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Decolonial Approaches through Reflection & Exchange

Decolonial practices and tools for youth work context

TOOLKIT

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Introduction

What is the DARE project?

DARE (Decolonial Approaches through Reflexivity & Exchange) aims to equip youth workers from across Europe with the knowledge, awareness, and practical tools to recognise and dismantle colonial legacies, whiteness, and systemic inequalities in their daily practice.

From a youth work perspective, our goal is to provide a structured space where participants can critically examine how privilege, eurocentrism, and structural racism influence youth work organisations, decision-making structures, and international cooperation.

By combining analytical tools with creative and participatory methods, youth workers will be supported to identify patterns of exclusion in their own contexts and design concrete strategies for more inclusive, anti-oppressive practice.

DARE PROJECT IS COMPOSED BY 4 KEY PHASES

1 **Training on how to utilise decolonial approaches in yoth work**
Joining 26 youth workers from 4 countries.

2 **Co-construction of toolkit**
Gathering all the material from the training and editing accordingly

3 **Piloting time**
Youth workers test all the tools and approaches they learned and feedback on them

4 **Final toolkit**
Final draft of the toolkit that will be shared with the broader public

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Meet DARE Partners

QUEST

Quality Education for Sustainable Social Transformation (QUEST) is an educational network based in Brussels (with more than 100 members in Europe and beyond) that has the objective to foster access to more democratic, inclusive and sustainable education in Europe through action-research, policy-advocacy and networking. QUEST as an European Network has strong expertise advocating for more participatory practices in education, encouraging the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes that concern them and supporting their autonomy. QUEST advocates for equity in education, posing particular emphasis on the importance of promoting intersectional approaches to inclusion, and advancing the perspectives of historically discriminate and marginalized communities. QUEST will support young women living in Belgium.

SEVILLA NEGRA (Spain)

Sevilla Negra is a cultural and social non-profit association based in Seville, Spain, dedicated to promoting intercultural dialogue, remembrance, and anti-racist education. Since its creation, it has developed projects that combine historical memory, civic participation, and cultural practices to highlight the contributions of African and Afro-descendant communities to European societies.

The association has become a reference point in Andalusia for decolonial and intercultural work, collaborating with schools, cultural institutions, migrant collectives, and local authorities. Its initiatives range from conferences and workshops to artistic interventions, publications, and public events that recover hidden histories of slavery and colonialism.

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Meet DARE Partners

ONDE (ITALY)

Officina Nuova Dimensione Europea (ONDE) APS is a nonprofit organization located in Lecce, Italy. Founded in 2022, ONDE focuses on the personal and professional development, education, and capacity building of young people to promote equal, inclusive and peaceful societies. Our organization centers on creating powerful change in the lives of youth through training, workshops, courses and local initiatives. Our specialties are human rights education with an emphasis on diversity, inclusion and migrant issues, communications and professional training, arts, culture and media projects, and mentorship. We believe that young people are catalysts for change in their communities and we help them tap into the infinite trove of resources already lying within them. Our mission is to inspire young people to abandon performative activism and discover, instead, the true power of their voices.

CUBE (Greece)

CUBE AMKE is a private non-governmental organisation established in 2020 in Thessaloniki, Greece, with a mission to promote entrepreneurship, social cohesion, and inclusion. Its scope covers research, education, local economic development, and European cooperation. The organisation works closely with women, young people, migrants, Roma communities, refugees, and other groups facing exclusion, and is committed to advancing gender equality, ecological awareness, and cultural participation. CUBE is also a Youth Accredited Organisation under Erasmus+, and has broadened its mission into the cultural and creative sectors. Through programmes such as E-ART, Theatre in Palm, and Our Stage, it has supported over 1,000 artists in crafts, theatre, music, and dance, while developing innovative curricula, workshops, and residencies.

By combining social inclusion, entrepreneurship, and cultural empowerment, CUBE has built a strong reputation as a multidisciplinary hub that connects vulnerable groups with opportunities for personal growth, skills development, and labour market integration.

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How to use this toolkit?

Everyone has the right to be heard, to be treated with dignity, and to grow up in communities free from racism and discrimination. Meaningful youth participation needs safe-brave spaces, practical tools, trust and opportunities for youth workers to critically reflect on how colonial legacies, whiteness and systemic inequalities shape their organisations and their practice.

This toolkit is the result of a 5-day training bringing together youth workers from Belgium, Greece, Italy and Spain, learning and putting into practice decolonial and anti-oppressive approaches Here, you will find clear information and tools to learn about colonial legacies, whiteness and systemic inequalities, and how to put decolonial and anti-oppressive approaches into practice through step-by-step instructions, tips and feedback from the youth workers who already took the training.

Whether you are supporting a group of young people or starting to transform your own organisation, this toolkit will help you move from reflection to action.

It is built to be accessible, encouraging and practical. You do not need to be an expert in decolonial theory or anti-racism to begin. What matters is curiosity, commitment, and the belief that challenging exclusion and privilege is essential to building fairer, more inclusive and democratic societies.



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For Youth Workers

Dear Youth worker, Educator, Facilitator, adult in the room,
This toolkit is here to support you in creating meaningful, safe and empowering spaces where young people of all backgrounds feel seen, heard and valued. We know that as a youth worker, educator, facilitator or community organiser, you play an important role in making inclusion real. You can help young people feel confident, respected and supported. You can create the conditions for them to ask questions, share experiences, challenge stereotypes and imagine fairer alternatives.

We ask you to reflect on your role and positionality. In decolonial and anti-oppressive youth work, you are not only guiding others, you are also questioning your own privileges, biases and the power you hold in the room.

Your role is to support, guide and protect the process, while making sure that the voices and experiences of those most affected by exclusion are centred, not sidelined.

Through this toolkit, you will find practical tools to guide you through a decolonial and anti-oppressive process, from reflecting on your own journey and positionality to understanding colonial legacies and whiteness, mapping power in your organisation, using creative and participatory methods with young people, and planning concrete actions for change.

The toolkit can help you:

- reflect on your own positionality, privileges and biases
- facilitate discussions on colonial legacies, whiteness, racism and systemic inequalities
- support young people in exploring their identities and experiences through storytelling and creative methods
- map power dynamics and identify exclusionary patterns in your organisation
- create safe-brave spaces where young people from marginalised backgrounds feel confident to speak and take part

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Decolonial Theory

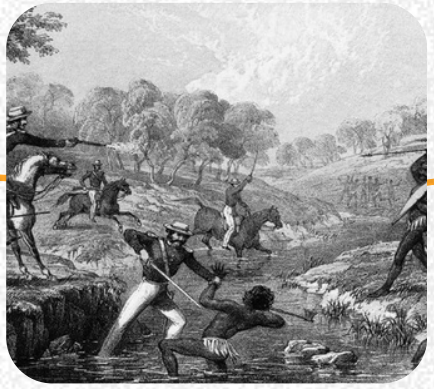
Imporant Terms

Before delving into decoloniality and the acitvities is important for you to understand these differences:

Colonialism

A POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL SYSTEM IMPOSED BY A DOMINANT COUNTRY THROUGH THE COLONIZATION OF ITS TERRITORY TO EXPLOIT ITS WEALTH.





Settler Colonialism

SETTLE COLONIALISM IS A STRUCTURE RATHER THAN AN EVENT, PREMISED ON THE ELIMINATION RATHER THAN EXPLOITATION OF THE NATIVE POPULATION.

Neo-colonialism

IT IS A VARIANT OF COLONIALISM WHICH DOES NOT RELY ON PHYSICAL FORCE. RATHER, IT USES CULTURAL AND MARKET INFLUENCES TO ENFORCE INTEGRATION INTO A CORE IMPERIALIST ECONOMY



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Decolonial Theory

Coloniality is the "living legacy of colonialism." Even though most colonies became independent decades ago, the ways of thinking and the power structures created during colonial times did not disappear. They still shape culture, labor, and knowledge production.

Modernity

In decolonial studies "Modernity" is understand as the European narrative of progress, reason, and civilization. This narrative proises development and democracy. However, the same system that brought 'progress' was built on racism and exploitation, on dismissing other peoples' knowledge and ways of understanding the world (Ahenakew et al., 2014), on gender discrimination (Lugones, 2010), and on the destruction of nature (Francis, 2020).

Modernity - Coloniality dyad

"Modernity" and "Coloniality" are a dyad: two sides of the same coin. The "hidden agenda of modernity" was this logic of coloniality, which established a global "colonial matrix of power".

Colonial Matrix of Power

The colonial matrix of power is an invisible web that decides who controls, who decides and whose lives and knowledge are valued. It connects four dimensions:

- **Coloniality of power:** control of land, resources, labour and institutions (Quijano, 2000).
- **Coloniality of knowing:** Western knowledge treated as universal, while other knowledge is dismissed (Mignolo, 2011).
- **Coloniality of being:** some lives and cultures are valued as fully human, while others are not (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).
- **Coloniality of gender**: heterosexuality and fixed gender roles are imposed as "normal" (Lugones, 2010).

These dimensions reinforce each other, which makes domination seem natural.

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Decolonial Theory

Implementing Decolonial Approaches

In June 2026, the DARE team invited youth workers from 4 European countries to Brussels and implemented a training course on decolonial and anti-oppressive youth work. Although the training material walks participants through reflecting on their own positionality, understanding colonial legacies and whiteness, mapping power in their organisations and building alliances for change, this training is still a starting point, youth workers still have to put these approaches into practice in their own organisations and with the young people they work with.

The training participants were youth workers, educators, trainers and NGO staff. That being said, the content of this training can be easily adjusted to any other target group within the youth field, including young people themselves.

The sessions were divided into 4 main themes:



Reflexivity



Unveiling coloniality



How to build other ways of doing

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Reflexivity

Planting Seeds

Session Outilne

This is the opening activity of the Reflexivity section, and it lays the ground for everything that follows. Decolonial and anti-oppressive work is not only about learning new content. It also asks us to practise new ways of relating. This means we need to enter the process with openness and humility, accepting that we may not have all the answers, and that some ideas may challenge what we believe or how we work.

You can use this activity at the start of a full programme, but it also works on its own before any single activity in this toolkit, or before any group process. We believe whenever a new group comes together, taking time to agree on how we relate to each other makes the space safer and braver for everyone.

Phase 1. Context mapping



30min

Objective

- Get to know each other and each other's youth work practice
- Build a shared agreement on how you will work together
- Prepare the group for content that may feel uncomfortable or challenging

Materials

- A large space (outdoors if possible)
- A long rope or ball of string
- Flipcharts

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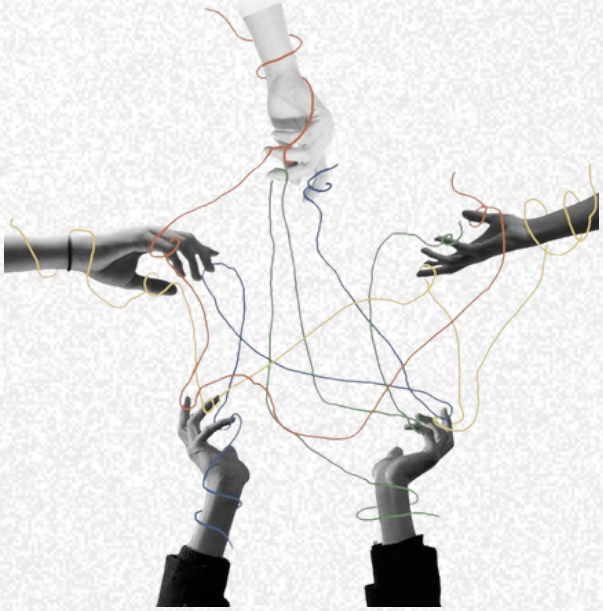
Phase 1. Context Mapping

1 Ask participants to create a physical map of the world in the room, standing where they were born.

2 One by one, each participant shares some context:

- Where are you from?
- Where do you work now?
- What does your youth work look like?
- Who is your target group and what is your relationship with them?

3 When a participant finishes, they hold on to the rope and pass it to the next person. By the end, the rope connects everyone. Close by pointing out that even though we come from different places, youth work connects us all.



Phase 2. Broccoli Seed Agreement

30 min

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Introduction to the activity

In a world obsessed with convenience and instant gratification, we want to offer you something that takes time and care to grow. Instead of offering you candy, we want to offer broccoli seeds: ideas and knowledge that might not offer quick solutions, that might need time to grow and digest, and might not be immediately tailored to your context. We ask you to trust the process, trust yourself, and stay open and curious, so you can take it home and shape it into something meaningful for your environment. This is called the Broccoli Seed Agreement.

The four fundamentals

Present a flip chart (or a ppt in case you want to do it digital) with the four foundamentals of the Broccoli Seed Agreement.

1. My engagement with this work may not have any immediate practical application in my context, and that is ok.
2. I do not have to agree with anything presented, but I am happy to see what happens
3. I may feel uncomfortable, confused and frustrated during this process, and I take responsibility for observing and learning from my conscious and unconscious responses, resistances and fragilities.
4. It is up to me to decide when to push myself further and when to stop and reflect or observe.

Group agreements

Present a another Flipchart with your proposal on communication, care and participation Ask: "Is there anything you would like to add?" and write additions on the flipchart.

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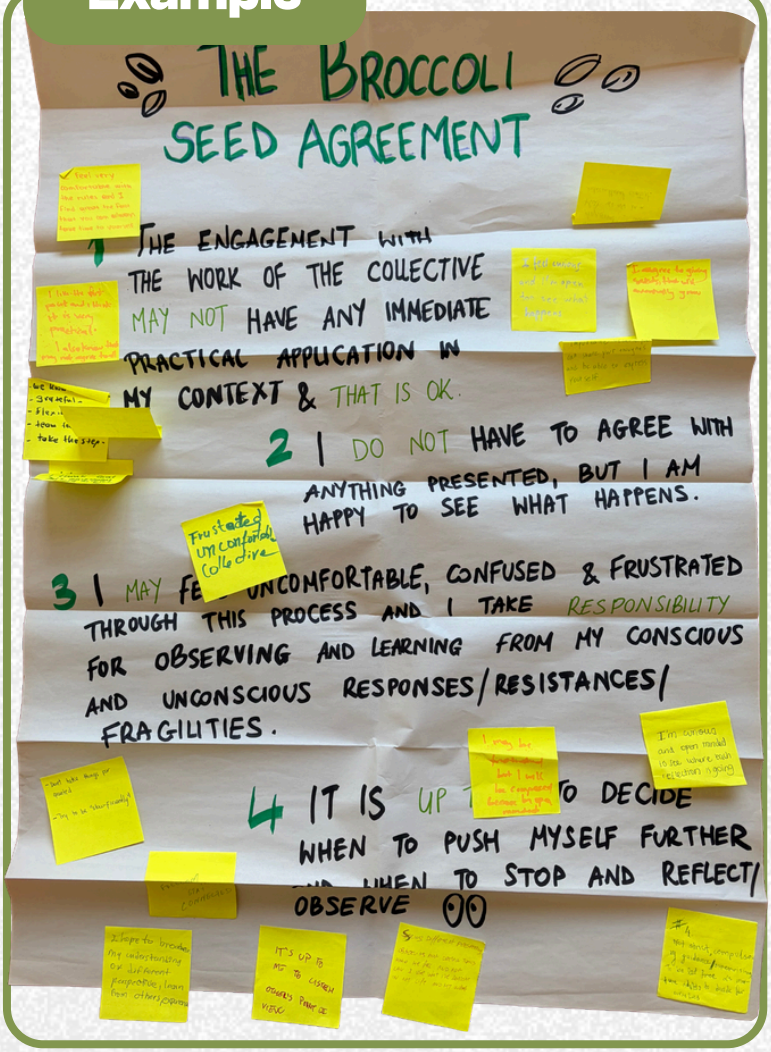
Phase 2. Broccoli Seed Agreement

Individual reflection

The individual refflection can be worked in a journal. Participants can write any doubts or enthusiasm about both Agreement and stick them on the Flipchart. You can read at loud some of them and comment around it.

Finally ask one more time if everyone feels comfortable and good with all the agreements/ground rules.

Example



Adaptations

- If you do not want to use paper instead of a flipchart you can do a power point presentation and use Padlet or Menti to display the opinions of the participants
- In case you are short in time you can skip Part 1 and keep only the agreements

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Unveiling Coloniality

Wheel of Power and Privilege

Session Outilne

This section helps participants recognise coloniality as something alive and continuous, and connect it to their everyday realities in youth work and NGOs. Through images, discussions and group work, participants explore different dimensions of coloniality, and start noticing the patterns that often feel "normal" or "neutral" in their organisations. Making these patterns visible is the first step to transforming them.

Wheel of Power and Privilege

2 hours

Objective

- Build a shared language to talk about power and privilege
- Understand power as contextual, layered and intersectional
- Reflect on our own positionality and how it shapes our role as youth workers

Materials

- Projected or printed Wheel of Power and Privilege
- Chalk or tape to draw the wheel on the floor,
- Paper and pen

Template

- Wheel of Power and Privilege template

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Unveiling Coloniality

Presenting the wheel

1 Start with a definition of power. For example:

"Power is not just about who shouts loudest or who holds a title. Power is about access:

- who gets to make decisions about land, resources
- whose knowledge counts
- who belongs and who doesn't.

Power is not fixed, it is contextual. The same person can hold a lot of power in one room and almost none in another."

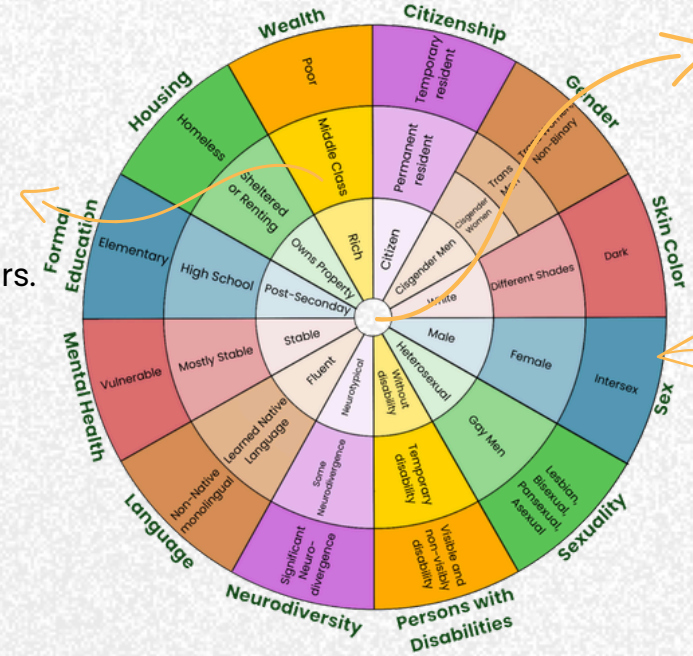
2 Explain that power works on three levels at the same time:

- Individual
- Institutional
- Cultural.

Many of the strongest forces in our lives are invisible because they have been normalised, this is just the way things are".

3 Present the wheel. Each segment is a dimension of identity: wealth, housing, formal education, mental health, language, neurodiversity, disability, sexuality, sex, skin colour, gender and citizenship.

Moving outwards means less access and more barriers.



The centre holds the most power and privilege.

The outer ring is where systems of oppression land hardest.

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Living wheel

1. Draw a large version of the wheel on the floor with chalk or tape: three rings (centre, middle, outer).

2. Give each participant a fictional identity card (for example: "a 19 year old Black woman, born in Brussels, studying at university" or "a 45 year old white man, undocumented, who does not speak the local language").

3. Read scenarios aloud, one at a time. After each one, participants move to the ring where they think their character would stand. Example scenarios:
   - You are applying for a job as a youth work coordinator.
   - You are stopped by the police on your way home.
   - You want to rent a flat.
   - You speak up in a team meeting to propose a new idea.
   - You go to a doctor because you feel anxious.

4. After 2-3 scenarios, pause and ask: "Who moved the most? Who stayed in the same place? Why?"

5. Close with a short debrief: "How did it feel to be at the centre? At the edge? What did you notice about how identities interact?"



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Unveiling Coloniality

Collective reflection

1. Critical lookt at the tool

You can explain that “No tool is perfect. This one was created in a specific context, by specific people, for specific purposes.

- What do you notice is there?
- What is missing, or represented in a way that feels incomplete?”

Run the discussion as open as possible, you could use the popcorn style (there is no clear order of participation, but whoever wants to participate, can do it)

2. Individual reflection

Show three questions. Participants can write or just think, and they never have to share:

- Which aspects of your positionality do you rarely think about because they feel "normal" or "neutral"? How might this invisibility affect people who do not share them?
- Which parts of your positionality most strongly affect how you perceive and interpret others' behaviour, language, "ability" or engagement?
- How does your positionality influence your role in your organisation? Where have you experienced privilege or disadvantage because of it, with colleagues, leadership or young people?

3. Group reflection

In random groups of 4, participants discuss the same questions, switching every 7 minutes. The aim is not to agree but to notice where do our experiences overlap, and where do they differ?

4. Guided restitution

Ask the whole room "What was the moment in your group where something shifted, where you saw something differently, or where something uncomfortable came up that felt important?" and take 4 or 5 answers

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Unveiling Coloniality

Collective reflection

5. Closing

A possible closing you can have is: “Looking at your positionality honestly is not comfortable, and it is not meant to be. Power analysis starts with ourselves. Not to paralyse us with guilt, but because you cannot see a system clearly if you don't know where you're standing inside it.”

Possible adaptations

- **Personal version of Part 2:** instead of fictional identities, participants place themselves on a paper wheel privately. Only use this with groups where trust is already strong.
- **Coloured cards:** instead of moving on the floor, participants raise the card of the identity dimension they relate to most in each scenario.
- **Working with young people:** use scenarios from their daily lives (school, public transport, social media, finding a summer job).
- **Online:** use a digital whiteboard with the wheel and movable avatars.

Tips for facilitators

- Always use fictional identities in the floor activity unless the group asks for something more personal. Nobody should have to expose their identity publicly.
- Some participants may experience the outer rings in their real lives. Watch the energy in the room and remind the group of the agreement that anyone can step out.
- Expect resistance such as "I worked hard for what I have". Bring it back to systems: the wheel describes structures, not individual effort.

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Unveiling Coloniality

Coloniality Matrix of Power

Session Outilne

Objectives

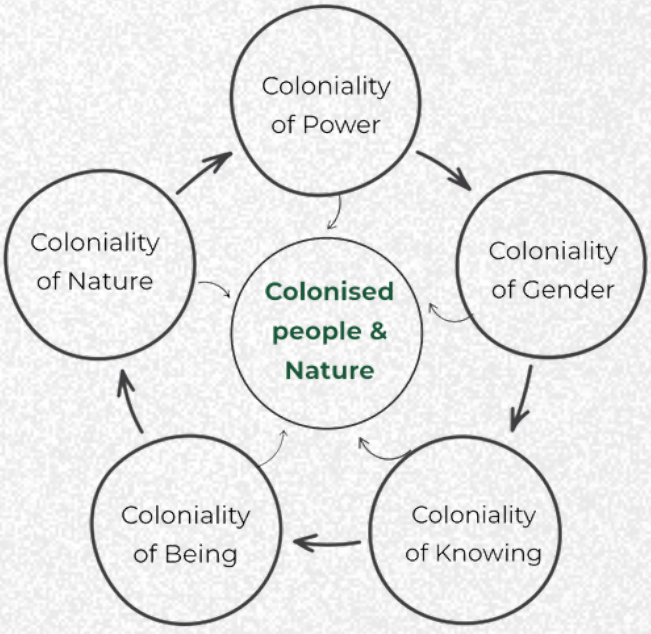
- Recognise coloniality as something alive and continuous, not only part of the past
- Connect colonial legacies to everyday realities in youth work and NGOs
- Introduce five dimensions of coloniality: of being, of knowing, of power, of gender and of nature

Materials

- 5 printed images (one per type of coloniality)
- Flipcharts
- Post-its
- Pens

1 hour

Matrix of Power



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Unveiling Coloniality

Opening reflection

1. Ask the guiding question: "When you think about youth work or NGOs, where do power inequalities show up?"

2. Participants write their answers on post-its and stick them on a flipchart. If ideas are slow to come, offer examples: funding, language, expertise, recruitment, decision-making, leadership.

3. Read the post-its aloud and explain: "We are not looking at individuals. We are looking at the system, the bigger picture."

Images

1. Before the session, hang five images on the walls of the room, each representing one dimension of coloniality. Do not label them yet.

2. Ask participants to walk around, look at each image, and then stand next to the one that speaks most to their lived experience in organisations.

3. In their image groups, participants discuss:
   - What drew you to this image?
   - Have you experienced this in youth work?
   - What organisational practices reinforce this?
   - What emotions come up?

4. Reveal which dimension of coloniality each image represents. Give each group a short description of their dimension to read and discuss what it means.

5. Back in plenary, each group shares the name of their dimension and one key idea from their conversation.

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Possible adaptations

- **Choosing images:** use images that are close to your participants' context (local street names, museum objects, advertising, school textbooks, photos of extraction sites). Images from your own country often have more impact than global examples.
- **Short descriptions:** if you don't have time for the following sessions, prepare a one-page handout per dimension so each group can go deeper on its own.
- **Small groups:** if a dimension has nobody standing next to it, ask the group why they think nobody chose it. This is a useful conversation in itself.
- **Working with young people:** use photos from social media, music videos or films they know.

Tips for facilitators

- Choose images carefully. Avoid images of violence or suffering that reproduce the colonial gaze or may be retraumatising for participants.
- Don't explain the images before people choose. The point is that participants connect them to their own experience first.
- Participants may feel strong emotions. Leave space for silence and remind them they don't have to share.

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Unveiling Coloniality

Coloniality of Knowing

Session Outilne

Objectives

- Understand what the coloniality of knowing is
- Recognise whose knowledge and expertise is valued most inside our organisations
- Identify concrete practices to stop, start and keep questioning

Materials

- Post-its in three colours (red, green, yellow)
- Pens
- Flipcharts

1 hour

Instructions

1. Introduction

Give a short explanation stating that the coloniality of knowing is the idea that some knowledge (usually Western, academic, written, in English) is treated as "real" or "expert" knowledge, while other forms of knowledge (Indigenous, local, oral, lived experience, from the Global South) are seen as less valid or invisible.

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Instructions

2. Audit in groups

Divide participants into groups of 4-5. Each group examines whose knowledge shapes their organisations, using the six areas below:

Area	Reflection Question	Example
Training Content	Whose knowledge shapes your trainings?	Mostly EU reports and academic resources
Experts	Who gets invited to speak?	Mostly European facilitators
Resources	Which authors and frameworks dominate?	Mostly Western authors
Language	Which languages are prioritised?	Everything happens in English
Youth Participation	Are young people consulted or co-creating?	Young people are consulted, but their ideas are dropped if they don't align with management
Partnerships	Who sets priorities and agendas?	The coordinator decides who to partner with and what the priorities are

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Instructions

3. Patterns

Ask each group: "What patterns do you notice?" Collect answers in plenary. Often, groups notice that most areas are centred on Western, European or institutional knowledge.

4. Reflection

Explain that "The goal is not to blame organisations or individuals. The goal is to start noticing patterns. The coloniality of knowing often survives through routines that feel 'normal' or 'logical': whose expertise counts, whose voices are heard, whose knowledge is legitimised. We make these patterns visible so they can be transformed."

5. Stop, start, question

Give each participant three post-its:

- Red (Stop): "What is one practice, assumption or routine in your organisation that should stop or be challenged?"
- Green (Start): "What is one action you want to begin experimenting with in your organisation?"
- Yellow (Question): "What is one thing you want to keep questioning moving forward?"

Participants stick them on three flipcharts. Read a few aloud.

6. Closing

You can reiterate that "decolonising organisations is not a single action. It is an ongoing practice of noticing, questioning and reshaping. Today we named things we want to stop reproducing, things we want to begin building, and questions we want to carry forward. That is a great start."

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Possible adaptations

- **Same organisation:** if all participants work in the same organisation, run it as a team audit and keep the post-its as the starting point of an action plan.
- **Different organisations:** let each person audit their own organisation individually first (10 min), then compare in groups.
- **More areas:** add areas relevant to your context, such as communication materials (whose faces appear?), recruitment (who gets hired?) or evaluation (who decides what success means?).
- **Working with young people:** adapt the areas to their school or youth centre (whose history is taught? which languages are allowed? who decides the activities?).

Tips for facilitators

- Keep the examples hidden at first. Only show them if a group is stuck, so participants find their own answers.
- Participants from smaller or grassroots organisations may feel this doesn't apply to them. Encourage them to look at funders and partners too.
- Take a photo of the red, green and yellow post-its and send them to participants afterwards. They are a useful base for Activity 10 and for action plans.

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Unveiling Coloniality

Coloniality of Gender

Session Outilne

Objectives

- Understand the difference between gender and sex assigned at birth
- Explore how gender roles shape our reality and relationships, as co-workers, as youth workers and outside work
- Understand how gender plays into power dynamics, and how the gender binary was spread through colonialism

Materials

- A4 paper for group work
- Flipchart paper
- Pens and markers

1 hour

Instructions

1. Opening discussion

You can start by asking "Have you noticed any patterns in who holds more power, or who gets taken more seriously, in your organisation? Does gender play into this?"

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Instructions

2. Input. what is gender and why is it constructed?

Ask each group: "What patterns do you notice?" Collect answers in plenary. Often, groups notice that most areas are centred on Western, European or institutional knowledge.

- Explain the difference between gender identity and sex assigned at birth, and highlight the existence of intersex, non-binary and trans people. If there are so many shades between "man" and "woman", why does a person's gender matter so much?
- Explain that the patriarchal system was built to organise and control societies. What mattered was that everybody played the part they had been given, male or female; individual talents, needs or desires did not. A young man who didn't want to go to war could be mocked as a failure; a young woman who didn't want children could be condemned as unnatural. Over time, this order came to look "normal" or even "natural", in the same way class and racial oppression have been presented as natural by those in power. These norms became today's gender stereotypes
- Connect it to coloniality: the philosopher María Lugones (2010) showed that colonialism imposed the European binary gender system on colonised peoples, often erasing other ways of understanding gender that existed before, such as Two-Spirit people in many Indigenous North American nations or the muxe in Oaxaca, Mexico.

3. Brainstorm: building the binary

On two flipcharts, the whole group brainstorms: "What does it mean to be a woman?" and "What does it mean to be a man?" Write down every characteristic named.

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Instructions

4. Group work: questioning the binary

In small groups, participants look at the characteristics and discuss which ones match or contradict their own lived experience.

3. Group work: reimagining

"How could a workplace be organised if it didn't take gender stereotypes into account?" Groups write or draw their ideas on A4 paper.

4. Presentations

Each group shares a short recap of what they imagined and 1-2 examples of how lived experience goes against gender stereotypes.

5. Food for thought

Close with a question participants can take home: "How might you have been reinforcing gender power dynamics in your youth work without noticing? What unconscious biases do you hold, and how could they affect the young people you work with?"

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Possible adaptations

- **Working with young people:** use images from advertising, toys or music videos to start the brainstorm.
- **Deeper personal reflection:** with groups where trust is strong, you can add an optional individual journaling question: "Have you ever questioned the gender roles expected of you?"
- **Local examples:** look for examples of non-binary gender traditions from regions connected to your participants' backgrounds.
- **Short on time:** skip step 4 and go straight from the brainstorm to reimagining the workplace.

Tips for facilitators

- Never ask participants to share their own gender identity or experiences of questioning it in plenary. Personal questions should always be optional and private.
- Some participants may be unfamiliar with, or resistant to, ideas about trans and non-binary identities. Keep the focus on systems and power, and protect anyone in the room who may be directly affected.
- Use inclusive language throughout and explain terms that may be new to the group.

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Unveiling Coloniality

Coloniality of Nature

Session Outilne

Objectives

- Build an understanding of the coloniality of nature
- Connect it to participants' knowledge, lived experience and concrete realities
- Open a space for critical reflection on alternatives

Materials

- Post-its
- Pens
- Flipcharts

1 hour

Instructions

1. Introduction

Go around the room and ask each participant for one word or one sentence (no pressure): "What is the coloniality of nature to you?". Write key words on post-its and cluster them on a flipchart (for example: extraction, loss, power, knowledge).

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Instructions

2. Definition

Explain: "Colonial power didn't just take land. It changed the very idea of what nature is. Instead of something we belong to and live with, like a river as a living system connected to community, identity and life, nature became a commodity: something to own, measure and extract from."

Ask: "Does this distinction between nature as relationship and nature as resource resonate with anything you know or have seen?" Take 2 or 3 answers.

Present three key concepts:

- **Terra nullius** ("land belonging to no one"). European powers used this legal idea to claim land inhabited by Indigenous peoples, ignoring their collective governance systems and taking land and resources (Pictou, 2020; Domínguez & Luoma, 2020).
- **Epistemic violence**: Indigenous and local ways of understanding nature, such as medicinal plants, seasonal cycles, land stewardship and water management, were dismissed as superstition or "primitive", and did not count as real knowledge.
- **Eco-apartheid:** Pollution, flooding, mining and toxic waste fall hardest on racialised and marginalised communities, leading to displacement, poverty and migration. This hits hardest at the intersection of race, gender and class (Sultana, 2022).

Close the input: "Colonialism formally ended, but its logic didn't. Today we talk about climate and sustainability, and it sounds progressive. But look at who drives it, who funds it, and who benefits. Green growth, carbon markets and energy transitions still rely on mining cobalt, lithium and rare earth minerals in the Global South, from communities who have no say. The language changes. The structure stays."

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Unveiling Coloniality

Instructions

3. Group work

In groups of 3, participants discuss: "Think of a natural place (a forest, a river, a field, a neighbourhood) that you know or have heard about. How has it been treated: as something to extract from, or something to live with? Who decided? And who paid the cost?" Each group then shares one thing that came up.

4. Final reflection

In plenary:

- "What would it look like to relate to nature differently, in your context, your work and your community?"
- "How do you, in your work, relate to natural resources, such as waste, paper or natural spaces?"

Possible adaptations

Outdoors: run the group work during a walk in a park or near a river, and ask participants to observe how the space is used and managed.

Local case study: replace the general examples with a local one, such as a mining project, a new motorway, or a polluted neighbourhood in your city.

Working with young people: start from objects they use every day (their phone, clothes, food) and trace where the materials come from and who pays the cost.

Action-oriented closing: ask each participant to name one change in their organisation's practices (events, travel, materials, food) that takes both environmental and social justice into account.

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How to build other ways of doing

Hierarchy Mapping

Session Outilne

Once we understand where we stand and how coloniality shows up around us, the question becomes: what can we do about it? This section moves from reflection to action. It focuses on the organisations we work in:

- the hierarchies that shape what is possible
- the people we are accountable to and
- the allies who can support us in changing things.

Through mapping exercises and Theatre of the Oppressed, participants make the systems they work in visible, practise intervening in situations of exclusion, and identify realistic steps and alliances for change. Decolonising an organisation is not a single action but an ongoing process. This section helps participants find where to start, and who to start with.

Hierarchy Mapping



45 min

Objectives

- Make visible the system participants work in
- Identify the systemic barriers and actors that shape what is possible, and what is not
- Recognise which structures have a colonial history, and where there is room to move

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Instructions

1. Introduction

Explain that "A hierarchy map is a tool to externalise the system you operate in. It asks: Who has power over what? Who shapes what is possible for you, and what isn't? What structures sit above you, around you and below you? Where are you in all of that?"

Add the colonial lens "Colonialism didn't just create economic inequality. It created hierarchies of knowledge, of land, of bodies, of who governs and who is governed. Many of them are still working today under different names. So when we map our hierarchies, we also ask, Where did this structure come from? Who benefits from it staying this way? Where, if anywhere, is there room to move?"

2. Drawing the map

Each participant draws the hierarchy map of their organisation with three layers, represented however they like:

- **Macro level:** global or national structures that shape the context (policies, international institutions, funders, economic systems, historical legacies)
- **Middle level:** the organisations, institutions or communities they work in or alongside
- **Micro level:** themselves: their role, agency, relationships, and what limits or enables them

There is no right format: arrows, boxes, circles, a landscape, a collage. What matters is honesty. Include the actors that really shape your work, not only the official ones. Guiding questions:

- Who or what sits above you, and how did they get there?
- Who do you depend on? Who depends on you?
- What rules, norms or laws shape what you can and cannot do?
- Where do you see resistance, cracks or space for movement?
- Who is absent from this hierarchy: erased, invisible, or not recognised as an actor?

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3. Gallery walk

Participants put their maps on the wall and walk around in silence to look at each other's work.

4. Drawing the map

Don't ask everyone to present their whole map. Ask three questions that anyone can answer:

- What surprised you about your own map?
- Looking at all the maps together, what patterns do you notice? Which actors or structures keep appearing?
- oWhere on your map did you feel the weight of a colonial logic, even if it wasn't labelled that way?

5. Closing

You can finish by saying that "Look at this wall. These are not individual problems, they are a system. Many of these actors, the institutions, policies, laws and funding structures, didn't come from nowhere. They were built, often through colonial processes. And because they were built, they can be challenged, reimagined or replaced. The point of mapping isn't to feel overwhelmed. It's to see the system clearly enough to find where to push."

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Possible adaptations

- **Same organisation:** participants from the same organisation draw one map together and compare how differently they each see the hierarchy.
- **Working with young people:** map their school, youth centre or city instead of a workplace.
- **Physical version:** use objects, chairs or people to build the hierarchy in the room.
- **Online:** use a digital whiteboard with shapes, arrows and sticky notes.

Tips for facilitators

- Remind participants that the maps will be on the wall. If something is sensitive, they can use symbols instead of real names.
- Some participants will draw a classic organigram. Encourage them to go beyond it: who has informal power? Who is missing?
- Ask participants to keep their maps. They will need them for the following activities.

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How to build other ways of doing

Theatre of the Oppressed

Session Outilne

Theatre of the Oppressed



1 hour and 15min

Materials

- The hierarchy maps from previous activity
- Open space
- A few chairs and simple props (optional)

Objectives

- Bring the hierarchy maps to life and experience power dynamics through the body
- Practise intervening in situations of exclusion or oppression in a safe space
- Explore concrete strategies to challenge power in our organisations

Instructions

This activity is based on Forum Theatre, one of the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed developed by Augusto Boal.

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Instructions

Preparation

Divide participants into two teams:

1. **Performers:** using one or more of their hierarchy maps, they create a short play (maximum 10 minutes, one or several scenes). The play shows how power flows in an organisation, how decisions are made (for example about projects, funding, hiring or activities with young people), and how these dynamics limit or enable the youth worker. They focus on realistic interactions: who holds control, who is left out, and what the youth worker's role is in the system.

2. **Reactors:** they review their own hierarchy maps and note the key situations they would like to see addressed. They plan possible interventions: moments when they might stop the play, propose changes or challenge the power dynamics, based on their own context.

Performance and intervention

- **Round 1** (10 min). The performers present their play from beginning to end. The reactors watch and reflect.

- **Round 2** (25 min). The play is performed again. This time, any reactor can shout "Stop!", step into the scene, take the place of a character (usually the person experiencing oppression) and try a different action. The performers react in character. Several interventions can be tried for the same moment.

- **Debrief** (10 min). After each intervention, or at the end, ask:
  - What changed? What did not change?
  - Was the intervention realistic in your context?
  - How did it feel to be in that role?
  - What could you try in your organisation?

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Possible adaptations

- **More time:** swap the teams, so the reactors also perform a play based on their maps.
- **Small groups:** create one scene together and let everyone take turns intervening.
- **Image Theatre:** if the group is not comfortable acting, ask them to create a frozen "statue" of their organisation with their bodies, then let others reshape it into an ideal version.
- **Online:** use scenes from school, family, public space or youth centres.

Tips for facilitators

- Start with a short warm-up game to help participants feel comfortable with their bodies and with each other.
- Your role is the "Joker": you guide the process, encourage interventions, and keep the discussion anchored in the theme of power and decision-making in youth work.
- Interventions should focus on the person experiencing oppression. Replacing the person in power with a "nicer" one is not a realistic solution.
- Make sure participants step out of their roles at the end, for example by shaking out their bodies or saying their real name.

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How to build other ways of doing

Accountability Mapping

Session Outilne

Accountability Mapping



1 hour

Materials

- A3 paper
- Coloured pens
- Printed handout with the map legend
- The hierarchy maps from previous activity.

Objectives

- Bring the hierarchy maps to life and experience power dynamics through the body
- Practise intervening in situations of exclusion or oppression in a safe space
- Explore concrete strategies to challenge power in our organisations

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Instructions

Introduction

Divide participants into two teams:

Explain that "we now shift from who holds power to who we are responsible to. By making our accountabilities visible, we can spot mismatches where those most affected have the least formal say, and identify relationships we may need to renegotiate or strengthen. We will compare this map with our hierarchy map and use it later to plan our alliances."

Listing

Each participant lists every person or group they are currently accountable to in their role, and notes what each one expects of them and what happens if they act or don't act. Prompts:

- Who expects me to keep or change my way of working?
- Whose knowledge, dignity and wellbeing am I responsible for (young people, families, communities, cultures)?
- Who or what can challenge me if I act, or don't act, on decolonial priorities? Who or what will back me up?
- Who is most affected if I keep things the same? Who benefits if I make changes?

Drawing the map

Participants put their role at the centre of the page and draw a circle for each person or group on their list. The size of each circle shows how strongly they influence the participant's decisions. They then use the following symbols

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Instructions

Drawing the map

Symbol	Meaning
Arrow pointing to you	They have oversight or put pressure on you
Arrow pointing to them	You hold responsibility towards them
Two-headed arrow	Mutual accountability
Thick line	Strong accountability
Solid line	Formal accountability (policies, contracts, funders)
Dashed line	Informal or relational accountability (young people, families, community)
+	Your decolonial action would benefit them
-	Your decolonial action is likely to trigger pushback
⚠	Acting here carries high risk
🔒	A constraint you cannot change alone

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Instructions

Drawing the map

Finally, participants circle one or two relationships they want to renegotiate or strengthen soon. These will feed directly into the next activity

Sharing

In pairs or small groups, participants compare their accountability map with their hierarchy map:

- Where do the two maps match, and where do they differ?
- Are the people most affected by your work (often young people) shown with dashed, thin lines?
- Which relationships did you circle, and why?

Possible adaptations

- **Simpler version:** use only arrows and the + and – signs, especially for groups new to mapping.
- **Team version:** a whole team maps its organisation's accountabilities together, which can reveal very different perceptions.
- **Working with young people:** ask them to map who they are accountable to (family, school, friends, coaches) and who is accountable to them.
- **Short on time:** skip the drawing and go straight from the list to the pair discussion.

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Tips for facilitators

- The legend can feel overwhelming at first. Show a completed example map before participants start.
- Most participants discover that funders and management have solid, thick lines, while young people have dashed, thin ones. Name this pattern explicitly: it is a key insight of the activity.
- The maps can contain sensitive information about colleagues or managers. Make clear that participants only share what they choose to.

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How to build other ways of doing

Alliance Mapping and Alliance Gallery

Session Outilne

Accountability Mapping



1 hour 30min

Materials

- String
- Paper
- Scissors
- Couloured pens
- Tape
- Post-its
- Stickers
- The maps from previous activities

Objectives

- Identify realistic allies who can support decolonial practices in our organisations
- Plan concrete strategies to build or strengthen those alliances
- Share and enrich each other's plans

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Alliance Mapping

Introduction

Explain that this activity builds on the two previous map. The hierarchy map showed who holds power, the accountability map showed who we are responsible to, and now we look at who can stand with us.

Listing allies

Using their previous maps, participants write a list of possible allies inside and outside their organisation (colleagues, young people, families, community groups, other NGOs, funders, researchers, activists). For each one, they note:

- What could this actor bring to decolonial action in my organisation?
- Is there already a connection I could draw on or strengthen?
- What strategy could I use to connect with them (a coffee, a joint project, a meeting, an invitation to a training)?

Building the map

Participants create a physical, creative map using string, paper and scissors. It shows who connects to whom, how and why, grounded in both their personal experience and the reality of their organisation. They can link the relationships they circled in the Accountability Mapping

Alliance Gallery

1. Each participant hangs their alliance map on the wall as a poster.
2. Everyone walks around and reacts to the others' maps with post-its (questions, suggestions, contacts) and stickers (ideas they like).

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How to build other ways of doing

Alliance Gallery

3. Participants collect the feedback on their map and add anything useful.

4. For closing you ask 3 to 4 volunteers "What is the first alliance you will work on when you go back, and what is your first step?"

Possible adaptations

- **Same organisation:** create one shared alliance map per organisation and finish by agreeing on who will contact whom.
- **Digital version:** use an online whiteboard so the map can be updated after the training.
- **Link to action plans:** turn the first two or three alliances into concrete actions with a date and a responsible person.
- **Working with young people:** map allies for a campaign or a change they want to see in their school or neighbourhood.

Tips for facilitators

- Encourage participants to think beyond the "usual suspects". Allies can be unexpected: a receptionist, a parent, a local shop, a former participant.
- Remind participants to be realistic. A small, strong alliance is better than a long list of contacts.
- Ask participants to take a photo of their final map with the post-its. It is their roadmap for the months after the training.

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How to build other ways of doing

Illnesses and Antidotes

Session Outilne

Okun describes a set of characteristics that shape the culture of many organisations. Norms such as perfectionism, urgency or fear of conflict that feel "normal" or "professional", but that exclude and harm people, especially racialised people and those with less power. In this activity we call them illnesses since they are not personal flaws, but a culture we have all been conditioned into, whatever our identity. And like any illness, they can be recognised, named and treated with antidotes.

Illnesses and Antidotes



4 hours

Materials

- Printed illness cards
- Post-its
- Flipcharts
- Markers
- Handouts

Objectives

- Recognise the characteristics of white supremacy culture as they show up in our organisations and in youth work
- Understand that these norms are a shared culture, not individual faults, and that they harm all of us, though not in the same way
- Design concrete antidotes at individual, team and organisational level

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How to build other ways of doing

Handouts

Instructions

Introducing the framework

- Present the idea of white supremacy culture. The norms and standards that many organisations treat as "normal" or "professional", and that make it hard for other cultural norms to exist. Many organisations say they want to be inclusive, but only let "others" belong if they adapt to these existing norms.
- Explain the illness metaphor. These are not personality traits or proof that someone is a bad person. They are a culture we are all swimming in. Recognising them is the first step to healing from them.
- Share Okun's own warning that this is a tool to understand our culture, not a weapon to shame or blame each other. "Attack the problem, not the people."

Recognising illnesses in our workplaces

- Give each participant the handout or a set of illness cards. They read through them individually.
- Each participant chooses the 3 illnesses they recognise most in their own organisation or workplace.
- For each one, they write a concrete example on a post-it, without naming people.

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Instructions

Sharing illnesses in groups

- In groups of 4 or 5, participants share their examples.
- Each group chooses 2–3 illnesses that appear most across their organisations and discusses:
  - How does this illness affect young people? And staff?
  - Who is most harmed by it, and who benefits?
  - Which other illnesses does it connect to?

Presenting the illnesses

- Each group presents its illnesses to everyone, with one example. They can use a creative format: a short sketch, a drawing, or a "medical diagnosis" of an imaginary organisation.
- As groups present, the facilitator clusters the illnesses on a wall to create an "illness map" of the group's organisations.
- Ask the whole group "Which illnesses keep coming back? What surprised you?"

Finding antidotes

- Each group takes 1-2 illnesses from the illness map, ideally ones presented by another group.
- Groups read Okun's antidotes for their illnesses, then create their own "prescription" adapted to youth work, with at least:
  - One personal antidote (something I can practise myself)
  - One team antidote (something we can practise together)
  - One organisational antidote (a policy, structure or habit the organisation could change)
- Encourage groups to be concrete and realistic: "What could we try next Monday?"

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How to build other ways of doing

Instructions

Sharing and presenting antidotes

- Groups hang their prescriptions next to the matching illness on the illness map.
- Everyone walks around and adds post-its with comments, questions or extra ideas.
- Each group presents its prescription in 3–4 minutes.
- Closing. "These cultures were built, so they can be changed. None of us can heal an organisation alone, but each antidote is a step towards a culture where everyone can belong." Invite participants to choose one antidote to take into their action plan.

Possible adaptations

- **Short version:** work with 4–5 illnesses only (for example perfectionism, urgency, defensiveness, fear of conflict and power hoarding), and combine recognising and antidotes in the same group work.
- **Team version:** run it with colleagues from the same organisation, and turn the antidotes into team agreements. Revisit them every few months.
- **Regular check-in:** after the activity, choose one illness per month to notice and discuss in team meetings.
- **Working with young people:** use the illness cards to look at their school, sports club or youth centre. Simplify the language and let them invent their own antidotes.
- **Local context:** Okun's examples come from the United States. Invite participants to find examples from their own country, and to connect the illnesses to colonial history in Europe.

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Tips for facilitators

- Repeat the warning against weaponising the list. If participants start using it to label colleagues ("she is so perfectionist, that's white supremacy"), bring the conversation back to culture and systems.
- The term "white supremacy culture" can create strong reactions. Explain that it describes a culture and its norms, not individual white people or extremist groups. The "illness" language can help depersonalise it.
- For some participants, especially racialised participants, recognising these patterns can be painful. Leave space for emotions, and remind the group they can step out at any time.
- Okun notes that many of these characteristics reflect middle- and owning-class norms. Invite participants to also look at class, gender and other intersections.

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Thank You

Thank you for your courage to look inward, for the discomfort you're willing to sit with, for the questioning and unlearning you're already doing.

Every step towards fairer and more inclusive youth work counts!

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