

CASEBOOK OF IDG IMPLEMENTATION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

Spaces of Resonance: Cultivating the Being and Relating Dimensions of the Inner Development Goals through Communities of Practice in Higher Education

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Abstract

Universities are encouraged to assume a more proactive role in the transformation of individuals, relationships, and society; however, traditional approaches in higher education often fail to cultivate the inner capacities necessary to address global challenges. The Inner Development Goals (IDG) framework offers a systematic methodology for fostering inner and interpersonal competencies, particularly through its Being and Relating dimensions. Nevertheless, limited research exists regarding the effective implementation of these dimensions within higher education, resulting in a disconnect between aspirational goals and practical application. This case study explores a community of practice that engaged 15 students in six sessions using mindfulness, somatic, arts-based, and psychospiritual transformative approaches. Based on qualitative thematic analysis, we examined the impact of these approaches on the Being and Relating dimensions of the IDG. The research emphasizes the important role of interconnectedness and resonance as fundamental

sources of self-awareness and empathy. Through interconnectedness, students learned about themselves as well as others, thus developing two of the main IDG competencies. Resonant spaces where students can learn about each other and themselves through interactions can be nurtured through appropriate methodologies. The IDG framework offers a systematic methodology for fostering inner and interpersonal competencies, particularly through its Being and Relating dimensions. Nevertheless, limited research exists regarding the effective implementation of these dimensions within higher education, resulting in a disconnect between aspirational goals and practical application. This case study explores a community of practice that engaged 15 students in six sessions using mindfulness, somatic, arts-based, and psychospiritual transformative approaches.

Keywords/key phrases: Inner Development Goals (IDG/IDGs), transformative learning, resonance, higher education, being, relating

1. Introduction

Universities are called to become agents of personal, interpersonal, and social transformation (Scharmer, 2019; Throop, 2024). While social transformation has been a long-standing goal of higher education, in the last few decades we have seen an increasing concern with the inner world, and the cultivation of empathy and collaboration capacities for sustainability as pillars of social transformation (Disterheft, 2024). A systematic study of the worldview of higher education institutions by Giesenbauer and Müller-Christ (2020), shows the need to change their operating system to an integrative worldview based on whole person development and systems-centric, co-creative, transdisciplinary perspectives.

However, this intention is undermined by the measuring of academic success through rankings according to specialized disciplines (Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020, p. 2), the neoliberal logic of commodified education based on efficiency, competition, and hierarchy (Giroux, 2014), the overemphasis on technocratic and conventional approaches to education as a pathway for employment (Martela, 2024), and the constant increase in mental health issues leading to disengagement (Olson et al., 2025; Weber et al., 2024). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) advocate for a more complex vision of higher education that focuses on whole person optimal development and the quality of life for all (Martela, 2024, p. 181).

The global framework of Inner Development Goals (IDG) offers a complex mapping of the competencies that contribute to whole person optimal development (Ankrah et al., 2023). Reimagining higher education involves holistic and systems-based approaches that address the crucial role of inner and interpersonal capacities as sources for sustainability. The cultivation of latent inner and relational capacities for self-awareness, empathy, connectedness, systems-thinking, and resilience can support hope and motivation to engage more effectively with current global challenges (Throop, 2024).

This casebook analyses the contribution of transformative learning approaches to the inner and interpersonal development of students, focusing on the Inner Development Goals (IDGs) dimensions of Being and Relating. The IDG framework currently includes five dimensions with a total of 25 subcategories: Being, Thinking, Relating, Collaborating, and Acting (Inner Development Goals, n.d.). While the name of IDGs refers to Inner Development Goals, its framework also includes aspects of interpersonal development, most salient in the Relating and

Collaborating dimensions. The purpose of this case study is first to examine the impact of transformative approaches used in the community of practice on the dimensions of Being and Relating. Second, we will explore the interconnected, mutually enhancing nature of these two dimensions relying on the concept of resonance. Rosa (2019) highlights the concept of resonance as the alternative to the acceleration, instrumentalization, and alienation of life in modernity. Resonance means the capacity to be affected, touched by the world at an emotional level, and responding in an agentic, effective way, reducing alienation and loneliness. It involves a fluid, vibrating, and mutually transformative connection that involves deep listening, effective response, and openness to mystery (Rosa, 2019, p. 167).

Creating spaces of resonance is an act of resistance to the forces of alienation, loneliness and disconnection of modern life, restoring the kind of relationality that contributes to a positive quality of life. It challenges the separation between self and others, the inner and interpersonal, offering a framework for an interconnected way of “being-in-the world” (Rosa, 2019).

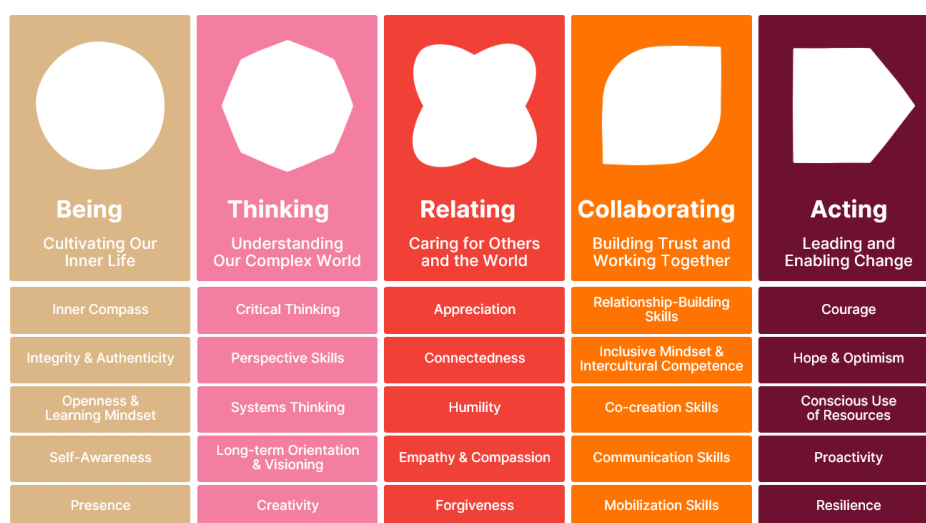
The community of practice engaged 15 students at our university in six sessions that used mindfulness, somatic, arts-based and psychospiritual development approaches as an experiential lab to examine their contribution to the Being and Relating dimensions of the inner development goals. We focused on these 2 dimensions because they are less present in academic teaching compared to the thinking or collaboration pillars, despite their ontological and foundational nature (Walsh et al., 2021).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Inner Development Goals (IDGs)

The Inner Development Goals framework was created in 2020 order to support Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through inner transformation (Inner Development Goals, n.d.). With the input of more than 1000 experts, scientists, and practitioners, the IDG framework includes five dimensions with 25 skills. These five dimensions are: Being; Thinking; Relating; Collaborating; and Acting (see Figure 1 below).

FIGURE 1. IDG FRAMEWORK



Source: Inner Development Goals, n.d.

2.2. Experiential Learning and Transformative Approaches

Although not considered a complete solution, the IDG offer a strategic outline of competencies that educational institutions should prioritize to facilitate whole person education and the advancement of sustainability goals (Wood, 2024; Ankrah et al., 2023).

There have been many initiatives to implement IDGs in higher education through diverse approaches, such as: reflective and self-awareness practices, including contemplative practices and mindfulness; experiential and embodied learning; assessment and evaluation innovations; safe learning spaces; systemic and multi-level approaches; relational approaches, community and collaborative learning practices.

Reflective and self-awareness practices involve different forms of meditation (e.g., Rodriguez Carreon & Vozniak, 2021; Disterheft, 2024; Pöllänen et al., 2023) as well as the cultivation of specific competencies. A particular competency is the management of complexity and uncertainty. For example, Ayers et al. (2023) identified the ability to “hold complexity” as one of eight crucial capacities to navigate situations of high ambiguity and paradox. Garcia-Alvarez et al. (2023) noted the higher level of ambiguity and complexity in the current world, which requires new educational approaches.

Experiential and embodied learning has been used by authors such as Rodriguez Carreon and Vozniak (2021) as well as by Pöllänen et al. (2023) as innovative approaches to support a deeper engagement with the material instead of memorization and cognitive learning. Assessment and evaluation innovations also have the role of enhancing IDGs skills. Such innovations include the use of alternative assessment formats (photography, art, poetry) for reflection (Rodriguez Carreon & Vozniak, 2021).

However, such new approaches need to be nurtured in the proper environment. The idea of safe learning spaces was explored by Bryant et al. (2021), who found that a sense of belonging to a community acts as a safe container for students to transform their worldviews. Similarly, Woiwode et al. (2021) recommended the creation of “spaces for emergence” as safe environments in which students can challenge their beliefs. Systemic and multi-level approaches emphasize the need for a fundamental transformation of educational spaces that would reconfigure the role of the university within broader society (Fathi, 2022; Garcia-Alvarez et al., 2023; Jakubik et al., 2023; Woiwode et al., 2021).

2.3. Relationality and Spaces of Resonance

Several authors argued for the crucial role of relationality in transformative learning (Böhme et al., 2022; Bryant et al., 2021; Walsh et al., 2021), despite the marginalization of this dimension in academic education (Walsh et al., 2021). Indeed, Walsh et al. (2021) argued the concept of relationality as a fundamental leverage for sustainability. The current study is also evidence of the importance of relationality.

A relational framework sees humans as deeply connected to nature and in a constant process of becoming through various relationships (Böhme et al., 2022). Many studies show the important role of groups and the need for collaboration in developing key competencies (Engel & Janssen, 2024; Nordén, 2024). For example, Bryant et al.’s (2021) study of the Master’s in Strategic

Leadership toward Sustainability (MSLS) identified community as important for creating a safe container where growth and critical reflection is possible.

This need for relational and holistic frameworks has been further evidenced in other works (Pöllänen et al., 2023; Walsh et al., 2021; Woiwode et al., 2021). For example, Pöllänen et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of bridging gaps across individual, collective, and system levels through their assessment of the sustainability course titled “One Year in Transition” in Sweden. Previously, Walsh et al. (2021) advocated for dissolving barriers between “inner” and “outer,” as well as “personal” and “collective,” dimensions of sustainability.

3. Methodology

3.1. Overview

In the fall of 2024, a group of fifteen students from a bilingual university in Eastern Canada voluntarily joined 6 sessions of a community of practice where they engaged in diverse transformative approaches for inner development. There were 8 undergraduate and 7 graduate students, 13 females and 2 males, between 22 and 50 years old. Participants were recruited through announcements in relevant courses and an open call sent via email to all students. This research relies on the qualitative methodology of focus groups to test the impact of the communities of practice based on the principles of participatory action research that integrates research results to benefit the community (Caine & Mill, 2015). We organized three 90 min. focus groups at the end of the community of practice, asking participants about the impact of the practices on their inner development. Focus groups facilitate a rich insight into participants’ subjective experiences and attitudes, empowering participants to contribute to the meaning-making process (Kitzinger, 1995). The communities of practice were designed based on the principles of integral transformative learning (Ferrer et al., 2005), with a special focus on inner and interpersonal development. They were led by a multidisciplinary team.

3.2. Description of Transformative Approaches in the Community of Practice

Table 1 below provides an overview of all six sessions, their duration, focus areas, and key methodologies used.

TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE SESSIONS

(Co-created by facilitators: Bianca Briciu, Marquis Bureau, Michaël Séguin, Jan Bentham, Stéphanie Larrue, 2024)

Session	Duration	Focus Area	Key Methodologies	IDG Dimensions
1	90 min	Mindfulness and Self-Awareness	Mindfulness practice, River of Life drawing	Being
2	90 min	Embodied Sensing and Belonging	Social Presencing Theater, embodied movement	Being, Relating
3	90 min	Care and Resonance	Empathic dialogue, care ethics	Relating
4	90 min	Creativity and Well-being	Arts-based posters, drama play	Being, Relating

5	90 min	Trauma Integration	Safe space for dialogue, shadow work	Being
6	90 min	Psychospiritual Integration	Integrated Mask exercise, spiritual emergence	Being, Relating

Source: own compilation/ calculations

The aim of the community of practice was to engage participants in a series of experiential, transformative approaches meant to deepen awareness of their inner world, develop empathic, trusting relationships with others, and cultivate capacities for flourishing. The exercises were based on mindfulness, arts-based, and psychospiritual development methods chosen in a sequential way as a journey to enhance openness, authenticity, and resonance with others. Its main purpose was to facilitate a shift from an ego to an eco-perspective (Scharmer, 2018). According to the IDG framework (Inner Development Goals, n.d), the workshops aimed to develop the dimensions of Being (inner compass, integrity and authenticity, openness, self-awareness, presence) and Relating (appreciation, connectedness, humility, empathy and compassion, forgiveness). Sessions were structured as circles that emphasized deep listening, authentic sharing and loving presence.

The first session focused on mindfulness and self-awareness. It started with a practice of mindfulness and continued with the River of Life guided drawing exercise for a reflection on participants' meaning and life purpose. Mindfulness is the gesture of slowing down, paying attention to aspects of embodied experience that are overlooked in the habitual action-driven ways of engaging. It means "awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, pp. 3-4). Mindfulness increases attention to one's sensations and emotions, creating more awareness of one's inner state of being without judgment. This opens more possibilities for recognizing and ultimately changing harmful emotions or habits, while also expanding one's range of perception. The practice of mindfulness is to become a caring witness to the flow and quality of one's own life (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The images of the River of Life served as sources for reflection and dialogue on participants' life journey, challenges, and transformation.

The second workshop used Social Presencing Theater (SPT) as a practice for sensing one's relationship to a larger social body (Scharmer, 2018). SPT is an embodied technology for systems change developed at the Presencing Institute. Through embodied sensing, movement and reflection, it creates awareness about the unseen dynamics of social structures and offers glimpses of emerging future possibilities (Hayashi, 2018). The invitation for participants was to express through group structures their sense of belonging and inclusion in the learning environment. They worked in small groups of 4 to create sculptures, with each person placing others in relation to their body as they sensed into their level of connection/disconnection in the classroom experience. The second part of the exercise was to move in a desired direction where each person would feel a sense of belonging with others. This embodied practice revealed the invisible but deeply felt relational dynamics of disconnection, and the longing for connection.

The third session focused on care and resonance as the pillars of a relational ethics that underpins flourishing. It created a space for authentic exchanges where participants could practice listening, empathy, and reciprocity. The principles of a care ethics are based on Gilligan's (1982) emphasis on relationality, vulnerability and needs, rather than abstract

principles of justice. Care is essential for sustaining democratic values and fostering resilience in the face of social and personal challenges (Fleury, 2019). The practice of empathic dialogue emphasized the importance of the quality of listening, vulnerability, and authentic connection. Listening is the most important leadership skill, but also the most easily overlooked in systems that value expression and action (Scharmer, 2019). The quality of listening enhances the authenticity of expression and contributes to resonance, a crucial aspect of a fulfilling and meaningful life (Rosa, 2019).

The fourth session engaged the collaborative and regenerative potential of creativity. Participants created posters of well-being in small groups reflecting on the elements that form a quality of life. They also created a short dramatic piece with movement and voice either in the form of tableaux or pantomime to express the influence of technology on well-being. Creativity can lessen anxiety, heighten social awareness, and provide new insights on issues of concern today, cultivating hope and engagement. Our creative impulses carry the essence of our humanness, the heart of our dignity (Fox, 2002). Arts-based approaches engage cognition, emotions and the body, increasing awareness of the unconscious and providing new ways of understanding and relating to the world (Romanowska et al., 2014). They contribute to meaning, positive emotions, relationships, and engagement of the whole person.

The fifth session invited participants to explore deeper aspects of their inner world. They engaged in a process of shadow work and trauma integration, exploring the maladaptive responses created by trauma (Briciu & MacDonald, 2024). Experiences of complex trauma create the long-term effects of losing deep connection with one's authentic self, and with others, a form of double alienation (Maté, 2009). Trauma responses create fear-based patterns of engagement with the world and freeze perception, reducing presence, trust, and empathy (Hübl & Avritt, 2020). This session involved more vulnerability, and we created extra levels of emotional safety through music, meditation on resilience and the invitation to share in dyads using the safe space for dialogue method (Briciu et al., 2024). Turning toward trauma in safe relationships contributes to more awareness of repressed parts of the self, restoring wholeness, expanding the range of emotions, and creating deeper connection with others.

The last session introduced the concept of psychospiritual integration as an approach meant to integrate different aspects of the self toward better functioning and overall health (Siegel, 2012). Participants were invited to share and reflect on experiences of transcendence that transformed their worldviews. Using Grof & Grof's (1989) concepts of spiritual emergence and emergency, we explored how certain peak experiences of openness of the self to spirituality could be moments of unity and flow or experiences of crisis and suffering. The Integrated Mask exercise invited participants to draw three masks representing a positive spiritual experience, a painful one, and a third one that integrated the two. This session explored the complexity of spirituality and the importance of learning both from pleasant and painful experiences.

These sessions created emancipatory and whole person-based processes in a safe and caring group container to facilitate expression of different parts of the self (emotional, embodied, spiritual), contributing to self-awareness, connection, and well-being. They brought to the surface latent inner and relational capacities with the potential to cultivate well-being from the inside out and in community.

4. Findings

4.1. Being

In the IDG framework, the dimension of Being includes the following aspects: inner compass, integrity and authenticity, openness and learning mindset, self-awareness and presence (Inner Development Goals, n.d.). The communities of practice had a most significant positive impact on two of these aspects: self-awareness, and openness through vulnerability.

4.1.1. Self-awareness for Authentic Presence

Participants reflected on their inner world through mindfulness, creative expression of emotions, embodied representation, journaling, and circle-based dialogue. Two important aspects of self-awareness were the ability to show up in an authentic way with others, and more acceptance of one's weaknesses. Social participation involves a negotiation between expressing one's authentic self and the management of others' perception of oneself. Being witnessed in a safe and caring way increases awareness of one's inner world and emotional responses. As one student mentioned,

I think maybe because I am a solitary human and I like solitary activities, I don't usually do big group things. So, it made me more mindful of how I present myself and of the things that are coming out of my mouth. Do they resonate as being authentic to what I have to say? [...] So, I think it made me more mindful about how I view things, what my opinions are about things and how I want to present those (Speaker 1, Focus Group 1).

Another student shared the importance of creating safety. Being free of the fear of judgment and the desire for social acceptance, participants could connect to and accept certain parts of themselves that they were trying to hide because of perceiving them as weaknesses. This contributes to a more holistic perception of one's inner world by holding in awareness both one's strengths and one's weaknesses.

I feel that it connected me with my weaknesses. And that was a step in understanding myself. For the strength also, I think they were developing within the practice. Just to be present was helping me just to let myself explore myself - it was very experiential - I was developing myself through the experiences, like the theater, seeing myself act again and enjoying that. So it was a lot of little capacities that I was developing here and there. (Speaker 4, Focus Group 3)

4.1.2. Vulnerability that Leads to Openness and Learning Mindset

Four participants mentioned the role of vulnerability in creating openness, connection, and a learning mindset that allowed them to pay attention differently.

One participant expressed this eloquently:

A lot of our world tells us to be strong or to be hard or to be still. This practice, this community showed a really deep strength in everyone about being vulnerable. Everyone developed - they walked in stiff and defensive and wanting to connect but not really knowing how... And I've noticed that I myself am willing to be more vulnerable with people and more emotionally honest, maybe[...] I feel I have a deeper confidence in being vulnerable and allowing myself to be seen as vulnerable, that I really struggled with before. (Speaker 3, Focus Group 3)

Experiences of judgment, exclusion or rejection and the lack of safe spaces for self-expression can lead to the closing up of the self, increasing disconnection, fear, and psychological protection mechanisms. The warm, empathetic presence and unconditional regard of others in the circles of the community of practice facilitated more openness to vulnerability and connection. One participant highlighted the value of welcoming, warm approaches that supported vulnerability.

It gave me an opportunity to feel I could be a little bit more vulnerable because it was less structured. And there was a circle, and we were very warmly welcomed by the facilitators. So, it was very positive. In some ways, my life also, as [previous speaker] said, affected my mood when I would first arrive at the circles. But overall, I think it really had a positive impact on my reflexivity and my ability to reflect on - just by hearing other stories - on my own life and my own goals. (Speaker 1, Focus Group 2)

These reflections show vulnerability as a source of courage, connection, and authenticity, shifting its perception as a weakness. Vulnerability involves uncertainty, risk and exposure, but it opens the self to deeper connection, empathy, and authenticity (Brown, 2012). The community of practice created opportunities for participants to engage with vulnerability and value its outcome, despite the initial discomfort.

4.2. Relating

In the IDG framework, the dimension of Relating includes the following: appreciation, connectedness, humility, forgiveness, empathy and compassion (Inner Development Goals, n.d.). The analysis of focus groups showed a significant impact on three of these aspects: connectedness, empathy and compassion.

4.2.1. Connectedness and Empathy

The circle dialogue in the community of practice emphasized empathic listening through questions and exercises that students shared in dyads, small groups and the larger circle where each person had a chance to share their experience and listen with full attention to the sharing of others. Another element that cultivated empathy was the specific focus on personal emotional and spiritual experiences. Empathy deepened through empathic dialogue that decentered the ego-based mindset of individualism, making it possible for participants to sense the inner world of others, while becoming more aware of their own inner world (Briciu et al., 2024, p. 2). This increased connectedness as a shift to a more eco-based mindset. One participant shared the following reflection:

Just to build on those skills as well, because there are so many opportunities to actively listen and not just reflect on your own things, but help other people reflect on their things, through your presence and your body language and everything. I think learning how to be a better listener was also something that I got out of the group. (Speaker 1, Focus Group 1)

The community of practice not only created opportunities to form deeper relationships with students in other departments, but also reinforced a sense of shared humanity, an awareness that emotions are shared with other people, reducing loneliness. Participants could recognize themselves in the emotional and spiritual experiences of others. As one student shared,

I don't know if this counts if it was a reaffirmation, but it was reaffirming to a previously held belief that human connection is the easiest, not necessarily the cleanest, but the easiest way to get something done is to work with another human. It doesn't mean it's not bumpy. But it was a reaffirmation as we went through week to week that I thought "it's funny, I've come across this theme before. It's funny, I have different language for this, but it exists for me." And so, for me, it was a strengthening of inner being. (Speaker 2, Focus Group 3)

4.2.2. Empathy and Compassion as Sources of Well-being

As participants engaged in transformative practices that invited the exploration of their inner world, they could access more kindness and care for others, which supported an experience of well-being. The sense of empathy in the group reduced stress and tension, helping students trust that they would be held in the caring attention of others. One student reflected on the reciprocity of kindness and care that created a climate of well-being for all participants.

For me, the element that contributed to my well-being was the kindness of everybody. That was really very welcome. And it continued week after week, month after month. It was very nice to feel cared about and to give the same space to others. (Speaker 4, Focus Group 3)

As participants shared more difficult emotional experiences of grief, anxiety, loss or despair through the exercises of trauma integration and spiritual emergence, they accessed a sense of compassion for themselves and others, realizing the multiple facets of suffering and struggle. Compassion was seen as a nurturing relational source that invited participants to tolerate the discomfort of witnessing the struggles of others and holding space for them.

I feel my sense of compassion for others and my compassion for myself - I feel it was huge. I think I really developed, I started to tone that muscle. Just knowing people like [another speaker] - seeing you not in a good mood. It made me sad. I felt I just had a lot of compassion for you (Speaker 1, Focus Group 2)

4.3. Resonance and an Interconnected, Eco-based Mindset

One of the interesting findings in analysing the responses to the focus group was the blurring of rigid boundaries between self and others through the experience of interconnectedness. Participants experienced a shift from the ego-based mindset of individualism to an eco-based understanding of experience as a set of relationships. The more deeply students could connect to each other, the more aware they became of their inner world and the other way around, an aspect that shows the interdependence of Being and Relating. This finding shows the relational dimension of inner development as a way of knowing oneself through others, a process explained by the concept of resonance (Rosa, 2019). Resonance is a mutually balancing act of interaction with others and the world, in which the subject is touched or affected by others, responding with interest, emotion, and a sense of self-efficacy, without control of the outcome (Rosa, 2019). Resonance creates open and fluid engagement with others, creating relationships that vibrate with wires of mutual connection while remaining open to transformation (Rosa, 2019, p. 170).

Sharing deep emotional experiences, both positive and painful, engaging with personal stories, and with the felt senses of the body (Through Social Presencing Theater) helped participants

access the dimension of an interconnected self that supports belonging and well-being, reducing isolation and loneliness. As one participant shared,

And also, I felt after sitting in a circle and maybe not speaking all the time, but I felt other people's stories and examples and jokes even I would feel 'oh, that would help me reconnect to myself or someone or a moment in my past or a stage in my life.' So, it was really nice to actually just listen and take it all in. And that really rekindled in me a connection with myself that maybe I haven't had in a while since I haven't been really socially active and I've been living a different kind of pace of life. (Speaker 1, Focus Group 2)

Another participant highlighted the process of remembering one's own stories through the stories of others. Resonance in this case meant an open flow of emotions and energy that increased the connection with self and others. As one was touched by the inner world of others, their own inner world also touched and contributed to the transformation of others.

And also just to echo what [previous speaker] mentioned - when somebody would share something that would make me remember something about myself and just make me connect with that person, but connect with myself as well. (Speaker 5, Focus Group 3)

We can see in these reflections that creating safe spaces and processes for deep listening and empathic dialogue, increase resonance as a relational way of being in the world. The transformative approaches created a shift from an individualistic, ego-based perception to the eco-based perception of Being as Relating.

4.4. Additional Dimensions

While this study primarily focused on the Being and Relating dimensions of the IDG framework, participants' reflections occasionally touched upon other dimensions. Some participants mentioned increased awareness of systems dynamics (Thinking dimension), enhanced capacity for collaboration and trust-building (Collaborating dimension), and greater motivation to act with purpose and courage (Acting dimension). However, these dimensions emerged organically rather than being explicitly targeted, and were less prominent in the findings. This suggests that deep work on Being and Relating may serve as a foundation that supports the development of other IDG dimensions, though further research would be needed to explore these connections more systematically.

5. Discussion

The results show the interdependence of Being and Relating as foundational aspects of the inner development goals. A relational ontology perspective postulates that “all entities emerge out of their constitutive relations” (Disterheft, 2024, p. 30). Such a perspective addresses the concern that inner development is an individualistic framework that overlooks important systemic and cultural aspects (Barret, 2025). A relational ontology pays attention to the interconnected dimension of relationships, weaving a web of connection that fosters belonging, safety and trust. Fostering connections and providing social support are crucial to students' optimal development (Lindsay et al., 2022).

The communities of practice created spaces and processes where participants felt genuinely safe, understood, and cared for. The mindfulness practice in each session created a state of calm and increased attention, while the various means to explore one's inner world led to deeper self-awareness and connections with others. Participants experienced an interconnected self through resonance with the stories and emotional experiences of others, accessing a more eco-systemic mindset (Scharmer, 2018). Self-awareness was enhanced by the ability to see oneself through the eyes of others and reflect on one's authentic presence, a quality overlooked in traditional academic approaches (Libertson, 2023). The empathy and non-judgmental acceptance of the group helped participants become more vulnerable to access and reveal parts of themselves that they kept hidden and saw as weaknesses. This process contributed to wholeness and integration.

The dialogue based on empathic listening deepened connections and supported participants to become witnesses to each other's inner worlds, experiencing the reciprocity of empathy and compassion. The community of practice provided a laboratory to cultivate spaces of resonance that supported the experience of interconnected self, enhancing self-awareness, relational thinking, and a caring perspective. Sensing the interconnectedness of life increases "an embodied understanding of care" (Disterheft, 2024, p. 29), undoing the ego-centric and self-serving worldview of individualism (Butler, 2019). This eco-systemic perspective is seen as a deep leverage point for transformation (Disterheft, 2024).

As we have seen in this case study, shifting the ego-based worldview of individualism and separation to a relational, empathic eco-based perspective requires a caring container and group experiential processes for exploring the inner world. According to Rosa (2019), the safe sharing of emotional and spiritual experiences leads to resonance as a relational ontology that contributes to the quality of life, undoing the stress and isolation created by alienation or hostility. He highlights a pedagogy of resonance supports the right conditions for openness, vulnerability, and transformative relationships that are non-instrumental, an experience where students do not merely process information, but are also touched and transformed by others. Resonance contributes to whole-person development and the quality of one's engagement in the process of learning, creating a culture of encounter and transformation (Rosa, 2019). The development of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies in the Being and Relating dimensions of IDGs fosters an experience of shared meaning and belonging that are foundational for sustainable collaboration.

6. Conclusion

This case study showed the impact of mindfulness, arts-based and psychospiritual development approaches on the Being and Relating dimensions of the IDG. Participants in the community of practice showed increased levels of self-awareness and tolerance for vulnerability at the Being level. At the Relating level, they expressed an increase in empathy, care and compassion, through a deeper sense of connectedness.

Can resonant spaces that foster inner and interpersonal capacities be recreated in the academic classroom or do they require communities of practice as "islands of sanity" (Wheatley, 2017)?

The practical implication of this research is the outline of transformative methodologies that contribute to the development of inner and relational capacities fostering resonance: circle-based empathic dialogue, sharing of emotional and spiritual experiences from a holistic perspective, empathy created by a welcoming and non-judgmental group attitude, mindfulness

practice, arts-based and embodied methodologies such as Social Presencing Theater, The River of Life, Shadow work, or the Integration Masks presented above, that reduce the discomfort of vulnerability and contribute to deeper connection. These methodologies integrate the cognitive, emotional, embodied, spiritual and relational intelligence, in line with the holistic approaches promoted by the IDG framework (Wood, 2024). These methodologies can be used in the classroom as transformative, whole-person pedagogies (Briciu et al., under review; Disterheft, 2024), and they can also inform the creation of communities of practice as spaces of resonance.

This study increases knowledge about the development of Being and Relating dimension of the IDGs that lay the foundations for a relational, eco-based worldview, and deep bonds that foster care, empathy and compassion. Ultimately, creating spaces of resonance in higher education offers a pathway toward addressing the isolation, alienation, and disconnection that characterize modern university life, while cultivating the inner and relational capacities necessary for addressing the complex challenges of our time.

6.1. Limitations and Conditions for Replicability

This study has several important limitations. First, the small sample size (n=15) and voluntary participation may have attracted students already inclined toward inner development work, potentially limiting generalizability. Second, the Canadian university context, with its emphasis on bilingualism, multiculturalism, and inclusive values, may have provided a particularly receptive environment for this work.

For successful replication, several conditions appear essential: (1) caring facilitators with training in transformative methodologies and trauma-informed practices; (2) institutional support, including dedicated space and time; (3) careful attention to creating psychological safety through clear agreements and gradual deepening of vulnerability; (4) sequential design that builds trust progressively; and (5) a cultural or institutional context that values holistic development. Adaptation to different cultural contexts would require sensitivity to local norms around emotional expression, group sharing, and spirituality.

6.2. Future Directions

Moving forward, this work points to several important directions. First, there is a need for longitudinal studies to assess whether the transformations observed persist over time and translate into sustained changes in students' lives. Second, research should explore how these approaches can be scaled and integrated into formal curricula while maintaining their transformative potential. Third, cross-cultural studies would help identify which elements are universally applicable and which require cultural adaptation. Finally, investigating the interplay between different IDG dimensions could reveal how cultivating Being and Relating creates ripple effects across Thinking, Collaborating, and Acting dimensions.

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Conflict of Interest

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Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Ethical Statement

The authors confirm that they have obtained the necessary permissions from their respective universities to publish the case studies included in this manuscript.

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