board – namely 97% (cf. Bühler-Niederberger 2009). The selection of which children are allowed to attend which types of schools, and thus which educational opportunities are available to them, is therefore not based solely on performance.

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3 Berlin, Brandenburg, and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania are the only federal states in Germany that provide six years of primary education. In the other 13 federal states, the starting age for secondary school may vary, but the norm remains four years of primary education.

4 The German school system is divided into several types of secondary schools after four years of elementary school, which offer different educational paths and qualifications. The *Gymnasium* usually leads to university entrance qualification (Abitur) after eight or nine years and prepares students for university studies. The *Realschule* provides a general education and ends with the "Mittlere Reife", which opens the door to vocational training or further education. The *Hauptschule* aims to provide a basic general education and usually ends after nine years with the "Hauptschulabschluss". The *Förderschule* is aimed at students with special needs, for example in the areas of learning, language or physical development. This differentiation usually takes place at an early stage and is controversial, as it strongly determines educational biographies and reinforces social inequalities.

The decisions made by teachers are not necessarily based on explicit racist and/or classist stereotypes that they consciously apply. Instead, they are often unconscious and unintentional attitudes. These attitudes are also referred to as *implicit bias* (cf. Scott 2021: 2). Several studies (cf. Walker and Brigham 2017; Hirn & Scott 2017; Jacoby-Senghor et al. 2016: Scott 2021) show that despite awareness of racism, teachers tend to evaluate the behavior and performance of non-*white* students more negatively. This implicit bias also leads to affected students being suspended more often, for example (cf. Scott 2021). But even without such racist bias-related evaluations, children fare much better when they have parents who can supervise and help with homework and have the time to invest in education; a fact that teachers pick up on and that can result in favoring children from middle class backgrounds.

Another example of implicit bias among teachers can be seen in the comparatively high proportion of migrant students in Förderschulen, special schools for students with learning disabilities. Racialized and migrant students are more often referred to this type of school than those without a migration background.

In addition to the failure of language teaching and distorted perceptions on the part of teachers, the maintenance and design of the school system itself plays a role in the dynamics described by Fereidooni. If not enough students are sent to the Förderschule, the school is threatened with closure. If a school does have to close due to low demand, jobs are at risk. Instead, children who are already marginalized receive inadequate schooling and support in order to prevent school closures. The desperate clinging to outdated school systems once again illustrates that the school system can only function if not all children are given equal opportunities for advancement. In other words, the school system is not only ill-equipped to provide equal opprotunities, it is invested in reproducing inequality. According to this design, the possibility of 'picking up' all learners and taking them along on the path to higher education cannot be considered in reality.

The school system is therefore *based on* segregation and hierarchization. Fereidooni emphasizes that discrimination against schoolchildren who are socially labeled as different is particularly evident in the allocation of different types of schools (cf. Fereidooni 2011: 25). "Schools have a relatively fixed number of places to allocate within an educational hierarchy […], so that the success of one is always the failure of another" (Bommes & Radtke 1993: 485).

> The reasons for this are not based on the disproportionate need for support of non-German students due to cognitive deficits, but on the lack of language teaching skills in German schools and negative ethnic-cultural attributions on the part of teachers. (Fereidooni 2011: 25)

The division into different types of schools according to, for example, learning types would not be objectionable in itself if different cultural values were not attributed to the types of schools. By dividing schools into different types with different cultural values, learners within these institutions are also portrayed as comparatively worthy of education and social respect. What Nancy Fraser (2000) describes as misrecognition in "Rethinking Recognition" can help to understand the normative implications of the German school system. Because referring to a type of school that does not favor a general university entrance qualification as a final qualification is also a subordination of status. An education at comprehensive, secondary, and vocational schools is often considered less valuable and has a decisive influence on the children's chances of success. If learners are transferred to these schools, a normatively 'successful' future in prestigious and/or well-paid professions becomes more difficult for them. All types of schools, and especially all types of qualifications, are anchored in social value and status: While Gymnasium graduates can consider which university course they want to enroll in after leaving school, graduates of special schools often find themselves in so-called workshops for people with disabilities. There, they are often exploited for an hourly wage of €1.35 and further marginalized by society (cf. Krämer 2021).

Before further exploring the question of whether, how, and where misrecognition and epistemic injustice occur in German schools, we will first examine the reality that stands between schools as institutions and their students: the reality of teachers.

1.3 Personnel: High demands and overworked teachers

> With less than 19 hours of teaching per week, 12 weeks of vacation, and a plethora of bridge days, one could say: I had a part-time job with 60 days of vacation, full pay – which was quite good, by the way – and all the privileges of German civil servant status. Sounds enviable. (El-Mafaalani 2020: 187)

In most cases, however, El-Mafaalani's assumption does not reflect reality. His own experience as a teacher also paints a contrasting picture: in addition to 25

hours of teaching per week, which he carried out in up to three different subjects and 8 to 10 classes, and for which he had to prepare and follow up, he also had to attend numerous conferences, further training, creating 30 school development plans, conducting parent-teacher conferences, planning field trips and class trips, mediating conflicts between students, and much more. There is no question that with this workload, some things have to be neglected.

For El-Mafaalani, this often meant sacrificing lesson preparation and development (cf. El-Mafaalani 2020: 187–9).

> Now you might ask yourself: Where are you supposed to find the time and energy to deal with social inequality in theory and practice? After all, you still have all your other tasks and responsibilities. In addition, legal and curricular changes must be kept up with. It is an enormously multifaceted, complex, and stressful job—even without systematically taking equal opportunity into account. (El-Mafaalani 2020: 189)

El-Mafaalani's descriptions make it clear that addressing social inequalities cannot begin when teachers enter the classroom. By that point, it is already long overdue. When teachers enter the school day unprepared, without any strategies for responding to the complex relationships in the classroom, they are forced to rely on their own knowledge and experience. Of course, it would be desirable if they could draw on a repertoire of independently acquired knowledge and strategies for action, for example from authors of anti-racist education in Germany such as Karim Fereidooni, Maisha-Maureen Auma, Tupoka Ogette, Mohamed Amjahid, Aylin Karabulut, or El-Mafaalani themselves. However, this cannot and should not be a requirement for being able to respond to social inequalities in the classroom. Instead, the social diversity of German classrooms should be an integral part of teacher training.

Another problem in German schools that teacher training cannot prepare for is the lack of staff in the schools themselves. With a shortage of almost 5:000 teachers across Germany (cf. Spiegel 2020), it is not difficult to guess who will end up doing the extra work. What is currently unavailable must be covered by teachers who are already overworked. This redistribution of labor comes at the expense of students—and, of course, the teachers themselves.

If the teaching of the curriculum itself is put on the back burner for a moment, the question arises, particularly from a pedagogical and moral point of view: With such a heavy workload, how are teachers supposed to find the time to give all students, with all their individual characteristics, the recognition

they deserve? And how can *all* students be adequately and equally recognized when teachers' perspectives are always distorted by cultural values, assumptions, and socially biased assessment criteria (cf. Weber 2005: 70)?

In the following, two social categories are outlined which can expose students to epistemic injustice and misrecognition due to their membership in marginalized groups.

2. Race and religion as categories of discrimination in schools

In "Mythos Bildung", El-Mafaalani repeatedly argues that class affiliation and parents' level of education are the main factors determining children's educational success in schools (cf. El-Mafaalani 2020: 69). However, a class analysis in the context of German educational institutions is outside the scope of this paper; this focus alone could fill a separate work. In the context of this work, racialization and religion are used as categories of discrimination to illustrate epistemic injustices and misrecognition experienced by students through marginalization and through their status as children and, accordingly, the status group of students.

2.1 Race as a category

At least since the recruitment agreements for guest workers between 1955 and 1973 in West Germany, the treatment of migrants in Germany can no longer be denied: People of color[5] are continuously associated with their migration history and devalued on the basis of it. This conditional right to exist is also evident in the term 'guest workers' itself. Anyone who is a guest in Germany should never feel too comfortable, never unpack their suitcases, never really arrive. The idea that all people living in Germany should have the same rights,

5 In the context of this work, all those people are considered people of color who, due to their own migration histories or those of their families, are associated with group-related pejorative and prejudiced stereotypes and are racialized. In the German context, these may be people from so-called guest worker families or, for example, people with a migration history from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, or South America. It should be emphasized that not all people with a migration history in Germany are considered people of color. People who have migrated to Germany from Western European and North American countries, for example, are not stereotyped, degraded, and marginalized according to the same standards.

the same working conditions, the same opportunities for success, and the same recognition still remains a distant dream.

This is also described by author and journalist Mohamed Amjahid in a conversation with Serpil Temiz Unvar, the mother of Ferhat Unvar, who was murdered in the racist attack in Hanau on February 19, 2020:

> I think my parents realized very early on that the German school system—even though they are 'uneducated'—has a certain 'plan' for their children. That migrant children and 'foreign children', so to speak, are automatically supposed to do certain jobs. Which doesn't mean that these jobs are bad. But it's simply absurd that young migrants don't have freedom of choice. That they have to fight against this system. (Amjahid 2021)

Here, Amjahid describes what has already become clear through Fereidooni and El-Mafaalani: Racialized children do not have the same educational and career opportunities as white children; they are not treated with the same respect and consideration. From the outset, they are not regarded as subjects in the German education system, but are stereotyped, generalized, marginalized and degraded. These projections from – mostly dominant – collective hermeneutical resources (Mason 2011) provide a suitable starting point for examining the epistemic and recognition-theoretical level of these degrading experiences of racialized students in Germany. After all, a cardinal point of Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice is that the practice of inferring the credibility of statements and access to knowledge resources based on membership in a socially marginalized group is based on negatively charged and identity-based stereotypes. This raises the question of what negative identity-prejudical stereotypes exist about racialized people in Germany that could impair their epistemic position.

> W: It's not just the language, there are students who simply can't think beyond certain boundaries, right? I'm not judging that now. Mario, for example, you don't notice that he's Croatian, right? Georgios, yes, you can tell he's Greek, and he also has immense problems; he'll have to drop out now. With Boris, you can tell, but that's not very symptomatic. Linda, for example, is a girl who has immense language problems and comprehension problems too; she'll have to drop out as well.
> I: She's Greek, right?
> W: She's Greek. (Weber 2005: 73f)

This excerpt from a conversation among teachers clearly shows how learners' perceived performance deficits are directly linked to their origin and thus justified. Although the teacher even notes that she did not want to 'evaluate' the students 'now' (cf. Weber 2005: 73f), that is exactly what she does. She links characteristics such as intellectual inferiority, comprehension problems and learning difficulties to their origin. For the two teachers, origin and performance are directly related (cf. Helmchen 2019: 85). This is a naturalization of social differences that can clearly be attributed to a racist pattern (cf. Rommelspacher 2011: 29).

Christian Helchen goes on to say that among the 20 most common stereotypes held by white people about people of Turkish origin in Germany are adjectives such as conservative, primitive, emotional, impulsive, and traditional (cf. Helmchen 2019: 85). It is obvious that these distorted representations of migrant and racialized people do not simply bypass school staff. The standards used to measure students' performance, their epistemic position, and their need for recognition are not neutral, but rather the product of one's own socialization, media consumption, teacher training, position within the teaching staff, and—in this case—a lack of confrontation with one's own prejudices. This lack of confrontation is also reflected in the way religious affiliations are treated.

2.2 Religion as a category

According to the Federal Constitutional Court, the state must be a "home for all citizens" – regardless of their religious or ideological beliefs. The state must therefore not identify itself with any particular religious or ideological beliefs. Rather, it must be neutral and tolerant towards all religious and ideological communities. (Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, n.d.)

What the Federal Constitutional Court has established as the basis for social life in Germany, and thus also for all German institutions, rarely describes the reality of religious minorities. It seems difficult to uphold the claim of neutrality and tolerance towards "all religious and ideological communities" (Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, n.d.) while people who do not conform to the *white* Christian dominant culture in Germany are continuously physically and verbally discriminated against, marginalized, criminalized, and essentialized (cf. Amjahid 2021). In Germany, Jews and Muslims are the main targets of religious discrimination based on the dominant culture (cf. Willems 2020: 11). Attacks on synagogues (cf. Deutsche Welle 2019)

and mosques (cf. Spiegel 2021) are part of everyday life in Germany; wearing religious head coverings such as yarmulkes and hijabs does not guarantee safety from violent attacks—rather, it increases it (cf. Köhler 2019). In schools, at work, and in public life, Jewish and Muslim people are regularly reduced to their religious affiliation, uniformised, questioned as 'experts', denounced by their counterparts' superficial knowledge as having interpretative authority, and regarded as a blank canvas onto which all conflicts that may arise within and between religious communities can be projected (cf. Willems 2020).

Julia Bernstein and Florian Diddens (2020) also describe the discrepancy between promised neutrality and tolerance and the reality of everyday life. For Jewish students, for example, there is hardly any opportunity to develop an identity outside of what sociologist Michal Bodemann calls *memory theater*. Max Czollek writes:

> In memory theater, Jews are important, but as in acting, it is not about them as individuals, but about the role they play—their symbolic significance as representatives of the exterminated, their role as Jews for Germans. (Czollek 2018: 85)

Memory theater does not serve to reflect the diversity of Jewish life in Germany, but rather the "need of German society for reconciliation" (Czollek 2018: 85). As a result, Jewish people are constantly associated with National Socialism, the Shoah, and Israel and reduced to these categories (cf. Bernstein & Diddens 2020). Bernstein and Diddens describe how many teachers have no understanding of anti-Semitism outside of National Socialism, yet insist on claiming interpretive authority over what is anti-Semitic (cf. Bernstein & Diddens 2020: 87).

This epistemic asymmetry (cf. Mason 2011), characterized by a willful hermeneutical ignorance (cf. Pohlhaus 2012)—that is, by holding a deficient or distorted concept of social mechanisms, refusing to revise it, and yet claiming interpretive authority—can also be observed in relation to Islam.

In this context, it is important to mention that religion and race cannot always be considered separately. Although an assumed race does not provide any information about people's religiosity, nor does religion provide any information about their race, the two categories are often mixed together. For example, religion-related stereotypes do not refer exclusively to religion but can also be biologically or culturalist in nature (cf. Willems 2020: 11). With the *racialization of religion*, Iman Attia describes how the attribution of religiosity and the racial-

ization of people are strongly linked (cf. Attia 2019: 138).The historical causality of racialization and religiosity described by Attia also leads to the invisibility of religious and ethnic minorities (cf. Attia 2019: 138). This is because the de-individualization and essentialization of affiliations cause those who do not fit into the expected categories to be forgotten. Ethnic minorities within religious minorities and religious minorities within ethnic minorities remain largely invisible, especially in the context of schools. As a result, the lived realities of Christian Arabs, Black Muslims, Jewish Iranians, or Yazidi Kurds, for example, are not acknowledged in the classroom. The motto seems to be: anyone who is perceived as 'Arab' is automatically assumed to belong to Islam. This insensitive approach to religion and race is particularly problematic in terms of epistemic injustice and misrecognition.

3. Epistemic injustice and misrecognition in schools qua marginalization

Students who are marginalized due to their membership in socially disadvantaged groups, for example because of their race, gender, or religion, are epistemically disadvantaged by negative stereotypes that limit the credibility of their statements. Ben Kotzee writes:

> Epistemic injustice would occur if teachers systematically gave learners less epistemic credit than they deserve due to some negative identity prejudicial stereotype pertaining to learners in a particular setting (or perhaps to children in general). This may be because teachers take learners' testimonies less seriously than they deserve to be taken, or it may be that the dominant culture or the way educational institutions are arranged may privilege 'adult' modes of thinking and talk, leaving children at an unfair epistemic disadvantage. (Kotzee 2017: 326)

Examples of the injustices described by Kotzee are not uncommon in German schools either. In an interview, Sepirl Temiz Unvar reports that she was informed in a personal conversation with the school principal that her son would have no chance of success at the school he had enrolled in (cf. Amjahid 2021). Further descriptions by Unvar in the interview make it clear that racist assumptions form the basis for this preliminary assessment. "Epistemic injustice is done here, because the individual is treated as a typical example of a

particular social type, before [he] has been allowed to show who or what [he] is or what [he] does" (Murris 2015: 333). In this example the headmaster portrays the boy as comparatively unworthy of equal educational opportunities on the basis of his identity and reproduces social hierarchies. By denying him respect and esteem, the boy is not recognized as a complete human being. The headmaster fails in his moral and legal obligation as an individual and as a representative of an educational institution to ensure recognition in the form of respect and esteem. "In cases in which we fail to give respect, we not only disrespect another person, but we deny them their personhood; we dehumanize them" (Hänel 2020: 13). As Taylor (1994) points out, the question of respect is not one of politeness. Misrecognition is morally wrong primarily because it harms subjects in their fundamental human abilities.

Marginalized students can also experience epistemic harm and misrecognition on a hermeneutical level. Kotzee writes:

> Teaching a canon of ideas and works by actors from a particular cultural tradition makes that form of culture accessible to students; conversely, not teaching other cultural traditions forecloses students' understanding of that cultural tradition. (Kotzee 2017: 327)

When students are denied access to knowledge that describes their own reality outside the dominant culture, the discrepancy between what happens in their own homes and what is taught in school (especially in terms of perspectives) becomes ever greater. As a result, marginalized students are denied epistemic access to concepts that are relevant to them in the classroom. They feel alienated by knowing and practicing different cultural values from their own homes, and the barrier to sharing these perspectives in class becomes increasingly greater (cf. Messerschmidt 2017; Mangan & Winter 2017).

One example of this is the devaluation of language and language varieties in dominant hermeneutical resources such as schools. Most statements from students that do not correspond to a school or educational language register are devalued and suppressed in the school environment. In addition, languages are categorized as 'good' and 'bad'. While some languages are considered respectable, educated, progressive, and valuable for a resumé, others are suppressed. In Germany, language varieties that contain Arabic or Eastern European terms, for example, and bring language patterns from non-dominant resources into schools are considered deficient, and speakers of these language varieties are associated with negative assumptions (cf. Stokowski

2019: 151). In North America, a similar devaluation of language varieties is taking place with African-American Vernacular English (AAVE), which Kristie Dotson categorizes as an epistemic side effect of colonization (cf. Dotson 2011: 236).

However, marginalized students can be hermeneutically disadvantaged not only in how they speak, but also in what they say. For example, if only limited insights into other cultural traditions are taught in the classroom, students from marginalized groups are often placed in the position of speaking as representatives of an entire culture, an entire country, or a religious group. Suddenly, students find themselves acting as specialists on these topics without necessarily having any actual connection to them (cf. Kotzee 2017: 327). Marginalized students are accorded a surplus of credibility when it comes to talking about their 'own culture'. However, this increase in credibility is conditional: only when it comes to reproducing content that has not already been discussed in class as representatives of an entire group do the students gain this surplus of credibility. Hence, it relates directly to epistemic injustice due to credibility excess (cf. Davis 2011; Lackey 2021; Medina 2011; Yap 2017) and content-based testimonial injustice (cf. Davis 2021; Dembroff & Whitcomb 2023).

Of course, there may actually be an epistemic asymmetry (cf. Mason 2011) here. In other words, it is not unlikely that marginalized students often have a clearer understanding on topics that affect them directly through non-dominant hermeneutical resources such as their own homes, neighborhood centers, circles of friends, or the internet. However, making assumptions about which topics are relevant to which students based on their group membership and expecting students to be available as representatives on these topics at any time deprives them of their subjectivity. Furthermore, as research shows, marginalized knowers are only awarded credibility excess as long as their testimony is in line with the dominant hermeneutical resources and narratives; in other words, students who are singled out as experts on Muslim traditions are awarded credibility excess as long as they describe their religious practices as, for example, traditional, restricting, or patriarchal. Here, too, a misrecognition takes place.

4. Epistemic injustice and misrecognition in schools qua student[6]

If we take another look at the design of German schools as described above, it becomes apparent that instances of misrecognition cannot only occur qua marginalization. Rather, students find themselves in a special position due to their status as students, which encourages misrecognition.

For example, one experience that is not necessarily linked to belonging to a socially marginalized group is that of repeating a year or being placed in a lower school stream. Let us think back to the ideological character of school described by Althusser. The change into a lower grade or school stream can be accompanied by the loss of friends and thus of important relationships of peer recognition, by misrecognition on the part of parents, and by compromised self-recognition (cf. Kammer 2013: 90). When the academic success of some is built on the failure of others and different types of schools vary in their social value (cf. Fereidooni 2011), misrecognition is already inherent in the structure of schools. Transferring students to a different type of school can thus be interpreted as a kind of 'social grading' that clarifies the child's position within society.

The relationship between teachers and learners can also lead to misrecognition. Teachers who accompany students for long periods of time and play a significant role in their school experience are particularly important in recognizing their students on an intellectual and personal level. After all, most children spend the majority of their childhood and youth in educational institutions. Hänel writes: "The misrecognition or lack of recognition from 'significant others' can be especially devastating for our self-recognition" (Hanel 2020: 10).

A lack of institutional recognition by teachers can be caused by framework conditions such as time constraints or overwork. According to Kammler, however, authoritarian behavior, emotional disinterest, a lack of student orientation, a lack of didactic competence, or a lack of democratic values on the part of teachers can also be the basis for recognition deficits (cf. Kammler

6 Although the concept of childism understands children as the target group of group-related injustices, the injustices in the context of this work are named as "qua students". This takes two levels of power into account: those already named by adultism and/or childism and, beyond that, those characterized by the relationship between teachers and learners. Children can take on a special epistemic status as learners, teachers, and intermediaries in the context of school.

2013: 90). Students are particularly prone to diminished self-confidence in their epistemic skills as a result of teachers' and the institutions' misrecognition: First, they are still developing these skills and, thus, orientate on what authority figures such as teachers present to them; second, they spend most of their childhood within schools with few opportunities to receive full recognition or counter misrecognition outside of school; and, third, teachers and school institutions wield the (arbitrary) power of taking students out of peer groups where they can receive recognition as happens in cases where students have to repeat a year or are moved to a different school. Hence, as mentioned above by Hänel, misrecognition can have a direct impact on the self-recognition of students. Misrecognition can be internalized and impaired self-recognition can lead to inferiority issues (cf. Keshky & Samak 2017: 129). Furthermore, if students link their self-worth to capitalist virtues such as productivity or their performance in class, they may also doubt their social value outside of educational institutions due to inadequate grades and experiences of misrecognition.

However, the recognition relationship between teachers and learners is not exclusively characterized by the school-specific aspects outlined here. Even if we could remedy the aspects outlined here, there would still be no status equality between teachers and students. There remains a distinction between adults and children that carries with it a social power imbalance. This is what childism precisely describes: the attitudes and behavior of adults who assume that they are more intelligent, competent, and better than children and young adults solely because of their age (cf. Ritz 2013: 163). According to Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, what is needed above all is the acknowledgment that there are prejudices against children as a distinct target group that undermine their status and make them vulnerable to experiences of violence. She argues, for example, that we can better understand phenomena such as the normalization of physical and psychological violence against children, childhood poverty, child prisons, and child pornography if we understand children as a social group that is subject to prejudice and socially classified as inferior to adults (cf. Young-Bruehl 2012: 6f). Importantly, their biological development is not the sole basis for assumptions about them: children as a group are also subject to social, cultural, and political constructs, evaluations, and distortions about their childhood. The establishment and ubiquity of these assumptions are analogous to those of all other marginalized target groups (cf. Young-Bruehl 2012: 7).

In this sense, we can understand children as a social group that, qua their being children, can become the target of injustice on the basis of preconcep-

tions, beliefs, and resulting actions (cf. Young-Bruehl 2012: 35) – which also form the basis for injustices qua social group in other forms of discrimination[7]. When children are not regarded as full moral persons in comparison to adults because of their being children, when their autonomy is questioned and they are continually classified as non-adults, a clear misrecognition occurs. If adulthood is seen as the goal of all development and adult modes of thinking, speaking, and acting are established as the norm in most contexts, then childhood is devalued as imperfect and incapable (cf. James & Prout 1990: 10f). These instances of misrecognition are evident, for example, in microaggressions that undermine children's value, self-esteem, and dignity through subtle, frequent, and ongoing devaluations. Children are not recognized as complete human beings whose status as children is as legitimate and unconditional as that of adults (cf. Pierce & Allen 1975).

This misrecognition is also found in the context of school. As already mentioned by Ritz and Young-Bruehl, prejudiced stereotypes exist that impair the epistemic status of children qua group membership. Examples of stereotypes about children include that they are irrational, easily influenced, and unreliable (cf. Burroughs & Tollefsen 2016: 366; Brainerd & Reyna 2012: 227). These assumptions can serve as a basis for compromising the credibility of their statements.

If we understand the status of children in the context of adultism (cf. Ritz 2013) as one that assigns them to a social group and, based on this affiliation, exposes them to social, cultural, and political constructs, evaluations, and distortions that can impair the credibility of their statements, the leap to Fricker's concept of testimonial injustice is not far off. In fact, Burroughs and Tollefsen (2016) illustrate testimonial injustice in children with an example from "A Circle of Quiet" (1972), the autobiography of Madeleine L'Engle. She recounts a situation in class that many students are familiar with: When a student needs to

7 The aim of this paper is not to compare the experiences of children as a target group of social injustice with those of racialized people, women, poor people, disabled people, or other socially marginalized groups. It does not claim that children experience oppression similar to victims of racism, sexism, ableism, etc. because they are children. All people who are marginalized and oppressed because of their group membership are subject to specific power structures and specific manifestations and mechanisms of identity-based power (cf. Fricker 2007), all of which must be considered in their own particularities. In addition, children may be exposed to multiple forms of oppression through multiple group memberships, which shape their experiences in all their intersections (cf. Burroughs & Tollefsen 2016).

use the bathroom during class, she asks her teacher for permission three times. Permission is denied three times. By the time the bell rings and the student can go to the bathroom, it is already too late. (A more modern version of the same story is the well-known answer by teachers to the question of whether one can use the toilet: "I don't know if you *can*." This seemingly funny response is funny only at the expense of the student.)

Primarily, the subject is wronged in a testimonial situation in her epistemic capacity as a knower (cf. Fricker 2007: 44). The interaction between the student and her teacher is clearly characterized by identity-based power (cf. Fricker, 28): The teacher is in a position to evaluate the student's statements and declare them invalid. In addition, the situation is shaped by the position of the teacher as an adult and the position of the student as a child (cf. Ritz 2013; Young-Bruehl 2012). In this situation, the identity-based stereotype that children are unreliable and therefore cannot be credible is at work.

When subjects are denied the opportunity to speak for themselves, they can lose self-confidence in their own ideas; this epistemic damage impairs epistemic value and intellectual self-confidence and constitutes a misrecognition (cf. Burroughs & Tollefsen 2016: 375). It is obvious that the testimonial injustice L'Engle experiences here happens qua her status as a student. It is not her gender, sexuality, or class background that impair the credibility of her statements and her epistemic position as a knower in the situation outlined. Instead, the relationship between L'Engle and her teacher, which is influenced by their roles as teacher and student, as well as by their roles as child and adult and the stereotypes associated with these roles, is the basis for the testimonial injustice experienced by the student here. The testimonial injustice thus occurs on the basis of the student's membership in the social group of students.

It is important to note that the teacher's failure to recognize her student as an epistemically capable person and thus also as a person with full moral status is not an individual failure. In addition to the prejudiced stereotypes that play a significant role here, it is also relevant to ask whether dominant ways of speaking, thinking, and acting already perceive adulthood as the norm, mark those of children as deviant, and make it difficult for them not only to articulate their experiences but also to access knowledge resources themselves.

This raises the further question of whether students, due to their status as students, not only experience testimonial injustices, but can also become the target of hermeneutical injustice. There is no clear answer to this question. Michael Baumtrog (2018), for example, argues that the ability to use interpretive resources must first be learned. If learners are unable to use interpretive

resources to the same extent as adults due to their less advanced development, the two groups would have unequal but not unjust access to hermeneutical resources (cf. Baumtrog 2018: 303).

However, this outlines the lifeworld and interpretative framework of adults as a goal that must be achieved in order to be recognized as a complete person. The opportunity to view children's lifeworlds as equally complete and legitimate, and to reflect on whether the available access points in the education system actually do justice to these lifeworlds, is missed here. Murris also recognizes the missed potential to actually reflect all content relevant to school learning in the curriculum: "Children's situated lived experiences of learning, their friends, family, or community are irrelevant to the 'real' work in class" (Murris 2013: 248). This discrepancy between potentially learnable and actually taught content can be explained by the fact that adulthood is also understood as the norm in schools (cf. Murris 2013: 253). According to this view, children are hermeneutically marginalized (cf. Fricker 2007: 152); the dominant hermeneutical resource of the school centers on adult language and interpretations of concepts. This suggests that children are only regarded as fully moral persons in social interactions once they have achieved the 'goal' of acquiring adult modes of language and action. The lifeworld of children is thus not considered equal to that of adults (cf. Murris 2013: 257). In the collective hermeneutical resources that Fricker considers as the basis for hermeneutical agency, there is little to no understanding of children. The generic knowers are adults (cf. Baumtrog 2018: 304). The understanding of children thus remains incomplete until they manage to access adult interpretations. The effort to make children's perspectives visible in hermeneutical resources that also contain understandings of children's interpretations remains minimal.

5. Dual epistemic injustice, intersectionality, and epistemic asymmetry: What (can) students know?

From the explanations above, we can conclude that children in schools can experience epistemic injustice and misrecognition both qua their membership of a socially disadvantaged group and qua their status as students. As Murris writes:

> Epistemic injustice is the case with all children (e.g., developmentality). […] Conceptions of childhood and implicit and naturalized discourses about chil-

> dren inform how adults experience and interpret their educational encounters with children [...]. But when a child is black (and also female), the injustice done to her could be even greater. (Murris 2013: 257)

The various parts of their identity that constitute their position as speakers and knowers must not remain as separate, isolated phenomena. Instead, all parts of identity that influence the subject's position within the framework of standpoint theory should also be linked to each other. Let us think back to Tom Robinson in Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird (1960)*: Robinson's position as a speaker in the courtroom was not only compromised by his blackness, but by the particular intersection of his blackness and his maleness in the context of the criminalization of black men in the United States (cf. Smiley and Fakunle 2016: 352). Similarly, Carmita Wood was hermeneutically marginalized by several aspects of her identity (cf. Berenstain 2016: 584). Her positions were constituted by *several* parts of her identity; her epistemic position was thus also compromised by several aspects.

5.1 Marginalized and student: a dual injustice

This phenomenon can be better understood through the lens of *intersectionality*. In "A Black Feminist Statement," the Combahee River Collective, a collective of Black lesbian women, made it clear as early as the 1970s that a collective process for the equitable distribution of rights and resources must also consider the diverse perspectives within feminist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist struggles. To this end, the intersections that may exist within these struggles must also be considered (cf. The Combahee River Collective 2014).

Black women such as Carmita Wood, for example, are situated differently as epistemic subjects than their white female colleagues (cf. Berenstain 2016: 584). Similarly, students such as Ferhat Unvar's brother are situated differently as epistemic subjects than fellow students who conform to the norms of German dominant culture. Baumtrog and Peach (2019) propose that childhood, like other forms of oppression, should also be recognized as an aspect that can impair people's epistemic position. Analogous to ethnocentrism, heterocentrism, and androcentrism, *adultcentrism* can also be seen as a dominant interpretive framework that sets norms and excludes deviations from them (cf. Baumtrog & Peach 2019: 226). Yet, this does not homogenize the experiences of differently situated students; rather, in the intersection of social identities,

being a student should be considered as yet another identity that plays a role in the diverse experiences of oppression and marginalization.

Accordingly, marginalized students are exposed to a *double* epistemic injustice that can influence their position as speakers and knowers. First, through identity-based prejudicial stereotypes that are applied on the basis of their membership in a socially disadvantaged group, and second, through their membership in the group of children or students, which parallelly expose them to other pejorative identity-based prejudicial stereotypes (cf. Baumtrog & Peach 2019: 227).

The hermeneutic gaps that this creates in the collective dominant resources can be described using Purdie-Vaughn and Eibach's concept of *cultural invisibility* (Purdie-Vaughn & Eibach 2019: 383): The failure to represent the specific experiences of marginalized and intersectionality marginalized groups in cultural memory (cf. Purdie-Vaughs & Eibach 2019: 383).

> As a consequence, 'such people will often be mischaracterized and misunderstood,' as Fricker claims of epistemic injustice in general. [...] This is also problematic for intersectional children. (Baumtrog & Peach 2019: 227f)

As with other forms of epistemic injustice, when children's perspectives are distorted and misrepresented in collective hermeneutical resources, this harms not only the children themselves, who are prevented from making their own experiences understandable to themselves and others, but everyone. In the words of Murris:

> If teachers are not open to the possibility that they can learn from children, then it is a case of 'listening-as-usual' (Davies 2014). It involves a listening out for, or rehearsal of, what teachers already know. Teachers' self-identity as epistemic authorities can constitute a serious barrier to listening to children [...]. (Murris 2015: 334)

If teachers are not open to learning from their students in the classroom and instead imply a supposedly one-sided epistemic asymmetry that always places teachers in a position of epistemic superiority compared to their students, they miss out on the opportunity to benefit from the perspectives of everyone in the classroom. In this context, it is often argued that adults *are* epistemically superior due to their experience and accumulation of knowledge, and that it

would be disproportionate to recognize students as equal knowers and grant them the same epistemic authority. An assumption that is deeply distorted.

5.2 Epistemic asymmetry: What can students know?

In feminist pedagogy, and also in this work, it is not at all the intention to discredit the expertise of adults and, in the context of this work, the expertise of teachers. As Carmen Luke puts it:

> Feminist educators, like any academic on the university payroll, *are* institutionally authorized because they are judged and named, at the moment of tenure or hiring, as authorities of knowledge. (Luke 1996: 293)

The question here is not whether teachers should be denied their epistemic status, but whether students can *also* be granted expert status in certain situations.

Based on the arguments presented in this paper, the answer is yes. By granting students epistemic authority, we do not render their status as learners invisible. There is no question that students know less at the beginning of their school career than they do when they graduate from high school. Of course, especially in educational institutions, they are in the midst of a process of finding appropriate terms to make their world understandable to themselves and others. However, this process does not end with adulthood or with the attainment of a university degree. It will probably never be possible to achieve full epistemic authority on a subject and thus be epistemically superior to everyone else. Murris calls the acknowledgment that all knowledge is limited and that a 'complete' mode of knowledge can never be achieved *epistemic modesty* (Murris 2015: 334). Even the oldest members of our society will never be able to complete the process of knowledge production, reproduction, and appropriation. Why, then, is it assumed that they are epistemically superior to children in every regard?

Children can also be experts. For example, when it comes to their own experiences of violence. When children experience violence through domestic abuse or are discriminated against through forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, or anti-Semitism, they often have a better understanding of what is happening to them than someone who can and has remained ignorant of these experiences due to their social position (cf. Burroughs & Tollefsen 2016; Mason 2011; Mills 2007). A teacher who suggests that racism or anti-

Semitism do not exist or do not exist in the form the student is testifying about is likely to have less knowledge about these issues than the students, who often cannot remain ignorant due to their personal circumstances. There is an epistemic asymmetry (cf. Mason 2011) in which the students are epistemically superior to the teacher in this particular context of knowledge acquisition. However, the epistemic position of the students does not stem from the assumptions that teachers make about their students and, in the context of the classroom, do not hesitate to declare them experts on entire countries or religious communities, but is instead based on their own experiences.

Students can assume a similar epistemic position in the context of niche knowledge. For example, if learners have a particular interest in an instrument, marine biology, or astronomy, they may be epistemically better situated on these topics than teachers who have little contact with this subject matter through their school subjects and their own life experiences. Even then, students can act as experts who have acquired a repertoire of knowledge on specific topics through non-dominant hermeneutical resources (cf. Mason 2011) that are hardly or not at all covered by the framework curriculum. The fact that students are younger than their teachers does not necessarily influence their ability to acquire new knowledge. Here, too, there is an epistemic asymmetry in which students may have more knowledge about certain topics than their teachers. Granting this epistemic authority to students does not discredit the epistemic position of the teacher. Ultimately, students are recognized as epistemic subjects who have the ability to acquire knowledge through dominant and non-dominant hermeneutical resources, to manage this knowledge, and to vocalize it for themselves and others. Recognizing that children have the ability to acquire knowledge and bear witness in specific areas does not mean that children are accorded an unreasonable or disproportionate level of credibility and epistemic power. We are simply recognizing them in a fundamental human capacity. In general, it could be said that children's curiosity puts them at an advantage of acquiring knowledge if they are being positioned in a way that allows them to follow their interests. In other words, not only should it be the school's and teacher's responsibility to foster relations of recognition with their students but to create spaces in which children can become knowers.

Interestingly, if we take the idea of recognition seriously, valuing children and students as knowers not only grants recognition to children and students but also to teachers. The main idea of recognition theory is that recognition is necessary for developing a positive relation to self. Recognition is given within

a social context of mutual vulnerability. The social practice of giving or bestowing recognition on someone also alters that person in a way that they are placed in a position that allows them to give recognition back. In other words, not fully recognizing another implies that we fail to receive recognition ourselves, since by devaluing another we restrict their capabilities in giving recognition. Mutual recognition between teachers and children or students is thus beneficial for both sides.

6. Principles for a more epistemically just school

So far, it has been shown that children and students are subjected to epistemic injustice not only in cases in which they belong or are taken to belong to a marginalized social group but also qua students. And it has been shown that both forms of epistemic injustice are closely linked to practices of misrecognition that are individually carried out by teachers but also reproduced by the design of school institutions. At this point, the question arises as to what specifically the institution of school can do to counteract the epistemic injustices and instances of misrecognition that are continuously being reproduced there. After all, it is or should be the responsibility of schools to provide all students with equitable access to education. As Kotzee writes: "From a social epistemological perspective, one may say that part of the point of education is to prepare people to take part appropriately, fairly, and *justly* in knowledge exchange" (Kotzee 2017: 329). In the following, I propose some principles for a (more) epistemically just school that bring about revisions of existing structures and norms at both a structural and individual level.

6.1 Breaking old patterns: Inclusive curricula and schools as spaces of solidarity

As already shown earlier, existing framework curricula in schools already constitute a breeding ground for hermeneutical injustice. If the curriculum only reflects certain lived realities, while other students are denied access to knowledge that is relevant to them, some subjects are prevented from conceptualizing their own experiences through collective hermeneutical resources. What is taught is therefore not socially representative. At least not for everyone. They are mainly representative in the sense that they reproduce the construction of

the other and the associated deep-rooted social injustices in the classroom content (cf. Fereidooni & Simon 2020).

To counteract the reproduction of this distorted social representation, Kotzee proposes creating a more epistemically just curriculum:

> [...] Achieving hermeneutical justice through education may well involve an attack on elite forms of education that provide the children of some (but not of others) with disproportionate cultural influence in our society and that, at the same time, hold up a certain culture as a pinnacle of education and refinement. (Kotzee 2017: 331)

According to Kotzee, exclusive curricula are problematic primarily because they reproduce the assumption that only selected cultures or certain ways of life – in our case, those of the dominant culture – are epistemically relevant. Students whose real lives differ from those of the dominant culture are thus taught that their cultural values and the ideas and concepts specific to their culture are not relevant to the classroom and therefore not relevant to society. According to Kotzee, preventing this misrecognition requires a more epistemically diverse curriculum (cf. Kotzee 2017: 331).[8]

Yet, whether or not more texts by women, trans people, or people of color are covered in class does not change the fact that students continue to be singled out and degraded because of their group membership. Whether or not there are more teachers of color or more teachers with experiences of racism, sexism, or classism does not change the fact that the school as a system promotes certain lived realities and sanctions the habitus of others. Especially if we continue Althusser's analysis of school as an ideological state apparatus that takes the design of schools to be invested in the reproduction of inequality, a much more fundamental and, above all, structural critique of the institution of school is necessary. Unfortunately, this goes beyond the scope of this project and cannot be pursued further here.

On a *hermeneutical* level, however, epistemic diversity is fundamental. If the aim is to make available in dominant hermeneutical resources all the concepts

8 It should be noted that this argument is not undisputed: Harvey Siegel (2006) questions whether diversifying the framework curricula actually solves the problem. For him, diversity does not necessarily mean cultural diversity. It is sufficient to teach a diversity of research methods and approaches, ideas, and schools in educational institutions. Cultural diversity is not necessarily required (cf. Siegel 2006). It is plausible that epistemic diversity alone cannot create an epistemically just school.

that people need in order to conceptualize their own experiences, then the content of school as a hermeneutical resource must be reworked. If only the lived realities of students from the dominant culture are represented in the curriculum, other students experience an epistemic disadvantage. They are denied the opportunity to acquire the concepts that are relevant to them in the school environment. Kotzee writes:

> [...] In order to address hermeneutical injustice, the worst off need to acquire the intellectual tools to make sense of and combat their own oppression; this will be achieved by offering these students the best critical political education that we can muster. (Kotzee 2013: 349)

Bellino and Louckey (2017) go further than Kotzee and argue that it is not only marginalized students who should be given the opportunity to learn about concepts that describe their real lives in the school environment, but all students. With their demand for a school based on solidarity, they ask how we as a community can show solidarity with those who are structurally marginalized by educational institutions while at the same time understanding how these exclusionary mechanisms function in the first place and have gained so much popularity throughout society (cf. Bellino & Louckey 2017: 231f). The point Bellino and Louckey make here ties in with Mills' concept of white ignorance (cf. Mills 2007): It is not exclusively about those personally affected by social injustices to make sense of their experiences of that injustice. It is also important to include all those who can remain ignorant of these mechanisms because they are not targeted by these injustices in their own lives.

In Bellino and Louckey's concept of solidarity, however, it is not one's personal involvement that should be the starting point for action. In a classroom based on solidarity, it is in everyone's interest to understand each other's realities and, above all, to understand the structural mechanisms that constitute these realities. They write:

> It involves people who mobilize ties of mutual understanding and community obligation to confront and change what is unacceptable. Forces of exploitation, capitalization, and dispossession are the main arenas for solidarity, yet its determinants and dynamics also apply to effective and transformative education, including the hidden curricula and implicit hierarchies enacted even even in democratic classrooms. (Bellino & Louckey 2017: 229)

Making the curriculum more inclusive and breaking down existing hierarchies in schools is therefore in the interests of all. For it is only in classrooms where social hierarchies based on identity-based power are no longer continuously reproduced that all participants can be equally recognized in their status as knowledgeable individuals. After all, which child contributes which ideas to the classroom is not determined by their group affiliation. In order for children to be recognized for their interests and potential, unlike in the example of Unvar's son (cf. Amjahid 2021), they must first be recognized in their subjectivity. This cannot happen if our perception is distorted by implicit assumptions about social groups. Becoming aware of one's own assumptions is also part of Fricker's virtue of testimonial justice and Medina's epistemic virtues (2012, 2023).

6.2 Creating new spaces: raising awareness, time for recognition, and collective hermeneutical resources

"What sort of critical awareness is needed for a hearer to be able to correct for identity prejudice in a given credibility judgment?" asks Fricker in her chapter on testimonial justice (Fricker 2007: 90). Fricker argues that the listener must be aware of their own social identity and that of their counterpart, including the assumptions that could be made on the basis of these positions. A virtuous listener neutralizes the influence of prejudice on the assessment of the credibility of the other person. Through testimonial sensitivity, listeners can continuously correct their identity-based assumptions and thus approach testimonial justice.

Fricker's virtue of hermeneutical justice also has a corrective character. This means that it is the responsibility of the listener to consider the hermeneutical marginalization of the other person and to take into account any missing or distorted concepts in the speaker's description (cf. Fricker 2007: 169). In a next step, the goal of hermeneutical justice would be to eliminate hermeneutical marginalization altogether and to break down the varying barriers to access collective hermeneutical resources. Yet, Fricker notes that this state cannot be achieved through the individual efforts of virtuous listeners:

> Shifting the unequal relations of power that create the conditions of hermeneutical injustice (namely, hermeneutical marginalization) takes more than virtuous individual conduct of any kind; it takes group political action for social change. (Fricker 2007: 174)

However, Fricker's argument remains primarily at an individual level. Fricker appeals to individuals to become aware of their own social identity and that of others, and to consider, in the long term, to dismantle possible identity-based assumptions that would impair the testimonial and hermeneutical role of speakers. However, individual corrections are not sufficient to address the structural problem of epistemic injustice; if they are at all possible in the context of implicit biases.

Naturally, it should be everyone's concern to correct problematic assumptions about others. This is especially true for teachers, who have a significant influence on how much they value their students. Recognition in the form of respect must be guaranteed by teachers to all learners (cf. Hänel 2020: 14). However, leaving this to the individual responsibility of teachers would be fatal. It should not be a matter of luck whether a student is taught by a teacher who, out of personal interest, is concerned with their social and epistemic position in the classroom and attempts to respect all learners equally.

Raising awareness among teachers must be an integral part of teacher training for everyone. Is there any better place for students to learn how to deal more critically with their own implicit and explicit stereotypes than in a classroom community? Sayles-Hannon writes:

> If [...] the most just testimonial evaluations will occur within an epistemic community, the social justice classroom could be an excellent place to start discussing possible prejudices or systemic ignorance that may influence assessments of testifiers' epistemic authority. (Sayles-Hannon 2012: 387)

This requires the teacher to not only engage critically with the task and responsibility of being a responsible listener for the students, supporting them in their access to hermeneutical resources and critically examining what is considered legitimate knowledge in society and what is not, but also to address the multitude of discriminations that are continuously reproduced through teaching.

Finally, awareness of racism and sexism, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim racism, and other forms of oppression is necessary in order to be able to identify racist, anti-Semitic, or sexist images in teaching content and classroom discussions in the first place. That is why Fereidooni and Simon (2020) demand:

> In a migrant society, anti-racist subject-specific teaching methods are an absolute necessity for (future) teachers, as (only) a deconstruction of racism-related issues within subject-specific teaching methods can prevent racism from being (unquestioningly) reproduced. In order to achieve anti-racist lesson planning and thus anti-racist subject-specific teaching considerations, subject-specific phenomena must therefore be reflected upon and deconstructed from an anti-racist perspective. (Fereidooni & Simon 2020: 1)

Such a critical reflection is, of course, not limited to anti-racist teaching methods, but can be extended to other forms of oppression, including adultism (cf. Ritz 2013). In contrast to racism, for example, adultism and childism are hardly ever considered in the context of schools. Yet, adultism significantly shapes the relationship between teachers and learners, including their status as knowledgeable individuals. Teachers can have a clear awareness of racist assumptions and actively work to prevent them from distorting their view of their racialized students. Despite such efforts on the part of teachers, adultism nevertheless deeply affects both their status as knowledgeable individuals and the personal status of their students. Hence, teachers might still engage in practices of misrecognition of students qua their status as students.

Furthermore, as long as the design of school institutions prevents teachers from engaging in epistemically just and recognition-based practices, individual virtues and anti bias training will not do the trick. As El-Mafaalani (see 2020: 187–9) already pointed out, most teachers are already overwhelmed by the demands placed on them as teachers. Overcrowded classrooms and a number of teaching hours that for many is incompatible with a regular 40-hour week mean that there is not enough time for sufficient mutual relationships of recognition between teachers and students (cf. El-Mafaalani 2020: 60). Plus, when teachers are under time constraints, they are more likely to rely on implicit biases (cf. Berliner 1990; Scott 2021). Hence, institutions have to provide work contexts in which teachers can reduce their workload. It is only when teachers are no longer forced to resort to implicit biases under time pressure in order to make decisions more quickly that they can start to recognize their students sufficiently and independent of their social position.

Finally, more needs to be done to promote these ideas and projects. Carel (2014), Györffy and Murris (2013, 2015) as well as Burroughs and Tollefsen (2016) have already shown that some of the forms of epistemic injustice experienced by children stems from the centering of adult modes of thinking and speaking. This results both in testimonial injustices and in problematic practices on

a hermeneutical level insofar as there are insufficient collective hermeneutical resources in which children are granted epistemic power and can create and manage hermeneutical resources themselves. Schools could be the ideal space for fostering collective hermeneutical resources. After all, it is in the context of schools where students learn how to critically engage with resources of knowledge, use different sources to acquire clear concepts, and record these in various forms. For example, students could work collectively on glossaries containing terms that are relevant to them and defined by them, instead of having to rely on existing ones, which may contain interpretations that differ from their own experiences. In fact, giving children opportunities to produce knowledge does not prevent them from using existing hermeneutical resources and acquiring knowledge from them, rather, it could be a valuable addition to their school education, through which they learn to work in a self-determined and self-organized manner. Self-determination and self-organization are fundamental skills for feminist education and are in any case neglected in schools (cf. De Santis & Serafini 2015).

To further strengthen these skills, Haynes (2009) suggests involving students more closely in school structures and assigning them roles that allow them to have a say in their everyday school life.

> The 2004 Ofsted report indicates that a key ingredient in the school's success is that children know they are listened to and that their contribution to the development of the school community is valued. (Haynes 2009: 59)

Haynes makes it clear that shared management enables learners to better represent their concerns and gives them opportunities to change things that have previously limited rather than promoted the progress of their skills at school. Haynes suggests, for example, that students be given a sum of money to enable them to realize their own projects and make the school their own space (cf. Haynes 2009: 60). "Children are not citizens-in-waiting, they already belong to communities and can participate in ways that benefit those communities" (Haynes 2009: 61). It is the school's responsibility to recognize students in their irreplaceable role and show them how fundamental their contribution is to the school community.

6.3 Recognizing (in)equalities: epistemic (a)symmetry, epistemic dependence, and epistemic modesty

Part of this task is also to acknowledge that education is not a process in which knowledge is passed on linearly from teachers to students. Instead, the focus should be on the process of teachers and learners finding meaning and understanding together in the classroom. There is a kind of *epistemic dependency* in which teachers and learners are mutually dependent on each other for the knowledge that emerges in the classroom. Kotzee writes:

> Rather than conceiving education as a process by which knowledge is passed on from teacher to learner, Murris [...] insist that one must see teacher and learner as making meaning together in the classroom. (Kotzee 2017: 328)

Teachers depend on ideas, established connections, and the learning process of their students. Otherwise, teaching cannot take place. Students depend on the expertise and guidance of their teachers; otherwise, they cannot contribute to developing meaning and significance within the classroom community.

While such epistemic dependency seems obvious, it is often not made visible, let alone acknowledged. This is probably due to a fear that acknowledging epistemic dependence could undermine authority and expertise. Yet, according to theories in feminist pedagogy (cf. Luke 1996: 293), recognizing epistemic dependence simply means that students are also knowledgeable subjects who can contribute significantly to the progress of the lesson content.

> In the longer term, one may hold that the very point of education is to make it the case that learners can begin to assign the right amount of epistemic authority to speakers generally and that, in those cases in which they are themselves the epistemic authorities, they assume this responsibility and discharge it well. From a social epistemological perspective, one may say that part of the point of education is to prepare people to take part appropriately, fairly, and justly in knowledge exchange. (Kotzee 2017: 329)

Kotzee makes it clear here that part of the competence to attribute an appropriate degree of credibility to speakers also includes being able to act with epistemic authority oneself. Learners may have epistemic authority over their own social experiences or their acquired niche knowledge. There is therefore necessarily an epistemic (a)symmetry. On the one hand, the potential of students

and teachers to act as learners and educators simultaneously should be recognized as symmetrical. On the other hand, it is important to recognize the expertise of teachers and students where it exists. In order to recognize this asymmetry from the perspective of students, teachers must remain open to learning from them as well. Murris writes:

> When thinking with children, adults need to 'give' their mind to what there is to think about, which is only possible when adults are 'open-minded', have 'epistemic modesty', 'epistemic trust' and are committed to 'epistemic equality'. (Murris 2013: 258)

This takes us full circle: While schools need to provide contexts in which mutual learning can be realized, individuals have to train epistemic modesty (Murris 2015: 334), recognizing that all knowledge is limited and that a 'perfect' mode of knowledge can never be achieved, neither by adults nor by children. After all, knowledge evolves with the world it seeks to describe. Remaining open to revising and expanding knowledge already acquired through the experiences of others neither delegitimizes what already exists nor grants speakers an unreasonable or disproportionate degree of credibility and epistemic power. Instead, we recognize that we can keep learning; from each other, with each other, and above all, *through* each other. And we owe this recognition to everyone—including children.

7. Conclusion

This marks the end of this work. However, the discussion on epistemic injustice affecting children is by no means over. There is much more to be discussed and integrated into the discourse on epistemic injustice and theories of recognition. For example, an investigation of parallels between the epistemic status of children in court testimony situations (cf. Oates 2007), a closer look at the implicit bias in the assessment of the performance and behavior of marginalized students (cf. Walker and Brigham 2017; Hirn & Scott 2017; Jacoby-Senghor et al. 2016: Scott 2021) or the epistemic injustice experienced by trans children when they try to make their own experiences understandable to others (cf. Fricker & Jenkins 2017) could be the basis of other noteworthy discussions.

The aim of this project was to illustrate that children in general and students in the context of school can be and are targets of testimonial and

hermeneutical injustice, best understood as a form of misrecognition. Yet, the observation of German schools has made it possible to show that children who are already marginalized due to their social group membership are facing multiple epistemic injustices: They experience epistemic injustice qua their social group membership *and* qua being students (or children). Furthermore, this production of inequality is reproduced primarily not be teachers but by the design of school institutions: Misrecognition, thus, occurs through the school system itself.

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