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Embedding Anti-Racism in the Community Development and Youth Work Programme: the Focus on Positionality

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Embedding anti-racism in the Community Development and Youth Work programme: the focus on positionality

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ABSTRACT

Racism is and has been a persistent feature in Irish society (McVeigh, 1992). Higher education institutions (HEIs) and practice education settings are a microcosm of Irish society and therefore also sites where racism is experienced and/or witnessed by students. Research (Poole, 2019) found that some students on our Community Development and Youth Work (CDYW) programme witnessed racism on placement but did not feel equipped to respond. We were awarded IMPACT funding in partnership with the EDI Directorate in TU Dublin to embed anti-racism in CDYW teaching and learning in 2020/2021 and have continued this work to date.

For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on the importance of positionality for future community development and youth workers and its impact of their practice. First, we argue that developing racial literacy, embedding anti-racism at a programme level, and developing a broader awareness of dynamics of advantage and disadvantage at multiple levels - individual, institutional, structural, and historical – is a long-term endeavour. It requires intentional scaffolding across programme modules. Second, we argue that the success of this is significantly dependent on raising educator and student awareness-levels of their own positionalities and how they are shaped by 'how things work' at an institutional and structural level. Storytelling is one way of raising awareness of positionalities and their connections to wider power dynamics. We argue that to build racial literacy in a classroom context, students need to learn about each other's life stories and an orientation toward curiosity and a willingness to stay with discomfort must be fostered. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks must be introduced at multiple points with students enabled to build their understandings and the complexity of same incrementally over time. Finally, we argue that a

key component of developing racial literacy among White settled students and educators, is the need to locate and understand their racial/ethnic position within the dominant contemporary norms which have been shaped by the specific Irish historical complexities.

Key words: anti-racism, higher education, Ireland, community development, youth work, whiteness

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Introduction

The Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 highlighted 'the pandemic of racism' (Joseph & Michael, 2021, p. 6) as both a global phenomenon and a pervasive feature of Irish society (see for example Walsh, 2017; McGinnity et al, 2017). Inward migration has had a significant impact on Irish society, particularly over the last two decades. While diversity is a reality of Irish society in 2021, it is not a new phenomenon (Murray & Urban, 2011). However, the scale of immigration experienced since the mid-1990s, and the range of ethnic diversity is new with people from 200 different countries of origin living in Ireland (CSO, 2017). While Irish society has witnessed an increase in racism reported (see Michael, 2021), similarly, racism is not a new phenomenon, nor indeed can it be exclusively linked to the rise in inward migration of the recent decades. Rather, racism is and has been an enduring characteristic of Irish society (McVeigh, 1992). The experience of Travellers (Joyce, 2018) or the discriminatory treatment of mixed-race children in Mother and Baby Homes (CERD, 2019; Cox, 2021) are just two examples.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) and practice education settings are a microcosm of Irish society and therefore are sites where racism is experienced and/or witnessed by students. While there is ample research evidencing this in the UK (Bhopal, 2018; Akel, 2019; Boliver, 2018); with some notable exceptions, there is a dearth of Irish research on experiences of racism in the higher education sector (Darby, 2020; Poole, 2019). Regarding our own programme, Community Development and Youth Work (CDYW) in TU Dublin, Poole (2019) found that some students witnessed racism on placement but did not feel equipped to respond. Partly in response to these findings we were awarded TU Dublin IMPACT funding in partnership with the EDI Directorate in TU Dublin to embed anti-racism in CDYW teaching and learning in 2020/21 (Year 1)[8]. The overall aim of this project was 'to embed anti-racism in the CDYW programme with three core objectives:

1. Embed anti-racism in the CDYW programme modules

[8] Further information on the particular TU Dublin IMPACT funding stream received is available here.

2. Increase the racial literacy of staff and develop their reflective practice regarding anti-racism
3. Support students to identify racism and empower them to respond to it' (Ní Chonaill et al, 2022).

In 2021/22 (Year 2) we continued to progress these objectives and we also prioritised the production of an Anti-Racism Placement Resource.

In this paper, we identify key learnings from our work thus far. First, we argue that developing racial literacy, embedding anti-racism at a programme level, and developing a broader awareness of dynamics of advantage and disadvantage at multiple levels - individual, institutional, structural, and historical – is a long-term endeavour. It requires intentional scaffolding across programme modules. Second, we argue that the success of this is significantly dependent on raising educator and student awareness-levels of their own positionalities and how they are shaped by 'how things work' at an institutional and structural level. Our positionalities involve how differences in social positions and power influence our identities and what we have access to in society (Misawa, 2010; Tien, 2020). Storytelling is one way of raising awareness of positionalities and their connections to wider power dynamics. We argue that in order to build racial literacy in a classroom context, students need to learn about each other's life stories and an orientation toward curiosity and a willingness to stay with discomfort must be fostered. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks must be introduced at multiple points with students enabled to build their understandings and the complexity of same incrementally over time. Furthermore, we argue that a key component of developing racial literacy among White settled students and educators in particular, is the need to locate and understand their racial/ethnic position within the dominant contemporary norms which have been shaped by the specific Irish historical complexities.

Developing Racial Literacy

Developing racial literacy is an ongoing process, which involves both learning and unlearning. Historicising processes of racialisation (historical racism); identifying how they have shaped present day laws, regulations, and norms (structural racism); how these play out at an institutional level (institutional racism); and shape our individual positionalities, and everyday manifestations of racism such as microaggressions and hate speech (individual dimension), is a central component of the teaching and learning process (INAR, 2020; Yancy, 2019). Although processes of racialisation are derived from global histories of colonialism and capitalism in particular, they

also take distinct forms in each society. It is thus important to understand and make connections between local histories of domination and hierarchy, and global processes (Joseph, 2020b). Developing an understanding of how the reproduction, and experiences, of racism intersect with sexism, homophobia and ableism for example is also essential (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Lentin, 2020; Guinier, 2004). The identification, and unlearning, of racist beliefs, stereotypes and ideas is another key component of racial literacy. This commitment to identifying the connections between race and power, ongoing reflection, and consistent unlearning, is one of the more difficult aspects of developing racial literacy, particularly for those of us who are accustomed to being in the know and convinced of our good intentions and academic expertise.

Racisms operate by privileging whiteness and by engendering advantages and disadvantages related to it (Garner, 2017; Joseph, 2020a). However, all White people do not gain equal benefit from whiteness - as a set of cultural norms, assumptions, and practices - because other norms (such as those that position being settled as superior to being nomadic) are also operative in local contexts. For example, there is a long history of racism and discrimination experienced by the Irish Traveller community due to norms, laws and regulations established by the dominant settled majority, even though both communities are White and Irish. Other examples of groups regarded as 'not quite White' (Garner, 2017) would include Roma or Eastern European migrants in the Irish context. To properly address racisms, we need to 'see' how they operate to both disadvantage some people and, just as importantly, how they work to advantage other people. This involves not just learning 'who' we are (our positionalities) but rather also learning 'how things work' in various spaces (the connections between positionality and wider histories and structures). We need to reflect on whose voices are heard, which experiences are regarded as the norm, which experiences are rendered invisible or unimportant and why this is.

There is a need to focus on the historical contexts in which race and indeed racism are produced and reproduced (Lentin, 2020) to better comprehend the present but also to deconstruct some of the stock stories that prevail (Joseph, 2020b) such as the Irish cannot be racist because they were colonised. As noted above, racism in Ireland is not a new phenomenon but a complex issue. Ireland has been described as 'quintessentially "between two worlds" – both perpetrator and survivor of racism' (McVeigh & Lentin, 2002, p. 8). Ireland constituted Britain's first 'colony' and as such, the Irish were the first group to be racialised within British imperialism (Hall, 2000, p. 217). Historical examples of the racialisation of the Irish within British colonialism abound, such as the nineteenth century Cambridge historian Charles Kingsley's account of the Irish as white 'human chimpanzees' (Curtis, 1968, cited in Ní Shuinéar, 2002, p. 180). During the Irish experience of

emigration, ‘No blacks no Irish’ was the sign that symbolised discrimination faced at the hands of landlords in Britain. Notably, Irish emigrants to the United States were also initially racialised as ‘Blacks inside out’ (Roediger, 2002, p. 329). However, the Irish ‘became white’ in the United States (Ignatiev, 1995) by distancing themselves from Others, in particular from Black people (Garner, 2004, p. 112). ‘White’ is a dynamic as opposed to a static, fixed category and it was not always clear down through history on which side of the colour line the Irish were situated (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 111).

Like the historical complexity regarding racisms in the Irish context outlined above, is ‘Ireland’s ambiguous status as part-colonised and part-colonising’ (Mac Einrí, 2006, p. 260). Ireland was exposed to colonial ideologies of western superiority that justified the suppression of Black people and the Irish participated in the British army, the colonial police forces and administrations, and the missions (Fanning, 2002, p. 13). Garner observes that whiteness as a norm was omitted from definitions of Irishness following the foundation of the Free State in 1922 as if such a characteristic were ‘natural’ and ‘uncontested’ (2004, p. 248). In the context of increased migration in the twenty first century, Lentin & McVeigh (2006, p. 37) argue that Irishness is purposively being associated with whiteness. The stories of young Black people experiencing racism and exclusion growing up in Ireland heard during 2020 and 2021 alluded to the connections made between Irishness and whiteness (see Osikoya & Ndahiro, 2020).

To develop racial literacy there is a need for the creation and facilitation of ‘brave spaces’ (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 141) wherein participants understand that they will experience discomfort, and they are willing to engage in critical thinking and listening to understand. Building a brave space takes time. It is important that participants respect each other’s confidentiality and contribute to the space in the spirit of solidarity, support, and respect. The facilitator needs to be aware of the power dynamics both between them and the participants, and between participants themselves. In a classroom context, educators need to reflect on what contributes to existing power dynamics such as Eurocentric curricula, cultural norms, and local legislative provisions, institutional arrangements, and media narratives (Tatum, 2021; Brookfield & Hess, 2021).

Racism is learned (van Dijk, 2000) and higher education institutions offer an opportunity to host critical conversations amongst staff and within classrooms. The ongoing process of developing racial literacy involves building our knowledge of and capacity to challenge existing structures, and taking effective anti-racism action at the structural, institutional, and individual levels (Kendi, 2019; Sealey-Ruiz, 2021). As a call for action and social change this is very much in keeping with

the principles of CDYW where our programme aim is to produce graduates who are 'agents of change'. While we recognise the time it takes to incrementally develop racial literacy, the ultimate envisaged outcome is for students to take action regarding racism and racial inequities.

Storytelling

As Delgado (1989) notes, storytelling has both a community-building purpose – contributing to group cohesion, developing shared understandings and deeper ethics; and a destructive function – storytelling can demonstrate the cruelty of underlying dominant cultural assumptions, illustrate unjustified exclusion, and expose power dynamics.

Stories of the dominant group situate the ingroup in relation to outgroups and provide members with a shared reality in which their insulated position is often unmarked and unquestioned. They can have a community building purpose based on common culture and shared understandings, but they tend not to affect a destructive function in terms of subverting dominant norms. Storytelling by outgroups, called 'counterstories', enable the psychic self-preservation of outgroups and can function as a means through which they can lessen their subordination. As Delgado notes self-condemnation is a 'principal cause of the demoralization of marginalized groups' (1989, p. 2437). Storytelling by outgroups which transmit the facts of historic oppression, illustrating how peoples came to be oppressed and subjugated, can enable members to cease self-condemnation and promote group solidarity. In this way, it has a community building purpose. However, counterstories can also lessen the subordination of outgroups through their potential effects on the dominant group. As Delgado observes, most oppression 'does not seem like oppression to those perpetrating it' (1989, p. 2437). Power and privilege are justified by explanations that are favourable to the status quo. Counterstories can highlight how dominant beliefs upholding the status quo are ridiculous and/or cruel, illustrate the need to reallocate power, humanize the 'Other', destroy the complacency of the dominant group, and help build new collectivities based on richer and more nuanced understandings of 'how things are'. In this way counterstories can destroy but, very importantly, 'the destruction they produce must be voluntary, a type of willing death' (Delgado, 1989, p. 2438). Arguably these 'willing deaths' on the part of members of dominant groups must be built up to and undergone repeatedly.

One form of storytelling are life stories. Life stories can be a means of exploring identity, a way of understanding how our experiences are shaped by wider histories and structures, and they can provide the means to potentially reflect and learn from our experiences and those of others (Bowler

et. al., 2010; Fitzsimons, 2020). A Freirean (1972) pedagogical approach to life stories requires participants to engage in ways that are respectful, trusting and co-operative. In so doing, a space can be built where people tell their personal narratives and, over time, locate them, and the narratives of their interlocutors, within structures of subordination and domination, power and empowerment, developing a collective understanding of the need for social change (Ledwith, 2020).

Arguably, a degree of racial literacy on the part of all participants is necessary for counterstories to enact both their community building and destructive functions. In and of themselves, working or learning within a multicultural team and a positive orientation towards diversity on a personal level, does not necessarily lead to substantive intercultural engagements (Jackson, 2005; Fozdar & Volet, 2012). In practice, a positive orientation towards diversity without at least a degree of racial literacy can translate to only locating 'culture' as an attribute of minoritized groups i.e., failing to see the dominant culture as particular and not a universal unmarked norm. It can also be accompanied by an inability or unwillingness to 'see' or talk about how processes of racialisation (among other processes of discrimination) manifest in interactions (Fozdar & Volet, 2012). Underlying this 'color blindness' (Bonna Silva, 2014) is the desire or belief that, if we don't 'see' race or ethnicity, then racism, discrimination and harm will not or cannot occur. Yet, as discussed above, developing racial literacy involves 'seeing' race or ethnicity, understanding its histories, and addressing its ongoing impact. In the classroom context students who variously align with dominant identities must be able to locate themselves in a 'brave space', and be able to repeatedly identify, and willingly forsake, their underlying discriminatory assumptions (Delgado, 1989).

During our workshops, and reflecting on project feedback, we realised that to properly understand each of the dimensions of racism (historical, structural, institutional, and individual) we firstly need an understanding of our own positionality and secondly the tools to locate our positionalities in wider histories and structures. Storytelling is one the tools which can assist in this. White settled students and educators, namely, need to see dominant norms as historically and culturally particular, locate culture as an attribute of all of us, and understand how processes of racialisation manifest in everyday interactions.

Community Development and Youth Work

Community development and youth work in Ireland take place in increasingly diverse cultural contexts. This requires practitioners to have the skills, knowledge, and value base not only to work from an intercultural perspective (NYCI, 2018), but also to recognise the reality of racism, the impact of racism on both the individuals and the communities that they work with and feel empowered to respond to it. Anti-racism is very much in keeping with the values of upholding human rights, equality and anti-discrimination which are central to community development and youth work practice education and training (AIEB, 2016; NSETS, 2013).

Although a full dataset is not available, the CDYW student cohort in TU Dublin is much more diverse than the programme staff cohort which is currently all 'White Irish' or 'White Other'[9]. The CDYW programme is delivered on the Blanchardstown campus in Dublin 15. Blanchardstown is in the local government area of Fingal, which has the second highest number of migrant residents in the country. 37% of the population in Dublin 15 were recorded as non 'White Irish' in the 2016 census (CSO, 2016). While the student population on campus reflects the diversity of the local area, relevant data is only available across the student cohort in terms of nationality. Notwithstanding the incomplete dataset on student profiles in terms of ethnicity available up until now across Irish higher education institutions (RIA, 2020; Athena Swan Intersectionality WG, 2020; Ní Chonaill, 2021), the CDYW classrooms on the Blanchardstown campus remain predominantly white.

Methods

We adopted an action research methodology to evaluate the actions of the CDYW anti-racism project. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the TU Dublin Blanchardstown campus. All data collection was conducted according to standard ethical protocols. A mixed method approach was selected, and data was collected using a combination of focus groups, surveys (evaluating pre-placement anti-racism workshops) and reflections (from lecturers and students in Year 2, 3 and 4) in the academic years 2020/21 and 2021/2022. An iterative plan of action has been adopted over the last two years with a constant cycle of reflection, planning, action, observation, and reflection to transform practice (Somekh 2005).

[9] These categories are based on the Central Statistics Office (CSO) 2022 census categories.

Embedding Anti-Racism in the CDYW Programme

In Year 1 of this project (2020/21) we ran two staff workshops on anti-racism; mapped module content and lecturers committed to introducing at least one element focused on anti-racism in their modules. Pre-placement workshops were revised so that they better equipped Year 2 and 3 students with the skills to identify and constructively respond to racist incidents in placement settings. We also co-developed and ran three events with students (a conference, global class, and virtual learning exchange); and Year 3 students collectively developed an Anti-Racism Charter.

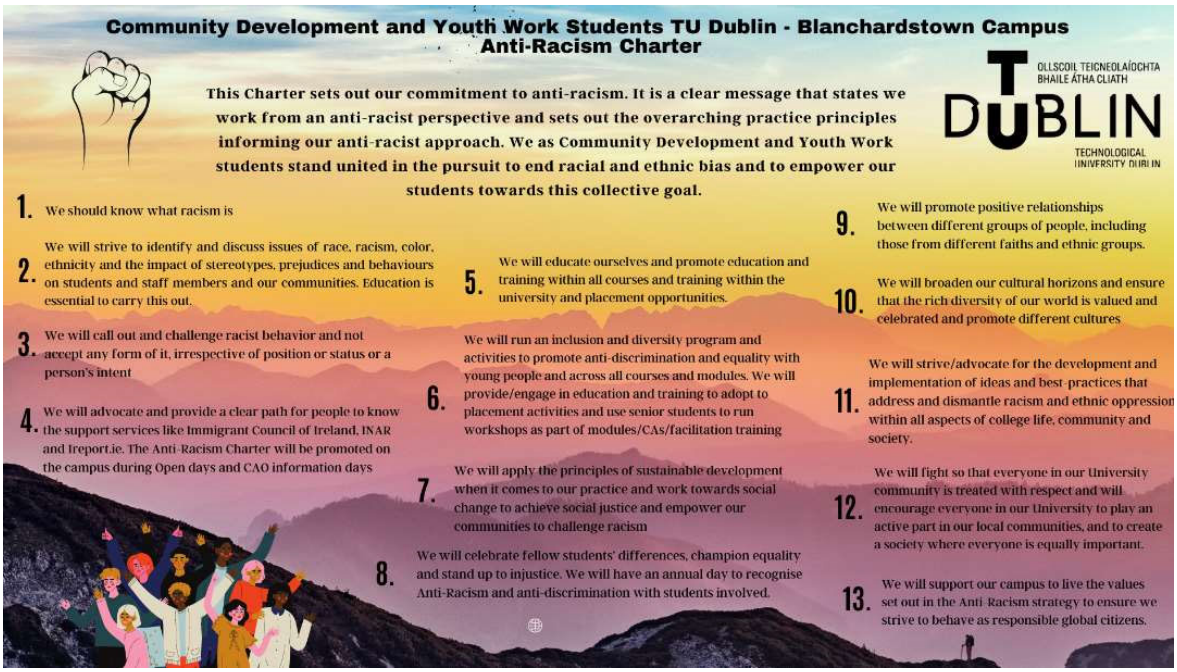

Figure 1. Anti-Racism Charter developed by Year 3 CDYW students in 2021

The CDYW programme team partnered with the EDI Directorate throughout the project, and we included the importance of advancing structural and institutional change throughout. Students in Year 3 and 4 of the programme developed and submitted responses to policy consultations on a national level (in terms of ending the system of international protection) and at institutional level (for the development of the TU Dublin Draft Action Plan for an Intercultural University with a focus on Race Equity).

As part of the pre-placement workshops Léargas[10] delivered 'Amongst Others', a workshop designed to develop students' intercultural awareness and competencies. The Irish Network against Racism (INAR) delivered 'Understanding and Responding to Racism in College' a workshop designed to increase student understanding of forms of racism in Ireland, their prevalence and how to constructively respond to racism(s). Students reported greater understanding of what racism is and how to address it after the pre-placement workshops (Ní Chonaill et al, 2021).

> *I have had an idea of what racism was before I started doing this workshop, but I did not really know the reason 'why' people are being racist towards ethnic groups and minority. It was a good opportunity to do this kind of workshops as it provides ideas and understanding of their backgrounds and the story behind it.* (Year 2, female student)

We conducted a focus group with Year 4 students to inform and evaluate our 2020/21 actions. Nine Year 4 students participated in a virtual focus group on March 2nd, 2021, via MS Teams. Student feedback identified a need for:

- Embedding of key concepts and theoretical frameworks from Year 1 through to Year 4 with knowledge and understanding built up incrementally throughout the programme.
- Equipping students with the language to discuss racism in constructive ways from Year 1 onward.
- Conscious acknowledgement that the classroom is not a 'safe space' given varying levels of power and privilege, and conscious building of 'brave spaces' from Year 1.
- Better supports for students who experience or witness racism on placement.
- Pairing of students from different cultural backgrounds.
- Facilitating anonymous feedback from students on programme structure and content.
- The need for all programmes across TU Dublin to develop student racial literacy.

Participants identified the need to support students who experience racism on placement, letting students know what to do if an issue arises, who to contact and what supports are there. P6 agreed speaking from personal experience:

[10] Léargas manage international and national exchange programmes in education, youth and community work, and vocational education and training. For more information see www.leargas.ie.

.. And in the second year of my placement, like, I wouldn't feel so helpless, because I had an incident in my second-year placement of someone attacking, attacking me like verbally about my […]. And, you know, I just, I was a bit shocked. I didn't know how to react and that would have been nice, and I don't know I said to the teacher whenever was my meeting. But that's it like, that was the only, only thing I could do, or I knew I could do. (P6, Year 4)

This feedback from Year 4 students was very much in line with existing research (Poole, 2019) and we decided on the development of an Anti-Racism Placement resource as a key priority for 2021/22 to build on the anti-racism work.

Lecturing staff during their workshops identified the question of language as a challenge and it also emerged as a key concern for participants in the focus group. As participant 7 outlined

"if we knew exactly what we can say and what's appropriate … if you do have that knowledge and language behind you, you would of course you'd feel more comfortable I think approaching the issue if it did come up" (P7, Year 4)

Participant 1 highlighted the need to create an 'honest space':

"we all keep talking about an honest conversation… But it's just creating that honest space that people actually feel safe to share. Where in a lot of cases like this, like people don't feel safe enough to share what they think or what they've been brought up to believe or whatever it might be. I don't know how you're going to do that though" (P1).

Given how feedback from students has emphasised the need for language and supports from Year 1 onwards, our additional focus for 2022/23 will be on intentional scaffolding across the programme which facilitates 'repeated, robust and deep engagement with the concepts, vocabulary, skills and dispositions that will promote their racial literacy' (Rolón-Dow et al, 2020, p. 15). The space created in individual modules, workshops and programme level webinars has presented some opportunities to have critical conversations, but this requires far more coherent and systematic development.

Development of the Anti-Racism Placement Resource

Our focus in Year 2 of the project (2021/22) has been on the development of the Community Development and Youth Work Anti-Racism Placement Resource funded by the TU Dublin EDI

Directorate. The resource was developed in consultation with external stakeholders (the Irish Network against Racism and the Immigrant Council of Ireland), placement partners, and with CDYW students.

Section 1 of the resource explains key terms and concepts related to race, racialisation, and racisms, including the different levels at which racism operates, the different forms it takes and its impact. Section 2 focuses on developing students' capacity to challenge racism on an individual, institutional, and structural level and includes resources, activities and case studies to discuss responses to lived experiences of racism in practice settings. The final section outlines what CDYW students can do if they experience or witness racism on placement, including the process to follow and the supports available. The focus of this resource is on the practice placement as the site where students apply their theoretical learning to context specific situations.

Three pre-placement workshops for students in Year 2 and three for students in Year 3 were designed to accompany this resource. The three Year 2 workshops, each based on a particular section of the resource, were piloted by programme staff in January 2022. Student participants provided feedback via surveys and a group feedback session on which the staff involved then reflected. Year 4 students also reviewed and provided feedback on the resource content as part of their module on Combatting Racism. A workshop on supporting students experiencing racism and discrimination was delivered to placement and academic supervisors in January 2022, which included input from Valeria Aquino of the Immigrant Council of Ireland on their approach and an outline of the resource developed, particularly Section 3. A follow-on focus group session with placement partners has been organised for September 2022 to share and reflect on anti-racism learning to date.

Student feedback gathered included:

- The risk of information overload in the workshops as the content is emotive and complex.
- Students felt that more time was needed in the workshops to discuss the issues. Staff also felt that condensing a huge amount of learning in such a short space of time was problematic and more time was needed for discussions and reflections.
- Students identified the need for a debrief and check in not just at the end of the workshops but a follow up after particularly how emotive and personal the content is for students of colour/minoritized backgrounds.

- Students also highlighted the need for staff training to support students experiencing racism on placement (Year 4) and to facilitate anti-racism discussions and model best practice (Year 3).
- Mirroring the feedback from the Year 4 2020/21 focus group, Year 4 (2021/22) students felt anti-racism should feature 'earlier in the course' and suggested modules from Year 1 semester 1 (e.g., Introduction to Culture) where there could '*bring in more of a focus … right from the start*'.
- Year 4 students made the point that we '*want students to be confident to identify racism and call it out'* but recognised that it '*takes time to build this'*; students, including those from minoritized backgrounds, need to '*grow strength and confidence'* which inevitably takes time.
- The need to centre voices and experiences of people from minoritized backgrounds in the resource and in the pre-placement, workshops was identified. Some students questioned the suitability of the all White lecturing team to deliver anti-racism workshops.

The Path to Transformative Teaching, Learning and Practice

Although we began the project with the conscious intention to equip ourselves (the project team), the wider programme team (CDYW) and students with a good understanding of how both dynamics of advantage and disadvantage operate and the ability to situate ourselves within those dynamics, we found that, in practice, participants focused primarily on the individual level, speaking about their fear of making mistakes and learning what '*we can say and what is appropriate*' for example. In their development of the Anti-Racism Charter (2021) the Year 3 students were encouraged to address the various dimensions of racism covered in the INAR workshop. However, the 13 principles remain largely focused on the individual dimension e.g., calling out racist incidents; individual learning of what racism is; appreciation of cultural diversity; promotion of human rights and respect for all, with a few references to broader dynamics. Students did develop relatively good understandings of the historical, structural and institutional dimensions of racism, but they did not necessarily translate these into substantive recognition of, and reflection on, their own positionalities, nor had we created the necessary learning and reflective spaces for this to happen. As participant 1 in the Year 4 (2020/21) focus group noted, it is difficult to create the conditions wherein people are able to share what they honestly think or believe. Although they framed it in terms of people feeling '*safe enough to share*' the key pre-condition is arguably

not safety as this impossible to provide, but rather a nuanced understanding of how individual positionalities connect to wider histories and structures.

Even within our own project team for example, when we first developed the activity in the Anti-Racism Placement resource (2021/22) which prompted students to reflect on how anti-Traveller racism manifests, our initial list of questions did not prompt students to reflect on their positionality as settled people, if applicable. This is indicative of how we ourselves are unused to self-identifying as settled people and reflecting on the implications of this, even though we had all become far more used to explicitly self-identifying as White people during Year 1 of the project.

That said the work during our first two years has moved us forward. For example, Year 1 students in one module (2021/22) were shown some pictures of young people in a socially disadvantaged part of Dublin and they were asked to associate words with the images of young people using a word cloud on Vevox. Upon completion of the exercise, they all saw that the most offensive K-word, used in relation to Travellers, came straight up as the biggest word in the word cloud. The lecturer immediately unshared the screen saying that they wanted to remind students they were in a professional space, that youth work is an anti-oppressive practice and that some language included was unacceptable. The lecturer went home and reflected on what they were going to do.

> *So I worked it into my tutorials which were the next day and I worked in ..ahm a discussion I suppose on the language I had seen but I started each tutorial by saying you know I want to say from the outset that I was personally offended by the language I saw in the word cloud ..ahm and I want to ask if anybody else was offended. So that opened a lot of conversations up with students. In fairness most of them said they were offended, a lot of them could see how language could exclude ...ahm especially seeing as a Traveller is actually on in the class, there is a Traveller young man in the class ehm.. and so, it did actually open up a lot of conversation so I felt from the work I'd done I could hold the conversation a little bit better than if I hadn't have done I suppose some of that ground work. So I suppose that's the unintentional impact ...ahm and so why I think it's valuable to have done that little bit of work* [reference to how the lecturer had embedded anti-racism in a Year 1 module in 2020/2021] *..ah for when it comes up in other ways and other spheres.*

The lecturer here can be seen to be building students' racial literacy by meeting them where they are and directly addressing how processes of racialisation manifested in a classroom activity. After reflecting on their own initial response to the incident (unsharing the screen and declaring the language unacceptable) the lecturer used their tutorials to consciously open up a conversation. They clearly stated how they themselves felt and asked students a question – was I the only one who was offended? This opened up a conversation with the students and enabled them to connect

their own views and the positionality of Travellers in Irish society to wider norms, histories and structures. Describing how they were '*fearful of the topic'* in 2020/21 prior to explicitly introducing anti-racism as a topic in the Irish Culture and Society module, the lecture commented on the '*ripple effect in their confidence dealing with the issue'* and facilitating a conversation in the tutorial on how language is dehumanising and excludes. The use of language was explicitly linked to the values and practice of youth work and shared as an example of how social exclusion is not just an abstract concept but operates on a day-to-day level with language as something that can push somebody out.

Race and ethnicity are often viewed in relation to the Other (Knowles & Lander, 2011, p. 59) and it is commonplace for White students and educators to think that race and racism do not impact them (Rolón-Dow et al 2020, p. 243) and that being White (or settled) does not constitute a racial or ethnic identity (Brown McNair et al 2020, p. 39). When asked to describe themselves students do not usually include descriptors that identify them as members of the dominant or advantaged social group e.g., male, White, and/or nondisabled (Tatum, 2021, Rolón-Dow et al, 2020). It is not just a question of identifying and understanding our positionalities as evolving and constructed in relation to both dominant and marginalised identities though. A key barrier to effective anti-racism work is the inability to connect individual positionalities to the histories of, and power attached to, dominant identities or social groups (Brookfield & Hess, 2021). Based on our 2020/21 and our 2021/22 experiences, one of our key lessons learned was the need to increase the racial literacy of educators (and students) and develop their reflective practice on anti-racism with a particular emphasis on understanding how whiteness functions (Ní Chonaill et al, 2022)[11].

At present we are focused on the first two steps – developing understandings of individual positionality (individual level) and connecting positionalities to the power attached to systemically advantaged social groups, and the impact of being a member of or aligned with a systemically disadvantaged social group (historical, structural and institutional levels). The Anti-Placement Resource activities consistently require students to reflect on their own positionalities across both dominant and marginalised identities and to connect those to wider dynamics of advantage and disadvantage. We are also developing a more structured approach to introducing key activities, concepts, and theoretical frameworks, which incrementally build student knowledge and confidence on how to identify and constructively address racism throughout the programme. Part

[11] Arguably we then also need to develop deeper understandings of how these norm/Other binaries were created, are sustained, and how we can dismantle those binaries, yet this is beyond the scope of this project at present (Dabiri, 2020).

of this is supporting first year students to present their life-story or personal biography as an initial means of community building and introduction to 'seeing' dominant and marginalised identities.

Adapting Life-Stories

As part of the CDYW programme development it was agreed to design an intensive induction week for the first-year students on a pilot basis during the 2018-2019 academic year. This continued into the 2019-2020 academic year. The aim of this week was twofold. Firstly, to provide an overview of community development and youth work to the students through interactive workshops, fieldwork visits and group discussion. Secondly, to foster a sense of identity, solidarity and support within the group through icebreakers and getting to know you sessions. The week concluded with each student presenting their own 'Life Story' to the group.

Table 1: Steps to Prepare Students to Present Their Life-Stories

Action	Purpose	Activities
Introduction to Programme	Orientation Introduction to CDYW Introduction to Professional Values	Interactive Workshops Visits to CD and YW organisations
Developing a Group Identity	Develop a Sense of Group Solidarity Group work skills and processes	Ice breakers Getting to know you activities Developing group contracts
Sharing Personal Narratives through Life Stories	Beginning the process of exploring our own positionality and power Reflect on how we hear and interpret the stories of others	Students present their life story / personal narrative to their class

From 2018 onward students were introduced to this approach at the beginning of the CDYW induction week. It was explained to students how this approach aligns with the values of the CDYW programme and aimed to provide opportunities for year one students to learn about the diversity of experience within their class group. For the purposes of this exercise, we invited students to enter into the principles of a 'brave space' (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 141) whereby in the telling of their story students may feel vulnerable and visible. We also set out ground rules for participants

regarding confidentiality, only sharing as much as they felt comfortable with and coming to the exercise in the spirit of solidarity, support, and respect. We communicated that each story is unique, and students were invited to be creative in how they told their story highlighting significant events, people, and chronology.

The pilot cohorts of students in 2018 and again in 2019 evaluated their experiences of welcome week. The feedback was extremely positive with students stating:

> *'I learned a lot about my peers and feel connected to some of them as they've experienced things that I have.'*
>
> *'I enjoyed getting to know my classmates. I feel like as a group we are all a lot closer now.'*
>
> *'Really enjoyed it, it pushed us to share and explore time, emotion, history and all was in a positive way.'*

Based on the evaluation of the two pilot initiatives and feedback from staff, this 'welcome week' has been embedded formally within a first-year module titled Personal and Professional Communication in CDYW. This change took place in the 2020/2021 academic year.

The first outcome of the telling life stories activity in week 1 is to acknowledge and welcome the diversity of voices and experiences within the class group, which illustrates the multidimensional and intersectional nature of identity (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hall, 2000). Echoing Ledwith's view that 'stories are at the heart of social change' (2020, p. 98) we maintain that the telling of stories can begin the process of dialogue. Within a Freirean pedagogical approach (Freire, 1972) we create a space for people to build trust, tell and hear their personal narratives in a respectful and co-operative fashion and to locate them within structures of subordination and domination, power and empowerment. Stevenson (2014) acknowledges the therapeutic role of racial storytelling and indeed the act of telling a story in itself can be an empowering experience, particularly for those voices seldom heard (Joseph, 2020b). Another goal of telling life stories is to foster a sense of solidarity and cohesion within the class group whereby the 'deeply personal' can be built on in due course to become 'profoundly political' (Ledwith, 2020, p. 99) as students make connections first of all and then, over time, develop competencies to take action to bring about social change. However, the extent to which the telling of life stories has been used as a preparatory exercise, in advance of work on positionality and power throughout the whole programme, has been limited to date. We have now decided to use the life stories in week 1 as the starting point for further work on positionality and power. The only objective for the initial life stories is that they contain, to the

degree with which the students are comfortable, key moments and events which have shaped their personal and social identities.

Telling their life stories paves the way for then starting to analyse and reflect on where students sit in terms of the wheel of power and privilege i.e., near the centre of power/privilege or closer to the edges (more marginalised) in terms of the various facets of their social identities (see also the Social Identity Wheel exercise (American Associate of University Women, nd). As a follow-on activity in the Personal and Professional Communication module, students can collectively identity the dominant social identities on the outer circle. They then individually fill in the inner circle in terms of their own positionality with regard to 'race', ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, social class, gender, ability and reflect on where they are members of groups that are 'systematically advantaged' or dominant and often at the same time may belong to a group that is marginalized or subordinated. This constitutes a start in terms of analysis around associated power and privilege which impacts professional practice but also in terms of the development of racial literacy centers race in the context of an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989) which acknowledges the multidimensional nature of identities and how racism intersects with other systems of oppression (Guinier, 2004; Lentin, 2020).

Having presented their life stories in week 1 Year 1 and filled in a wheel of power subsequently in Year 1 modules, students will then build on these incrementally throughout the programme, gradually connecting their own stories and those of their peers to wider histories and structures such that they learn 'why' dominant social identities are dominant and how to constructively address the impact of this in their professional practice. In this way we aim to build their capacity to listen to counterstories, work to understand them and willingly endure the 'destructions' (Delgado, 1989) they may produce including building a sense of solidarity based on a more nuanced understanding of 'how things are'. The Anti-Racism Placement resource activities also prompt students to reflect on their own positionalities across both dominant and marginalised identities and to connect those to wider histories and structures. Based on our learning from this year's pilot, we have moved some of the content and activities to other modules, focusing primarily on remapping the first-year modules to develop the anti-racism thread coherently and incrementally throughout so that students can 'develop a deeper understanding and discourse that can propel them to action' (Sealey-Ruiz, 2021), which is our ultimate aim.

Conclusion

During the first two years of this project, we have worked to equip ourselves and students with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks necessary for understanding what racism is, how it manifests and how it connects and intersects with wider dynamics of advantage and disadvantage. However, we have realised that without a clear and increasingly complexified understanding of their own positionalities and that of others, students find it difficult to link their own views with wider histories and structures, and students from dominant groups are unlikely to self-identify with advantaged social groups e.g., male, White, and/or nondisabled. If they do self-identify as White or settled for example, they tend to remain at the individual level and focus on the guilt a sense of individual privilege can prompt. However, remaining focused on guilt is counterproductive to initiating and working for the transformation of norms, systems and structures.

Developing racial literacy involves both learning about what racism is – its historical, structural, institutional and individual dimensions – and unlearning racist beliefs, stereotypes and ideas. The unlearning and discomfort which are part of that process, is particularly difficult. We argue that this process does not require a sense of safety for this is impossible to provide. Rather it involves building brave spaces. We need to build the conditions across the programme whereby students are open to undergoing the 'destructions' counterstories may produce. For storytelling to have a transformative effect i.e. to build collectivities based on richer and more nuanced understandings of 'how things are' (community building), and to attack complacency, highlighting the ridiculous and/or cruel nature of the status quo (destructive function) members of the dominant group must in some senses 'agree' to 'listen to understand' – the destruction produced 'must be voluntary' (Delgado, 1989, p. 2438). A core task of educators in our view is to build spaces within which students are willing to endure discomfort, understand the complexity of our local and global histories and structures, not get stuck at the individual level with feelings of guilt or helplessness and instead be motivated to do the work necessary for social transformation. Building students' understanding of their own positionality and that of others, and how they link to wider histories and structures takes time and patience, it requires intentional scaffolding and constant learning and unlearning on the part of educators themselves.

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