



Decolonising curriculum

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Aim of the Presentation

- Positionality;
- About the Project
- Decolonising Curriculum
- Process
- Guiding Principles
- Challenges
- Food for Thought

Positionality



This is an image of my grandmother's memory book. Both my grandmother and the memory book were survivors from the Ravensbrück, women only, concentration camp. @copyright Dr Patricia Prieto Blanco

-Geography, people, history and my personal experience define my thinking about colonization and decolonization.

-One of the major ruptures in my life: dissolution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), where I was born;

-Researching about home in a foreign language and not always familiar lens

The project

A project funded by HEA and led by the Office of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion;

University of Galway Race Equality Framework
2023-2027

Overall aim: to look for examples and practices already in place;

- Supporting initiatives across the Schools and disciplines;
- Developing a toolkit to support academic staff on initial journey

Why shall we decolonize
curriculum?

What did students say?

**University is a
Lifestyle!**

- Lack of voices from the Global South (majority world), specifically not hearing much about Travellers, indigenous knowledge and nomadism and Black Studies;
- ‘Largely white or largely male curriculum is intellectually unsound and monocultures do not produce good thinking’ (Garrett, 2024: 2031);

What is Irish indigenous knowledge? What are core values in connection to community, the world, nature and interpersonal relationships?

Talking about Global South without Global South

Nature and Climate Change: What is the role of nature in our learning, and how do we integrate nature into the education process?

What do we know about the history of our own university and the disciplines of our study?



Celebrating 175 years of Galway students
since 30 October 1849

Institutional Positionality

Addressing diverse types
of powers in an Irish
context through two
ruptures (Khoo, 2012)

1st Rupture: three Queen's Colleges were founded in 1845 in Belfast, Cork and Galway and united as the Queen's University of Ireland in 1850.

In 1908, this became the new National University of Ireland, predating the postcolonial Irish Free State by some two decades.

2nd Rupture: Globalisation and the new Spirit of
Academic Capitalism

Decolonising curriculum

- A development of modern science and scientific disciplines coincides with the rise of colonialism;
- Colonialism created systems of hierarchies around constructs of race and knowledge (De Sousa Santos, 2007). It is a denial of pre-colonial knowledge and a restriction and control of indigenous culture and knowledge production;
- Conquering the physical spaces, followed by conquering the mind (Thiong'o, 1986);
- **Eurocentrism** is a prejudice, based on two myths:
 - History of human civilisation as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe
 - Differences between Europe and non-Europe are 'natural' (racial) differences and not consequences of the history of power (Garrett, 2024: 2032 - 2033);



Universal vs. Pluriversal knowledge

- Knowledge produced in the West has been **universalised** and **recognised** as the only legitimate form of knowledge (Moncrieffe, 2018):
 - What counts as legitimate knowledge and how this knowledge can be legitimately produced (Meghji, 2021: 3)
- **Pluriversality (Mignolo, 2018):** ...'sensing the world as pluriversally constituted'; co-existence of many worlds
- Diverse ways of knowing and pluriversity mean **challenging the basis of Western humanism** and its detachment of known from the knower (subject/object; nature/culture, human beings and other species);
- **Ecologies of knowledge** (De Sousa Santos, 2017): university curriculum needs to be discussed with other forms of knowledge production,



Decolonising curriculum

Western universities: key sites through which colonial knowledge is produced, institutionalized and naturalized (Bhambra, Gebrial and Nisancioglu, 2018);

Decolonising curriculum: is about ***the process*** (which is not straightforward): allowing others to experiment, making mistakes and learning from them, and remaining open-minded (SOAS toolkit – providing a set of reflective questions as their toolkit);

Decolonising is **not aiming to delete or cancel canonical**, white, male authors from the curricula; but it is a process through which a body of knowledge...is liberated from received wisdom and reconstituted on new terms (Kenny in NicDhaibheid et al, 2022: 307).

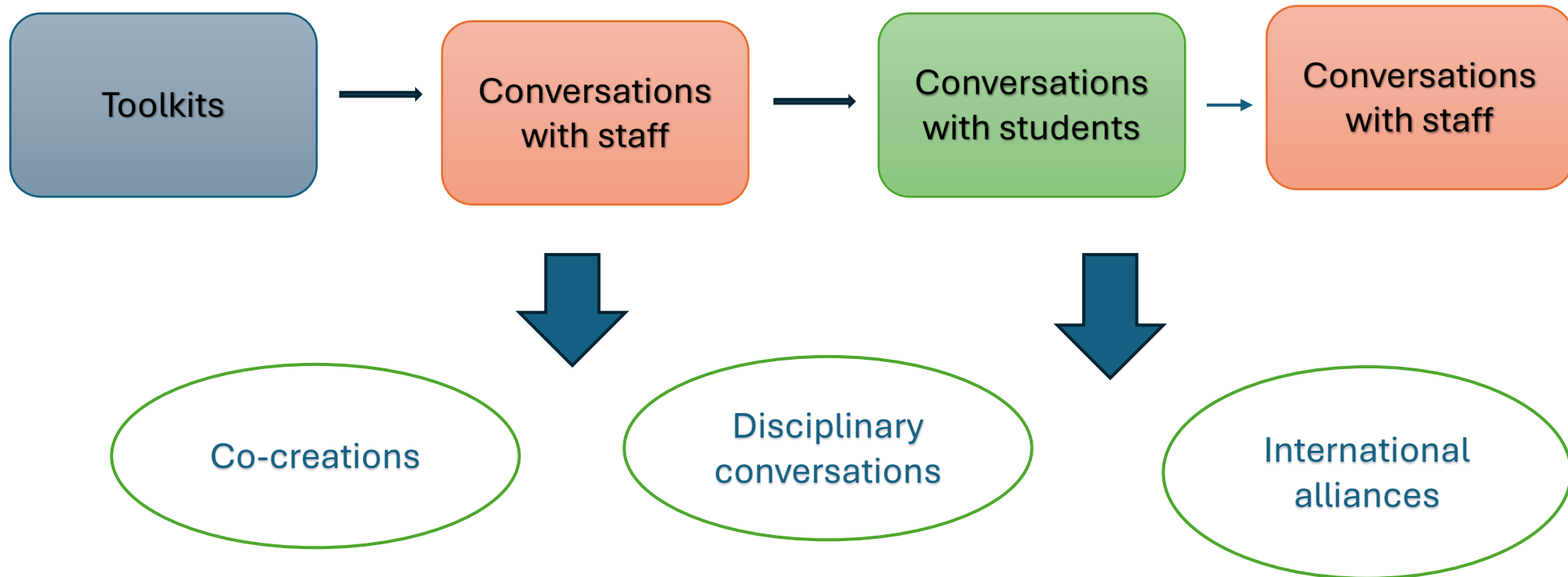
What is curriculum?

- Designing curriculum is never neutral – it is political, social and cultural (Tikly, 2023);
- What and whose knowledge is most worth learning? (Le Grange, 2019).

Curriculum as:

- 'The stories we tell students about their past, present, future' (Grumet in Le Grange, 2019: 37)
- Curriculum: *not only planned* (**curriculum-as-plan**) but also on *how it is lived* (**curriculum-as-lived**);
- Curriculum as three broad perspectives:
 - a) The explicit** (what students are provided with prescribed readings, assessment guidelines, module frameworks, etc.)
 - b) The hidden** (what students learn about the dominant culture at university and what value it reproduces)
 - c) Null** (what universities leave out or what is not taught and learned at university) (Le Grange, 2016).

Process



Staff conversations

- Spoke to 60 staff members across Schools and Disciplines;
- **Emerging topics:**
 - a) Developing common understanding of decolonising curriculum at UoG (compass);
 - b) Recognising some principles of decolonial work;
 - c) Challenges and tensions.



In search of the meaning of decolonising curriculum at UoG

“What does it mean to decolonise?”
cannot be an abstract universal. It has to
be answered by looking at other W
questions: Who is doing it, where, why,
and how? —Mignolo and Walsh (2018, p.
108)



A) TIME AND PLACE:

- colonial history shapes our reality;
- nationalism and whiteness
- neo-liberal university;
- avoiding copying the UK

C) DISCIPLINARY AUDITS

- positionality from personal – disciplinary - institutional

B) MARGIN TO THE CENTRE

- knowledge
- students
- staff

D) SCEPTICISM

- Who is it for?
- Resources, time, workload and what is possible in the current climate

A COMPASS OF SHARED
UNDERSTANDING OF
DECOLONISING
CURRICULUM

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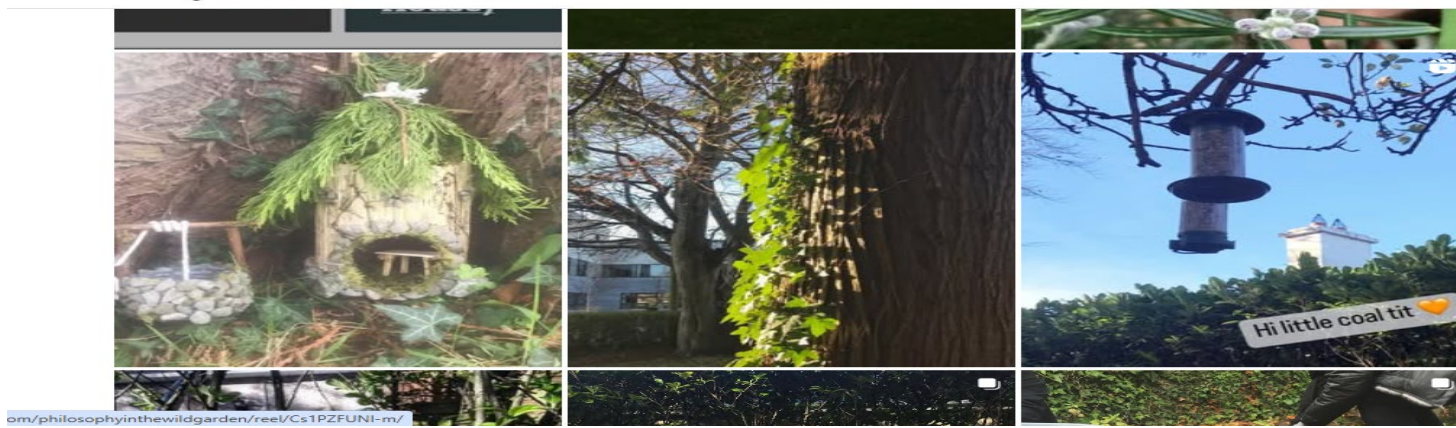
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PRINCIPLES OF DECOLONISING CURRICULUM

- **Where do we learn, and how do we position ourselves in connection to students in the classroom?**



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<https://www.instagram.com/philosophyinthewildgarden/>



Safe Space



Setting up the culture of community first: what a community should look like;



Developing a set of principles and rules with students which guide the teaching and learning process;



Taking responsibility for our own moods and emotions – what we bring into the space;



Trust might develop as a result.

Relational pedagogies

- Developing pedagogies that students can engage with: seminars instead of big lectures;
- Discursive and flipped classroom;
- Facilitating instead of teaching;
- Relating to other places and times through personal experiences:

Making content relatable to students (how does this material make you feel? What sticks out for you?).

What do we learn?

Teaching beyond the Canon

- De-universalizing the canon (learning and un-learning);
- Bringing margin to the centre (e.g. providing space to authors from the margin);

An example of decolonial strategy (Khoo, 2024 and Meghji, 2021):

1. Double translation and Sociology of Ignorance
2. Reverse Tutelage: margin to the centre
3. A Double Repair: A sideways reading strategy



Diversifying reading list

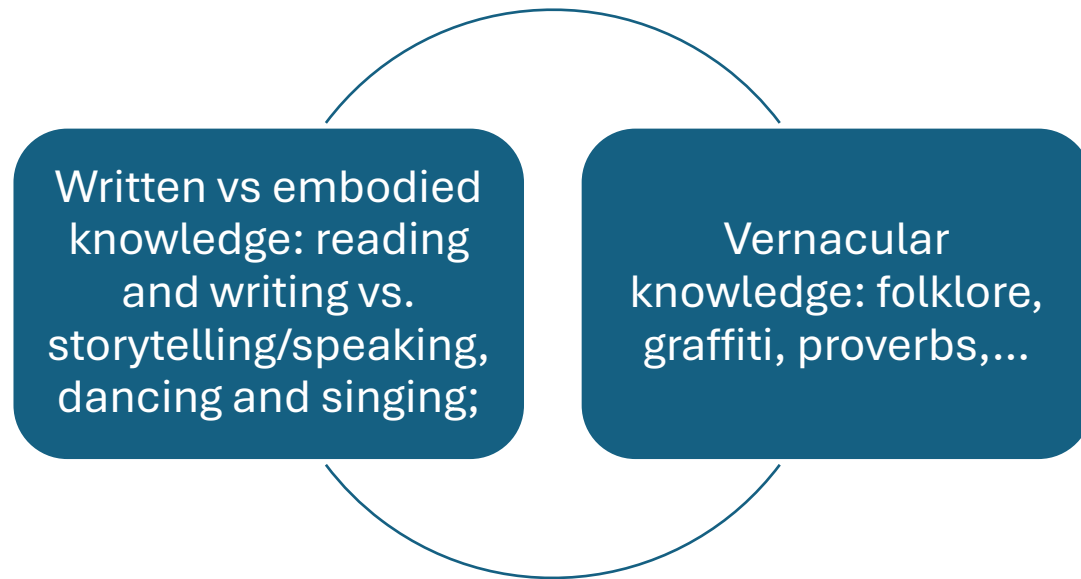
- Looking for examples from across the world;
- Thinking how specific concepts and ideas might be interpreted and understood globally?

Challenges:

- Do scholars worldwide replicate Western theories and approaches, or do they use their local approaches and knowledge?
- Languages
- Our understanding of those concepts elsewhere – it requires patience, practice and understanding
- Monopoly of Western publishing

‘What is the World’?

Knowledge as an archive and repertoire



Inter and trans-disciplinarity

- Bringing disciplines in conversation (e.g. Designing Futures project);
- Cooperating with communities and other stakeholders in knowledge creation process (e.g. climate change, physics and local artists)

...and some more...

Students' co-creation



CO-CREATING THE
MODULE WITH
STUDENTS;



EXPLORING THEIR
INTERESTS AND IDEAS;



BRINGING THEIR LIVING
EXPERIENCES INTO THE
MODULE AND
ASSESSMENT (IT HAS TO
BE ACTED UPON)

Language

- Monolingualism vs. multilingualism;
- Presenting and publishing in different languages;
- What do we gain or lose if we use only one language?
- Could we write in more languages simultaneously?

Mincéirs Archives

[View the Mincéirs digital collection here](#)



Library Archive

Public history as a pedagogical tool in the curriculum
(Clarke, 2022)

Assessment



- Assessing according to students' strengths: introducing oral exams, group assessment, peer-assessment, no assessment



- Importance of vernacular(practice-based) knowledge: dancing, rapping, writing poetry and haiku, graffiti, designing a song list



- New technology and the content



- Student projects.

A personal and collective journey and responsibility

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- Personal reflection (decolonising starts with oneself, addressing one's own privilege);
 - Disciplinary conversations and audits;
 - Co-creations;
 - CoP;
 - Learning and (un)learning;
 - Sustainability and changing culture.



Disciplinary Audit – A Case of Humanities at UoG

Dedicating time and space for exploring what decolonising means and might entail in the humanities;

The process:

In 2024/2025: organising four dedicated events on the topic:

-An introductory seminar;

-Consultation with staff and students

Food for thought



HOW TO EMBRACE THE IDEA OF
DECOLONIZING EDUCATION? IS
IT A JOURNEY, OUTCOME, OR
MINDSET?



HOW TO SUSTAIN THIS INITIATIVE
KNOWING THAT HIGHER
EDUCATION IS UNDER
CONSTANT PRESSURE
(PRECARITY, SUSTAINABILITY,
FUNDING AND MANAGEMENT
ISSUES)?



HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT THIS
IS NOT ONLY A VIRTUE
SIGNALING AND TICKING THE
BOX EXERCISE?



HOW CAN WE ADDRESS ISSUES
AROUND POWER AND SOCIAL
JUSTICE IN A CURRENT
UNIVERSITY SETTING? AND WHO
SHOULD RUN THE
DECOLONISING PROCESS?

Thank you for your attention!

If you want to discuss your work or further engage in decolonising curriculum conversation, email me at:

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