


## Article

# A Paradigm Shift for a More Inclusive, Equal, and Just Academia? Towards a Transformative-Emancipatory Pedagogy

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**Abstract:** This article puts forward the core argument that a pedagogical shift is very much needed if we want to address the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities represented by increasingly diverse educational settings and move towards a more inclusive, equal, and just academia. First, it is suggested that we replace the current pedagogical models in use, namely, the teacher-centered and student-centered models, as their educational philosophies are insufficient and can be considered, to a certain extent, oppressive. Then, it is argued that transformative pedagogy can broaden the scope of academic goals by including students' well-being, as well as their individual and collective emancipatory goals. To support the argument, the author presents a theoretical framework that has been developed over time while teaching migration topics to students coming from all over the world. The framework includes a holistic approach rooted in transformative pedagogy, which engages with students' cognitive, practical, and affective dimensions. It is further argued that the theoretical framework should integrate intersectional and decolonial approaches into its praxis. These approaches offer further insights into how to challenge power imbalances in the classroom, center the experiences and voices of marginalized communities, and recognize the interplay between individual experiences, systemic oppressions, and the broader socio-political context. The article concludes by explaining that transformative pedagogy has not yet received the attention it deserves, both in practice and in research, and that more efforts need to be made to explore its potential and scientific relevance.



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## 1. Introduction

Internationalization efforts and the inclusion of underrepresented groups have made many universities and colleges around the world more diverse [1]. Today, more than ever, teachers and students follow many different life paths and come from various socio-demographic backgrounds and parts of the globe. Diversity is manifested through intersecting expressions of gender, class, ethnicity, race, nationality, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and (in)visible dis/abilities [2], as well as diverse political perspectives and worldviews [3]. This new educational landscape poses new pedagogical questions concerning how we can engage with this diversity in meaningful ways [2,3]. It is acknowledged that this diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for higher education institutions and societies at large, and the role of these institutions in society depends on their ability to accommodate students' differences and leverage their unique talents and merits [4,5].

Despite significant variations among regions and universities worldwide, there is a global trend of increasing demands and debates for more inclusive, equitable, and just education [6]. Two primary broad solutions can be identified. Advocates of the first solution promote the idea of making our current educational models more inclusive by implementing inclusionary practices in the existing pedagogical approaches. From this perspective, there is a need to push for an agenda that promotes changes in the curriculum

to accommodate diverse needs and create more inclusive educational practices for all students. Excellent examples of such efforts can be seen in the initiatives undertaken by policymakers, universities, individual teachers, and instructors who prioritize creating inclusive curricula and learning environments to support the success of all students, including those who are typically marginalized or left behind [4,5,7]. In several countries, existing educational approaches have been combined with additional pedagogical frameworks like Culturally Responsiveness to Diversity [8] or Universal Design for Learning [9]. These approaches recognize individual differences as valuable assets that have the potential to enhance both students' lives and their learning journeys [9]. In this context, the focus is on intentionally designing pedagogy, curricula, and assessment methods that actively involve students in meaningful, relevant, and accessible learning experiences [9]. While this solution offers numerous advantages, it can be considered reformist, as it does not fundamentally challenge the prevailing paradigms currently in use.

Advocates of the second solution argue for a radical transformation of education to promote inclusion. This approach entails addressing the underlying causes of social injustice and structural inequalities within educational settings, with a specific focus on rectifying the historical oppression and marginalization faced. In countries dealing with their colonial legacies in the so-called "Global North", such as the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and a variety of countries in Latin America (including Brazil, Mexico, and Uruguay, just to name a few) for instance, there is a push not only for increased representation of indigenous and non-white communities but also for an agenda that incorporates indigenous and decolonial perspectives in academic teaching [10–13]. Here, *critical* approaches to education, especially those inspired by Paulo Freire's tradition [14], have emerged as powerful strategies used by social movements and marginalized communities to challenge power structures and the role of formal education in perpetuating social inequalities and injustices. Examples of these approaches include Social Justice Education [15] and a variety of interventions coming from feminist, intersectional, queer, anti-racist, disabilities, and decolonial perspectives [10]. One key development is the incorporation of indigenous epistemologies and knowledge in some academic curricula [13,16].

Acknowledging the valuable contributions of both sides in the debates mentioned above, this article takes a bold stance to explore how transformative pedagogy, grounded in the critical tradition established by the seminal work of Freire [14], can serve as a viable solution to rethink current pedagogical approaches for our era and reimagine alternative futures for more inclusive and just academic teaching [6,17].

In order to illustrate my argument, I first explain why time is ripe to move away from current pedagogical approaches in use, namely, the teacher-centered and student-centered models, as their educational philosophies are insufficient and can be considered, to a certain extent, oppressive. Then, I argue that transformative pedagogy allows to expand the scope of academic goals by including students' well-being and individual and collective emancipatory goals. By way of example, I present a theoretical framework rooted in transformative pedagogy I have developed over the years while teaching migration topics in international programs in social sciences in a variety of countries (Canada, Italy, and Sweden), to students from all over the world. Called transformative-emancipatory pedagogy, this framework is based on more than a decade of research and practical experience, teaching, and offering training as an international young academic (and an immigrant myself) to diverse groups of learners and vulnerable communities on sensitive topics, such as migration politics, racism, and gender-based and intersectional violence [3,18,19].

In this framework, I understand *inclusion* of diversity not only as numerical representation and equal treatment, but as a much broader pedagogical orientation that allows teachers and students to work together about how to nurture their well-being and construct an educational environment that can better incorporate their rich and situated perspectives and experiences and reshape educational settings to meet their needs [17]. I propose to adopt a holistic approach, which engages with students' cognitive, practical, and affective dimensions. I further argue that the theoretical framework should integrate intersectional

and decolonial approaches to align teaching praxis with higher education's expanded goals [14,20]. These approaches offer further insights into how to challenge power imbalances in the classroom, center the experiences and voices of marginalized communities, and recognize the interplay between individual experiences, systemic oppressions, and the broader socio-political context. The article concludes by explaining that transformative pedagogy has not yet received the attention it deserves, both in practice and in research, and that more research needs to be made to explore its full potential and scientific relevance.

## 2. Towards a Pedagogical Shift in Higher Education

It is my contention that today's predominant educational approaches in academia—both teacher-centered and student-centered—need to be replaced, as they do not effectively address the challenges and unique opportunities presented by an increasingly diverse higher education setting. Despite their important differences, the philosophies of education of both teacher-centered and student-centered approaches have important limitations, and in various ways they can be considered oppressive.

It is also worth bearing in mind that the models presented here are ideal types. In practice, there are different definitions and applications [21]. According to O'Neill and McMahon [21] (p. 32), for instance, the teacher-centered and student-centered approaches mostly exist on a spectrum, and many educational approaches are hybrid models and can incorporate elements of both. Moreover, it is important to note that the prevalence and distribution of these models may vary across institutions, disciplines, and geographical regions. The dominance of one model over the other can depend on various factors, including cultural context, institutional policies, and educational philosophies. As a way of example, universities in Canada, USA, and Britain, as well as Nordic countries (e.g., Denmark, Sweden, Norway), for instance, tend to embrace variations of the student-centred model, while universities in France, Italy, and Spain, Switzerland, and Austria, just to name a few, are often teacher-centred.

### 2.1. The Teacher-Centered Model

For many decades, the teacher-centered model has dominated most academic settings in Western countries (Europe and North America) and other regions of the world, including in many universities of ex-colonized countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Despite important reforms and academic efforts to replace it, the teacher-centered model remains prevalent in much of higher education internationally [21], even in countries where Paulo Freire's is most influential like Brazil.

The teacher-centered model is a philosophy of education that places the educators at the heart of the educational process and power is predominantly held by them [22–24]. The primary focus is on the instructors' knowledge and expertise, with the assumption that they hold the authority in imparting knowledge to students. Conversely, students are expected to passively receive information and conform to the teacher's instructions. The practical implication is that teaching is primarily lecture-based, where the emphasis is on transmitting knowledge from the teacher to the students [21]. The teacher acts as the primary source of information, while students are expected to listen, memorize, and reproduce the material. Moreover, the curriculum is often predetermined, and students are expected to absorb and accurately rehearse the information provided. In line with the teacher-centered philosophical principles, assessment techniques are often focused on testing students' ability to recall information or reproduce what they have learned, via the use of exams or quizzes.

The teacher-centered model has been widely criticized because it affords limited space for active learning and independence, fostering primarily a surface-level learning [25]. Moreover, it is argued that the classroom dynamics in a teacher-centered model are hierarchical. Students have limited autonomy and decision-making power in the learning process and may have fewer opportunities for critical thinking, creativity, and self-expression. On this matter, using Freire's framework, one can define the teacher-centered model as

“banking education” [14]. Freire defined banking education as a pedagogical model where the teachers are seen as the holders of knowledge and authority (“depositor”), while the students are viewed as passive recipients (or “banks”), where knowledge is deposited. As such, banking education is mostly *disempowering* as it “treats students as objects of assistance” [14]. Here, the students are expected to memorize and regurgitate this information without critically engaging with it or actively participating in the learning process. In doing so, this model devalues the students’ experiences, knowledge, and critical thinking abilities.

More importantly, Freire believed that banking education perpetuates oppression by maintaining a hierarchical power dynamic. The students are positioned as objects of the educational system, lacking agency and the ability to challenge or transform their own reality. This model of education reinforces the *status quo* and inhibits the development of critical consciousness and liberation, especially for the historical marginalized communities, such as Black and indigenous people [14].

In sum, it can be argued that the teacher-centered model fails to acknowledge diversity and tends to reproduce oppressive practices [14]. Thus, a paradigm shift of the teacher-centered model should be prioritized if universities and teachers working in diverse classroom seek to promote deep learning, acknowledge students’ unique talents and perspectives, and better include a diverse group of students coming from different paths of life.

## 2.2. The Student-Centered Model

Over recent decades, academics and policy-makers have pushed for a change in paradigm, seeking to supplant the teacher-centered model with a student-centered model [24,26]. In the scholarship of education, the student-centered model is preferred to the teacher-centered model for its ability to facilitate deeper learning, encourage critical thinking, and foster students’ agency and autonomy [23,26]. Today, this approach serves as the primary educational model in numerous countries around the world. In Europe, for instance, reforms have been initiated by the Bologna Process in 1998–1999, and several countries have sought to gradually replace the teacher-centered model with the student-centered one into their academic programs.

According to O’Neill and McMahon [21] (p. 30), the concept of student-centred learning has been credited as early as 1905 to Hayward and in 1956 to John Dewey’s work [22], and it is rooted in the constructivist tradition. This philosophy of education departs from the focus on the teacher and teaching to an emphasis on learners and learning. One of its first results is to move *power* from the teacher to the student [24–27]. This means that the student-centered model seeks to place the student at the center of the educational process [21,27], recognizing that students have unique needs, interests, and learning styles that should be taken into account. Moreover, instead of relying solely on knowledge transmission, the student-centered model emphasizes knowledge construction. Students are encouraged to explore, discover, and construct their own understanding through inquiry-based learning, experiential learning, and practical application of knowledge [28].

Beyond its different philosophical stands and applications, some common characteristics of the student-centered model include: (1) *Personalization*: Tailoring instruction to meet individual student needs and learning styles; (2) *Active Learning*: Encouraging students to actively engage in the learning process through discussions, projects, and hands-on activities; (3) *Collaboration*: Promoting teamwork and group activities to foster cooperative learning and social interaction; (4) *Student Agency*: Empowering students to take ownership of their learning by setting goals and making decisions about their educational path; (5) *Critical thinking*: Encouraging students to engage with interactive discussions, problem-solving, critical thinking, and applied knowledge; and (6) *Flexibility*: Allowing students to explore topics of interest and follow their curiosity to deepen their understanding.

In pursuit of these core features, assessment methods focus on not only recalling information but also higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and the application

of knowledge [24,26]. Assessments may include project-based tasks, presentations, and portfolios. Moreover, experiential learning activities, such as simulations, role play, and service engagement with local communities outside the classroom are key developments of the student-centered model in some countries and university, more closely aligned with Dewey's vision of education. These activities seek to engage the learners' practical dimension alongside "reasoning" [28] and to draw also on the lived experiences of the learners [19]. These assessment activities may also include a certain degree of involvement of students in their design [29].

The student-centered model is widely praised because its effort to promote active learning and independence. Moreover, it has a greater potential to open up spaces for greater inclusion in the classroom than the teacher-centered model. The classroom dynamics are more horizontal, interactive, and participatory. Moreover, students also have a higher degree of agency in the learning process. They are encouraged to explore their interests, make choices, ask questions, contribute to discussions, and actively engage in their own learning process by taking ownership of their learning. There is also more space to value unique perspectives and experiences and integrate them into the learning environment [19].

From this point of view, the philosophical principles of the student-centered model share several aspects with Freire's pedagogical vision, especially its variations of deep and experiential learning rooted in the Dewey's tradition. In contrast to banking education, and drawing also directly from Dewey's work, Freire advocated for a dialogical and participatory approach to education, known as *problem-posing education*. In line with his idea, the student-centered model values the active engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration of both teachers and students in the co-construction of knowledge [14,30]. Moreover, compared to the teacher-centered model, the student-centered model has the potential to create a more egalitarian classroom environment, with power being shared among students and teachers. The emphasis is on understanding concepts deeply and applying knowledge to real-world situations [31].

Despite its important merits, from the perspective of Freire's view of education as a site of liberation, the philosophy of education of the student-centered model is limited in scope. Moreover, to a certain extent, it can be considered oppressive. Before I turn to my critique of the student-centered model, I present how the latter differs from the philosophical principles of transformative pedagogy.

### 2.3. Transformative Pedagogy

Transformative pedagogy is grounded in critical pedagogy [20,30,32] and is rooted in the educational philosophy and methodology developed by the Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire, particularly in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [14]. Since Freire's foundational work, transformative pedagogy has gained widespread development in Latin America and has been adapted in various regions globally, both in formal and non-formal educational settings [30], especially in programs focusing on peace and human rights education [33,34]. As mentioned earlier in this article, in recent years, it has regained momentum in many countries due to increased discussions on the need to address exclusion and injustice in higher education for underrepresented and historically marginalized groups [30,33,35]. However, based on my preliminary research, it remains uncertain whether transformative pedagogy is used as the primary educational model in any universities or specific departments worldwide. Furthermore, in contrast to the other two models, the field of scholarship in higher education has not yet developed a systematic research agenda to assess the potential added value of transformative pedagogy [3]. This includes, for instance, a profound reflection on the types of assessment activities needed to effectively promote its learning and transformative principles within the classroom. (One example of efforts to address this important limitation is the toolkit developed in our collaborative project, as found in [20]).

Like in the student-centered model, transformative pedagogy places the learner at the center of the educational process, and it is also based on the belief that students are active



participants in their learning and have unique backgrounds, experiences, and interests that should be considered when designing instructional approaches. However, while the student-centered model prioritizes personalized learning experiences and student empowerment, transformative pedagogy emphasizes students' well-being alongside social justice, critical thinking, and challenging power structures [14,20,30,35]. Thus, different from the student-centered model, transformative pedagogy's primary aim is to empower students not only as learners but also as agents who can analyze and question the social and cultural contexts in which they live. To achieve this, transformative pedagogy emphasizes the importance of connecting heads and hearts to promote action [34] and it has at its core the mission to promote social justice and challenge oppressive systems in education and in society [20,32].

As such, a distinct characteristic of transformative pedagogy is to go beyond individual learning goals and focuses on broader social and political transformation. This is achieved by explicitly addressing issues of social justice in the classroom, striving to raise critical awareness of systemic injustices, challenge oppressive structures, and foster a sense of social responsibility among students [17,30,32]. This effort, in turn, promotes transformative learning experiences that enable students to become agents of change and advocate for social justice [14,20,32,36].

Furthermore, while in the student-centered model the instructor acts as a facilitator or guide, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment, transformative pedagogy emphasizes social justice, questioning authority, and addressing power imbalances in the classroom. As such, transformative pedagogy goes deeper in challenging traditional power dynamics in the classroom by seeking to dismantle hierarchical relationships between instructors and students, as well as among students [14,20].

#### 2.4. Why We Need to Depart from the Student-Centered Model

I have identified three interconnected critiques of the student-centered model, which demonstrate that this paradigm is still insufficient to promote inclusion in the classroom.

*First*, the student-centered model remains entangled with the idea that "reasoning" is the dominant ability to be developed in higher education. While this model helps to foster students' autonomy and critical thinking [23,26], it tends to overlook other important dimensions of learning, such as emotions, emotional intelligence, and introspection [20]. While more recent developments of this model have paid greater attention to practical skills and competences (for example, via the use of experiential learning techniques) [27], the role of emotions is still undertheorized and seldom used [37,38]. As I argue below, we need to adopt a holistic approach to learners, which engages the whole person in the learning process. This approach should connect academic learning goals to students' different talents, intelligence, abilities, ways of learning and knowing, as well as their different worldviews and perspectives. This means rethinking in-class activities in ways that actively include these diverse perspectives, thereby diversifying and expanding the range of activities to include, among others, the affective dimension of learning (for practical solutions on how to address this problem see [19]).

*Second*, and related to the first point, the student-centered model is not able to fully capitalize on the diversity represented in the classroom as a key aspect to enhance students' learning and understanding of the world. An approach that relies mostly on "reasoning" can and has been criticized for being andro-centric, ableist, Eurocentric, and universalistic, among others, and thus oppressive toward a variety of groups who do not conform to the constructed "norm" [16,20,39]. We know that many students of marginalized groups often encounter alienation and discrimination within the classroom, which can have a negative impact on their academic achievements and overall well-being [20,36]. As I will argue below, transformative pedagogy can show us how to value the diverse perspectives of marginalized groups in the learning environment while empowering all students in the classroom (including those from more privileged groups) to engage with oppression. By tackling the exclusion and silencing of marginalized groups, and by de-

centering academic practices, transformative pedagogy has the potential to empower and promote the transformation of beliefs, values, and worldviews of all learners involved in the learning process.

*Third*, the student-centered approach relies on an individualistic model of learning and does not have power and social justice as its focus [32]. Consequently, it is not actively engaged in dismantling the structural oppression that affects oppressed groups. An approach in education that pursues inclusion, equity, and justice should make an explicit link between the purpose of education beyond formal educational goals, in order to make it relevant for students' well-being and for the broader society. While the student-centered approach can provide more opportunities than the teacher-centered one in terms of improving society, especially the variations more closely aligned with Dewey's vision of education, social justice is not its primary goal.

### 3. A Transformative-Emancipatory Pedagogy

In my work as an academic educator, I have crafted a framework based on transformative pedagogy, which I refer to as “transformative-emancipatory pedagogy” to address the three key limitations outlined above. These limitations became evident during my academic training and tenure in universities and departments that predominantly utilized the student-center model (e.g., Canada and Sweden).

More specifically, this framework presents key features, which have been particularly useful while teaching in the field of social sciences to international students coming from all over the world. A more expanded version of this framework as well as a test and evaluation of its implementation can be found in [3,20]. The framework allows for the clarification of how the pedagogical shift proposed in this article can be implemented into academic teaching. Moreover, I explain that intersectional and decolonial approaches are needed if we want to deepen the scope of transformative pedagogy and create a more inclusive, equal, and just learning environments for a variety of students coming from all over the world and from different paths of lives.

#### 3.1. The Theoretical Framework




The core feature of this framework is the active promotion of a holistic approach to learning [35]. I call this approach “holistic” because it seeks to mobilize *in synergy* learners' cognitive (*heads*), practical (*hands*), and affective (*hearts*) dimensions and utilizes participants' interactions in relation to these three dimensions to foster deep learning, as well as learners' well-being and emancipatory goals [3,19]. As such, this framework allows us to expand the goals of academic education beyond knowledge and understanding, and skills and abilities, to include more explicitly a change in attitudes and behaviors [3,34].

In the specific context of higher education, I have integrated the holistic approach into traditional academic goals, as shown in Table 1. While the academic curricula are mostly focused on acquiring knowledge and understanding (cognitive dimension) and skills and competences (practical dimension), this table shows how we need to include the affective dimension as well in order to address behaviors and attitudes, which allow for the promotion of change [20,34]. Thus, the theoretical framework values emotional and introspective abilities alongside cognitive and practical outcomes. It is also important to note that the table uses inclusion as its main content. However, its structure can be adapted to any other topic and discipline.

By engaging the whole person, a holistic approach provides the conditions for producing a greater understanding of the topics taught, as well as the conditions for triggering a transformative process in the learners (e.g., a shift in perspective or greater openness). Some of these insights come also from the American tradition of Transformative Learning Theory inaugurated by Jack Mezirow, which has contributed largely to theorizing and studying how learners change and transform their perceptions of reality. See, Taylor and Cranton [40] for an overview of the field. See also my work [3,19]. Moreover, although

the three dimensions are considered separated, it is more correct to say that they work in synergy to achieve key educational and emancipatory goals [3].

**Table 1.** A holistic approach applied to higher education.

Cognitive Dimension (Heads)—  Knowledge and Understanding	
Examples of expected learning outcome(s):	
-	Acquiring deep knowledge and understanding of the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion in society
Practical Dimension (Hands)—  Skills and Competences	
Examples of expected learning outcome(s):	
-	Developing new skills and competences that allow participants to practice an inclusive culture and to acquire key intercultural awareness
Affective Dimension (Hearts)—  Attitudes and Behaviors	
Examples of expected learning outcome(s):	
-	Transforming students' perceptions of privileges and oppression and trigger change to treating everyone equally in the classroom

Accordingly, the holistic approach presented above allows for the promotion of “conscientization” [14]. Freire envisioned education as a process of liberation, whereby learners develop critical awareness, or “conscientization”, of their position in the world, enabling them to analyze their own reality, identify real problems and needs, and take action to transform society [14]. Conscientization can be achieved by creating a safe and inclusive space that acknowledges the diverse experiences and needs of *all* students [20] and that is able to engage with them in meaningful ways, by capitalizing on the lived experience, perspectives, and worldviews in the classroom [3,19,20]. In particular, engaging with emotions (affective dimension) is crucial to break through the initial resistance that some people may experience when talking about sensitive topics, and it can trigger deeper reflection about injustice and a change in attitudes and behaviors [3], while promoting “healing” [16,20,34–36].

Freire’s approach is also called “social-emancipatory” as it seeks to promote social transformation. By addressing real-world problems and social justice demands, teachers and students should seek to tackle the deep-rooted problems related to the silencing of marginalized groups and the reproduction of inequalities. This social-emancipatory dimension is made particularly relevant in the idea that education should endeavor to raise awareness about and challenge inequalities and discrimination, both within educational contexts and throughout society at large [14,20,32]. By involving the experiences of all students in the classroom and reflecting on how their lived experiences and positions within existing power structures shape their distinct understanding of the social world, the classroom can become a place in which people can explore and challenge power structures and discrimination and, ultimately, foster social change [14].

All in all, the framework proposed here seeks to combine traditional academic learning goals (such as acquisition of new knowledge and practical skills) with (1) *students’ well-being*, growth, and self-awareness, as well as (2) *individual emancipatory goals*, such as nurturing critical consciousness about one’s situation in the world, and (3) *collective emancipatory goals*, such as a greater awareness of social injustice and a desire to seek socio-political transformation (by promoting, for instance, actions in support of pluralism, tolerance, democratic values, human rights, and peace) [18,20,30,32,34,36]. These goals are connected to the holistic approach proposed in Table 1, as transformation can happen by drawing on a learners’ lived experience and by engaging the learner holistically and in meaningful ways acknowledging their specific ways of learning and perceiving the world. Thus, the theoretical framework expands the goals of higher education by fostering both *deep learning* outcomes, in line also with Dewey’s vision of education, and empowerment



through transformative experiences for teachers and students, particularly regarding real-life problems that affect them as part of the larger society [20].

### 3.2. Integrating Intersectional and Decolonial Approaches

Intersectional and decolonial approaches, when applied to higher education, can help us go deeper into addressing and challenging the intersecting systems of power, oppression, and marginalization present within educational institutions and society at large [12,41,42]. Intersectionality is a concept developed by black feminist Crenshaw [42]. It recognizes that (1) individuals hold multiple social identities based on race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, and these identities intersect and interact to shape their experiences and opportunities (*individual dimension*), and (2) multiple forms of oppression and privilege are interconnected, and they interact and shape collective experiences (*social dimension*) [41]. An intersectional approach applied to higher education involves considering how multiple dimensions of identity intersect and impact students' educational experiences, opportunities, and barriers [2], and how these aspects can be integrated into in-class activities to enhance students' learning experiences [3,19].

Decolonial approaches, influenced by indigenous, decolonial, and critical race theory, aim to challenge and dismantle the legacy of colonialism within educational systems. They emphasize the need to deconstruct white supremacy and Eurocentric knowledge frameworks, power hierarchies, and cultural dominance that perpetuate inequality and marginalization [12]. Decolonial approaches applied to higher education involve rethinking curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional structures to incorporate diverse knowledge systems, amplify marginalized perspectives and knowledge systems, and promote epistemic justice [3,10,16].

All in all, intersectional and decolonial approaches can be combined in order to create inclusive spaces that validate and center the experiences of marginalized communities, including indigenous and non-white communities [2]. Integrating these approaches within the framework of transformative-emancipatory pedagogy has the potential to promote more actively inclusion, equality, and justice, by tailoring the learning experience to students' unique perspectives and worldviews.

### 3.3. Examples of Transformative-Emancipatory Praxis

Below I offer some practical examples of possible ways of integrating the theoretical framework into our praxis, by paying also attention on how to include intersectional and decolonial approaches. The list of practices is described as separate, but one can observe several overlaps.

#### 3.3.1. Promoting Personal Well-Being, Growth, and Self-Awareness

One practical consequence of adopting a holistic approach rooted in transformative pedagogy is that the curriculum as well as the teaching and assessment techniques used in the classroom are redesigned in ways that align with its broader goals [3,19]. To promote students' personal growth and well-being, educators and students can develop and even co-create a variety of teaching practices and in-class activities that nurture students' cognitive, practical, and emotional dimensions.

This approach requires flexibility from the teacher in order to let students define their own topics and activities. This means, for instance, valuing the co-construction of the curriculum, which is tailored to students' specific needs on a case-by-case basis. Practices such as mindfulness and self-care can be integrated in the classroom to open up a new space for self-awareness, connection, healing, and learning [20]. These activities should also be tailored to students' unique talents and ways of knowing and learning. In addition to formal lectures and various students-led activities, a range of learning activities should be developed and tested accordingly (cf. for instance, [3,19]). Experiential learning techniques, for instance, which focus on developing practical skills via the use of case studies, simulations, and community-based activities [28], can be included in the

curriculum with a greater emphasis on the “transformative-emancipatory” elements [19]. This means, among others, including the emotional dimension, together with the practical dimension of learning (cf. [3,19]).

### 3.3.2. Providing Spaces for Dialogue, Deep Reflection, and Trust

A key priority of transformative-emancipatory pedagogy is to create a space where teachers and students feel heard, respected, and valued [14,20]. It recognizes and validates the diverse experiences and backgrounds of students, allowing them to contribute their unique perspectives to class discussions and activities. Creating safe and inclusive spaces for open dialogue, reflection, connection, and trust allows teachers and students to feel more at ease to share their perspectives, experiences, and questions related to power, privilege, and social justice. In-class discussions can be used to foster empathy, understanding, and solidarity among students from diverse backgrounds, promoting a sense of interconnectedness with one another and the world, while enhancing their capacity to engage with difficult conversations and sensitive topics, and to challenge oppressive systems.

In this safe environment, transformative-emancipatory pedagogy equips educators and students with tools and strategies to navigate potentially challenging topics in a sensitive and inclusive manner. Encouraging the use of affective learning and lived experiences can facilitate deeper understanding and empathy [14,20]. Moreover, by addressing sensitive topics, such as stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices [3,36,43], for instance, teachers and students can work jointly to develop critical consciousness, and to counter intersectional exclusion and injustice [19,30]. By providing guidance and resources, educators can support students in recognizing and addressing their own biases, promoting respectful and inclusive language, behavior, and actions towards one another. This endeavor allows individuals to connect deep learning goals with emancipatory goals [3,19].

### 3.3.3. Including Diverse Voices and Perspectives

A safe learning environment allows for the incorporation of diverse voices, experiences, and perspectives in the classroom. Moving beyond token representation [44], educators and students can actively seek resources that reflect their knowledge and experiences. This can be achieved by creating a curriculum that values and affirms the cultural, ethnic, and social diversity of students. This entails, for instance, integrating texts, narratives, and materials that challenge dominant narratives and provide alternative viewpoints, that better reflect the lived experiences and diverse perspectives of teachers and students. This can be achieved, as pointed out earlier, by giving students a key role in defining the class curricula and the content of the material used in the classroom.

By acknowledging and addressing the intersecting dimensions of discrimination and privilege, a holistic approach rooted in transformative pedagogy can also capture the experiences of marginalized individuals who may face overlapping forms of oppression and exclusion, encouraging greater recognition of the unique challenges faced by students from marginalized communities and creating inclusive and just spaces that validate and center their experiences. An intersectional approach, moreover, facilitates an engagement with the complexity of diversity in the classroom and helps the teacher and learners to understand, discuss, and deconstruct intersecting discrimination in society. By zooming in the “positionality” of each person involved in the learning process (teachers and students alike) and the “power dynamics” at play in the classroom, the learning environment can be used to reflect on broader societal dynamics.

Furthermore, incorporating an intersectional approach allows educators to consider the unique experiences and perspectives of all students. Fostering individual and collective emancipatory goals within academic teaching can benefit all students working in diverse learning environments, including the more privileged ones [3,19,45]. While the focus of transformative pedagogy is often on addressing the alienation and silencing experienced by marginalized individuals (see, for instance, [36]), an intersectional approach can present unique insights on how to develop new teaching material that reflects intersectional realities

in their content and to create opportunities for critical self-reflection and awareness among all students [14,20]. This means encouraging students to critically examine their own positions of privilege in light of the course content, to understand the systemic nature of oppression, and actively engage in dismantling oppressive structures. Moreover, teachers can foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective action for social justice, benefiting both marginalized and privileged students alike.

#### 3.3.4. Challenging Eurocentric and Colonial Narratives via a Decentralization of Knowledge

The imperative of including diverse voices and perspectives also entails challenging patriarchy, white supremacy, and Eurocentric and colonial bias, among others [16,46]. By addressing and disrupting hegemonic perspectives, educators and students can incorporate the materials, lessons, discussions, and narratives that highlight the historical contributions, knowledge systems, and cultural practices of indigenous peoples and marginalized communities [3,11,47]. By decentering knowledge and dominant perspectives and knowledge systems, teachers and students can make efforts to recognize the contributions and epistemologies of historically marginalized communities. This means acknowledging, for instance, the multiplicity of knowledge systems, fostering a deeper appreciation for diverse ways of knowing and being in the world, while helping students understand how power structures shape knowledge production and representation and how this impacts their lives and society in multiple ways. In addition, teachers and students can work together to include the diverse perspectives represented in the classroom, through cultural responsiveness and contextual understanding of students in the classroom who come from all over the world (including from ex-colonized regions and the so-called “Global South”) [3].

#### 3.3.5. Fostering Collective Solutions and Action

By analyzing power dynamics, systems of oppression, and the interconnectedness of socio-political issues, students can become more aware of the power dynamics that surround their lives and society and move toward becoming agents of change. Incorporating diverse perspectives in the classroom allows for a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between human beings and global injustices, promoting socio-political consciousness and action. Teachers and students can engage in ways that encourage them to develop collective and creative thinking which, in turn, allows them to identify more clearly the problems they face and to become active agents in the search for collective solutions. One example of how to create the connection between critical consciousness and action is to encourage students to understand the reality of marginalized communities via the use of visual material and practical activities in the classroom which *bring in* the lived experiences and realities of these groups. Another way to promote this understanding, is by promoting students' engagement with community organizations that work on intersectional and decolonial issues. By partnering with community leaders, activists, and experts, educators and students can bring diverse perspectives and experiences into the classroom, drawing on collaborative principles [34]. Encouraging students to actively participate in community initiatives that promote social justice and challenge oppressive systems reinforces the importance of civic engagement and collective action and can provide additional opportunities for students not only to connect learning to real-world content [22,28,46], but also to open their eyes to the reality of other groups in society and to become aware of possible solutions already developed, for instance, at the grassroots level.

The examples presented in this section offer insights into how we can introduce practices and in-class activities that acknowledge and capitalize on the diversity represented in the classroom to enhance the learning experience, students' well-being, and the emancipatory goals. They are not exhaustive, and more efforts need to be made to explore their usefulness and relevance for students. However, they show how *in practice* transformative pedagogy changes the way we work with students in the classroom. Overall, this pedagogy

ical approach allows to engage with learners in ways that are not possible with the current paradigms in use.

#### 4. Final Discussion

This article put forward the bold argument that we need to promote a pedagogical paradigm shift in higher education. Contributing to current political and academic debates on the need for a more inclusive, equal, and just education [7,48–50], I have argued that embracing transformative pedagogy's philosophy of education allows us to explore new ways to broaden the scope of academic teaching and connect academic learning goals to students' well-being and emancipatory goals (both individual and collective). Moreover, building on current academic debates and demands by marginalized communities around the world about the need to address androcentrism, ableism, Eurocentrism, and the colonial legacy of education, among others, we should redouble our efforts to integrate intersectional and decolonial approaches into academic teaching.

Transformative pedagogy is distinct from the two dominant pedagogical models in use today in that it aims to directly address power dynamics in the classroom and in society at large and to promote a more inclusive and just learning environment. While it is incompatible with the teacher-centered model, it is not mutually exclusive with the student-centered one, especially the variations that align with Dewey's broad view of progressive education [22]. As such, some of the inclusive practices presented in this article can be incorporated into the student-centered model (see also [19] for practical examples of this). However, a pedagogical shift would best serve the goals of an educational philosophy that is broader in scope and has the explicit goal of addressing the root causes of structural inequalities, exclusion, and marginalization in educational settings and in society (see, in particular, Chapters 2 and 17 of [19]).

Despite its recent developments and the growing interest in Freire's work around the world, transformative pedagogy is yet to receive the attention it deserves within academia, both in practice and research. To begin with, transformative pedagogy remains confined to specific academic niches and is often promoted by individual teachers, departments, or networks that actively challenge existing systems of oppression [19]. While a few universities worldwide have embraced elements of Freire's educational vision, it remains unclear whether transformative pedagogy has become the primary educational model across any entire department or university.

Furthermore, many existing approaches to transformative pedagogy are centered around addressing the alienation and silencing experienced by victims of discrimination. Although this is an essential step towards promoting inclusion, equity, and justice in academia and in formal and non-formal education more broadly, more can be done to harness the philosophical principles of transformative pedagogy to incorporate the shared experiences of all learners involved in the learning process, including those who are more privileged [3,45]. As such, the full potential of transformative pedagogy can be better exploited by seeking ways to reshape teaching practices in ways that transcend an exclusive focus on marginalized groups.

Consequently, when working in highly diverse classrooms, the question of who is privileged and non-privileged should be problematized. One way to move in this direction is by avoiding assuming that some students are more privileged than others based on ascribed categories such as gender, class, and race, for instance. While distinctions between privileged and non-privileged students may have worked in the past in more homogeneous societies, where privileges and non-privileges are more clearly distributed among groups (for instance, in the USA between whites vs. blacks), assuming these kinds of binary divisions today may be counterproductive [3]. As we have come to have a deeper understanding of what 'diversity' implies when viewed through intersectional and decolonial perspectives, we need to develop practices and in-class activities that acknowledge the multidimensional and non-binary nature of privilege and non-privilege,

recognizing that individuals hold multiple social identities and a combination of forms of oppression and privilege [41].

As an example, I can use my experience teaching international students who come from universities in the “Global South” to the “Global North”. These students often belong to some of the most privileged groups in their own countries of origin. From a ‘class’ perspective, they may be among the more privileged students in the classroom as well. Yet, they may still have been subjected to some form of discrimination in their home country based on their ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. At the same time, being racialized in most countries where they go to study and possibly work, they are often exposed to a variety of barriers in universities and society, which make them obviously less privileged than their white peers. Hence, how do we take into account “diversity” for learning and emancipatory purposes in ways that illuminate the lived experiences of students and power dynamics without being reductionist or reproducing exclusion is one key question that future research and practice should further address [3].

Furthermore, there is a pressing need for greater efforts to explore the scientific relevance of transformative pedagogy to assess its potential added value for deep learning and transformation. New hypothesis-driven and empirical research in the fields of education and psychology in particular is urgently needed to fully understand the strengths and limitations of transformative pedagogy, as well as what works and what does not work. While comparisons between teacher-centered and student-centered models are well-developed [25], there remains a scarcity of research on the impact of transformative pedagogy on a variety of learners, especially in higher education. We have surprisingly limited understanding, for instance, of for whom approaches rooted in transformative pedagogy work, when, and under what conditions [3]. Another issue, which has been long discussed among critical pedagogists, is how to avoid forcing students to expose their hurt and suffering [20,36]. Now that the educational academic landscape has become more diverse and some of our students come from different parts of worlds, how to tackle this ethical challenge and individuals’ different sensitivity is not clear [3]. Moreover, one aspect very rarely taken into account when debating intersectional and decolonial interventions in universities is that, from a pedagogical point of view, in some cases, students’ political inclinations (e.g., left-wing vs. right-wing) may be as important or even more important than other identities, especially when addressing sensitive topics in the classroom related to students’ exclusion [3].

The examples above illustrate some of the main reflections that have guided my work over more than 7 years of experimenting with transformative pedagogy in highly diverse classrooms and other settings [3,18]. They highlight why and how we need to raise and address new pedagogical and ethical questions as our educational landscapes have become more complex and diverse. By addressing the research gaps and the ethical concerns mentioned above, we can envision new possibilities for academic teaching and explore empirical questions surrounding the extent to which transformative pedagogy fosters students’ deep learning, well-being, and empowerment. This assessment should engage a variety of actors and researchers from, for instance, educational and social sciences as well as neurosciences [3], and should allow us to better determine if a paradigm shift rooted in transformative pedagogy in higher education is both possible and necessary.

The proposed framework in this article is not the only possible approach for revitalizing educational pedagogy. It is to be considered, instead, as one possibility among others. As such, I consider it as an initiative intended to inspire colleagues around the world to re-evaluate why and how transformative pedagogy can become more relevant in their work and, potentially, to consider ways to collectively reimagine alternative futures for our fast-paced changing society [6].



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