

# **Cognitive justice and decolonising the curriculum: Whose knowledge counts and why?**

IVAC Online Festival  
University of Gottingen  
30 August, 2021

Professor Emerita Betty Leask  
La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia

[Leaskb@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:Leaskb@latrobe.edu.au)



@BettyLeask

[www.ioc.global](http://www.ioc.global)

# Overview

1. The context
2. Cognitive justice, decolonization of the curriculum and the disciplines
3. Implications for Internationalisation of the Curriculum

# Poll 1

1. How familiar are you with the terms cognitive justice and/or decolonization?

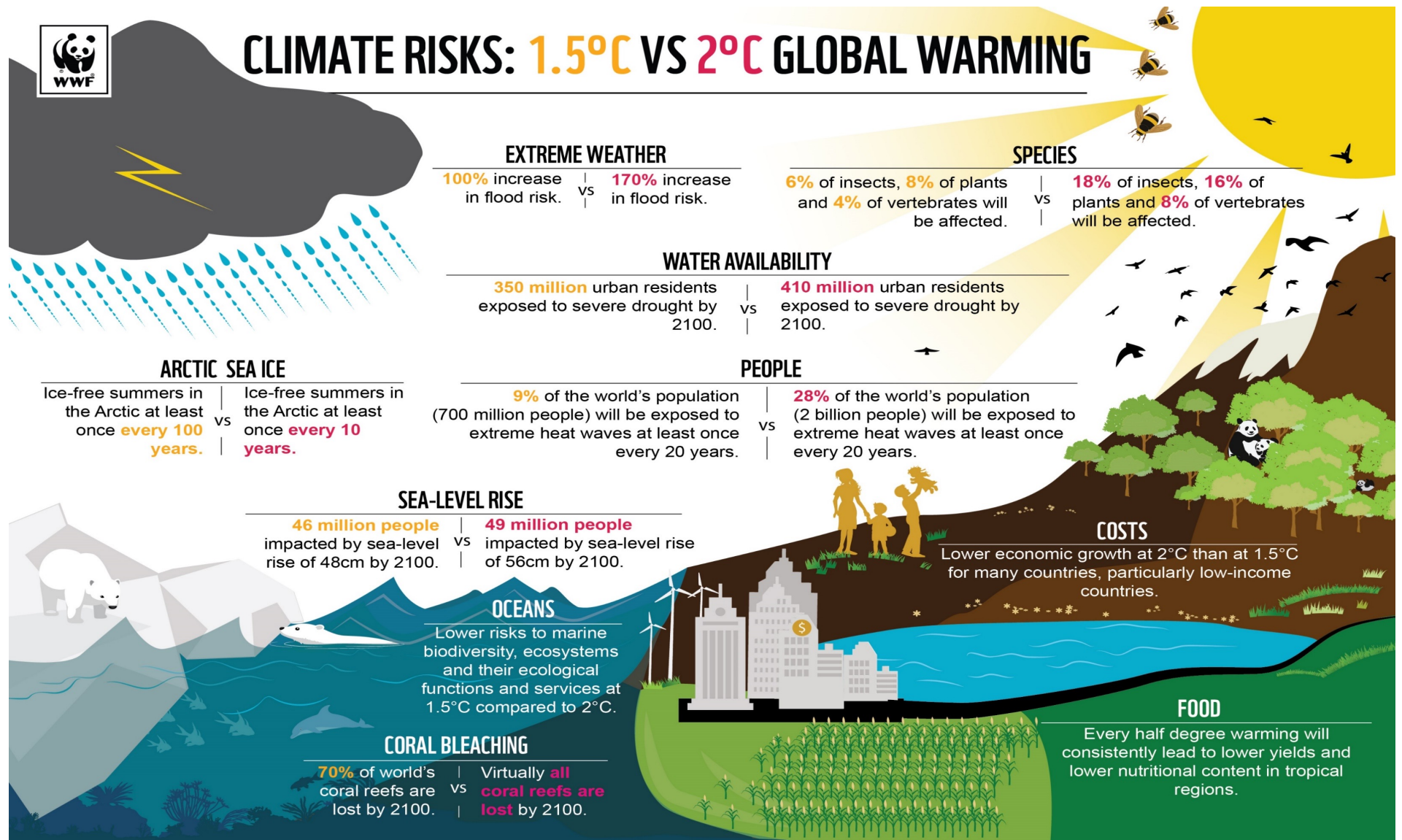
Not at all.....a little .... quite familiar .....very familiar

# The context

# Increased emphasis on social responsibility of universities – locally and globally

- Universities have a role to play in ensuring national prosperity **and a broader responsibility to contribute to the creation of dynamic and sustainable global communities, no less caring for human values than the pursuit of material wealth** (Escrigas, Sanchez, Hall and Tando 2014)
- *The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, **and to make a meaningful contribution to society.***” (De Wit et al., 2015)

Our world is shaped by complex and fragile local and global relationships between people and their physical and cultural environments and faces a number of *wicked problems*



# Internationalisation of the Curriculum

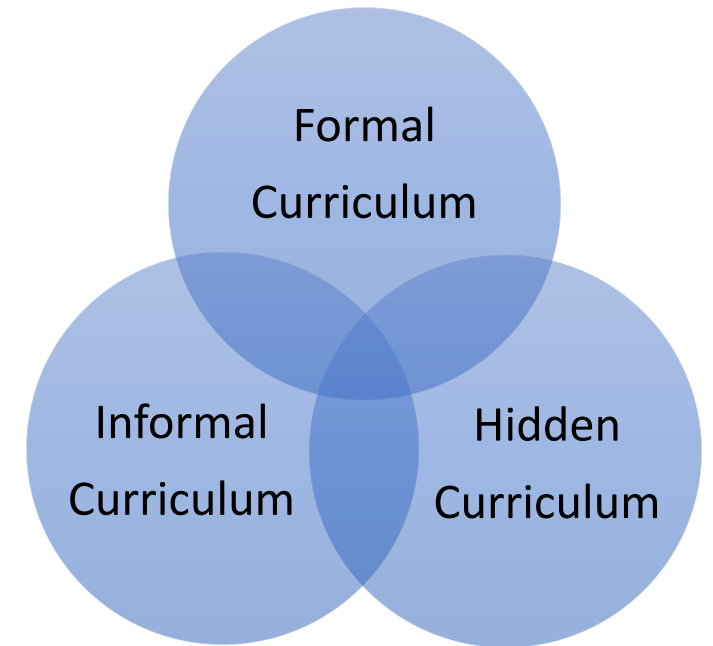
Internationalisation of the curriculum is the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the preparation, delivery and outcomes of a program of study (Leask 2009)

The incorporation of international, intercultural **and/or global dimensions** into the **content** of the curriculum as well as the **learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services** of **a program of study** (Leask 2015)

Across three domains of curriculum – ‘knowing, doing and being’

# Curriculum?

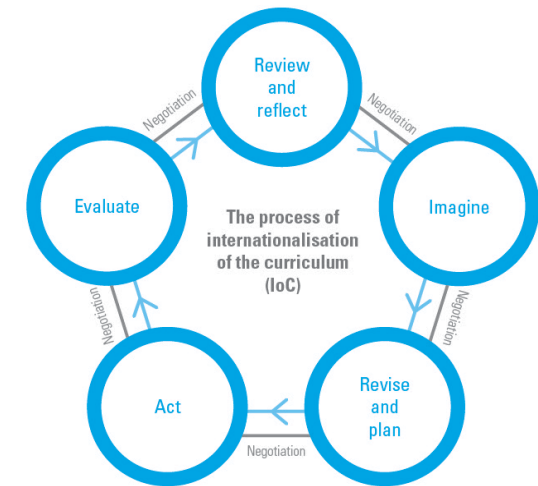
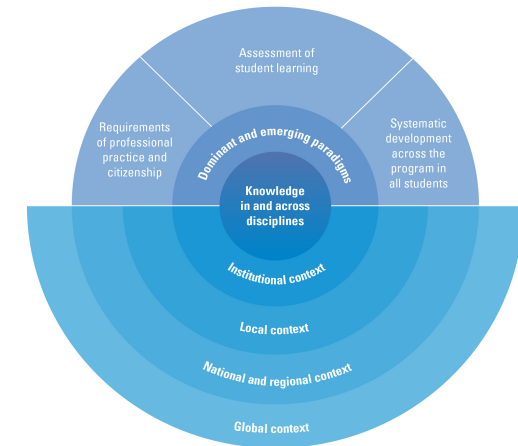
- Inclusive of:
  - stated purpose of learning
  - content, teaching and learning processes and what is assessed
  - students' learning experiences in and beyond the classroom (on campus and in the community through activities organized by the university)
- ***A space to explore solutions to existing and emerging issues and create new pathways for human development and wellbeing.***



# Internationalisation of the Curriculum -an emerging paradigm

- Theory and practice - concept and process
- **Content + learning objectives** – course and program design + teaching, learning, assessment,
- **Intercultural, international and global**
- Important for *all* students – how to integrate mobility into the curriculum at home?
- Active, experiential learning online, in class, in community and, for some, abroad
- IoC as professional learning for academics, teachers and staff
- **Cognitive justice an important component**

A conceptual framework of internationalisation of the curriculum



The role of the facilitator in the process of IoC is critical to ensuring the success of the process. One of the most important skills is that of negotiation.

# Responsible Global Citizenship as an outcome of an internationalised curriculum

Facilitated by a focus on developing students' :

- critical understanding of the world,
- social consciousness and sense of belonging to a global community.

*“We **urgently** need to develop **a more inclusive understanding of knowledge in universities** in order to build our capacity to find solutions to complex problems in local and global contexts” (de Wit & Leask, 2017, p. 228)*

# Cognitive justice, decolonization of the curriculum and the disciplines

Cognitive justice:

*the right of  
different  
knowledges to  
coexist so long as  
they sustain the  
life, livelihoods, and  
life chances of  
people*

Recognises different ways of knowing and understanding co-exist in the world each intimately connected to the cultures, practices and beliefs of groups of people.

But:

- Higher education privileges some knowledges over others due in part to modern development theory which sees development over time as linear and absolute.
- Hence that which is tribal, Indigenous, traditional is forced towards obsolescence.
- Up to now Western higher education has determined how ancient cultures are discussed and 'presented'

# Decolonization of the curriculum

- Connected with the idea of cognitive justice.
- A critical view of traditional ways of knowing and learning (Stein, 2019).
- Requires denaturalizing traditional frameworks of higher education to pluralize possible higher education futures.
- Allows us to nurture the “possibility of possibilities” (Barnett, 2014)

# The disciplines and knowledge in higher education

- The disciplines are the 'life-blood of higher education' (Becher 1994, 151).
- As exclusive global communities, they determine whose knowledge counts in the world.
- Disciplinarity exerts enormous power and influence over the organization and production of knowledge (Klein 1993).
- As *academic tribes the disciplines* each have a distinctive culture, their own set of intellectual values and their own patch of cognitive territory, their own way of seeing the world, understanding the world, shaping the world and coping with the world (Becher 1994)
- Indigenous peoples agree that indigenous knowledge cannot be defined from a Western orientation. (Augustine 2018)

# The search for Cognitive Justice

## From tolerance and liberalism to plurality

*Shiv Visvanathan, OP Jindal Global University, India*

<https://www.acu.ac.uk/the-acu-review/the-search-for-cognitive-justice/>

A plurality in which all societies, not just the post-industrial, are recognised as knowledge societies.

- Some have suggested the idea of a knowledge *panchayat*: a knowledge village, where all citizens meet to debate the future of ideas, and the equal exchange of knowledge and ideas becomes fundamental to decision-making.
- The idea of cognitive justice is an invitation to that thought experiment.

# Rethinking & Reimagining the Curriculum through Decolonization

- Since the challenges of modern higher education stem from the naturalized dominant systems and culture, solutions that come from within “will only address the symptoms...and not the root” (Stein, 2018)
- To understand the idea of cognitive justice and the process of decolonizing the curriculum, it is necessary to first understand our present conditions.
- There is *no single approach* to decolonization and a more strategic approach is to pluralize potential futures for higher education moving forward (Stein, 2020)

# Poll 2

- To what extent do you think that ***people in your institution*** are aware of and/or committed to issues related to cognitive justice and decolonization of the curriculum

Not at all.....a little .... quite a lot .....a great deal

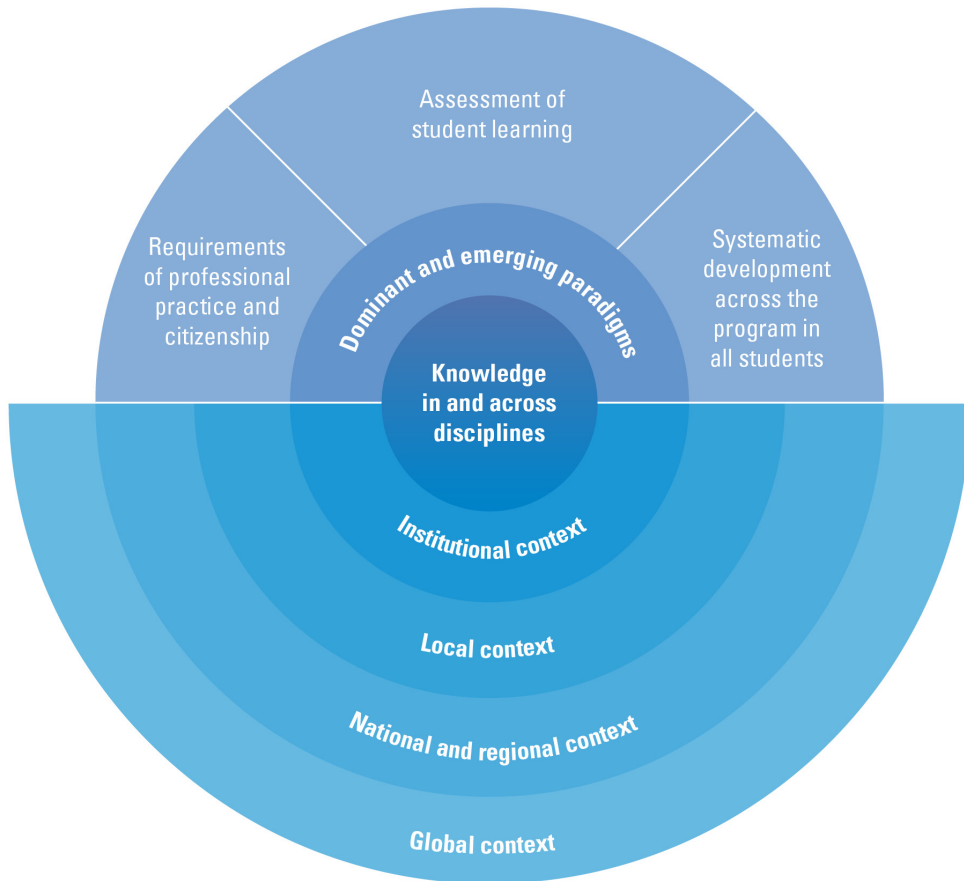
# Implications for Internationalisation of the Curriculum

For example, though Global Citizenship Education (Stein 2018, 2021)

# Unanswered questions

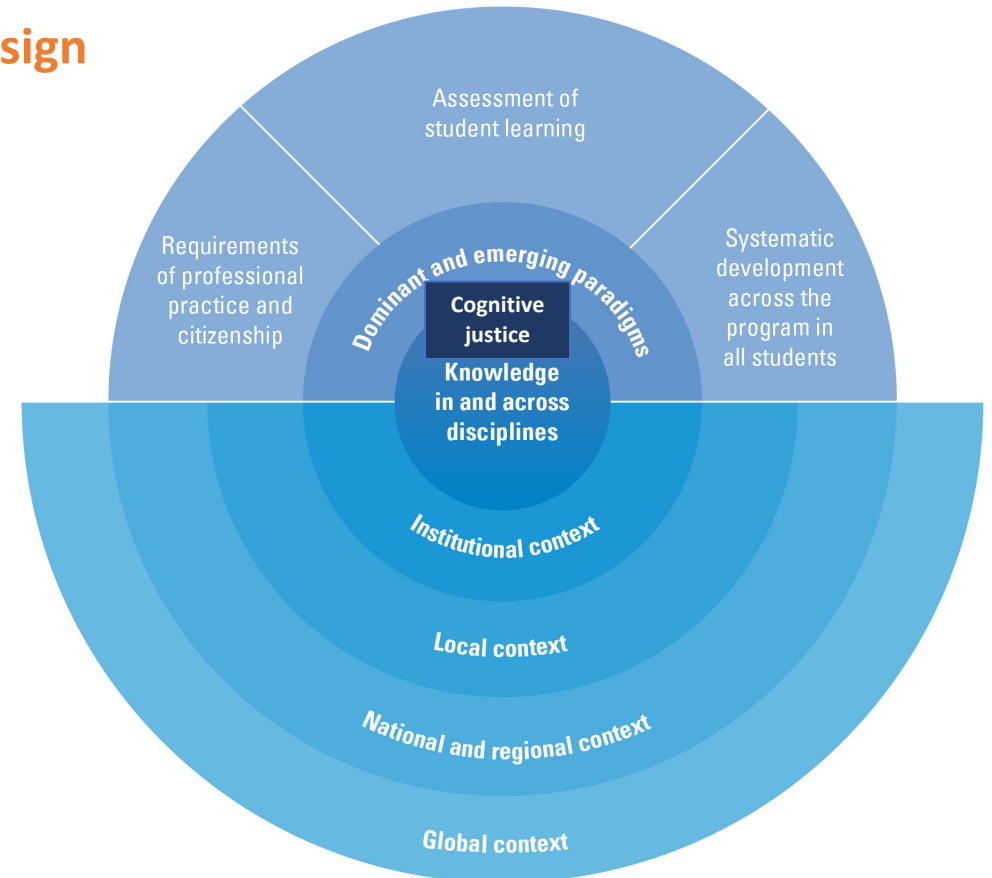
- How does cognitive justice relate to the concept of internationalization of the curriculum?
- How does cognitive justice relate to the process of internationalization of the curriculum?
- Can we advance cognitive justice in situations where there is social injustice?
- Can we advance social justice by applying the ideas of cognitive justice?

## A conceptual framework of internationalisation of the curriculum



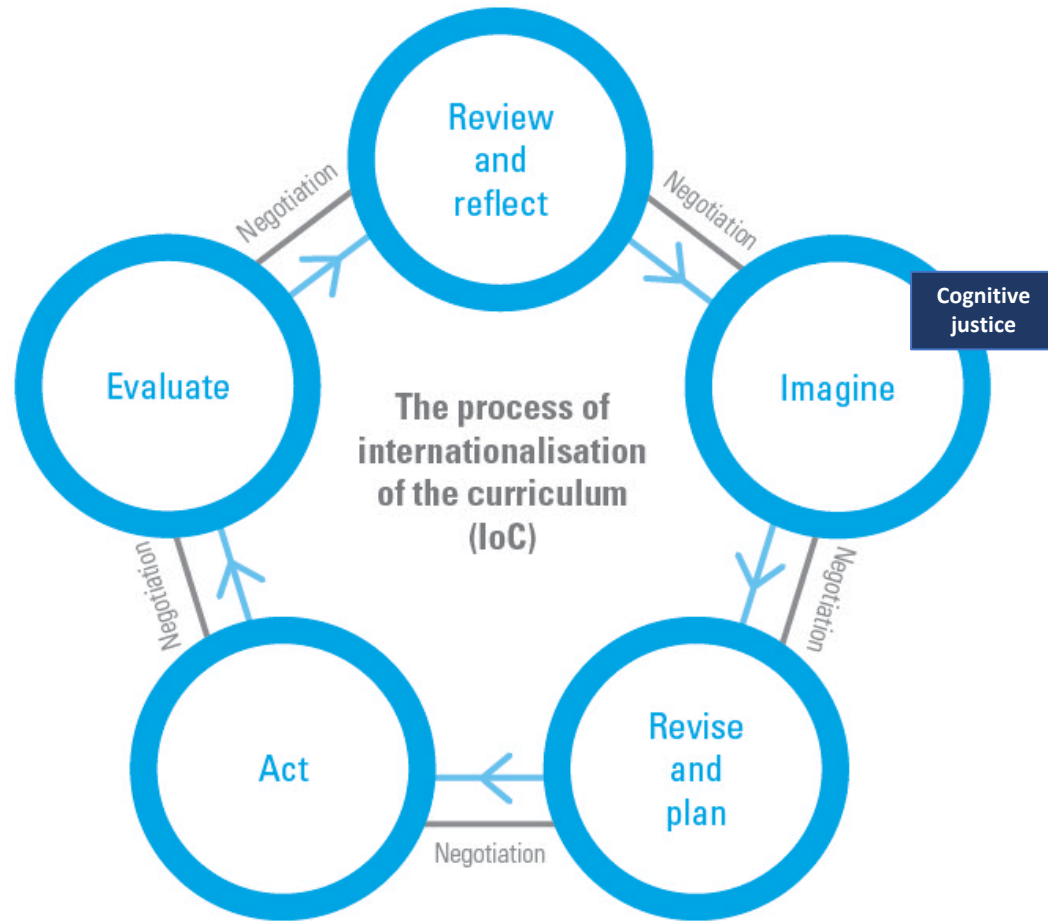
## Curriculum design

## A conceptual framework of internationalisation of the curriculum

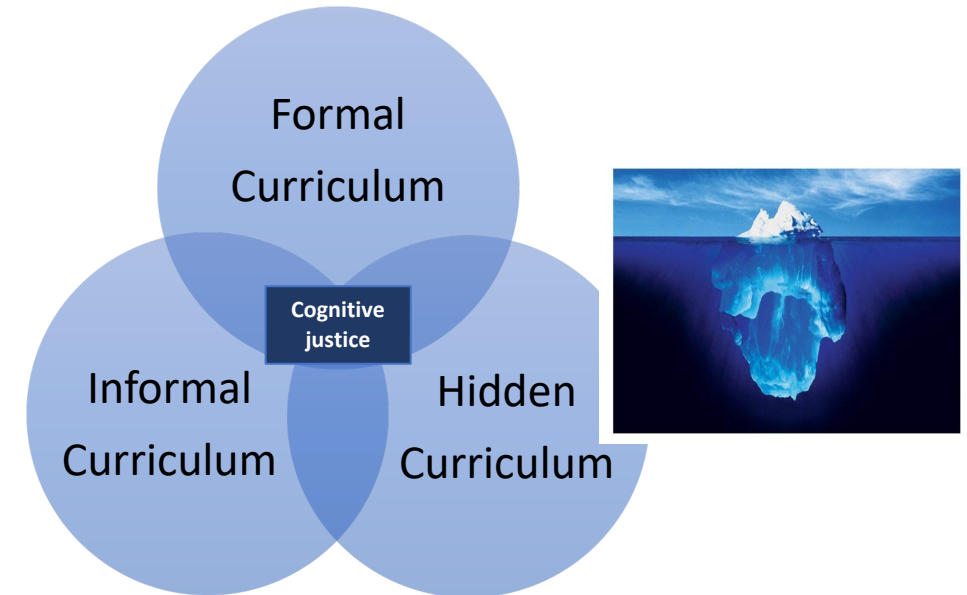


## Contextual influences

Betty Leask  
[b.leask@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:b.leask@latrobe.edu.au)  
[www.ioc.global](http://www.ioc.global)



## The Process of Internationalizing the Curriculum



The role of the facilitator in the process of IoC is critical to ensuring the success of the process. One of the most important skills is that of negotiation.

# Brazil

Educational structures are said to maintain racial and socioeconomic inequalities through the design of competitive entrance exams and lack of access to HE.

- The Brazilian government initiated a set of reforms (Transatlantic Slave Trade And Affirmative Action Policy) to:
  - Expand the university system
  - Offer evening courses & create new campuses
  - Make affirmative action mandatory for federal universities
  - **Teaching of history and culture of Africa and Afro-Brazilians a mandatory part of the curriculum**

(Leibowitz 2017)

# South Africa

Apartheid resulted in the segregation of higher education institutions.

Higher education reform is currently caught between becoming more globally competitive while also addressing issues of racial and social inequality.

8 institutional priorities intended to increase diversity and equality on campus and reform the curriculum

- appointing new African and Coloured academics,
- moving towards an 'Africanised curriculum – including rethinking content and pedagogy
- reforming institutional cultures to ensure they support needs of Black South African students,
- introducing local languages to enable multi-lingual instruction.

(Leibowitz 2017)

# Global Citizenship Otherwise

## Reimagining global citizenship education for a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous world (VUCA) World

Teachers and learners are invited to engage with a fuller range and complexity of approaches to GCE:

- carefully weave new local and global relationships to collectively mobilize critically informed approaches to global justice in multiple contexts simultaneously ,
- identify and transform problematic ongoing patterns of North/South, Indigenous/non-Indigenous, and racialized/white engagements that tend to be hegemonic, ethnocentric, depoliticized, ahistorical, and paternalistic.
- expand their frames of reference moving beyond “either-or” toward “both and more”

(Stein, 2021)

## “Mainstream” *Global Citizenship* vs *Global Citizenship* “Otherwise”

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Understand global dimension of local issues; develop consensus on ways to move forward.</li><li>2. Empower/motivate students to act locally &amp; globally in authorized/official ways.</li><li>3. Human rationality, ingenuity and innovation will enable us to create a society that is sustainable and in balance with nature.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Develop capacity to embrace complexities &amp; internal contradictions &amp; understand how we are complicit in harm.</li><li>2. Develop stamina to engage with difficult issues and conversations without relationships falling apart.</li><li>3. We can learn from the recurrent mistakes that our current habit of being reproduces. A wiser way of being may emerge, but we will make different mistakes in the future.</li></ol> |
|--|--|

Stein and Andreotti, 2021, pp 7-8

# Challenges of decolonisation of the curriculum

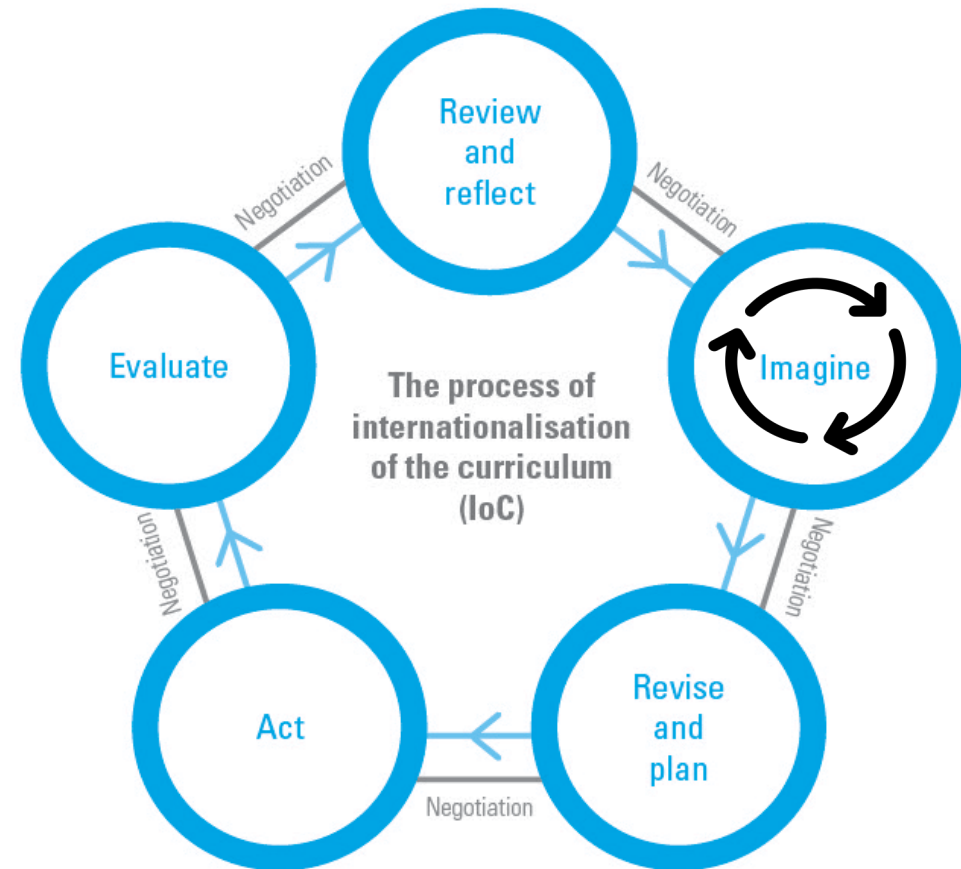
Some are specific to context, but many are common across contexts e.g.

- Starting with understanding the current state and assumptions underpinning it
- Moving past entrenched ways of thinking about whose knowledge counts in the curriculum
- Connecting activity within the formal & informal curriculum
- Identifying and addressing the hidden curriculum
- Having difficult conversations with colleagues
- Recognizing our own internal contradictions

# Ways to decolonize the curriculum

1. Create a safe space for ongoing discussion, debate and critique of assumptions that underpin your curriculum (formal and informal curriculum)
2. Approach the idea of cognitive justice as 'an invitation to a thought experiment' (as part of internationalisation of the curriculum).
3. Explore the possibilities of *global citizenship otherwise* as a decolonized, epistemological, and ontological approach
4. Focus your curriculum on interculturalization at least as much as internationalization.
5. Encourage and challenge yourself and others to cultivate pedagogies that develop *critical literacies* in students.

- 
- Explore different ways of thinking about the world **and** what these might mean for the *formal and informal curriculum*.
  - Engage diverse partners in discussions around cognitive justice, decolonization of the curriculum, the disciplines and internationalisation



The role of the facilitator in the process of IoC is critical to ensuring the success of the process. One of the most important skills is that of negotiation.

# Conclusion

# Embracing the possibilities of disruption

- Both cognitive justice and decolonization of the curriculum are relevant and important to internationalisation of the curriculum due to the:
  - Common values underpinning them
  - Possibilities they suggest
- Internationalization of the curriculum provides a space and some tools to advance both, but it will also be enriched by the key ideas and principles that they encapsulate.

*We are what we learn - decolonization and cognitive justice have the power to transform us individually and collectively.*

# Creating a new normal?

- Now is not the time to look back nostalgically on the past.
- Rather it's the time to critique the past and as we look forward to the future - embrace complexity, ambiguity and change.

# Some questions to ask yourself

1. Whose knowledge counts in my curriculum? Why?
2. What are *my assumptions* about knowledge and purpose of teaching and learning?
3. How did I form these assumptions?
4. What other possible ways are there of thinking about knowledge in the curriculum?
5. How can I explore the potential of these possibilities in my work to extend the boundaries of my thinking?
6. If I can't answer any of these questions, with whom can I discuss and debate ideas and possibilities?

# Poll 3

- To what extent do you see cognitive justice and decolonization of the curriculum as being relevant to your work?

Not at all.....a little .... quite a lot .....a great deal

# References

- Charles, E. 2019. "Decolonizing the Curriculum". *Insights* 32 (1): 24. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1629/uksg.475>
- de Wit, H. & Leask, B. (2017) Re-imagining the Curriculum for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In Grau, F. X., Escrigas C., Goddard, J., Hall, B., Hazelkorn, E. and Tandon, R. (eds) *Higher Education in the World 6: Towards a Socially Responsible University: Balancing the Global with the Local* (pp 222-235). Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) <http://www.guninetwork.org/report/higher-education-world-6>
- Leibowitz, B. (2017) Cognitive Justice and the higher education curriculum. *Journal of Education*, n.68. Durban
- Majee, U & Ressa, S.B. (2020) Colonial legacies in internationalisation of higher education: racial justice and geopolitical redress in South Africa and Brazil, *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 50:4, 463-481, DOI:10.1080/03057925.2018.1521264
- McLaughlin, J.M & Whatman, S. (2008) 'Embedding Indigenous Perspectives in University Teaching and Learning: Lessons learnt and Possibilities of reforming / decolonising curriculum'. In Heber, R.W. (ed) *Indigenous Education: Asia/Pacific* (pp.123-146) First Nations University of Canada, Saskatchewan
- Stein, S. (2020). Pluralizing possibilities for global learning in western higher education. In D. Bourn (Ed.), *The Bloomsbury handbook of global education and learning* (pp. 63-75).
- Stein, S. (2021) 'Reimagining global citizenship education for a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world'. In *Globalization, Societies and Education*, 19:4, 482-495, DOI: 10.1080/14767724.2021.1904212
- Stein, S. & Andreotti, V.D.O. (2016). Decolonization and higher education. In M.Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational philosophy and theory*. Singapore: Springer Science+Business Media. doi:10.1007/978-981-287-532-7\_479-1
- Visvanathan, S. (26 April, 2021) 'The Search for Cognitive Justice' . *The ACU Review: Dialogues of Difference*. Association of Commonwealth Universities <https://www.acu.ac.uk/news/acu-review-dialogues-of-difference/>