

Reflexive praxis for global and environmental justice: A resource for teachers

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Background and orientation

Teaching global and environmental justice issues

Educators are increasingly called upon to address complex global and environmental justice issues in their classrooms. Climate change, for example, is no longer primarily a scientific concern but is also an existential, ethical, and political challenge. How have teachers responded? This resource comes out of a participatory project¹ with teachers in Sweden and researchers (with teaching backgrounds) who sought to deepen and complexify their understandings of global justice challenges and develop their reflective practice. This resource first provides an overview of the concepts that underpinned the project and then shares a set of activities and tools co-developed by teachers and researchers which can be adapted to educators' own contexts and practices.

Recent global frameworks increasingly recognise the need to address deep-rooted structural inequalities in education about global justice issues.

“Global Education is education that enables people to reflect critically on the world and their place in it; to open their eyes, hearts, and minds to the reality of the world at local and global level. It empowers people to understand, imagine, hope and act to bring about a world of social and climate justice, peace, solidarity, equity, equality, planetary sustainability and international understanding.”

— Definition of Global Education taken from the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 (Dublin Declaration).

A 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report points to the unequal distribution of impacts of climate change, noting: “Complex human vulnerability patterns are shaped by past developments, such as colonialism and its ongoing legacy (high confidence), are worsened by compounding and cascading risks (high confidence) and are socially differentiated” (p.53).

Education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCE) have been central to meeting UNESCO's work towards the Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.7. Yet, researchers in both fields express a now established concern: Teaching and learning about global justice challenges in ‘global North’² contexts remains largely

framed by a dominant narrative that creates a ‘we’ who learn about and solve the problems and a ‘them’ (in the ‘global South’) who experience the problems and receive ‘our’ help and solutions³.

Responding to the climate crisis, therefore, also means confronting inequalities and taking responsibility for historical and present-day injustices. Recently, in light of the final years of Agenda 2030, researchers have called for a stronger bridging of critical approaches in GCE and ESD to respond to these concerns. As per the Dublin Declaration, teachers and schools in Europe, as elsewhere, play a key role and centring rather than stepping over coloniality is one approach.

What is coloniality?

Building from close work with social movements, Latin American theorists, including Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Arturo Escobar, and Walter Dignolo, have helped articulate coloniality as not merely a relic of the past, but as deeply embedded in persistent inequalities today. They reflect on how modern ‘Western’ civilisation in Europe is rooted in ideas of progress, development, and civilisation that came out of the Renaissance and Enlightenment and ushered in many important changes in society. The project of modernity also has a darker side, coloniality. It expanded through imperialism, colonisation, and industrial economic growth. These processes were enabled by exploitation of resources and of humans (e.g., via the Atlantic trade and slavery circuit). More recently, scholars such as Catherine Walsh and Françoise Vergès working with decolonial and feminist theories have emphasised how coloniality is inseparable from gendered, racialised, and capitalist forms of domination experienced as systems of oppression. Vergès emphasises how colonial legacies continue through racial capitalism, labour exploitation, and environmental destruction.

Speaking from northern Europe, we understand the term coloniality refers to the often unquestioned, asymmetrical nature of global power structures that in fact exist alongside or even underpin modernity through systems of oppression such as racism, exploitation, sexism, genocide, and others. While political decolonization has occurred where many former European colonies gained independence and where anti-colonial movements have long and active roots, coloniality continues alongside modernity including through its expansion into modern global economic and political systems. We can see this for example in persisting racial injustices and on-going power imbalances within Europe and other ‘Western’ ‘global North’ contexts and between so-called ‘global North’ and ‘global South’ contexts. Writing from northern Europe, we see a need to centre and think with the concept of coloniality as a way of responding to the concerns that teaching about global justice issues can sometimes reinforce a ‘we’ who learn about and solve a problem of a ‘them’ in ways that reinforce colonial relations of power. The concept of

coloniality highlights the need for a reflexive approach to epistemology (what counts as knowledge) and ontology (how we understand the world) alongside structural understandings of material inequalities locally and globally. These theories provide resources for how to recognise and interrupt the often hidden, continued processes of colonial logics underpinning global justice issues. This can help students to consider ways in which the world is a *pluriverse* rather than assume one way of knowing and being is universal.

It is important to emphasize that centring coloniality is not about fully undermining nor rejecting everything about modernity, given how deeply embedded and invested in it our lives are here in Europe (and elsewhere). Some, including the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures collective, suggest it's time to turn to hospicing or out-growing modernity. Centring coloniality is an invitation to reflect on and question how inequalities continue despite many 'good intentions' in order to build capacities to understand and respond otherwise.

How are we all both part of the problems and part of the solutions albeit differently, and what have we tended to negate and overlook that explains the various inequalities that have persisted through modern development? How can we respond otherwise?

What is reflexive praxis?

What roles can teachers play in supporting this type of reflexivity? Praxis refers to the connections between theory and practice, theory and action. *Reflexive* praxis helps to emphasise what could be considered an additional layer, relating ourselves to the issues and challenges facing the world today and to the transformative responses in which we wish to engage our students.

Da Costa completed a systematic review of research that helps to shed some light on such an approach. She analysed research literature in the fields of GCE and Environmental and Sustainability Education that engage with critiques of 'Western' modernity in contexts that could be referred to as 'global North'⁴ including research in schools and with teachers. Her review found:

Teachers need support with:

- time, professional development opportunities and materials to support more critical and in-depth engagements with global issues.
- finding opportunities to participate in research about teaching about global issues that enables continued development of reflexive practice.
- historicising global issues, centring tensions and complexities, and moving beyond finding quick fixes through 'feel good' activities.

Pedagogical approaches that respond to and centre coloniality prioritise:

- unpacking assumptions: recognising complexities and complicity including unacknowledged denials about and investment in systems of harm.
- decentring our own worldviews at times: considering both their contributions and limitations; recognising and engaging with indigenous knowledges and experiences and with non-'Western' philosophies.
- centring relationalities: recognising entanglement and interdependencies with other humans including within and between generations and nature/more-than-humans; 'showing up' differently.

The DecoPrax project

We were interested in how to support educators in northern Europe to respond to the calls for reflexive praxis and had an opportunity to do so with a group of highly skilled teachers in Sweden. *A decolonial approach to teaching global justice issues* (DecoPrax), funded by the Swedish Research Council (2022-2026), aimed to explore if and how concepts drawing from decolonial and critical theoretical resources could support teachers' work in classrooms. It involved participatory research with 15 upper secondary teachers (teaching 16-19-year-olds) from four schools (3 to 5 from each school) in a central region of Sweden. They teach across subject areas⁵.

Conceptual framework

We developed a conceptual framework that aimed to support participants' reflexive practice. Through a series of workshops and school visits, we explored the concepts and considered how they applied to or resonated with teachers' practice. The concepts enabled reflections on global justice issues themselves (we focused a lot on climate change and related crises) and on the role of schools and teachers' subject areas in relation to understanding and responding to global challenges. These reflections also informed 'happenings' in the classroom (choosing materials, formulating activities, framing responses to classroom discussions in the moment, etc.) some of which are shared in this resource.



In centring coloniality through a conceptual framework for reflexive praxis, our project did not pretend to ‘solve’ or ‘fix’ or ‘get rid of’ coloniality nor do we step outside of it. We realise formal education contexts are embedded in modernity and coloniality, and teachers’ work is done within expectations of and responsibilities to formal curriculum and student assessments. However, the teachers were interested in what is possible. By working with these concepts, they responded to the concern that global justice issues teaching can reinforce colonial systems of power. Here we give a brief overview of the framework. We have suggested readings at the end for further engagement.

Building from Quijano's idea of coloniality, Mignolo describes the shine and shadow of **modernity/coloniality**. The light side of modernity holds much of what is deeply valued in international and national development (e.g., seamless progress towards civilised and prosperous societies, universal principles, human rationality, the nation-state and liberal democracy). These ideals depend on the dark side of modernity, coloniality (e.g., over-exploitation of resources and oppression of people, slavery, genocide). Andreotti identifies ‘modernity’s trick’ as occurring when well-intended acts of altruism promote bringing more people into the ‘light side’ of modernity without realising it depends on the dark side. Essentially, this is about negating rather than engaging with and responding to coloniality.

Once we recognised the shine and shadow of modernity/coloniality, we started to work with the concept of **pedagogy of implicatedness**. Bryan argues that any pedagogical framework that might provide a comprehensive treatment of global justice issues, and she focuses on the climate emergency, must “provoke learners to engage with the crisis from a position of non-innocence or self-implication and must serve as an ‘invitation to human agency’ to respond (otherwise) to the crisis”⁶. Implicatedness offers a productive starting point for conversations given a tendency to step over the causes of global issues and move straight to finding solutions through fun and/or apolitical activities where perspective of ‘others’ experiencing such issues/challenges are absent or included in problematic ways⁷. Taking time to consider the complexity of a given challenge related to climate change and how one might be implicated in it does not have to mean leaving students feeling guilty, overwhelmed, or disempowered. Instead, Bryan argues this brings to the fore questions around both responsibility *and* agency in ways that authentically respond to the problems. Starting from positions of non-innocence may provoke emotional resistance or discomfort as learners struggle with ideas that unsettle their existing worldviews. However, thinking about it through a lens of agency can help to recognise discomfort not as a problem to be solved but as a necessary part of ethical engagement. A pedagogy of implicatedness may open the possibility for personal and collective transformation by facing rather

than avoiding histories of violence, injustice, and complicity. Later we consider this as responding rather than reacting to an issue.

It is important to recognise how local or regional **exceptionalism** might play a role in reinforcing the ‘us’ and ‘them’ in global justice issues. Our project was in Sweden, so we drew attention to the concept of Nordic exceptionalism, but there are versions of exceptionalism in all contexts, and we invite those engaging with this resource from elsewhere to consider the version that plays out where they are located. Nordic countries have tended to perpetuate a sense of innocence in relation to historical injustices, particularly as tied to colonialism and despite their entanglements in European colonialist projects⁸. Research by Eriksen and Stein has shown that this impacts how racism is often denied within educational settings because there is an idea that these are exceptionally equal societies with human rights for all. While there are certainly reasons to be proud of human rights records in different Nordic countries, an unquestioned Nordic exceptionalism can cause a lack of attention to the inequalities that do exist and avoid and/or deny the differential experiences faced by groups who do not ‘naturally’ fit into the Nordic model. It can also enable denials of entanglements with broader global inequalities.

One response is to recognise the historical injustices faced by indigenous groups alongside their on-going resistance to colonialism and the thriving of their cultures and ways of knowing and being. We raised the concept of **indigenous relationality** with the teachers on our project. This included the extent to which there are historical and/or present-day engagements with local and global indigenous cultures included in their teaching and if not where it might be possible. There are examples of engagements with indigenous experiences and knowledges all over the world. For example, Dwayne Donald draws on indigenous teachings from Cree elders (in Turtle Island or what is now known as Canada) to define ethical relationality:

"ethical relationality is tied to a desire to acknowledge and honour the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences position us in relation to one another, and how our futures as people in the world are similarly tied together. It is an ethical imperative to remember that we as human beings live in the world together and also alongside our more-than-human relatives; we are called to constantly think and act with reference to those relationships" (Donald, 2016, p. 10).

It was important in our project to also consider indigenous relationality from within Europe. As we were in Sweden, we specifically looked at indigenous communities living in Sápmi which spans across the north of the Nordic countries Norway, Sweden and Finland (as well as Russia).

Eriksen and Jore refer to *árbediehtu*, a holistic understanding of human and nature based on knowledge from Sápmi and encourage teachers to explore opportunities to recognise these deep ways of knowing and being as highly important in the context of climate crises. This can support teachers to deepen their approach to critical thinking in formal education settings, enable a broader understanding that different ways of knowing and being exist outside a Eurocentric frame, and consider the contributions and limitations of our own world views. Teachers may not ‘know’ at all nor will most ever fully ‘know’ indigenous ways of knowing and being, nor ought they simply romanticise indigenous cultures. However, taking seriously our responsibility to indigenous groups and recognising different ways of understanding the world, may open pedagogical possibilities for relating to and through local-global challenges.

Another concern we took up together is how ecological issues are often presented on their own and separate from justice issues. Writing from France and drawing on Caribbean connections, we find Ferdinand’s work on **decolonial ecology** insightful. He identifies a “double fracture” within modernity between ‘the environmental’ and ‘the colonial’, insisting these need to be brought together in the context of today’s climate change crises. With the term *decolonial ecology* he refers to an imperative to preserve ecosystems and limit biodiversity loss alongside a direct response to the decolonial demand being raised by anti-racist groups (e.g. via BlackLivesMatter) calling for fair treatment of humans.

Responsibility for climate change is shaped by deep asymmetries, and recognizing this imbalance is essential for a deeper understanding of global justice issues. The principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”, included in the Paris Agreement, builds on this idea by acknowledging that while all countries must take climate action, wealthier and historically high-emitting nations have a greater responsibility to lead and to support more vulnerable countries. Ferdinand argues that ecological justice cannot happen without historical and present-day justice. Later in the resource, we have included an activity that helps to unpack and apply decolonial ecology.

The final concept, **responses-ability**, supported teachers in the project to consider their specific role as educators facilitating engagement with global justice issues. Speaking from within Eurocentric scientific traditions of knowledge production, but with an awareness of its inherent limitations (as well as benefits), Haraway explored the creative possibilities that come with ‘staying with the trouble’. Similarly to Bryan’s ideas about implicatedness, this inspired the teachers on the project to look at ethical complexities and relating with and through them rather than moving quite quickly to lead the students to determine solutions that may neither be appropriate nor helpful. Being response-able is

about engaging one's sense of *responsibilities* through contextual and contingent *responses* to the current global emergencies. It invites us to reconsider and adjust those inherited ways of relating that may be underpinning injustices.

Hofman offered a framework for thinking about response-ability in classroom practice. For her, classrooms and schools are sites of relations of care for our students. While teaching is always constrained by a set of tensions and obligations (embedded in power relations), it is not determined by them. When taking up global and environmental justice issues with students, educators engage in relations of care and experimentation in their classrooms. This can take different forms (e.g. interpreting curriculum, choosing materials, phrasing activities/questions, responding in the moment to student comments). For this reason, we added an 's' to responses-ability to emphasise the plurality of responses and to emphasise that there won't be 'one' best practice or 'one' answer to how to put these concepts to work in our practice, but rather, reflexive praxis will require multiple responses.

We found these concepts supported a reflexive approach to global justice issues teaching although many other concepts could also have been included and may become relevant to those engaging with this resource. Within the limits of this project, we chose these for the time and context we were in, and we hope they might be useful and adaptable for others.

What now?

Together we created the following set of resources and tools. These have supported the teachers in the project and could support others to make situated and meaningful (even if small) changes to practice. We have seen possibilities in: a) thinking with decolonial concepts, b) shifting orientations towards implicatedness and decolonial ecology, and c) attuning ourselves away from desires (on the part of ourselves and our students) to jump to solutions. This is difficult work, and we recommend engaging with some of the suggested readings and videos as it is important to first start with your own critical reflexivity and then consider how you might use or adapt the different tools. Any pedagogical tool also depends on educators' professional skills and creating inclusive and as-safe-as-possible spaces for learning.

Recommended readings and media resources

Modernity/coloniality

Interview with Vanessa Andreotti:

<https://youtu.be/le2A5hxr6XE>

Andreotti on 'modernity's trick' (see page 3)

<https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/jaaacs/article/download/187728/185833/>

Teaching for sustainable development through ethical global issues pedagogy: A resource for secondary teachers. A project with teachers in England, Finland, and Sweden that adapted Andreotti's HEADSUP tool to classroom practice. Includes a co-developed resource available in multiple languages. <https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/esri/teacher-resource/>

Indigenous relationality

Refleksjonsverktøy for arbeid med samiske perspektiver og urfolksperspektiver i lærerutdanningen [Reflection tool for working with Sami perspectives and indigenous perspectives in teacher education] in Norwegian: <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/zepd4ite/production/0f8a937db4a9b82e4c0004154fbdf6a67480f788.pdf>

Eriksen, K. G. & Svendsen, S. H. B. (2020). *Decolonial options in education – Interrupting coloniality and inviting alternative conversations.* Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education (NJCIE), 4(1), 1-9. <https://journals.oslomet.no/index.php/nordiccie/article/view/3859/3495>

Pedagogy of implicatedness

Exploring a Pedagogy of Implication for Climate Justice Education by Audrey Bryan
YouTube talk 3.30 min: <https://youtu.be/B8YZYqleR7I?si=bqKuqtIEe92VuaYR>

Decolonial ecology

Book talk with Malcom Ferdinand Decolonial Ecology: [A Decolonial Ecology with Malcom Ferdinand and Shela Sheikh - Institut Français · Royaume-Uni \(institut-francais.org.uk\)](https://www.institut-francais.org.uk/decolonial-ecology-with-malcom-ferdinand-and-shela-sheikh)

Exceptionalism

Interview with Kristín Loftsdóttir on Racism, Nordic Exceptionalism & Whiteness in Iceland: <https://allthingsiceland.com/kristin-loftsdottir-racism-iceland/>

Responses-ability

Donna Haraway | Making OddKin: Telling Stories for Earthly Survival: Multispecies environmental and reproductive justice must be practiced against human exceptionalism and in resistance to colonial capitalist divisions of species, landscapes, peoples, classes, genders, populations, races, natures, and societies. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMBRX9EcrH8>

DecoPrax

activities and tools

We have developed a set of resources and tools designed to support teachers in their current practice. While not intended as a direct 'how-to' guide, we hope they inspire teachers to apply and adapt them.

The tools below aim to spark reflection, dialogue, and experimentation. Co-created with researchers and teachers, they are grounded in the realities of everyday teaching and seek to create space for thoughtful shifts in how we teach, relate, and respond to complexity.

Reflexivity questions

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Breaking down an issue

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Reacting versus responding checklist

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Decolonial ecology

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DecoPrax synthesis map

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Reflexivity questions

The following tool is designed to support teachers to think through each of the DecoPrax concepts.

There are many ways to use these questions, and educators on our project found them useful for taking time to reflect on how they engage with global justice issues themselves and to think critically about their teaching practice. They can be used before or after planning and teaching units. Teachers may use the tool individually, for example when preparing lessons or reviewing teaching materials or collaboratively in teacher teams or professional learning communities. The questions can also help initiate conversations about ethical tensions, positionality, and the complexities of working with climate justice and inequality in a school context.

DecoPrax concepts	Reflexivity questions	Reflections /New questions
<p>Modernity/coloniality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making visible historical and contemporary systems of oppression • recognising modernity's trick, the tendency to want to include more into the system that excludes 	<p>What do I know about historical and contemporary patterns of oppression in the contexts involved? In what ways might these be mirrored in my teaching about environmental issues?</p> <p><i>To what extent do I support students to critically examine the power relations (e.g. racism, exploitation) connected to environmental and sustainability issues in my teaching?</i></p> <p><i>What in my teaching materials reinforces and/or avoids questioning underlying systems of oppression?</i></p>	Empty space for reflections

DecoPrax Concepts

Pedagogy of implicatedness

- initiating positions of non-innocence as an invitation to agency
- recognising we are all both part of the problems and the solutions, albeit differently

Reflexivity questions

To what extent do I recognise I am implicated in a range of global and local power relations?

To what extent does my teaching encourage a reflexive identification of responses/actions/solutions?

To what extent does my teaching start from the assumption that we are part of the problem as well as the solution, albeit differently?

Reflections /New questions

(Nordic) exceptionalism

- recognising how national or regional pride often focuses on positives and avoids complicity with global injustices

What does exceptionalism look like from my national context and in my teaching about global and environmental issues?

To what extent do I assume that I am already doing global justice work in my teaching and our curriculum is already critical and social-justice focused?

Decolonial ecology and related denials

- identifying the double fracture (environmental and colonial)
- recognising common but differentiated responsibilities for responding to climate change

To what extent does my teaching address global social inequalities underlying the causes, impacts, and responses to the current climate crisis?

To what extent does my teaching address both the colonial (hierarchical division that places different value on humans based on race, class, gender, etc.) and environmental (hierarchical separation between human-animal-nature) fractures?

DecoPrax Concepts

Indigenous relationality

- recognising there are diverse indigenous groups with distinct cultures, languages, contributions, and histories
- considering there are multiple ways of knowing and being; each has contributions and limitations
- recognising the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples in the context of global injustices

Reflexivity questions

To what extent does my teaching support an understanding that all knowledge is partial, highlighting there are other ways of living, relating, and making sense of the world?

Whose world views are absent in my teaching, given there will always be absences?

To what extent do I make room for engaging with and/or learning from Indigenous experiences nearby and/or around the world?

To what extent does my teaching allow indigenous perspectives to exist on their own terms as much as possible?

Reflections /New questions

Responses-ability

- engaging an ethical position of openness
- responding from a position of entangled (and accountable) existence
- identifying and embracing tensions and paradoxes
- highlighting ethical positions and supporting intergenerational, interspecies, and intercultural relations
- opening a wide understanding of agency in classroom practice

How am I responding to these complexities in my teaching?

What do I and don't I know about my students' experiences of global and environmental issues?

What tensions/constraints am I experiencing in my teaching? In what ways are they dynamic as well as challenging?

What relationships of care can I develop in my teaching?

Breaking down an issue

This question set adapts one co-produced by teachers on a previous project⁹ that helps teachers and students explore complex global justice issues through multiple lenses. It supports critical inquiry into historical causes, power relations, and interconnected

responsibilities across local, national, and global scales. The questions can be used to guide classroom discussions or collaborative activities to deepen understanding.

Backdrop

Historical and current causes:

- What are the main factors contributing to this problem?
- Is the problem driven by a single cause or by multiple, historically and currently interrelated causes?

Local and global linkages:

- What local and global issues does this particular issue link to?

Perspectives and stances

Divergent perspectives and stances:

- What are the points of divergence/different perspectives/different opinions?
- Which groups would likely agree with one another, and who might see it differently?

Power dynamics:

- Who will decide which opinions are heard or valued?

Hidden or marginalised perspectives:

- Are there perspectives that are difficult to find but that would be important to understand this issue? What voices might be underrepresented?

Implicatedness across scales

Personal connection:

- In what ways am I connected to this issue?

National connection:

- In what ways is the present or past government of the country/region/city I am living in connected to this issue? If you are not sure, recognise that and consider how you could find out.

Global scale:

- In what ways is this a global problem?

- What role have international organisations played? (e.g., The United Nations, World Bank/International Monetary Fund, Multi-national corporations, Regional organisations [African Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Arab League, Caribbean Community, Council of Europe, European Political Community, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, etc], Economic/Defense organisations [NATO, OECD, BRICS])

Responsibilities

Intergenerationality

Responses:

- What possible responses are there to this issue?
- Who will most likely put forward each response?

Decision makers:

- Who will most likely decide what will happen?

Beneficiaries:

- Who benefits from responses put forward?

Ongoing concerns:

- Who might not agree with the responses?
- Who should be responsible for taking account of the response and any unintended consequences?

Responses

- Where do you think this problem and/or the responses to it will be like or look like in 10, 50, 100, 1000 years?

Future scenarios:

- In 10 years - immediate impacts of responses
- In 50 years - long-term sustainability of solutions or escalation of issues
- In 100-1000 years - how will future generations view this issue and its responses

Notes:

Breaking down an issue exemplar:

We trade but at what cost?

Below is an example of applying 'Breaking down an issue' to a study of fair trade where students examine

a commodity they use every day and trace the raw materials used to produce it (e.g. t-shirt, mobile phone).

Environment

What effects are there on the local environment when the raw material is extracted or processed for the product?

What effects are there on the environment in the place where waste from the raw material is disposed of, burned, or processed?

Can the local impacts on the environment be linked to larger global environmental crises?

What was the situation like a few decades ago compared to now?

How much do we know about the total impact of the use of raw materials from both an environmental and a global justice perspective?

What groups are affected: a) by negative impacts on the environment, b) by benefits of the production and its trade, and c) by benefits of the consumption of the product.

What different groups of people are in positions of responsibility in regards to the negative impacts?

What are the needs of the environment and the people who are directly involved in the extraction, production, and consumption? Are all those needs recognised and responded to equally?

Looking over your answers, are there clear links between environmental and global justice problems with extraction and production?

Global justice

When and how did production of this raw material develop in the countries where it is currently produced?

How has the production and trade of this commodity affected the economies of producing and consuming countries?

Who consumes the commodity produced from the raw materials and where? Are there historical, geographic, or political factors that explain these patterns?

Who are the key actors involved in the production, processing, and consumption of this commodity?

Who benefits most and least from trading this commodity, and why?

Are these historical and/or new, and why do they persist?

In what way are you involved in the processes underpinning the extraction, production, sale, and use of this commodity (e.g. through consumption patterns, lifestyle choice, your country's trade agreements or support of extra companies)? What could change for the better?

Does anyone have solutions to the problems in the extraction, production, and consumption of the product? If so, who? What are those solutions? What are the challenges with these solutions, who would be affected by them and who would benefit?

If nothing changes, what will be the effects on the environment in 5, 10, 100, 1000 years and on the local and global communities?

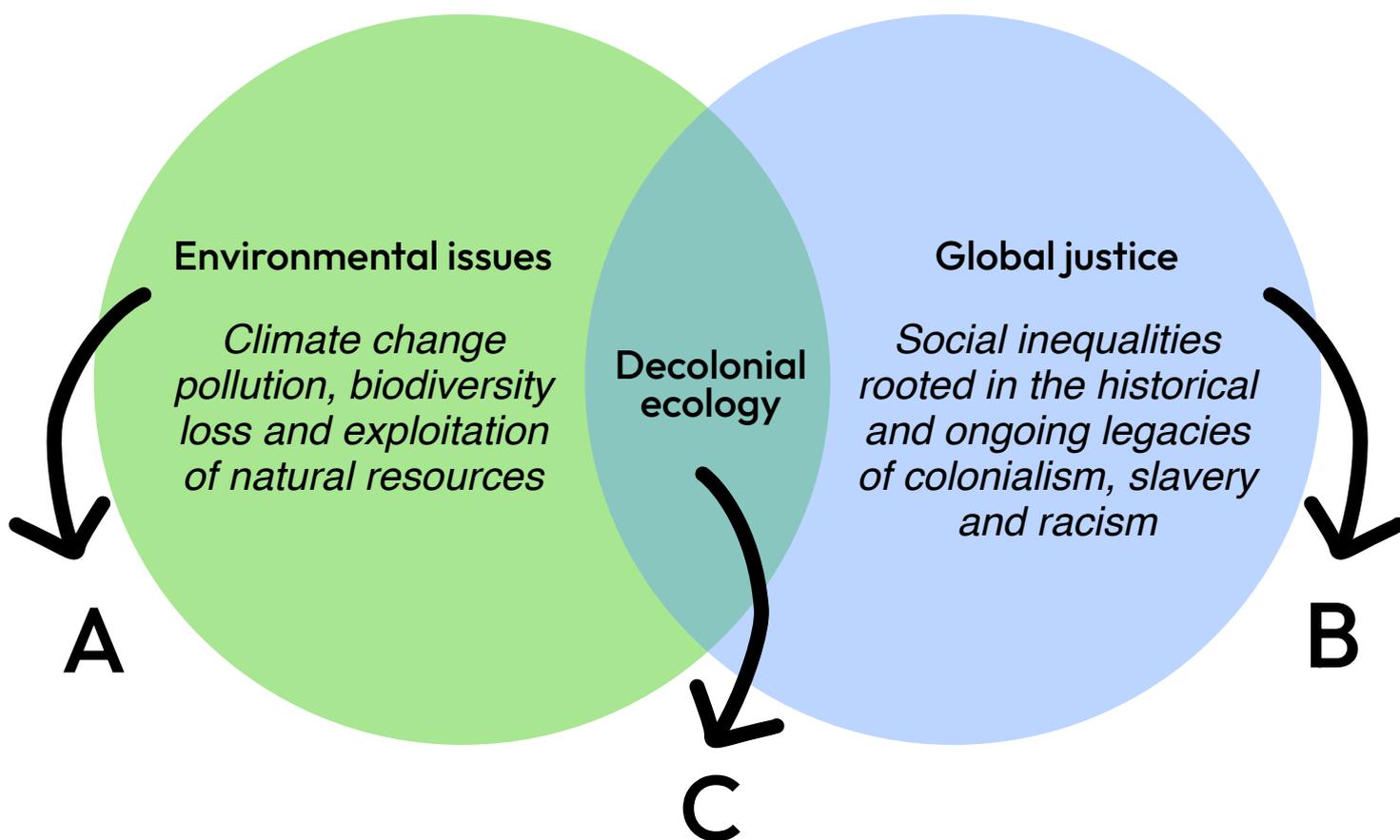
Decolonial ecology

Interconnection of environmental issues and global justice

Malcom Ferdinand’s work offers a powerful lens for connecting environmental issues with deeper questions of justice. Ferdinand’s ‘double fracture’ emphasizes that environmental destruction and social inequalities are deeply connected to the historical and ongoing legacies of colonialism, slavery, and racism. He calls for a *decolonial ecology* that refuses the separation between environmental issues and struggles for justice. This approach challenges educators and students to recognise that many

environmental problems are not “natural” but human-made and historically produced, rooted in unequal power relations. In this way, Ferdinand pushes us beyond a “soft” social justice narrative toward a critical understanding of how race, colonialism, and systemic oppression shape ecological crises.

Think of an example issue and map it onto this model. This question set A-C can be used in group work or independent work to explore the issue with the students.



Backdrop: Exploring an issue as both environmental and social justice

What do we and don't we know:

- What main factors underpin this issue and what problems are created by the issue?
- Whose perspectives can we draw on? How are they helpful and limited? Whose perspectives are we missing? How am I involved in this issue?

A. Environmental

- In what ways is this an environmental issue?
- Which factors/problems more strongly relate to the environment?
- What will the impacts on the environment be in a few months, a few years, a few decades, a few centuries if not addressed?

B. Global justice

- In what ways is this a social justice issue in a global context? Which factors/problems more strongly relate to social justice?
- In what ways is this issue connected to historical and present-day inequalities, and what issues might continue or worsen in the future?

C. Decolonial ecology

- How is this issue connected to both environmental problems and historical and present-day inequalities?
- What are the problems that become visible when we examine the issue from an environmental approach versus when we examine it from a global justice approach? Is one approach more dominant? Why?
- If you bring together the effects of the environmental problems/climate crisis and historical events related to the issue - what new perspectives and responses are generated?
- Are there any indigenous groups who have knowledge and experience relevant to understanding and responding to this issue?

Exploring entanglements

This activity helps to analyse a complex sustainability issue through the perspective that global and environmental issues are 'entangled'. You will first describe the situation and then consider entanglements between social and ecological aspects, past and present, and consider

future perspectives. Choose a sustainability issue (for example climate change and environmental justice, deforestation and Indigenous rights, natural resource exploitation in the 'global South', or AI and global power structures).

Part 1: Describe the situation - Outline what is known about the current situation

Part 2: Consider entanglements - Based on your description of the issue, identify relationships and tensions

Impacts

- What are the problems for humans?
- What are the problems for the environment?
- What about anyone/thing that wouldn't fit in either category?
- What are the driving forces behind the issue?

Actors

- Who contributes to the problem?
- Who experiences the problem?
- Which groups/individuals agree on what is causing the issue? Which groups/individuals disagree?
- Who is in a position to make a positive change?
- Who agrees about what changes should happen? Who disagrees?
- In what ways am I connected to this issue?

Knowledge

- Where are we getting our information about this?
- What kind of knowledge do we have (e.g. facts/statistics/measurements, first hand accounts, academic theories, storytelling, oral history)?
- Where are the gaps in our knowledge about this issue?
- What additional sources of knowledge could be helpful to understand this issue?

Between social and ecological

- Where are there overlaps between impacts on humans and nature? Is one more impacted than the other?
- How are different groups affected differently by the issue?
- Are there conflicting perspectives and interests (e.g. between growth and ecology and between the 'global South' and the 'global North', between groups within a local region)?
- Are there united perspectives and interests (e.g. possibilities for activism or for reinforcing the problem that link communities at local and global levels)?
- What becomes highlighted that might otherwise not be as obvious by looking at the issue from both an environmental and a global justice perspective?

Between past and the present

- Which historical processes are playing a part in the problem today? (colonialism, industrialization, the rise of capitalism, exploitation of resources and humans).
- To what extent are the power relations of the past continuing into the problems of today?

Between present and the future

- What will happen in the next five, ten, thirty, hundred years if the issue is looked at as only about the environment?
- What could happen if responses support both environmental and societal changes, and who can make this happen?

Part 3: Present creatively - share your analysis in writing or orally

You can start with a mind-map and use different symbols to show relationships, write an essay, create a poster or a meme, record a podcast or think of something else.

Notes

Reacting versus responding checklist

The conceptual distinction of ‘reacting’ and ‘responding’ is central to (Haraway’s framing of) response-ability and resisting simplistic technofixes or dystopian positions to complex global issues.

Haraway’s concept of *staying with the trouble* encourages us to face complex challenges through unexpected forms of collaboration and connection. Rather than seeking simple solutions or retreating into despair or blind optimism, she suggests we stay engaged and grounded in real, local contexts and relationships. This involves developing *response-ability*, or the ability to respond with care, humility, and accountability, especially in our relationships with other people, species, and the environment. We add

an ‘s’ to responses-ability to emphasise there are many responses, not one ‘best’ one. She uses the idea of *making kin* to highlight the importance of forming ethical and respectful connections across differences. For educators, this means helping students think critically and compassionately about the world they’re part of, and how they might contribute to more just and sustainable futures.

This table can support classroom discussion, critical reflection, or small group analysis when exploring environmental and global justice issues. It can also be a tool for teachers to identify connections to practice.

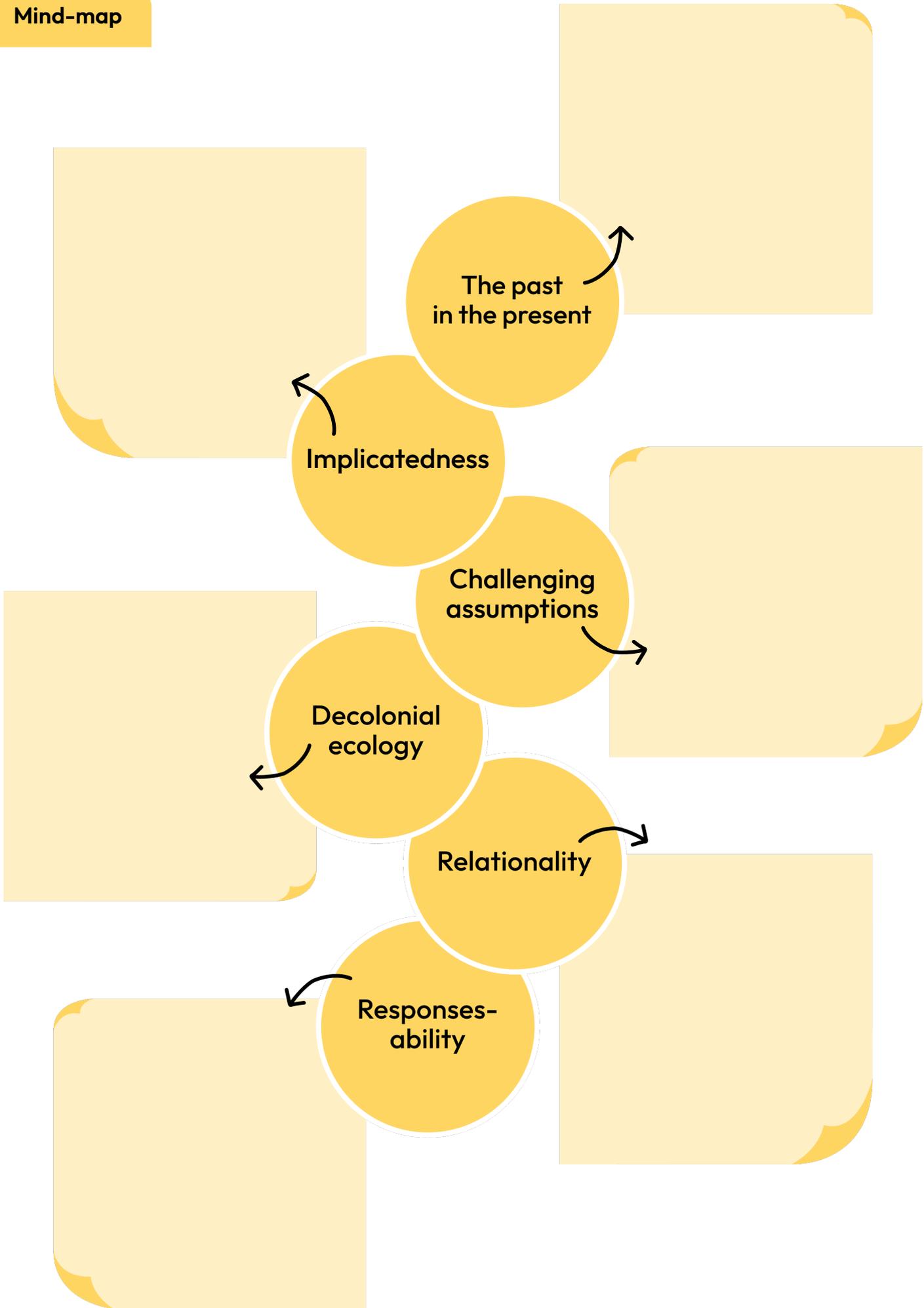
Acting	Reacting	Responding	Notes
Orientation	Immediate, control-driven, doom-driven narratives	Thoughtful, relational, grounded in ethical responsibility	
Motivations	Fear, urgency, guilt, desire to fix or save	Care, humility, curiosity, and willingness to stay with complexity	
Relationship to systems	Often reinforces existing structures	Challenges and rethinks dominant systems and hierarchies	
Time scale	Short-term, immediate outcomes	Long-term, process-oriented, intergenerational; anticipating unintended consequences	
Role of the human	Hero, fixer, or saviour	Co-creator, part of a network of relations	
Learning approach	Crisis-response, problem-solving, knowledge as control	Situated learning, mutual listening, knowledge as relational and dynamic	
Pedagogical implication	“What can we do <i>now</i> to fix this?”	“How do we live <i>well</i> and <i>ethically</i> together in troubling times?”	

DecoPrax synthesis map

Use the mind-map to reflect on having explored and responded to a sustainability issue using the DecoPrax concepts. Add your own questions and answer with your thoughts and feelings using words, phrases, sentences, symbols/emojis, colours, etc.



Mind-map



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Endnotes

¹ A decolonial approach to teaching global justice issues (2022–2026) was funded through the Swedish Research Council.

² As we have said previously (Sund & Pashby, 2020; Pashby et al., 2023), our use of 'global North' and 'global South' as well as 'Western' refers to geopolitical areas. They are important if imperfect terms when recognising our complicity within how knowledge, economic power and political organisation in the 'North' have been privileged, naturalised and projected. Similarly, the term 'global South' perhaps over-states a geographical classification (there can be constructions of the 'South' in the geographical 'North' and vice versa). As Kloß (2017) notes, the 'global South' "should be understood as something that is created, imagined, invented, maintained, and recreated by the ever-changing and never fixed status positions of social actors and institutions" (p. 1). We recognise they are imperfect (hence use of single

quotations) and alongside modernity/ coloniality we deploy the terms to name and challenge eurocentrism and the dominance of 'Western' ways of perceiving the world (see Levander & Mignolo, 2011).

³ Some examples of research that point to this on-going concern are Andreotti (2012); Pashby (2012); Sund (2016); Pashby et al., (2023); McKenzie et al., (2023). And examples of research calling for an explicit bridging of critical approaches to GCE and ESD include Khoo and Jørgensen (2021) and Swanson and Gamal (2021).

⁴ She reviewed 45 papers published up to 2020 mostly from 'global North', in that they were published in/about contexts that have relative political and economic privilege and security, and reflecting what had been published in English at the time. It's important to note the review therefore excludes other languages.

⁵ e.g., Swedish language and literature, Social Sciences, Biology, Chemistry, Psychology, Religion, History and Geography and cross disciplinary courses in international relations and sustainable development.

⁶ Bryan (2022) p. 338.

⁷ For some examples of research that demonstrates this see Eriksen, 2018; Karsgaard & Davidson, 2021; Pashby & Sund 2020.

⁸ For a more thorough treatment of Nordic Exceptionalism see research by Loftsdóttir & Jensen (2012), Keskinen (2022).

⁹ The *Teaching for sustainable development through ethical global issues pedagogy: A resource for secondary teachers* Pashby & Sund, 2019) is available at www.mmu.ac.uk/about-us/faculties/health-and-education/research/projects/teaching-sustainable-development However, if that link changes, you can search for it using the title. It's available in 11+ languages.

Biographies

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