

## Chapter 2

# Driving Agentic Empowerment With Metatheory: Global Transformation or Global Tokenism in Higher Education?

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### ABSTRACT

*Making meaning from experience belies all approaches to the facilitation of transformative learning in practice. This chapter provides an insight into how this process of activating epistemic transformations takes place at the front line of educational provision with students. By incorporating the theoretical basis of social constructivist learning principles, the consideration of concepts such as critical thinking, critical discourse, and their relationships to heuristics and bias are used to drive the challenging of presuppositions and assumptions in self-reflective practice. The chapter considers how the functional capacities for transformation and the ability to debate existing published literature are central to the development of epistemic transformation, which transcends disciplinarity and extends into the epistemic basis of personhood. Central to the development of each is due regard for the situational specificity of meaning making, which is used to reconcile the complex ambiguity of self-contemplation and the acknowledgement of its impact in reflective processes.*

### INTRODUCTION

The whole notions of global democratic equality and equity are rightfully in a dynamic state of flux, reflective of the social and political crises the world faces in relation to race, a global pandemic and escalating levels of nationalism and division. Hedges (2021) contention that, as a consequence of these factors, social justice is now the fourth purpose of education, whether or not the concept of social justice in itself is being dealt with in terms of global transformation or merely global tokenism remains wide open to critical academic debating fora. Delineating between equality and equity in terms of operational definition and implementation across global societies is still lacking in terms of understanding, despite

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there being an impetus for transformative change in approaches to driving empowerment and just societies where the engendering of equity and inclusion is advocated as a right and not merely a privilege for underrepresented members of them.

The aims of this chapter are threefold, in relation to Section 3 of the book. Firstly, the aim of the chapter is to debate the concept that the metatheory of transformative learning can be a generic means of addressing levels of epistemic injustice across global societies. Secondly, the chapter will aim to delineate between how blurred boundaries of understanding between equality and equity are framing the actual rather than perceived opportunities for the address of institutional structure and agency in relation to both. Finally, the chapter will aim to provide a lens through which HE curricula can authentically advocate transformation in its purest form by moving beyond the bureaucratisation of underrepresentation to pragmatic addresses of it in ways that recognise change does not emanate from the basis of equality as a starting point for building future democratic societies. The chapter will explore the current efforts within the context of Higher Education, to address issues raised in nevertheless altruistic efforts to decolonise curricula, create avenues for widening participation and to integrate universal designs for learning. Affecting social justice in society stems from a capacity to change not just the actions of societal members but their unconscious biases, presuppositions, and assumptions about people of whom they have minimal knowledge or understanding.

The context of educational research and its situatedness in time, context and culture is relevant to broad claims of transformative change currently prevalent across global societies. Whilst issues of the global pandemic and public reaction to the death of George Floyd have framed an avenue for disruptive ambiguity in society, the only means of delivering proactive change is being able to provide a lens of perspective for people as they seek to reconcile meaning from experience and fundamentally alter society as a consequence. Whilst this is a visionary panacea for activism and change, it also falls short of pragmatic sustainability where racism and sexism are engendered and embedded parts of culture and society. It is here that planning for intergenerational impact and disruptive innovation are so badly needed but also so badly under resourced and acknowledged in Higher Education. Establishing the need for change is visible without effort, impacting upon it will be the sustained work and challenge of future generations if global society is to move beyond tokenism.

Effecting social justice within the context of global Higher Education poses many challenges but also several opportunities. In attempting to address the imbalance of cultural and political fora, critical debate of the degree of tokenism rather than proactive impactful initiatives ought to be illuminated and recognised. Whilst events of the last year have truly highlighted areas of concern such as women's and black peoples' rights as citizens of a global workplace, so too have there been many issues which drive into question the long term sustainability of action for change, or whether in another fifty years, we will simply repeat the same degree of enthusiasm and still fail to implement concrete improvement in terms of the levels of equity and inclusion visible at the front line of social injustice.

In considering transformative learning as a metatheoretical perspective rather than simply a learning theory with much to offer the underrepresented and voiceless, it is possible to unravel the interrelationships of how critical introspection can lead to profound change on an individual level and act as a means of driving wider collective dynamism in the effort to effect social justice across the world. The concept of transformation itself, in the context of Higher Education, has evolved over time, which has served to magnify and provide diverse interpretations of it as a construct or instrument for purposeful social change. However, one key drawback has been the tendency of pedagogists to frame all transformative approaches under the ownership of Mesirow, as opposed to regarding transformative learning as a far

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