

# No Curriculum Transformation Without Epistemic Justice Capabilities

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# Basic claim: no curriculum change without epistemic justice

- Centre for Curriculum Redesign in Boston - four core dimensions of curriculum: knowledge (what we know and understand); skills (how we exercise that knowledge); character (how we behave and interact with others); and meta-learning (how we reflect and adapt).
- Tawana Kupe, A university should enable the education of students who have acquired the six C's: think critically, communicate clearly, use connectivity, develop creativity, work collaboratively and embrace culture.
- Knowledge and power in curriculum choices – whose knowledge, which knowledge? Universality or pluriversality?
- My claim: that none of these can be achieved well, nor the politics of knowledge critiqued without developing epistemic justice capabilities.

# Outline: Justice-facing ideas for *an* (not *the*) account of curriculum change

- An open framework
- An aspirational decolonial ethics and higher education purposes
- Why Sen's capabilities as a transformation metric?
- Epistemic justice capability
- Why it matters for flourishing in higher education
- What can we do?
- Argument informed by *Miratho* project on Achieved learning outcomes for rural and township youth (ESRC-DfID and NRF, 2016-2020)

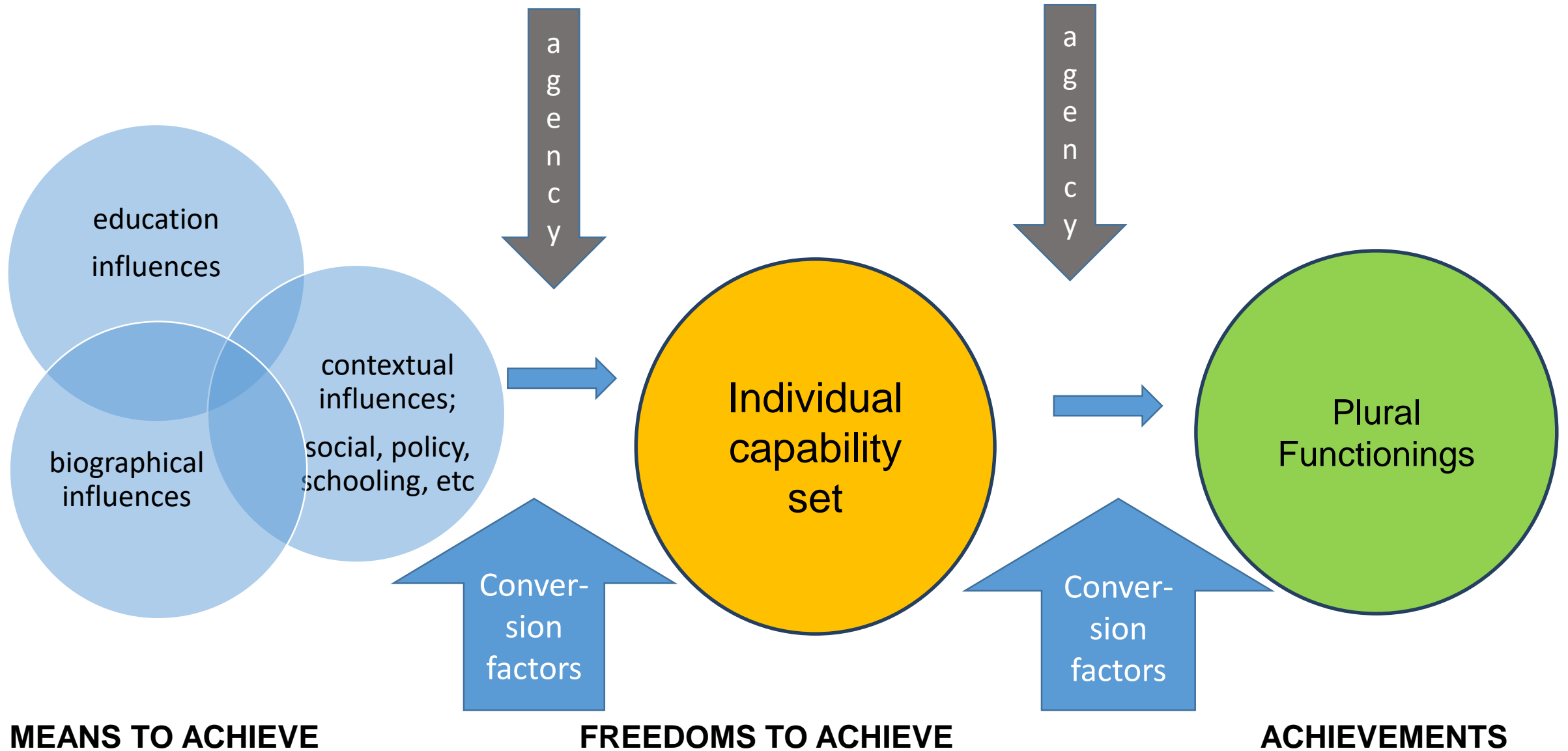
# Aspirational decolonial ethics and higher education purposes

- Problematises 'good' development and inequalities
- Focus on decoloniality beyond decolonization
- 'Entangled knowledges'
- Epistemic power and who has it matters:
  - ❖ Ngugi Wa Thiong'O (1981),: 'Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorships. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world'.
  - ❖ Steve Biko (1978, 49), 'that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed'.
  - ❖ French lawyer, Joseph Servan,(1767), 'When you have thus formed the chain of ideas in the heads of your citizens, you will then be able to pride yourselves on guiding them and being their masters.... [on] the habitual union of ideas...on the soft fibres of the brain, is founded the unshakeable base of the soundest empires' (cited in Foucault 1977, 102-103).
- An expansive reading of HE beyond human capital and skills

# Why capabilities as our measure?

- A justice 'compass'
- Capability approach originates with Amartya Sen: key concepts of wellbeing freedoms ('capabilities') and achievements ('functionings') and agency freedoms and achievements (choices and decision-making).
- Basic question: What is each person able to be and to do in this setting with the resources and entitlements available to her? Which capabilities does she have reason to value?
- Forming and translating capability into functionings is shaped by conversion factors: personal, social, environmental. A transformed curriculum could be key conversion factor.

# Formation of functionings



# Epistemic in/justice

- A epistemic justice capability as foundational to 'good' curriculum
- Compared to epistemic exclusions and testimonial (prejudicial) and hermeneutic (structural and systemic) epistemic injustices (Miranda Fricker).
- Epistemic injustice is wrong done to someone as a knower

# Why this matters for higher education and curriculum

- i) Four core dimensions of curriculum: knowledge; skills; character; and meta-learning ii) Six C's: think critically, communicate clearly, use connectivity, develop creativity, work collaboratively and embrace culture iii) A (new) politics of knowledge iv) Biko's imagined self.
- None can be achieved well, absent epistemic justice capabilities
- Curriculum proposal for a core '**epistemic contribution capability**' and **functioning of being an epistemic contributor**, both receiving and giving knowledge, being recognized as a competent knower and contributor to the shared knowledge pool.
- Exclusions through unequal power to be a knower: hermeneutic injustice and marginalization by dominant knowers or through testimonial injustice based on prejudice about person's identity = epistemically irrelevant conversion factors
- Both-and change: individuals + structures/institutional conditions of possibility: 'The larger systems by which we organize the training of inquirers and the circulation, uptake and incorporation of individual's epistemic contributions to the construction of knowledge may need to be reformed to ensure that justice is done to each knower, and groups of inquirers' (Anderson 2012, 165).



# What can we do?

1. Acknowledge **responsibility** for justice: We are all responsible for which epistemic practices enable and which constrain. Epistemic wrongs do not happen without perpetrators.
2. Ground curriculum in an **ecology of knowledges** (however that looks in your own subject/professional field).
3. Build **enabling pedagogies** as well as transformative knowledge
4. Nurture **connections** and solidarities, develop personhood
5. Work practically for **non-ideal justice**

# In (modest) conclusion....

- Susanne Kappelar: 'I do not really wish to conclude and sum up, rounding off all the arguments so as to dump it in a nutshell...I lot more could be said about any of the topics I have touched upon.....I have meant to ask questions to break out of the frame...The point is not a set of answers, but making possible a different practice'
- In my case I have argued for a transformed curriculum practice, developed prospectively and evaluated using capabilities and functionings, and specifically the epistemic contribution capability, as the informational basis of our justice judgments in higher education.

- Thank you