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CASEBOOK OF IDG IMPLEMENTION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

From *Self* to *World*: Implementing the Enlace Metro for Inner and Relational Development in Higher Education

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Abstract

Higher education often prioritizes technical, scientific, and artistic skills while overlooking inner development. This paper shares insights from applying the Inner Development Goals (IDG) in higher education through a five-year case study of Enlace Metro, a university-wide pedagogical strategy at Centro Universitário Facens in Sorocaba, Brazil. Enlace Metro is a metaphorical, self-guided learning pathway set within an imaginary city divided into three zones (Me and Myself, Me and Others, and Me and the World) where each 'metro station' represents an IDG competency guiding students through experiential learning activities. As part of the broader Enlace System, this model promotes social, emotional, and relational development within and beyond the academic community, using a methodology that blends Awareness-Based Design and practice-based design research, including co-design workshops, surveys, prototyping, and classroom observations. Findings show that while students

participated, their motivation was often extrinsic, and faculty felt unprepared to facilitate inner development learning, indicating that mandatory, self-directed activities alone are insufficient. Effective implementation requires professional development, active facilitation, and responsive interventions. This paper advocates for a pedagogical shift from individual well-being to a collective, relational approach to inner development, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between awareness and action, where real-world collaborative projects foster meaningful engagement and reflection. The study also highlights tensions between rigid institutional structures and flexible, transformative learning pathways, raising questions about how universities can support student-driven journeys aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These insights offer valuable pedagogical guidance for educators, curriculum designers, and university leaders seeking to create learning environments that integrate inner development and outer change.

Keywords: Inner Development Goals (IDG), transformative learning, relational pedagogy, awareness-based design, higher education innovation, student-centred learning.

1. Introduction: Preparing for the Journey

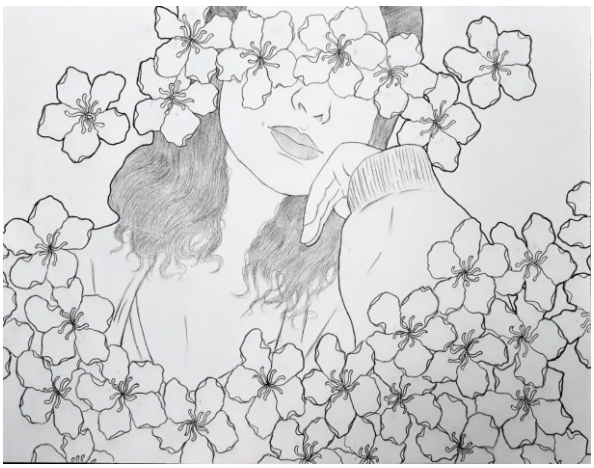
Higher education is recognized for developing technical, scientific, and even artistic skills—but it often overlooks the importance of what is increasingly being referred to as inner development (Barrett, 2017; Jordan et al., 2020; Palmer, 1998). In this paper, we draw upon inner development as the continuous cultivation of social, relational, and emotional capacities among students, faculty, and the wider academic community to navigate the complexities of a changing world (Hayashi & Gonçalves, 2023; Scharmer, 2016). In the context of global, social, and environmental challenges, we argue that inner development is a "systemic lever" (Meadows, 2008) for transforming not only individuals but also communities, cities, and countries (Engert et al., 2023; Seligman, 2011; Wamsler et al., 2020). While the term itself remains emergent, contested, and not uniformly defined or measured, in this paper we build upon our own practice to explore inner development through two interrelated concepts: togetherness and relational well-being.

By togetherness, we allude to the simple, ordinary, and immediate qualities of being with others. In our practice, we have explored togetherness through three primary dimensions (Gonçalves, 2024; Hayashi, 2021): the embodied awareness and presence individuals bring into relational spaces; the direct, felt experience of being in relation; and the emerging collective creativity that arises from groups being together (Berger et al., 2018; Gonçalves, 2024; Hayashi, 2021; Lueke & Gibson, 2016; Oyler et al., 2022). These dimensions help us understand togetherness as a dynamic process through which inner transformation unfolds and becomes visible in intentional, collective action.

In higher education, togetherness may also relate to the strengthening of the university's social fabric—that is, the evolving web of relationships and interactions within the academic community. In this paper, we argue that the social fabric is shaped not only by individual connections but by the collective awareness, presence, and relational sensibility that students, faculty, and staff bring to shared spaces, enabling collaboration and creativity (Hayashi, 2021; Hayashi & Gonçalves, 2023; Pomeroy & Herrmann, 2023; Scharmer, 2016).

In addition to togetherness, our approach to inner development is also informed by theories of relational well-being. Drawing on theoretical work in this area, we understand well-being not as an individual possession or personal achievement, but as a dynamic process that emerges within and through relationships—with others, with environments, and within broader social contexts (Gergen, 2009; White, 2010). This perspective emphasizes that well-being is co-constructed and sustained in interaction, rather than developed in isolation. Furthermore, we engage with the idea of well-being as an unfolding, open and emergent phenomenon (Bilbao-Nieva & Meyer, 2024)—one that can resist fixed definitions or static measurement and instead invites an ongoing attentiveness to the conditions that support life-affirming connection and growth.

FIGURE 1. "INNER DEVELOPMENT" ACCORDING TO A STUDENT AT CENTRO UNIVERSITÁRIO FACENS, SOROCABA, BRAZIL



Source: Pedro Fortes, 2019

This paper explicitly considers inner development through the lens of the Inner Development Goals (IDG) framework, which connects personal, social, and emotional growth to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Centred on the premise of "inner growth for outer change," the IDG framework emphasizes five key dimensions: being, thinking, relating, collaborating, and acting (Inner Development Goals, n.d.). We argue that social, emotional, and relational capacities must be integrated—not separated—from technical education focused on knowledge, skills, and professional competencies (Ahmed, 2014; Anzaldúa, 2015; Robinson, 2006). This raises key questions: What forms of inner development are essential in academic settings? And how can we prepare students not only for the job market but also for the complex social, environmental, and relational contexts they are a part of?

This paper draws on our work with students at Centro Universitário Facens (Sorocaba, Brazil; 2019–2024), following a request from university leadership to address students' social and emotional needs. In response, we established the Enlace Lab — Laboratory for Emotional Collaboration — as a space to engage with these challenges. The lab works with undergraduates across 18 programs spanning Engineering, Technology, Architecture, Urbanism, and Health. During the early phases of this laboratory's work, by listening closely to students' voices and experiences, we understood some of their key needs, such as recognizing diverse learning styles, balancing academic and personal demands, fostering belonging, building trust with faculty, and expressing ideas that impact their communities and the wider world.

While the university leadership initially focused on students' social-emotional needs, our experience revealed the need for a broader, systemic approach—one that includes faculty and the wider academic community. Unlike many social-emotional learning initiatives (CASEL, 2020; Durlak et al., 2011), the Enlace Lab centres the relational and systemic dimensions of inner development, rather than solely individual competencies. This way, its key innovation lies in fostering a collective, participatory process that treats inner development as a relational, ongoing, emergent, and contextually grounded practice, aligned with the complexities of academic life and community well-being.

2. Research Objectives: Destination

In this paper, we explore the following research question: *How might we apply the Inner Development Goals (IDG) in higher education*, with a special focus on supporting students in moving from individual well-being to sustained collective action—both within the university and in the wider community?

The secondary questions include: (I) How might students become aware of skills, competencies and qualities of inner development?; (II) How might the IDG be introduced as a pedagogy?; and (III) What challenges and possibilities arise from the implementation of the IDG in a university context?

2.1. Methodology: Map and Compass

Our research methodology brings Awareness-Based Design (ABD) and Practice-Based Design Research to higher education. Developed by Dutra Gonçalves in his doctoral thesis, *Awareness-Based Design: The Role of Making Aware for a Transformative Learning Practice*, ABD is both a social design methodology and a living curriculum grounded in the belief that becoming aware of the inner dimension of experience is fundamental for effecting systemic change. By *living curriculum*, we mean one that is not static or fixed, but continuously changing and evolving (Greene, 1978).

Rooted in transformative learning (Dirkx et al., 2006; Grocott, 2022), ABD integrates design research, embodied awareness, and relational practices (Hayashi, 2021; Mattelmäki, 2006). Its methods draw from social arts—collective, socially engaged artistic approaches (Beuys & Harlan, 2004; Hayashi, 2021)—and mindfulness-awareness practices (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Trungpa, 1996; Yongey & Tworkov, 2014). As a pedagogical method, ABD cultivates literacies, comprehensions, and sensibilities (Rinaldi, 2009) that support creative awareness of non-verbal, embodied, and relational aspects of our lived experiences (Gonçalves & Grocott, 2024). This includes attentiveness to thoughts, mindsets, beliefs, values, emotions, and sensations.

ABD's primary research method is *awareness-based prompts*—non-intrusive pedagogical tools that combine inner development activities with tangible reflections (e.g., photos, videos, drawings, writing). Integrated into the Enlace Metro as *Vivências*—learning experiences grounded in students' lived realities—these prompts help surface what is often pre-reflective or unnoticed. Rather than a fixed toolkit, ABD offers a practice that supports the inner-outer

dynamics of transformative learning through attunement, relational inquiry, and experiential sense-making (Gonçalves & Grocott, 2024).

Alongside Awareness-Based Design (ABD), this paper draws on practice-based design research, a mode of inquiry through which knowledge emerges through making and reflection—via prototyping, iteration, and feedback (Buchanan, 2015; Candy, 2006; Frayling, 1993; Koskinen et al., 2011). Methods such as co-design workshops, classroom observations, and discussions with faculty, monitors, and students support iterative learning and collaborative sense-making. Here, design encompasses not only tangible outcomes but also experiences, interactions, and learning models. In this sense, the multi-year development of the Enlace Metro (Section 3.2) is an example of designing an engagement model that bridges students' inner experiences with their broader academic and community contexts.

We invite you, the reader, on a symbolic journey through this paper. **Section 1, *Preparing for the Journey***, introduces the context for applying the IDG in higher education. **Section 2, *Destination***, presents the central questions, methodologies, and methods. **Section 3, *Charting the Course***, explores a case study of the Enlace System at Centro Universitário Facens (Sorocaba, Brazil). **Section 4, *Discoveries Along the Journey***, shares key observations and findings. Finally, **Section 5, *Inward and Forward***, concludes with emerging paradoxes, future directions, and implications for ongoing exploration.

3. The Enlace System as a Case Study: Charting the Course

To apply the Inner Development Goals (IDG) at the university, we began with the insight that students' learning should start with direct, embodied awareness of the framework's skills, competencies and qualities (Inner Development Goals, n.d.)—because awareness grounded in lived experience is the first step in transformative learning (Dirkx et al., 2006; Gonçalves, 2024; Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). Therefore, to support students in becoming aware of the IDG, we designed learning opportunities to help them build a shared foundational language around inner development.

3.1. Emotional Collaboration Lab (Enlace)

To strengthen institutional capacity at Centro Universitário Facens, the Enlace Lab was established as a dedicated space to develop collaborative strategies supporting students and faculty in fostering a healthy social fabric within the university and the broader Sorocaba community. The lab identifies students' social, relational, and emotional needs and creates self-instructional tools and activities integrated into technical curricula. Through these small interventions, the lab helps students recognize how their personal and professional decisions affect their careers, others, and the planet.

3.2. The Enlace System

The Enlace System is a broader pedagogical engagement model (Gonçalves & Teixeira, 2015) aimed at promoting creativity and well-being within the academic community through awareness of self/others, relational well-being, and the discovery of skills, talents, and purpose. By "engagement model," we mean a learning model including various features and opportunities for students and faculty to engage with the IDG (detailed below). We believe that

designing engagement models like the Enlace System fosters modularity and decentralization, key elements for activating collective and systemic participation (Gonçalves & Teixeira, 2015).

Through designing the Enlace System, we reflect on the possibilities, challenges, and implications of implementing the IDG in higher education. Our reflections stem from the practice of design-led prototyping, aligning with Schön's (1983) concept of "reflection-in-action." This approach involves ongoing reflection throughout the process, allowing for real-time learning rather than limiting reflection to after the action. Reflection-in-action enables us to make informed decisions while immersed in the work, making the Enlace System more dynamic and contextually relevant.

This way, we believe that what distinguishes the Enlace System as a novel approach is its foundation in action learning and participatory action research. That is, the system was not designed as a fixed program to be implemented in a linear fashion, but as a living system developed iteratively through cycles of practice, reflection, and adaptation. Formal and informal feedback from students, faculty, and the institutional context continuously shaped the design. In many instances, students were not only participants but also co-creators. This participatory dimension made the system more responsive and attuned to the evolving needs of the academic community.

3.3. The Enlace Metro

One of the main tools of the Enlace System is the Enlace Metro, a self-instructional learning pathway, that is, a structured set of activities and reflections that students can follow independently at their own pace. This pathway is currently facilitated by the *Well-Being Ambassadors*, who are responsible for mobilizing their peers to participate in online activities and supporting them throughout the immersive experience. Teachers act as facilitators alongside the Enlace team and ambassadors, encouraging student engagement, monitoring socioemotional outcomes, and proposing targeted actions aligned with recurring needs. The Enlace Metro is hosted on the university's learning management system, Canvas, which is an online platform used to organize course materials, assignments, and communication, allowing students to access learning resources anytime and track their progress.

Through a metro journey narrative, students engage in inner development practices on the platform. Each semester, they work on about four competencies, spending around 10 hours per competency: 3 hours on self-instructional online activities with theory and reflection, 1 hour on well-being and mental health questionnaires, 3 hours of facilitated in-class interventions, and 3 hours on immersive activities to build a personal life project—balancing 60% in-person and 40% online engagement. Students who complete the full 40 hours of inner development activities in a semester receive an extra 1.0 point to add to the final grade of a course of their choice. This incentive reinforces the value of social, emotional and relational development within academic evaluation—recognizing that a student's inner growth can support their overall academic performance. This proposal is currently under review and is part of a broader process to foster a more holistic approach to assessment.

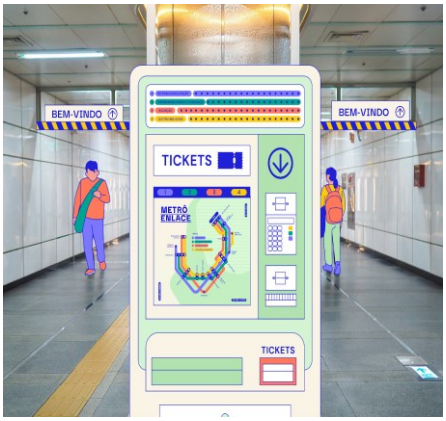
FIGURE 2. ENTRANCE TO THE ENLACE METRO—PHASE 3

Source: Enlace, 2020

The Enlace Metro has four lines, each with three to four stations, representing Centro Universitário Facens' institutional pillars: Sustainable Development, Innovative Mindset, Entrepreneurial Attitude, and Global Vision. As students 'travel' through three city zones—*Me and Myself*, *Me and Others*, and *Me and the World* (CASEL, 2020; Taddei, 2018)—they visit metro stops representing the Inner Development Goals. At each stop, students engage in *Vivências*, experiential learning opportunities that use awareness-based prompts as a multimodal approach—combining short texts, dialogical videos, and reflective exercises. These prompts activate personal insights, linking content to lived experience and encouraging reflection on social, emotional, and relational aspects.

The metro journey metaphor shows that skills, competencies, and qualities are not academic content to master all at once or as a single block to complete by graduation. Instead, inner capacities develop gradually through knowledge and lived experience, without a strict linear path. This way, within higher education, we understand inner development as an ongoing process shaped by choices and opportunities throughout academic life. Each part of the journey offers diverse learning paths that students and faculty may choose to explore—or not.

FIGURE 3. TICKET COUNTER—PHASE 3

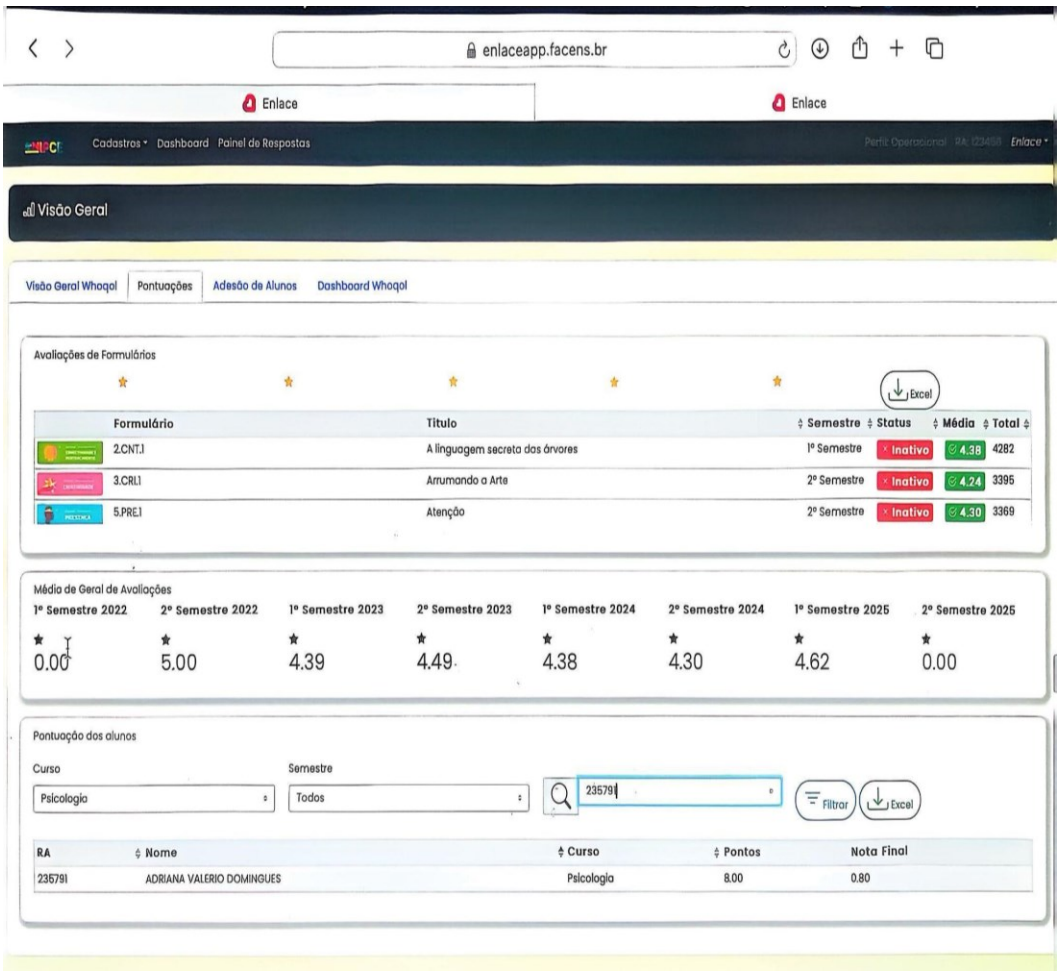


Source: Enlace, 2020

In addition to the Enlace Metro, the Enlace System includes assessing students' quality of life using standardized tools: the WHOQOL-BREF, which measures physical, psychological, social, and environmental well-being, and the Purpose in Life Test (PIL), which evaluates a person's sense of meaning. These validated assessments (WHOQOL-BREF: WHOQOL Group, 1998; PIL-Test: Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) are administered each semester and displayed on an online dashboard (Figure 4), enabling students to track their well-being over time. The assessments promote self-awareness and guide targeted support within the Enlace System.

The Enlace System was developed over five years (2019–2024) through a co-design process divided into three main stages—Foundations and Conceptualization (Phases 1–3), Platform Development and Capacity Building (Phases 4–5), and Pilot Implementation and Collective Impact (Phases 6–8). Although we describe these as distinct phases to help illustrate and clarify the development process, we acknowledge that implementation in a higher education context is complex and nonlinear. These phases often overlap, unfold simultaneously, and may require moving back and forth rather than following a strict start-and-end sequence. This reflects the dynamic and iterative nature of applying the IDG in practice.

FIGURE 4. STUDENT DASHBOARD



Source: Enlace System

In Phase 1, the Enlace team explored theoretical frameworks on socioemotional development—including SEE Learning, the Big Five personality traits, and the Brazilian National Common

Curricular Base (Brazil, 2017; McCrae & Costa, 1999; Roeser & Schlesinger, 2019). These were examined in relation to the university's mission and academic pillars: Global Vision, Sustainable Development, Innovative Mindset, and Entrepreneurial Attitude.

In Phase 2, a design-driven prototyping process created a strategy to integrate the Inner Development Goals (IDG) with the university's mission and academic pillars. Because the content is personal and subjective, the format needed to be engaging and meaningful. The Enlace team used the metaphor of students traveling on "paths and journeys" with the "luggage" they carry, structuring it as a "metro journey through an imaginary city," where metro lines symbolize broader capacities the university aims to develop and stations represent specific IDG capacities.

In Phase 3, IDG skills, competencies, and qualities were selected, reorganized, and validated with students. The skills were grouped into four tracks—Sustainable Development, Global Vision, Entrepreneurial Attitude, and Innovative Mindset—and integrated into three city zones: *Me and Myself*, *Me and Others*, and *Me and the World* (Figure 5). Experiential learning activities were created for each metro stop to correspond with specific IDG skills, such as the *Reflection Stadium*, *Self-Knowledge Square*, *Creativity Museum*, *Planning Hotel*, and *Diversity Garden*. These activities form a catalogue of exercises students complete to validate their journey.

In the *Self-Knowledge Square*, for example, students create a personal timeline of key life moments and emotions, fostering self-awareness and emotional understanding in a safe space. *The Planning Hotel* uses a fictional story of a student facing academic and emotional challenges to prompt reflection on time management, procrastination, openness to help, and self-organization. While the *Creativity Museum* encourages students to create original titles and captions for provocative images, it stimulates creative expression, symbolic thinking, and imaginative engagement with everyday themes.

FIGURE 5. LEARNING ACTIVITIES PLOTTED ALONG THE ENLACE METRO

Source: Enlace System

In Phase 4, self-instructional content was developed for the online platform and made accessible to students. The Enlace team also created a *Socioemotional Observatory*—an online system featuring dashboards that enable students to track their socioemotional and relational development over time (Figure 4)—organized by course and semester to support faculty in designing academic proposals.

In Phase 5, the Enlace team trained faculty on the IDG content, addressing challenges in implementing self-instructional materials, selecting monitors for the online platform, and supporting teachers with targeted classroom interventions.

In Phase 6, the Enlace Metro was launched as an initial pilot at the university, with a focus on assessing and grading student participation.

In Phase 7, the Enlace Metro scale pilot launched with a student-centred focus, beginning with an immersive onsite session for faculty that introduced the semester's core IDG capacities through interactive activities.

As part of the scale pilot, a lifelong learning initiative offering Inner Development Goals micro-credentials was made available to all students across the university—both undergraduate and graduate—interested in registering. Each of the 15 IDG micro-credentials involves a 10-hour cycle of theory, practice, and classroom planning. Upon completing at least 40 hours, students can become Well-Being Ambassadors—that is, peer guides supporting immersive activities and helping embed the IDG across the university.

Throughout the semester, ambassadors and faculty co-led three one-hour sessions per course, combining theory with hands-on activities to give students practical tools. Students also completed self-paced online modules and tracked their well-being through dashboards. A second immersive onsite session, now focused on students, culminated in a personal life project. Completing the 40-hour Enlace Metro program earned students an extra 1.0 point toward their course grade, reinforcing the value of social, emotional, and relational learning alongside technical skills. The grading format is currently being piloted.

In Phase 8, student participation remains mandatory as the program integrates into selected course curricula, though institutional acceptance of socioemotional scores in final grades is still evolving. Engagement continues through in-person, self-paced, and immersive formats to maintain the experience's spontaneity and formative quality. The focus has also expanded to designing a social incubator that builds on students' inner development and guides coordinated collective action addressing university and community needs.

4. Findings: Discoveries along the Journey

All students' responses are recorded in the Enlace System, where the team can access an anonymized dashboard showing results from answers, evaluations, and comments (Figure 4). At the end of each semester, the following indicators were analysed (Appendix I): student participation (Table 1), qualitative open-ended responses to online activities, student evaluations of online activities (rating scale 0-5), qualitative feedback on both online and in-person activities (Table 2), and faculty qualitative feedback of in-person interventions (Table 3).

We observed that student participation in the Enlace Metro online activities from 2021 to 2024 fluctuated, influenced by program format changes and institutional factors (Table 1). Early semesters (2021/1 to 2022/1) saw low and uneven engagement, with Engineering—the most established program—peaking at 64%, while Technology and Architecture remained below 30%. Improved coordination in 2022/2 raised overall participation to 44%. From 2024, the introduction of in-person interventions and increased involvement from Health programs boosted participation to 51% in 2024/1, with Architecture reaching 84%, likely reflecting a greater affinity for the

reflective nature of the Inner Development Goals. Overall, participation benefited from in-class presence, institutional maturation, and alignment between Enlace's pedagogy and the social, emotional and relational capacities promoted by the IDG.

During the early phases (Phases 3–6), many faculty felt unprepared to address socioemotional topics like mental health and well-being, citing lack of expertise. Most students engaged superficially, completing activities mainly to earn points without deeper reflection. Though mandatory participation initially boosted adherence, it also caused negative perceptions, leading to a temporary suspension of the requirement for program realignment.

In response, the Enlace Lab implemented in-person faculty training, bimonthly pedagogical support meetings, and by 2024 appointed student ambassadors to facilitate communication, active listening, and stronger connections (Phase 7). The ambassadors led classroom interventions on IDG themes—selected with the course coordinators' input and offering student opt-out. With increased support and shared responsibility, faculty engagement grew. Early 2024 feedback indicates that well-coordinated interventions are viewed as meaningful teaching contributions (Table 3).

FIGURE 6. IN-PERSON ACTIVITIES—ENLACE METRO

Source: Enlace System

4.1. From *Self* to *World*

Throughout the project, the team met biweekly for a co-creative, iterative design process, continuously reflecting on feedback from in-class discussions, student interactions, and experiences with the Enlace Metro. Over time, we observed a shift in the Enlace System's pedagogical focus: from solely emphasizing students' socioemotional development for personal growth (Phase 1) to focusing on how inner development supports collective action across broader contexts—from the self to others, from the university to the city, and from the city to the planet (Phases 3-8). This shift highlighted the importance of seeing students not only as individuals seeking to improve their own skills but also as agents capable of positively influencing their community and the world.

This way, we understand that incorporating new skills, competencies, and qualities from the Inner Development Goals (IDG), aligning with the institution's core pillars, and engaging across the *Me and Myself*, *Me and Others*, and *Me and the World* dimensions were all essential to expanding the Enlace System's pedagogical shift from self to world. By introducing the IDG framework alongside other pedagogical references, we enabled a shift in teaching—inviting students to move from isolated actions toward a more relational, collective, and co-creative awareness of inner development.

4.2. Awareness of the IDG is not Enough to Motivate Action

The Enlace Metro was initially designed to invite students to become aware of the IDG. However, collaboration with faculty revealed their focus on solving concrete problems. Teachers emphasized that "becoming aware is not enough" and that "awareness must be accompanied by actions in the real world." Listening to teachers and course coordinators, we understood that students often need a clear *why* grounded in real challenges before engaging with the IDG. Therefore, we realized they could interact with the framework by actively working on real-world problems and, through this process, develop awareness of skills, competencies, and capacities central to inner development. In other words, the learning experience moves from action towards awareness, and not solely from awareness towards action. It is essential to recognize that this is not a linear process but a cyclical one—a continuous movement between outer-world action and inner-world awareness, two entangled and interdependent dimensions (Gonçalves & Grocott, 2024).

4.3. One Journey Leads to Many

Throughout the development of the Enlace System, we observed that the narrative of the metro itself inspired other initiatives in the university. In other words, the very existence of the Enlace Metro by itself prompted additional (direct or indirect) actions within the academic community. For example, although students initially completed the activities because they were mandatory, they were still (anyway) engaging with the IDG. In one notable instance, engineering students proposed improvements to the system with artificial intelligence, specifically, using AI to name emotions based on students' responses. This demonstrated that the engineering students not only envisioned benefits for themselves but also proposed an 'action in the world' that could positively impact other students.

In architecture, we observed that using the Enlace Metro also created new opportunities. An initial delay in integrating the IDG provided extra time to refine how capacities were introduced each semester. In the first semester, course content and themes were defined; in the second, classroom visits monitored progress, addressed questions, and resolved issues. This ongoing dialogue helped faculty explore new possibilities inspired by the platform. For example, some Enlace Metro activities were incorporated into extracurricular events like the Creativity Week and integrated into courses, such as the Expressions course, where architecture students created artwork on well-being that was showcased at a Wellbeing Summit.

However, we noticed that these "new journeys" often must align with the university's established pathways, formats, and discourses. In other words, students' interests and actions tend to be categorized within existing structures (such as "entrepreneurship," "innovation," "sustainability," or "creativity"), which may have lost personal significance. Additionally, there is institutional pressure to structure and assess courses by grades. The implication is that while the Metro encourages students to explore and expand their paths through a 'journey,' ultimately, they are expected to fit these journeys back into courses, grades, or labels. This tension between exploration and institutional conformity highlights the challenge of balancing student-centred and institution-centred approaches.

Therefore, we ask: Are universities prepared to let students live their "own journeys"? In other words, are they willing to allow paths outside pre-established frameworks? With the Enlace

System, we see that the logic of 'fitting' students into predefined structures serves the university's financial, commercial, and organizational interests — but does it truly serve each student's potentials and possibilities? Are universities ready to embrace unique journeys that don't align with conventional trajectories? And how might opening space for multiple IDG 'journeys' affect the learning environment and support students in the long term?

5. Conclusion: Inward and Forward

We are nearing the end of our journey. This paper explored integrating the Inner Development Goals (IDG) into higher education through an awareness- and practice-based design approach. Our reflections arose from learning by doing, acknowledging there is no one-size-fits-all solution to linking inner development with outer change in universities. With this in mind, we share key takeaways to support the broader field of transformative learning in higher education — especially for those working with the IDG. These insights aim to help university leaders, educators, curriculum developers, and implementers design learning environments that meaningfully connect inner and outer transformation.

A key takeaway is the importance of presenting the IDG as a continuous, emergent, and open learning process. A practical pedagogical strategy that supported this in our context—and may be valuable for other universities — is the use of metaphor to communicate complex and evolving learning processes. In our case, the metaphor of a journey, embodied in the Enlace Metro, helped convey the idea of ongoing learning and discovery. Such metaphors help students and educators navigate inner development by making the intangible visible. That said, we caution that making such tools mandatory may hinder authentic engagement. Additionally, successful implementation depends on creating enabling conditions — such as providing professional development for teachers, the supportive presence of monitors, and timely, responsive interventions.

Complementing this, we invite universities to consider a broader pedagogical shift that moves inner development beyond individual well-being or personal growth, toward a more relational, open, and collective process. This shift aligns with emerging research on relational well-being and togetherness and is vital because it moves away from a fixed, objectivist view that treats well-being as a static attribute of the student — instead framing it as an open, emergent, and communal process. In our case, this shift was expressed through the metaphor of city zones — "Me and Myself," "Me and Others," and "Me and the World" — helping students situate their learning across personal, social, and systemic dimensions.

Finally, we learned that central to this pedagogical shift is the dynamic interplay between action and awareness. Awareness alone is not enough to sustain engagement. Students become more meaningfully involved when action comes first. By participating in real-world, collaborative projects, they begin to recognize and reflect on the inner capacities they develop. This cyclical movement—action leading to awareness, and awareness leading back to action — should be intentionally integrated into learning design. Ideally, such programs should also connect to course content and align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Finally, we encountered a major challenge: universities often try to fit students' learning journeys into pre-existing institutional structures. These structures — shaped by conventional

labels like "entrepreneurship," "innovation," or "creativity"—can dilute or reshape students' experiences so they no longer feel meaningful. Although the Enlace System offers students space to explore and expand through open inquiry and discovery, higher education institutions frequently pressure them to translate these experiences into assessable outcomes aligned with academic formats, grades, and administrative logic. This creates a tension between a student-centred, emergent learning process and the institution-centred demand for categorization, standardization, and control.

This tension invites a deeper inquiry: Are universities ready to let students live their own journeys—ones that may not fit neatly within institutional frameworks? Are they willing to hold space for experiences that resist easy categorization or measurement? Through the Enlace System, we saw how the institutional urge to "fit" learning into existing molds often serves organizational interests but may limit each student's transformative potential.

We, therefore, wonder: How can universities support learning paths that remain open, relational, and driven by students' evolving sense of purpose? What would it take to design environments that welcome multiple, even unpredictable, IDG 'journeys'? And how might such a shift redefine both learning outcomes and the very purpose of higher education? We close by inviting university leaders, educational boards, and curriculum developers to embrace transformative learning as a *movement* — from content transfer to content experience, from knowledge-based training to relational development, from a single journey to many possibilities, and from isolated well-being to collective action.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no 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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