

# **ENGAGING WITH INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES**

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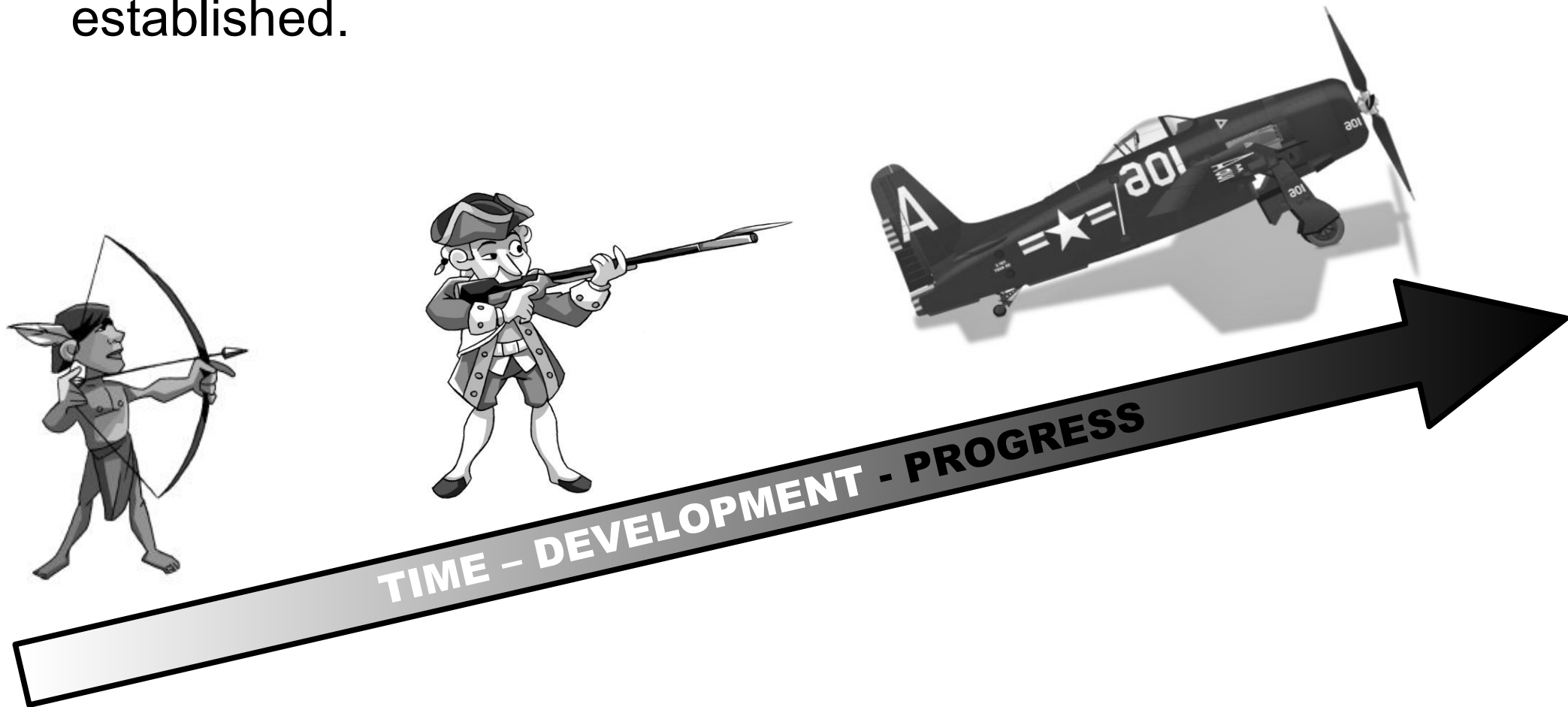
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In this set of slides we present some issues related to engagements with indigenous knowledges that are key in the 'Through Other Eyes' project. We also outline the educational framework we adopt in this project for the introduction of global perspectives in education, which consists of four dimensions:

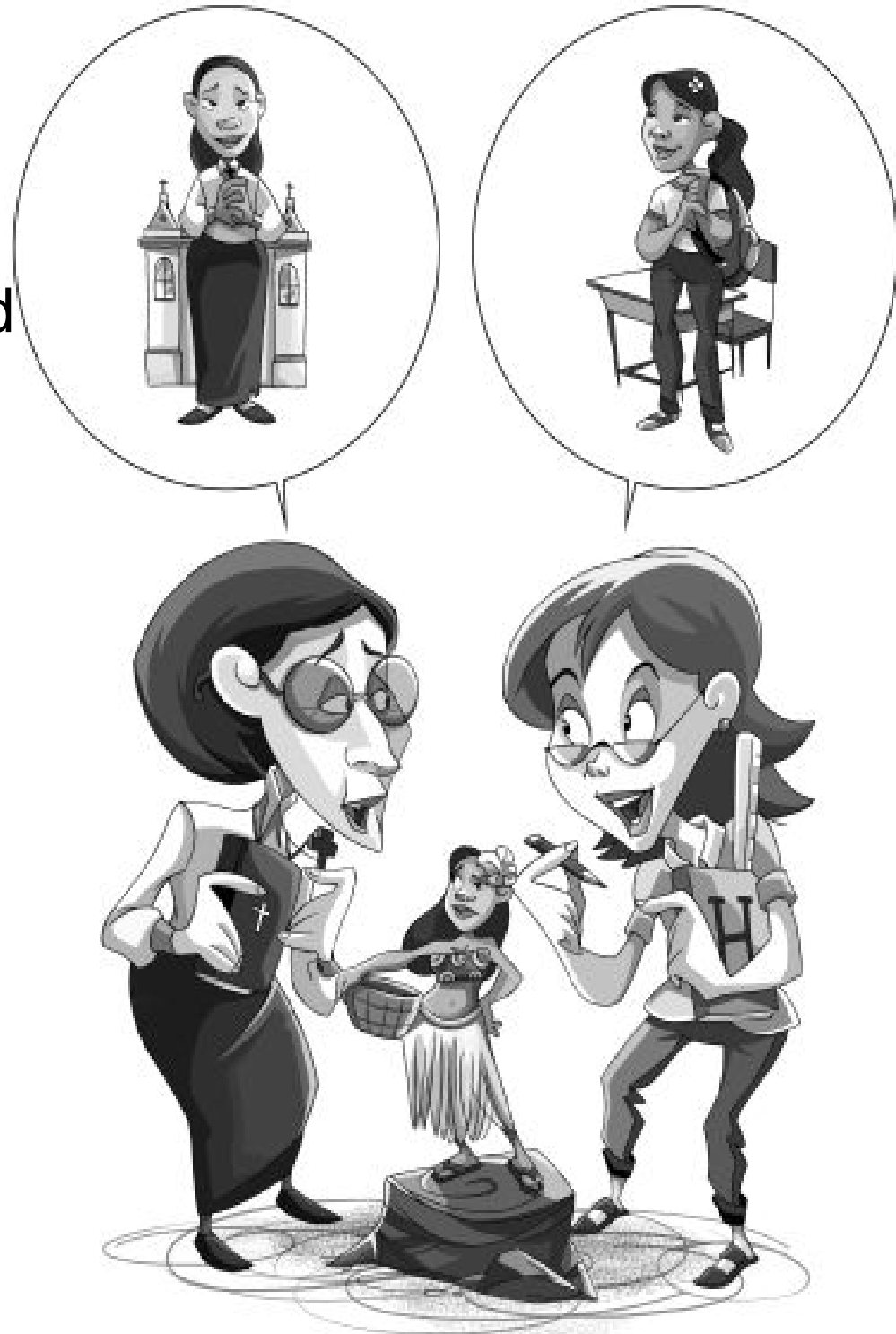
- 1) learning to unlearn;
- 2) learning to listen;
- 3) learning to learn;
- 4) learning to reach out.

We start by looking into one of the key moments of intercultural contact in recent history which was the **PROCESS OF COLONISATION** and the impact it has had on the **identities** of both colonisers and the colonised, as well as the **implications** of this process to **our own identities and relationships today**.

Cultures that colonised others tended to see difference in terms of time; thus cultures which were perceived as different were seen as cultures which were '**primitive**', '**archaic**' or '**stuck in the past**', at a phase of development which modern cultures had been in a long time ago. Therefore modern cultures adopted the mission to 'civilise' others - to help them to 'catch up' with the progressive line of time and development that they had established.



This colonial mission to civilise, educate, enlighten and 'develop' the other was perceived as the 'burden of the fittest' which would save other cultures from darkness, ignorance, chaos and backwardness. **In defining others as inferior, ignorant, traditional and barbaric, those which colonised others have learned to think of themselves as superior, enlightened, modern and civilised.** This is part of our colonial heritage and is still at work today.



Apart from the mission to 'civilise' the other, and related to it, other aspects of our colonial heritage may include:

- the desire to study, to analyse, to categorise, to record, to inscribe and to judge the other
- the projection of our parameters of analysis as universal and objective
- the desire that the other will conform to our parameters and categorisations
- the belief that if the other does not recognise our parameters and categories, he\she has no parameters or categories of his own



Therefore, in order to engage ethically with indigenous cultures, we need first to do our 'homework': to unlearn these tendencies by tracing and examining our own cultural 'lenses' and 'baggage' – becoming aware of the vulnerabilities and blind spots of our beliefs and values and the power and systems of representation in which they are embedded.



**LEARNING TO UNLEARN**

On the other hand, trying to put ourselves in the shoes of others is a very complicated exercise. In fact, in absolute terms, it is an impossible task as we cannot simply forget our own experience, language and concepts and we lack their experience, language and concepts to see 'exactly' what they see.



It is like trying to put their shoes on without taking our own shoes off. Therefore, we need to listen taking into account '**where one is speaking from**' (both in relation to ourselves and to others) in terms of social-historical contexts and power relations.

**LEARNING TO LISTEN**

Indigenous cultures have in common experiences of discrimination. They are as place-bound and time-bound as any other culture. What we can learn from indigenous cultures is to stop perceiving ourselves as modern, universal and uniquely rational, and to stop perceiving certain other cultures as retarded, local and irrational. But this is not sufficient. It is also important to perceive how and why we were led to believe what we did believe about indigenous cultures.



Also, how we and our communities can benefit from a change in these perceptions, and how we may interact more positively and constructively with cultures, such as the indigenous, which have undergone processes of discrimination.

**LEARNING TO LEARN**

Learning to listen and to learn from indigenous cultures, although demanding and difficult, can provide new ideas that we can use to rearrange our understandings of the world and of ourselves and transform the ways we relate to others.



This may help us understand the importance of relating to others without expecting them to be or become like us.

**LEARNING TO LEARN**

As a result of the violences of colonialism, an important tension that has been a topic of debate for a long time in relation to indigenous knowledges and cultures is related notions of cultural revival, preservation and change.

Like any other culture, indigenous cultures are constantly changing in response to many factors and tensions, including changes in their contexts and encounters with different cultures. In fact, many indigenous cultures see the process of change – of appropriating and transforming the 'new' that is brought by the other - as essential to their survival.

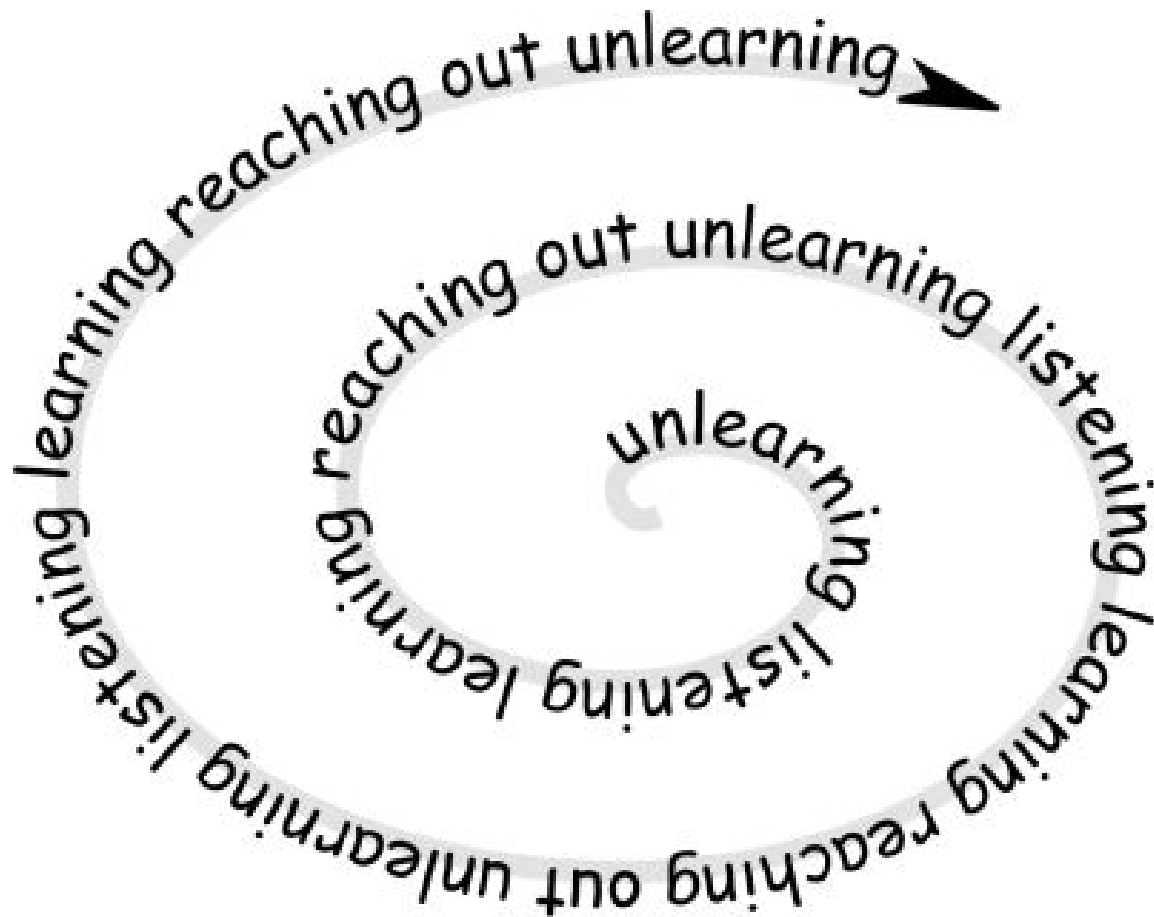


Therefore, learning to reach out involves **learning and teaching** through cultural contact and cultural contact results in cultural change. However, if we have done our homework and become open to the limits of our own knowledge systems and their capacity to change, and to redefining our identities in contact with others, we also need to be prepared for the conflicts, tensions and unpredictable outcomes that these engagements might bring.



**LEARNING TO REACH OUT**

Thus, learning to reach out also involves learning to work without any guarantees – renegotiating power relations as we go along without projecting our values as universal or always attempting to impose what 'we want' in the relationship.



This results in **openness**, openness to approach and to being approached, to question and to being questioned, to agreeing and to disagreeing – in a continuous process of dialogue and mutual learning that does not intend to turn the other into ourselves, or ourselves into the other.

## **LEARNING TO REACH OUT**

**EDUCATIONAL  
FRAMEWORK FOR THE  
INTRODUCTION OF  
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES**

# **4 types of learning:**

**Learning to unlearn**

**Learning to listen**

**Learning to learn**

**Learning to reach out**

## **In summary:**

### **Learning to unlearn** is about

- learning to perceive that one's own experiences and understandings are related to one's context/social groups and learned from others within one's own context/social groups
- perceiving that although we are different from others in our own contexts, we share much in common with them
- making the connections between social-historical processes and encounters that have shaped our contexts and cultures and the construction of our knowledges and identities
- perceiving that we carry a 'cultural baggage' filled with ideas and concepts produced in our contexts and that this affects who we are and what we see.
- perceiving that all social groups contain internal differences and conflicts and that culture is a verb: it is the production of meaning in a specific context

## **Learning to listen** is about

- learning to perceive how our ability to engage with and relate to difference is affected by our cultural 'baggage', the ideas we learn from our social groups
- being mindful of our cultural tendencies when making interpretations of ourselves and difference
- becoming aware that our interpretations of what we hear (or see) say more about ourselves than about what is actually being said or shown
- keeping our perceptions constantly under scrutiny (tracing the origins and implications of our assumptions) in order to open up to different possibilities of understanding.

# **Learning to learn** is about

- creating different possibilities of understanding
- trying to see through other eyes by transforming our own
- avoiding the tendency to want to turn the other into the self or the self into the other
- seeing the other (already) in the self and engaging with new concepts about the world and about ourselves to rearrange our 'cultural baggage': our understandings, relationships and desires
- crossing the boundaries of the comfort zone within ourselves.

# Learning to reach out is about

- learning to engage, to learn and to teach with respect and accountability in the complex and uncomfortable intercultural space where identities, power and ideas are negotiated
- perceiving that in making contact with others, one exposes oneself and exposes others to difference and newness, and this often results in mutual teaching and learning (although not always intentionally)
- expecting that this learning will involve tension and conflict (and that both are productive)
- understanding that one needs to be open to the unpredictable outcomes of mutual uncoersive learning
- understanding that the process is cyclical: once one has learned to reach out in one context, one is ready to start a new cycle of unlearning, listening, learning and reaching out again at another level.

# **TOE METHODOLOGY: RATIONALE**

What to do at each stage and why

# TOE Methodology stage 1:

## **Getting started**

- Focusing on the self in order to check existing knowledge and values and creating the conditions for reflection and analysis

TOE Methodology stage 2:

**Mainstream perspectives**

- Focusing on how one's knowledge is related to one's social group

## TOE Methodology step 3:

### **Different logics**

- Focusing on how we interpret others and how this is learnt from our social groups
- Perceiving that when we listen to others, what is said is also learned from the social groups of the speaker

## TOE Methodology stage 4:

### **Through other eyes**

- Engaging with difference and reading other worlds
- Opening the possibility for transformation of one's world

# TOE Methodology stage 5:

## **Case Study**

- Perceiving the local in the global
- Addressing complexity and conflict

## TOE Methodology stage 6:

### **Reading the world again**

- Taking stock of one's own learning and unlearning in order to transform relationships of inequality

**READING WORLDS:  
QUESTIONING  
REALITIES**

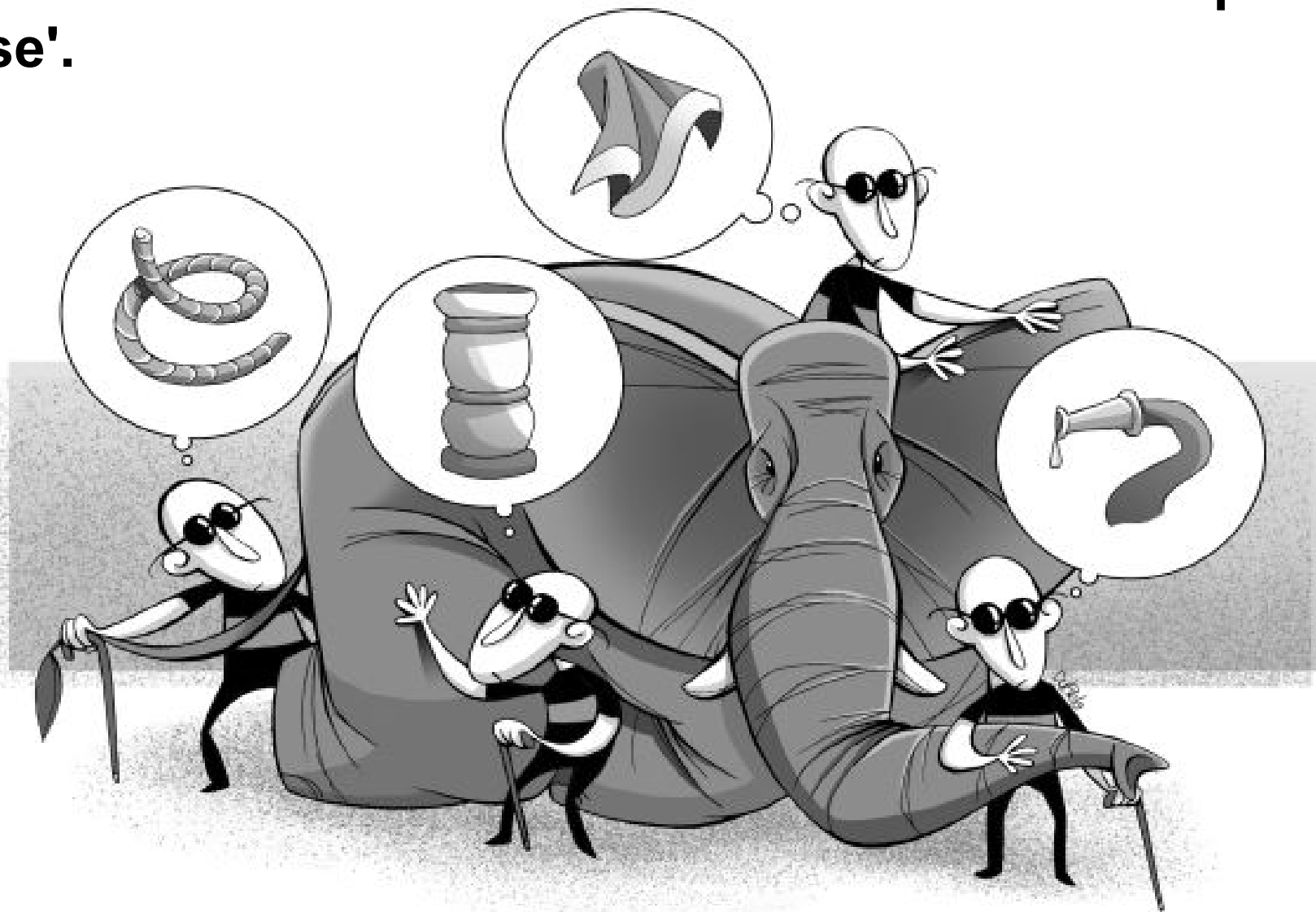
In order to attempt to read or interpret the world from other perspectives, first we need to understand a little bit about reading itself: the process of construction of notions of reality and knowledge or 'ontological and epistemological' assumptions.

We can start with an adaptation of a famous story from Buddhism. Some disciples came to Budha one day and asked the question:

**“Sir, some preachers and scientists say reality is infinite and eternal, others say it is finite and not eternal. Some say the soul dies with the body, others say it lives forever. What do you say?”**

Budha then told the following story:

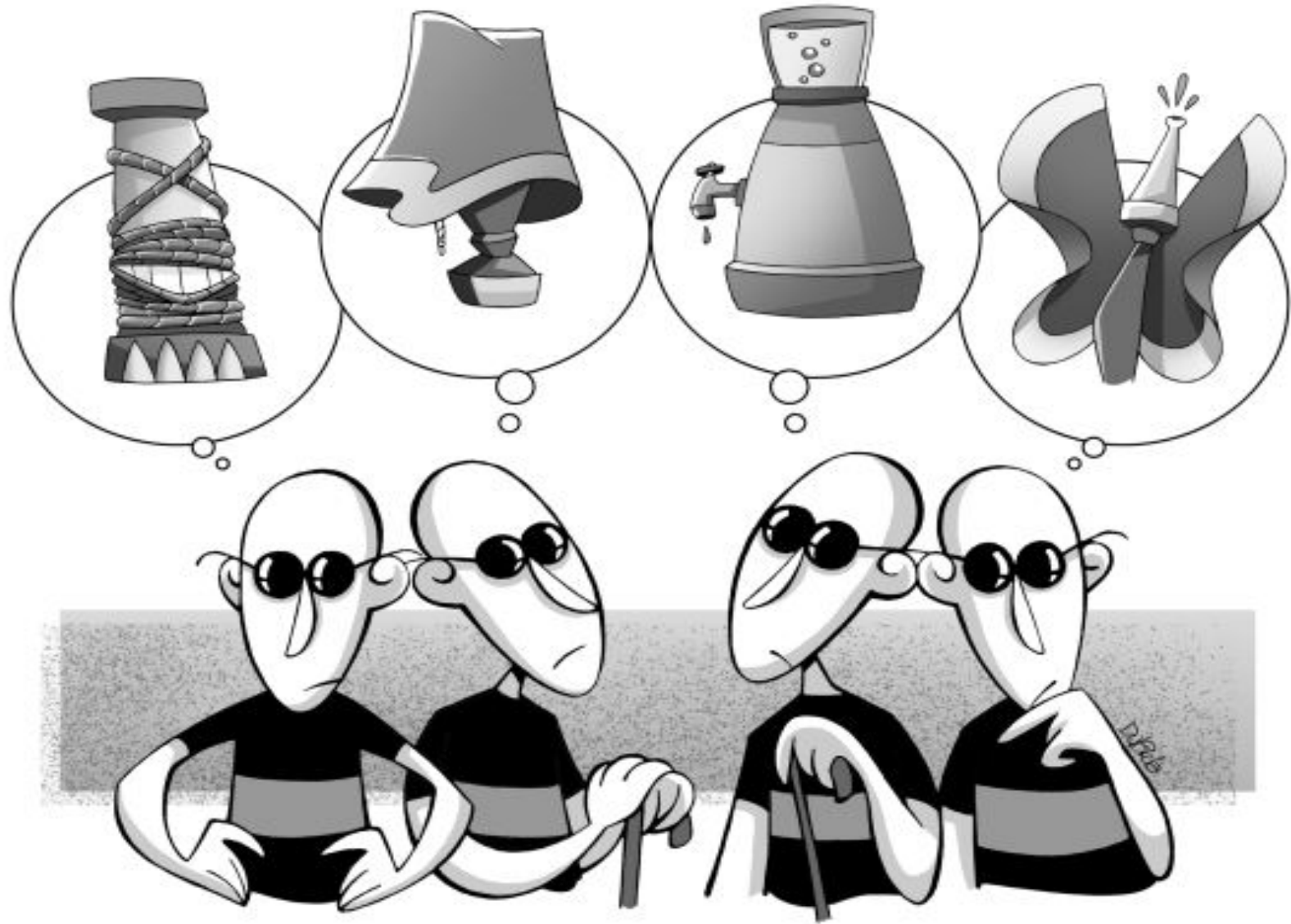
Four blind man were given the task of determining what an elephant was. The first touched its tail. He said 'an elephant is a rope'. The second touched its ears – he said 'an elephant is a rug'. The third touched its leg – he said 'an elephant is a pillar'. The fourth touched its trunk – he said 'an elephant is a hose'.



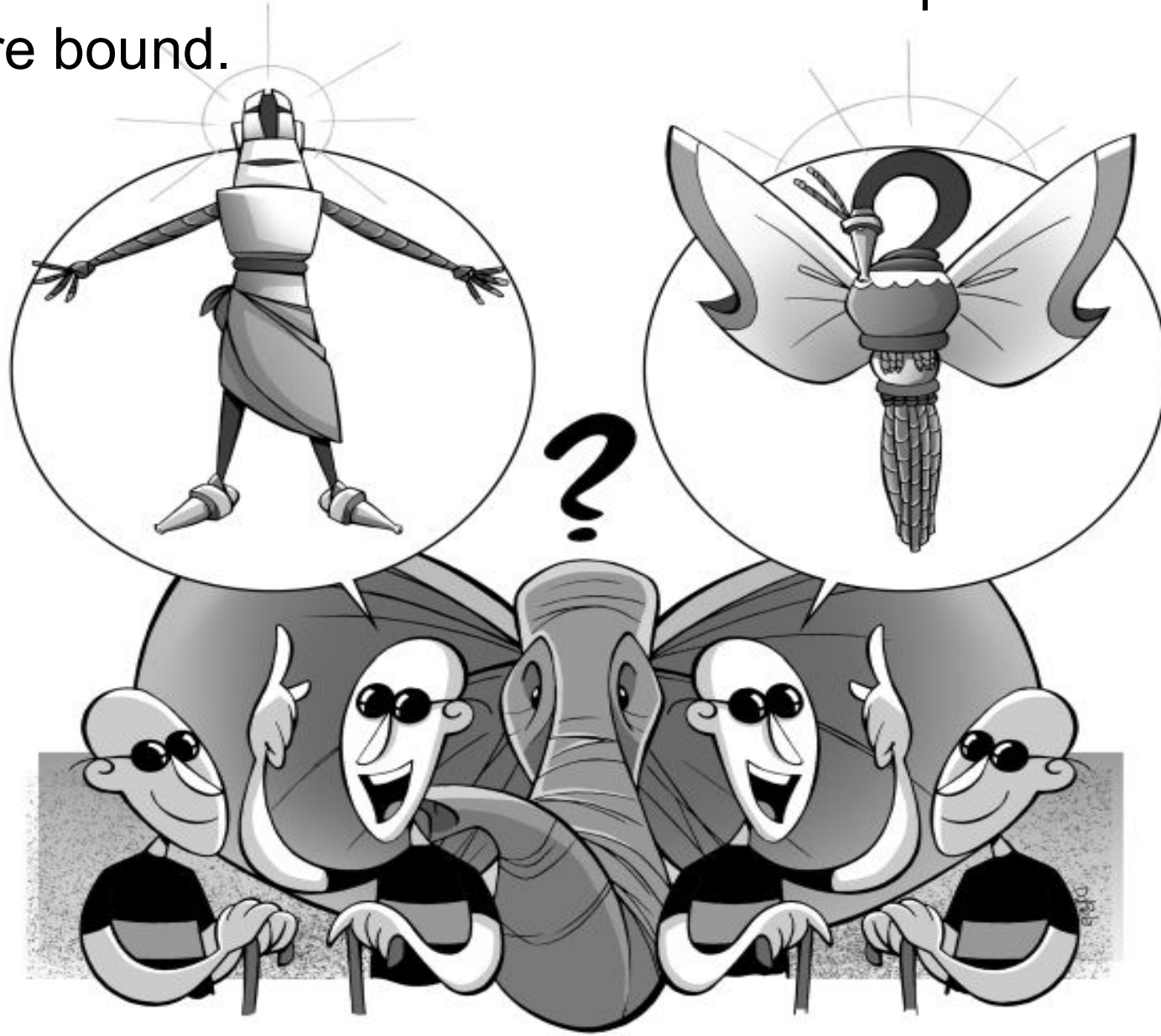
Budha finishes the story with the blind man arguing about what the elephant was. This echoes the scene of the preachers and scientists at the beginning of the story who could only understand reality based on the (partial) things they experienced and the concepts or languages they already had to explain it (which were also based on other partial concepts and experiences). In the same way, our 'readings' of the world are based on our experiences of reality and the language and concepts (or knowledges) that our cultures have given us to make sense of it.



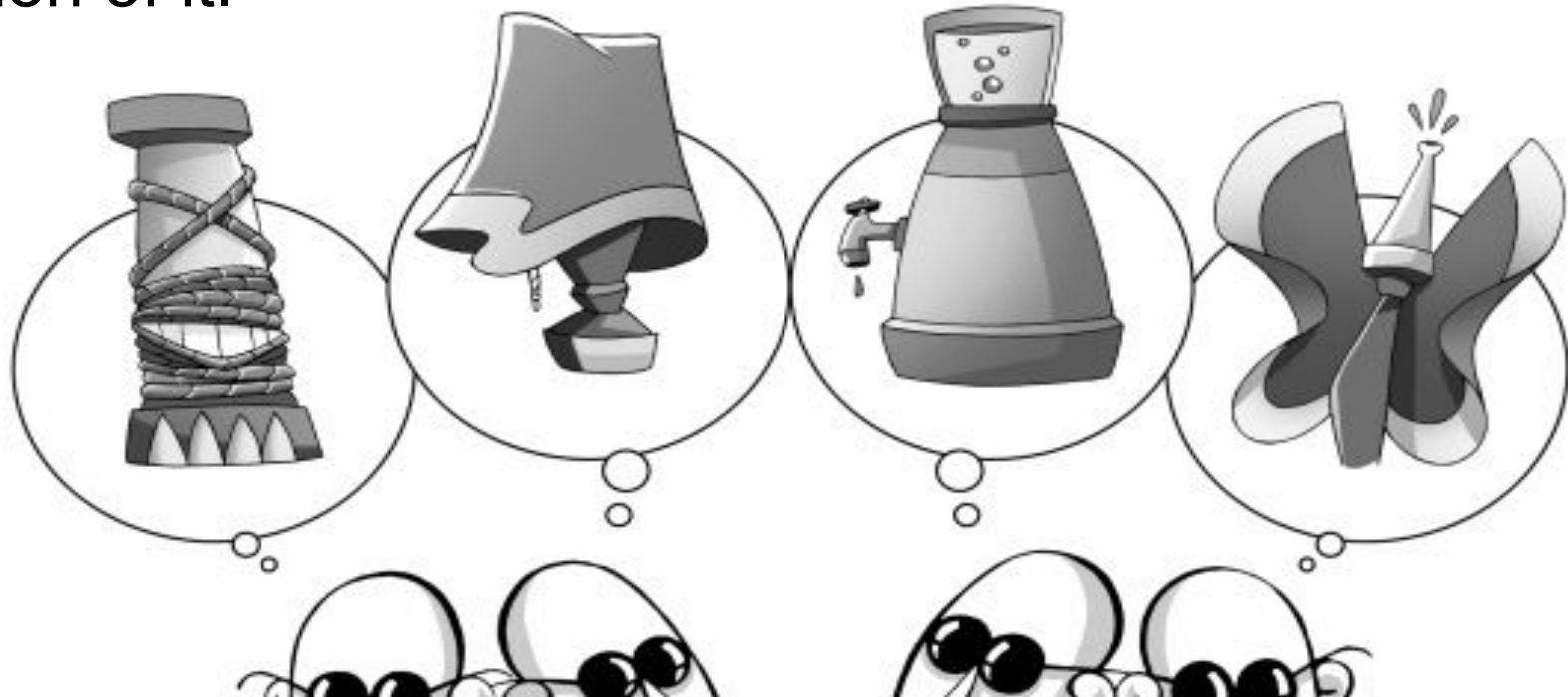
On the other hand, both cultures and our own understanding of things change with interactions with other cultures and concepts.



Although our partial language and concepts are essential to construct our understanding of the world, they are also what blinds us to understanding the concept of others. They also blind us to the awareness that our own concepts are restricted and culture bound.

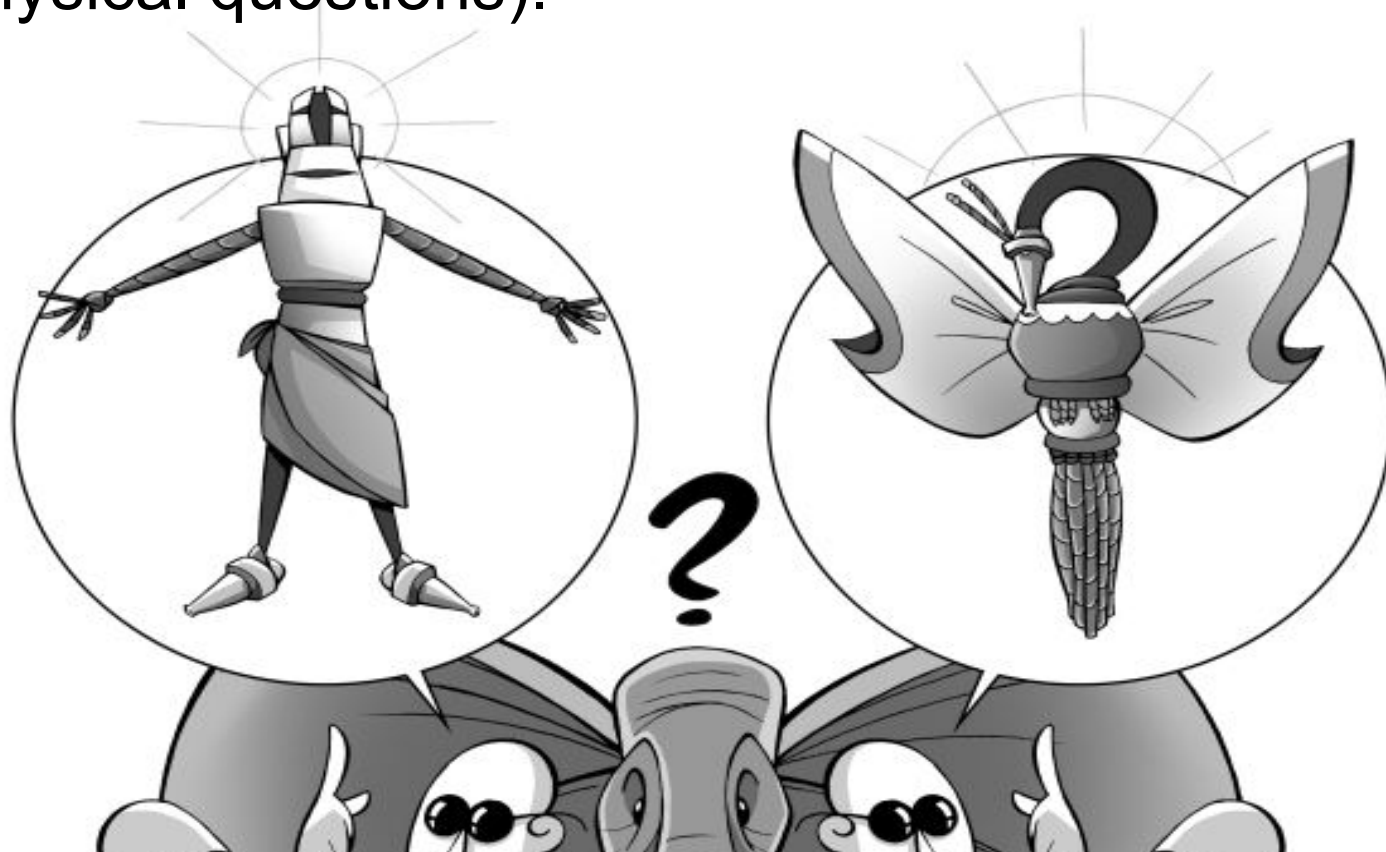


The elephant as a metaphor for uninterpreted reality is beyond our capacity of comprehension. There is no consensus in science, education, physics, politics, theology, philosophy or any other field about the nature of reality. And yet whatever understanding we have of it affects the core of our identities, relationships and 'readings' of everything else. This is because we understand these as being firmly based on 'reality' itself, which, as we have seen, really means our version of it.



Therefore dealing with the unknown – or difference – is essential to put into perspective our notions of identity, knowledge, truth, reality and values. At the same time that this is deeply unsettling, the reward is the perception of interconnectedness and its importance.

So, what's your elephant like? (Suggestion OSDE activity on metaphysical questions).



**THROUGH OTHER EYES**  
**EDUCATIONAL AGENDA**

# EDUCATIONAL AGENDA

Let's start by looking at two kinds of logics cultures use to construct their understanding of the world:

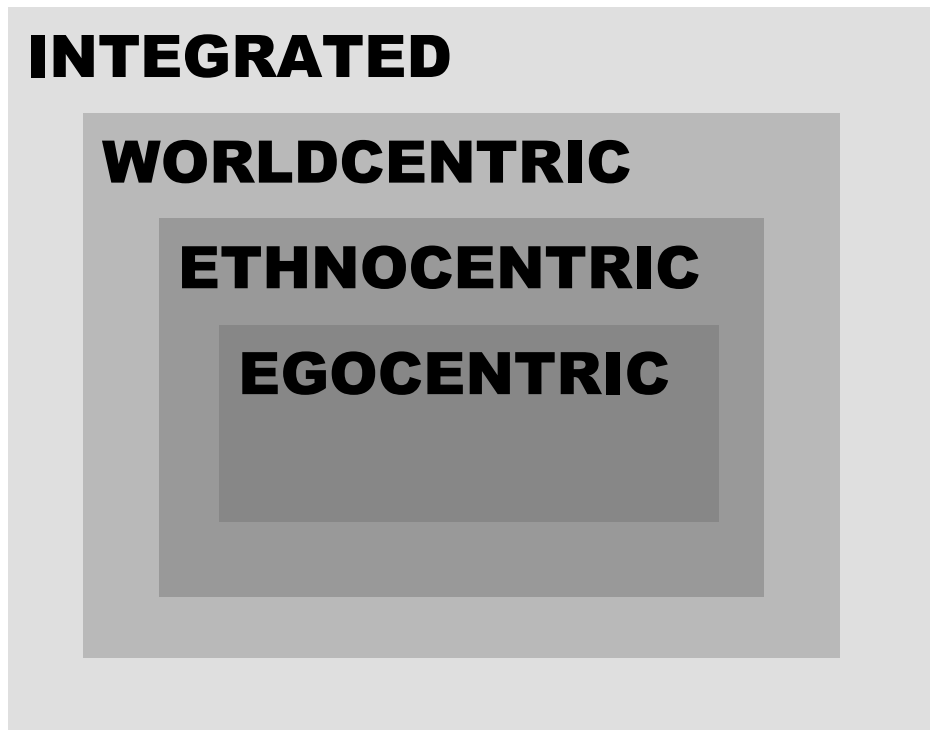
**A logic of universalistic thinking, ordering, control, judgement and ranking associated to discourses of justice, rights, progress and morality**



**Another logic of relational thinking and care that is non-hierarchical (and resists control) associated with discourses of respect, responsibility and ethics**

# EDUCATIONAL AGENDA

Now, let's identify different configurations of encounters with difference within these two logics.



# EDUCATIONAL AGENDA

In each configuration (from egocentric to integrated), the logics manifest themselves as below:

## **INTEGRATED**

rights and justice or care and respect  
FOR ALL FORMS OF LIFE

## **WORLDCENTRIC**

rights and justice or care and respect  
FOR THOSE I CONSIDER HUMAN

## **ETHNOCENTRIC**

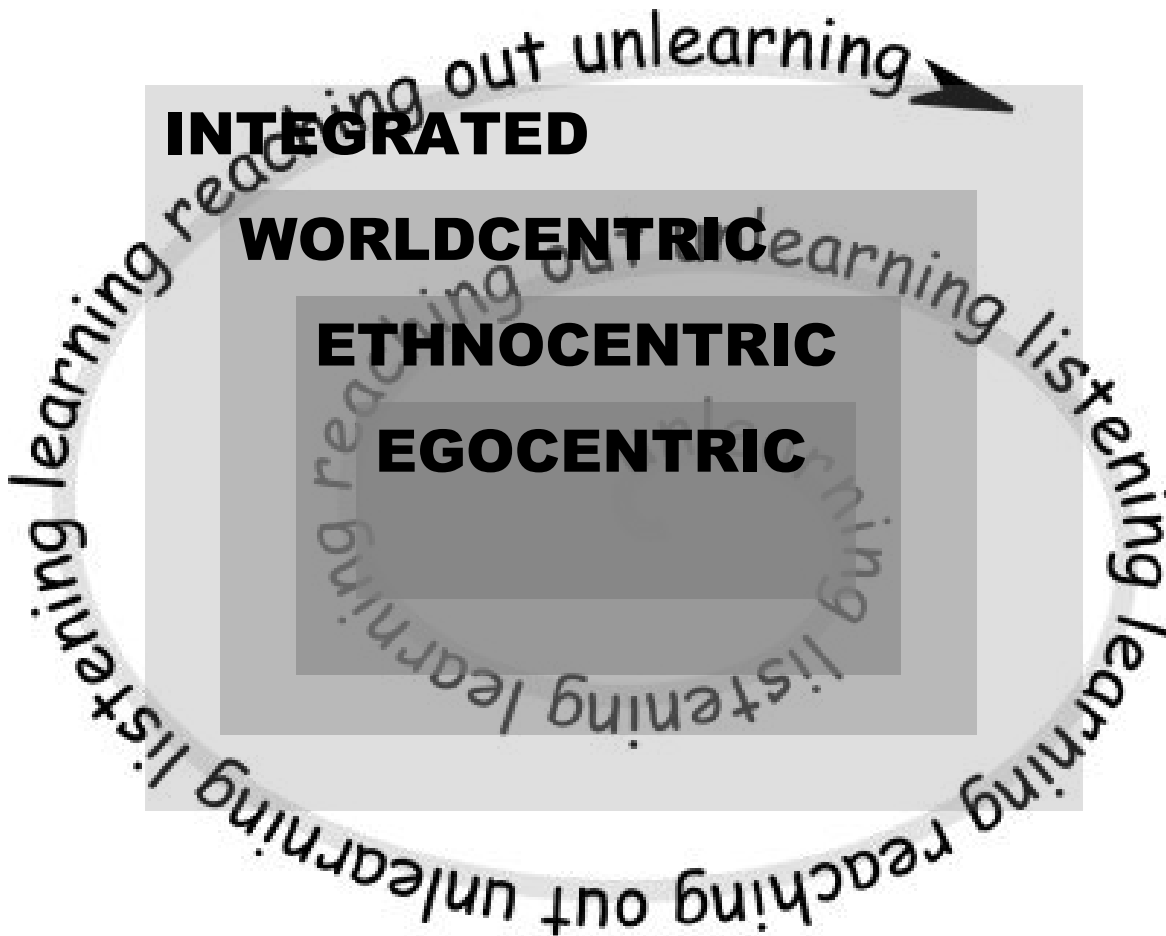
rights and justice or care and  
respect FOR MY EQUALS

## **EGOCENTRIC**

rights and justice or  
care and respect FOR  
MYSELF

# EDUCATIONAL AGENDA

This project primarily aims at preparing learners for an ethical engagement with difference. It privileges the relational logic as an educational strategy in the project's framework and methodology.



## TOE METHODOLOGY

2. GETTING STARTED
3. MAINSTREAM PERSPECTIVES
4. DIFFERENT LOGICS
5. THROUGH OTHER EYES
6. CASE STUDY
7. READING THE WORLD AGAIN