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# **A Freirian Approach to Epistemic Justice: Contributions of Action Learning to Capabilities for Epistemic Liberation**

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## **Introduction**

Throughout modern history, reason and the Eurocentric method have prevailed in science and education, remaining detached and separate from subjectivities, life experiences, diversities, and socio-cultural contexts (Dussel, 1996). This epistemological imposition dehumanises being, generating epistemic oppression. This vision of a rational, decontextualised, generalist, and universal knowledge is also present in the field of higher education—an education focused on transferring knowledge, but which often nullifies students' creativity and criticality. Considering epistemic justice in higher education requires, therefore, rehumanising the subjectivity of students in educational processes, including recovering the knowledge that comes from experience.

In this chapter we propose rethinking the University based on the perspective of Paulo Freire. In the 1970s, the Brazilian pedagogue highlighted the need to transform education and move towards a pedagogy of liberation (Freire, 1970). His proposal, which is still relevant today, is an alternative pedagogy to that of the West, capable of promoting the epistemic liberation of historically marginalised and oppressed people and communities in educational processes and knowledge production. Based on his ideas, we propose four capabilities for epistemic liberation that should be enhanced in the field of higher education. These capabilities are the ability to be, do, learn, and transform.

These capabilities will be analysed through a case study in Valencia (Spain) through an Action Learning process promoted by the Master in Development Cooperation of the Universitat Politècnica de València. This experience was carried out in Na Rovella, a historically marginalised Valencia neighbourhood where various vulnerable communities and social groups converge. In this educational process, students put into practice different participatory methodologies with the aim of making the neighbourhood problems visible and acting on them collectively. The present analysis focuses on the

capabilities for epistemic liberation that have been enhanced in students throughout the participatory process.

The following section examines the theoretical framework outlined in this introduction. Next, the qualitative methodological strategy is presented. Subsequently, the contribution of the participatory process to the expansion of capabilities for the epistemic liberation of students is discussed. Finally, the main conclusions of the research are presented.

### **Capabilities for epistemic liberation**

Miranda Fricker (2015) emphasises that if all people could exercise their capability for epistemic contribution, that is, their ability to share their beliefs and interpretations, the exchange and construction of knowledge would be facilitated. Therefore, she underlines the importance of analysing the epistemic injustices that prevent people from being able to share their knowledge. She divides injustices into three types: deliberative injustice (when a person is deliberately prohibited or coerced so that she/he cannot express herself/himself), testimonial injustice (when prejudices lead the hearer to reduce the credibility of the speaker)' and hermeneutical injustice (when the lack of resources makes it difficult to understand the information). According to Fricker (2015), institutions play a fundamental role in preventing these epistemic injustices from occurring, but also in reproducing them.

Fricker's contribution has made it possible to place epistemic justice as a central problem in the processes of knowledge production, with special emphasis on the role of public institutions. Indeed, it is a public higher education institution—the University—which we will focus on in this chapter. Specifically, Walker (2019) emphasises that the capability for epistemic contribution proposed by Fricker should be considered as a central freedom in the educational field. However, there are still very few academic papers that propose a road map to contribute to epistemic justice in the field of education. In this sense, we will use Freire's approach to take a step further: in addition to stressing the importance of institutions, we will examine the role students can play in their process of epistemic liberation. Based on Freire's postulates, we will propose that it is necessary to strengthen a series of capabilities in people (students in our case) to bring about epistemic liberation. However, before explaining these capabilities, it is important to highlight some of the Brazilian pedagogue's key postulates.

Latin American thinker and educator, Paulo Freire, positioned himself from the perspective of people and communities that have been historically oppressed in educational and knowledge production processes. In his works *Education, the practice of freedom* (Freire, 1970) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2007) he links education with politics, recognising people's capability for liberation in the face of epistemic and epistemological oppressions. For Freire (2007), the oppressed person is the one who is not allowed to be—is dehumanised—who is prevented from developing his humanity and capability for epistemic contribution. This epistemic oppression is historically reproduced through education, which also produces epistemological oppression. Freire uses the term the 'banking model of education' (1970) to describe and critique the traditional education system, in reference to the metaphor of students as containers into which educators must place knowledge. Therefore, he conceives education as 'the act of depositing, transferring, transmitting values and knowledge' (Freire, 2007, p. 52) and that it 'nullifies the creative power of the students or minimizes it, thus stimulating their naivety and not their criticality' (Freire, 1970: 53). We believe that the transmission of knowledge promoted by this type of education still prevails today, including in higher education.

To overcome such oppressions and move towards liberation, Freire proposes liberating education. He advocates the emergence of the consciousness of the being through a horizontal relationship, based on reflection-action, collaboration, and mutual learning:

although the teachers or the students are not the same, the person in charge of education is being formed or re-formed as he/she teaches, and the person who is being taught forms him/herself in this process. ...Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning. (Freire, 2004, p. 12).

This is an education focused on the participation of people in their own learning, in doing and learning through reflective practice, a problematising and critical education that leads to transformative action:

Existing is more than living because it is more than being in the world. It is being in it and with it. And that capability or possibility of communicative union of the existing person with the objective world, contained in the etymology of the word itself, gives existence the sense of criticism that is not in the simple life.

Transcend, discern, dialogue (communicate and participate) are exclusivities of existing. Existence is individual, but it is only realized in relation to others, and in communication with them. (Freire, 2007, p. 29)

This recognition of existing beyond simply living requires recognition as a being, as an interdependent being with the capability to communicate and participate in educational processes and knowledge production. Freire (2007) proposes the rehumanisation of the being in educational processes, as a being with a conscience and knowledge. This self-recognition of the being as a being who knows promotes the implementation of the capability to make an epistemic contribution. For Freire, this liberation must be achieved by the oppressed people and communities themselves:

Therein lies the great humanist and historical task of the oppressed: free themselves and free the oppressors. Those who oppress, exploit and violate because of their power, cannot have in that power the force of liberation from the oppressed or from themselves. Only the power that is reborn from the weakness of the oppressed will be strong enough to free both. (Freire, 2007, p. 25)

This liberation must be promoted in the educational field based on a liberating educational practice. This praxis is characterised by the communicative openness between students and teachers, which consists of a reflective and horizontal dialogue about and with reality. A praxis that objectifies reality: ‘the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. Without it, overcoming oppressor-oppressed is impossible’ (Freire, 1970, p. 32).

For Freire (1970) this communicative openness requires immersion in the historically oppressive reality followed by a critical interpolation to objectify it and to act collectively on the contemporary reality. This process of reflection and collective action on reality is what ensures transitivity towards *conscientisation*, a term he coined (Freire, 2007). Through the collective dialogue on reality it is possible to decode the oppressor code and its subsequent recoding. This recoding is made based on shared reasoning, the consensual search for a common language and a shared meaning. This is the epistemological method proposed by Freire (Morollón, 2018).

Based on Freire's ideas, we identify four capabilities for epistemic liberation that should be enhanced to achieve a liberating education:

- The **capability to be** is the opportunity to recognise yourself as a being with experiences, knowledge, and abilities to do, learn, and transform. The implementation of the capability to be enables the expansion of the self-concept and the reinforcement of self-esteem. It is the opportunity to recognise oneself as being interdependent and with historicity, to recognise oneself as part of the whole, of the problems, but also of the solutions. This capability is enhanced by communicative openness, through the participation in spaces of critical reflection on historical reality and the processes of oppression and social and epistemic injustices existing at local and global levels. This individual and collective *conscientisation* allows the rehumanisation of the being, the recovery of the subjectivity of people (knowledge and experiences) in social and educational processes.
- The **capability to do** is the opportunity to participate in knowledge co-production processes and communicate knowledge and experiences. This capability is enhanced by communicative openness in and with contextual reality, together with different people, knowledge, and experiences. This communicative openness is characterised by horizontality, critical reflection, and inclusive participation through a care approach between those involved. The awareness of the ability to do is the recognition of the intent of the being, of his or her ability to produce knowledge from experience and participation. This capability enables awareness of the reality, its problems, and the potential for collective action. It is the recognition of the knowledge of all beings and the implementation of participatory methods and techniques in the processes of knowledge production. This capability encourages power relations between expert knowledge and experiential knowledge to be overcome.
- The **capability to learn** is the opportunity to participate actively in the learning process; it involves the overcoming of power relations between the educator and the educated. This capability is promoted by horizontal relationships and the recovery of people's subjectivities, knowledge, and experiences in educational processes. It is the ability to learn from other people and from and with reality. This communicative openness in the classroom between students-teachers, and in real life between university-society, is the opportunity to put into practice the dialogue

of knowledge to decode knowledge, learn from the community, and re-codify knowledge from shared reasoning. The capability to learn reinforces critical awareness about reality and enables recognition of the ability to transform it through collective action.

- The **capability to transform** is enhanced by the capability to learn from other people, by the capability to do through the co-production of knowledge, and by the capability to recognise oneself as a being with knowledge and experiences. That is, it is promoted by the three previous capabilities (to be, to do, and to learn) so that the four capabilities are multi-dimensional and intersect. It is from the transition between the awareness of the being towards the implementation of his or her capabilities to do and learn that *conscientisation* is achieved, the capability to transform based on collective action. It is the opportunity to put into practice the knowledge of shared reasoning through collective action. The implementation of this capability enables the development of actions and products that reflect the diversity of voices, knowledge, and practices and which propose individual and collective solutions to make visible, confront, and overcome social and environmental problems at local and global levels.

We understand that these four capabilities for epistemic liberation enhance epistemic justice in educational processes. In dialogue with the capability for epistemic contribution proposed by Fricker (2015), we could point out that it has certain similarities with the definition proposed here of the capability to do. Fricker (2015) proposes two types of contributions for epistemic justice: providing informative materials (such as evidence, thesis, etc.), and providing interpretative materials (such as critical material, interpretations, etc.). We propose that the capability to do should include acting in the processes of knowledge co-production; i.e., although it contributes to the generation of materials (informative and interpretive), the focus is placed on the co-production of knowledge. It is recognised, therefore, that all knowledge is valid. The other similarity is that the capability to transform enables the generation of products that can contribute to epistemic justice. However, these products arise through collective action, which generates their appropriation by the people who participate in the epistemic contribution.

In short, we propose the four capabilities for epistemic liberation as a road map in the field of higher education and in the processes of knowledge co-production. We believe

that only through the epistemic liberation of students can we move towards a more just and sustainable society, capable of overcoming the epistemic oppression and injustices existing in contemporary society. Epistemic liberation requires communicative openness based on dialogue, critical reflection, horizontality, inclusive participation through a care approach, as well as the critical awareness of the power relations existing between teachers and learners, seeking to overcome them. This communicative openness is only possible, therefore, through participatory methodologies.

In the next section we characterise the case study of an Action Learning process in Na Rovella as a liberating educational experience based on the facilitation of participatory methodologies. The methodological strategy used to collect the learning and the changes generated in the students throughout the process of knowledge co-production is also presented. Subsequently, the results are shown based on the discourse analysis and its contribution to the capabilities for epistemic liberation: to be, to do, to learn, and to transform.

## **Methodology**

Our qualitative research combines the theory and practice of Freire's education for liberation in order to give meaning to the co-production of knowledge for social transformation. To this end, we analyse the case study of the Action Learning process 'Tejiendo voces en el barrio de Na Rovella, València (España)' (*Weaving Voices in the Na Rovella neighbourhood, Valencia (Spain)*) promoted by the Masters in Development Cooperation of the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV).

Action Learning (hereinafter AL) is a methodology aimed at solving problems through action and reflection on its results. It arose based on the principles and characteristics proposed by Reg Revans in the 1980s, in order to guide and adapt educational practices according to the diversity of organisations, contexts and problems of contemporary society (e.g., Revans, 2011). The author did not devise his own definition of AL, rather he proposed it is a set of ethical points that nurtures various approaches (Pedler et al., 2005). Due to this lack of definition, a wide diversity of formats and practices have arisen (Willis, 2004; Marquardt and Yeo, 2012). In practice, it has been widely used by companies to solve problems and to carry out organisational learning. On an academic level we are interested in the view of Pedler et al. (2005), who define AL as learning



processes where participants face complex problems and learn by exploring new opportunities and challenges in a specific reality. Especially interesting is the contribution of authors like Trehan (2005), who differentiate the processes of conventional AL with critical processes, i.e., those that consider the promotion of critical thinking among the participants as one of the objectives of the process. The emphasis is therefore placed on reflection based on individual action (learning from experience) and collective, critical reflection on the organisational, political and emotional dynamics enhanced and generated by collective action (learning from the organisation). It is the latter view—critical Action Learning—which inspires the process analysed here as a case study.

This experience was carried out in the academic year 2018–2019 of the Masters in Development Cooperation of the Universitat Politècnica de València in the Na Rovella neighbourhood, Valencia. The neighbourhood organisations that were most involved were the Jordi de Sant Jordi Secondary School, the Universitat Popular Na Rovella, and the Taleia Youth Centre of the ADSIS Foundation. The group of students of the Masters in Development Cooperation of the Universitat Politècnica de València (hereinafter, MDC-UPV) is characterised by being a diverse group: intergenerational, intercultural, and multidisciplinary. Four groups were formed by students, teachers, and researchers. Participants in the experience included 11 female students, 7 male students, and 6 facilitators of the process. The interdisciplinary team of facilitators was made up of teachers of the Masters degree and researchers from the Ingenio Institute (CSIC-UPV).

To understand the process, we will first explain the participatory methodologies used by the groups together with each entity in the neighbourhood (summarised in Figure 1) and, secondly, we will explain the methodology used by the research team to analyse the capabilities for epistemic liberation expanded during the process (summarised in Figure 2).

Figure 1 illustrates the four groups, the methodologies provided by the students of the MDC-UPV, as well as the entities and vulnerable communities that actively participated in the experience.

***Figure 1. Methodologies provided by the students.***



As we can see, the groups provided the following methodologies: 1) PhotoVoice to 3rd year students at Jordi de Sant Jordi Secondary School. PhotoVoice or participatory social photography is a methodology that seeks to bring lasting change to participants, empowering them to inform others and to be actively involved in decisions that affect their own lives and their community's development (Hussey, 2016, p. 2) Participatory video process to the intergenerational group of students of the Universitat Popular Na Rovella. Participatory video involves a group or community creating its own film. The filmmaking process can enable participants to take action to solve their own problems, or to communicate their needs and ideas to decision-makers (White, 2003, p. 3) Social diagnosis with five mothers of young immigrants linked to the Taleia Youth Centre. In addition to individual interviews, the group used the technique of the network target to visualise the associations, people, and spaces that most influence the current situation of women, and what these relationships are like; and 4) mapping of citizen initiatives based on the CIVICS Platform. This is a way to collectively map and build a database that relates social initiatives, sharing their contributions and motivations to act in the neighbourhood. Collective mapping offers a common meeting space to articulate and relate the initiatives, making possible the construction of critical narratives through the eyes of the participants in relation to their environment. Figure 2, below, shows the stages of the AL process and the methodological strategy used in the present research to analyse the capabilities for epistemic liberation.

***Figure 2. Methodological stages to analyse students' capabilities***



In the centre of Figure 2, the timeline of the AL process is presented, accompanied by the methodological strategy carried out by the research team to analyse the capabilities for epistemic liberation enhanced in the students. Stage 1, prior to the immersion in the neighbourhood, consisted of the implementation of Participatory Workshop 1, provided to the students. The objective of this workshop was to gather their motivations and expected changes in the AL process. At this stage, meetings were also held between the team of facilitators and the neighbourhood stakeholders.

Stage 2 of immersion in the neighbourhood with the participating entities was mainly carried out through participant observation, which occurred both in groups and on an overall level. Stage 3 featured the facilitation of participatory methodologies (participatory video, PhotoVoice, social diagnosis and mapping of citizen initiatives), interviews were conducted with students and people linked to the entities. In Stage 4, within the framework of the collective evaluation of the first week, Participatory Workshop 2 was held in order to follow up on the learning, obstacles and strengths of the process.

Stage 5 featured the co-designing of products and collective proposals. Interviews were conducted with students and people linked to the entities that participated in the four groups. These interviews were also conducted in Stage 6 (public feedback), in order to collect the learning and results of the process. At the end of the AL, Stage 7, a second collective evaluation was facilitated through Participatory Workshop 3, with the objective of triangulating the learnings and empowered changes among the students of the MDC-UPV. Finally, in Stage 8, interviews were conducted with the participating entities to

triangulate the learnings and changes of the participants and the impact of the AL on the entities and the neighbourhood. The students in this last stage carried out two tasks: on the one hand, each group presented a report that included the experiences, processes and learning; and on the other hand, each student made an individual reflection based on the critical learning that had been expanded after the process. Both tasks made it possible to triangulate the results related to the participation, learning, and changes desired and achieved on a personal level and as process facilitators and development professionals.

Finally, note that for the analysis of qualitative data, Nvivo 12 software was used.

## Results

This section presents the enhanced learnings in MDC-UPV students throughout the AL process carried out in the Na Rovella neighbourhood. The results have been categorised according to their contribution to the four capabilities for epistemic liberation. These learnings and their contribution are summarised in Figure 3 for each stage of the process.

*Figure 3. Learning and contribution to capabilities for epistemic liberation*

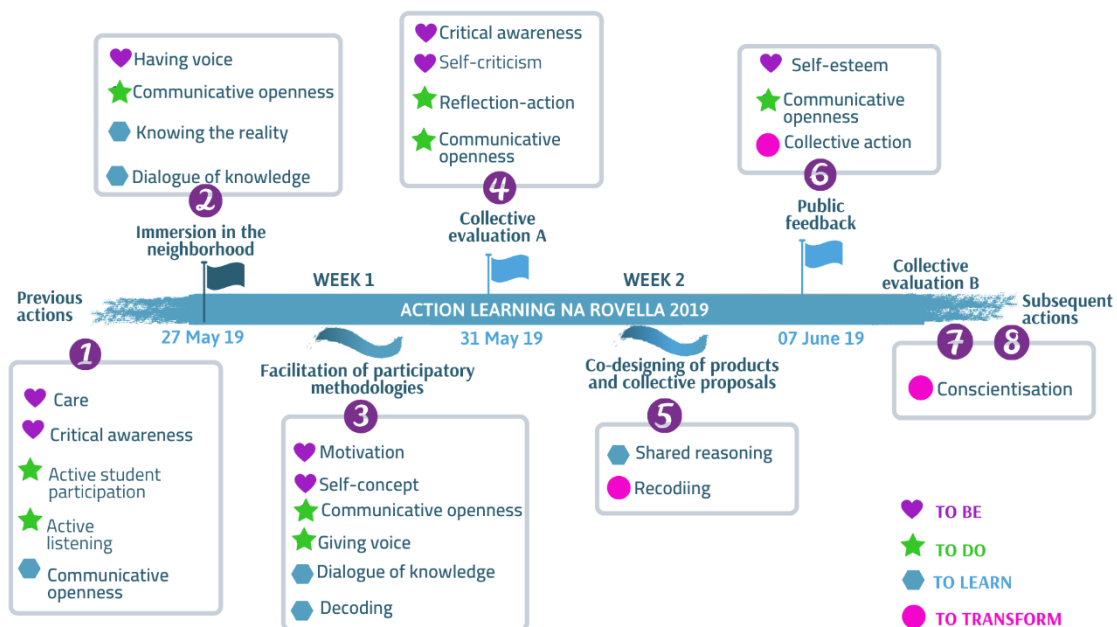


Figure 3 shows the stages of the process and the learnings that have been enhanced in the Masters degree students. These learnings show the expansion of capabilities for epistemic liberation in students who participated in the Action Learning process. These capabilities for epistemic liberation (capability to be, capability to do, capability to learn, and capability to transform) are not equally enhanced at all stages of the process. From Figure 3 it can be seen that, for example, the capability to be develops more in the initial stages, while the capability to transform is evidenced in the final stages. This is consistent with Freire's thinking because the capabilities are interrelated, and in order to for people to transform, first they have to be aware of their capabilities to be, do, and learn. In the following subsections we will highlight some moments where these capabilities have been evidenced throughout the process.

### *Capability to be*

Regarding the capability to be, we consider that the actions carried out prior to the process of immersion in the reality of the Na Rovella neighbourhood enhanced the horizontality in the relations between students and teachers. This communicative openness between students and teachers enables a horizontal relationship and the rehumanisation of the being as a student who is educating. This awareness of participation allows students to recognise themselves as beings, beings who know. This capability to be is also enhanced in teamwork, by having a voice and giving voice to other people, at the intergroup and relational level:

During this Masters degree I have learned to listen to others much more and respect their opinions. This is something that I have endeavoured to apply throughout the AL process, I think successfully, and I consider it crucial to generate a horizontal and participatory space of trust in which all people can have a voice and nobody feels excluded. (MDC student – UP Group)

This capability to be is reinforced in the spaces of individual and collective reflection generated in the formative spaces prior to immersion in the neighbourhood. The previous participation of the students in the subjects of the MDC-UPV (international aid system, globalisation, different conceptions and alternatives to development, inequalities, and social injustices—gender, climate change, poverty, participatory methodologies, and other competences) make it possible to transition towards a realisation of the being in the

world. Students recognise themselves as beings and as part of the whole, establishing connections between local reality and the global context.

Participatory methodologies and teamwork based on the care approach used in the classroom have enhanced the recovery of their voices as beings with intercultural and interdisciplinary experiences and knowledge. This recovery of the being and the motivation to do contributes to the expansion of the students' self-concept:

I think it is essential to believe in what you are doing, to work with enthusiasm and convey the same thing that you intend to achieve. I think I could say that being an active listener and being patient, which I have applied in the process, is absolutely necessary to make the participants feel that they are being heard, because in this way they will open up more and you can really delve into the points that they want to address. (MDC Student – Mapping Group)

Through active listening and inclusive participation, students are able to be and do more as a person, student, citizen, and development professional. The communicative openness between students-facilitators in the spaces of collective evaluation allow individual and collective reflection on the theory and practice of development. This reflection on the practice encourages an awareness to arise about the learning achieved over the two weeks. This contributes to reflective self-criticism about being and doing. In this sense, the words of one student stand out:

I still need to deconstruct myself and work on myself a lot. I still have to work, study and understand a lot to fill up my kit bag. This would also improve my self-perception when it comes to contributing to development processes, I may have more to contribute and say than I think I do. In short, I have to improve and work on all those skills that the contribution to social change requires through constant questioning, self-questioning, learning, and training. (MDC Student – Secondary School Group).

This motivation to contribute to social change emerges through the students' implementation of their knowledge and know-how. This practice, also reflective, facilitates their recognition as a being who knows, but also as a being who does not know everything, who does not own the truth and, therefore, is in a continuous learning process.

This process of reflective self-criticism allows students to channel forces to be the being they want to be, both as an individual and as a development professional.

Being in a complex reality and facing it through one's experience as a development professional allows one to recognise oneself as part of the whole, not only of the problems, but also of the solutions:

Other qualities that have contributed to this process have been my desire and motivation to give a voice to this group. At all times I have been able to express to them that this was an opportunity to give them the voice that society denies them, making them invisible because they are young. This is because I have always seen it as important to have the opinion of young people, because they also make up the social fabric of the neighbourhood. I believe that this yearning has transmitted to them the importance of this process and their involvement in it. (Secondary School Group Student).

Putting this opportunity into practice in the process and, specifically, in the public feedback contributes to the increase of students' self-esteem, recognising themselves as beings, beings who know, that learn with other people, with the intent for transformative action. This capability to be, recognising oneself as a person with knowledge and experiences and being interdependent on the local and global level promotes active participation and the appropriation of the process to do, learn, and transform.

### ***Capability to do***

The active participation of the UPV students in actions prior to their immersion in the neighbourhood contributes to the expansion of their capability to do, understood as the ability to make and produce knowledge with other people, in a horizontal relationship, also recognising them as beings with knowledge and intent. Process facilitation is an opportunity to co-produce knowledge through active listening and dialogue of knowledge:

Through this experience I have realised that by listening to the cities you acquire a much more transversal vision of the idiosyncrasies of the communities. Active listening has an infinite power to identify the need for change and to find a way to carry it out. The ability to actively listen to the work team itself and to put your

ego aside, something that I have been improving a lot during this academic year, offers innumerable answers about what may be the most appropriate way to act and when to do so. (MDC Student – Mapping Group)

This immersion in the reality and in the practice of the entities alongside vulnerable communities motivates the students to participate as an active subject in the learning process. This communicative openness is previously reinforced by the actions prior to immersion in the neighbourhood (classroom activities on previous experiences of Action Learning, socio-cultural contextualisation, and transect walks through the neighbourhood).

Through the facilitation of participatory processes and methodologies, students have the opportunity to give a voice to the people linked to the entities. This capability to do is expanded based on the dialogue of knowledge and inclusive participation through a care approach, as an intentional practice that is implemented in the participatory process with the entities:

Action Learning has helped me to first know then delve into the methodology of accompaniment and facilitation of development processes, in this case local, applying an inductive method that tries to guide rather than impose or expose the ideological frameworks of the facilitators, through participatory and horizontal behaviour. (MDC Student – Secondary School Group)

This communicative openness enhances alternative ways of doing, of producing knowledge, through a transformative practice that recognises the other as a being and their experience as knowledge:

As for the methodology, the PhotoVoice has been a way out of the established paths. From the beginning we made it clear that no photo was bad, and that no narrative or idea was better or worse than another. I think this was super important to bring about their commitment to the project, since they saw that in addition to having a voice and it being valid, they had both our support and that of the rest of their peers. (MDC Student – Secondary School Group)



These alternative ways of doing make it possible to give a voice to the most vulnerable groups and to make visible the diversity of experiences and knowledge, contributing to change through mutual learning and collective action:

I'm someone who's willing to listen to others, always with a receptive and respectful attitude. To that, perhaps you could also add having a close and horizontal relationship with the people I work with and accompany. This is not only because of my conviction that I am merely someone who should guide, accompany, and cooperate, but also because of the personal pleasure I get from working with people who have a lot to say, a lot to pursue and live, and with whom I can grow while, somehow, I contribute in some small way to their being heard, to improving their real opportunities to develop. (MDC Student – Secondary School Group)

This awareness of the need to do based on communicative openness, horizontality, and dialogue of knowledge enhances critical awareness about the reality, also with regard to the educational system:

I think the AL has contributed by demonstrating that it can also be learned outside the classrooms and outside the rigid system into which we are pigeonholed. (MDC Student – Secondary School Group)

I think that the group has felt it's been part of our learning and it's been possible to break down, symbolically, the distance that usually exists between the research subject and the 'object' of study. (MDC Student – Taleia Group)

By recognising that the educational system generates epistemic and epistemological oppression, students put into action the co-production of knowledge based on communicative openness, inclusive participation through a care approach and the dialogue of knowledge. This capability to do is the opportunity to generate transformative processes and practices that enhance learning related to ownership and commitment to social transformation. This capability enhances the capability to learn in an alternative way to the transfer of knowledge imparted by banking education.

***Capability to learn***

The immersion of the students in the neighbourhood contributes to the awareness of power relations and towards establishing horizontal relationships between students-neighbourhood, promoting learning in facilitating processes together with vulnerable communities:

I recognise that it's very important to generate peer relationships where not only the students express their visions, but also where we, as facilitators, also express our concerns. During the process we noted that the students were more receptive if we carried out the activities with them as well. (MDC student – Secondary School group)

This immersion in reality is the opportunity for students to learn about the neighbourhood and entities, through their voices, practices, and knowledge:

Without a doubt, walking through the neighbourhood to contact the different stakeholders, I think it's essential, because you learn how everyday life goes by so when they tell you things about the neighbourhood, you understand them better. (MDC Student – Mapping Group)

Living in the neighbourhood and understanding the reality of the people who inhabit it by facilitating workshop and communicative spaces (interviews, conversations, active listening, observation) enhances relationships of trust and mutual learning:

The horizontal nature of the workshop and I believe that, above all, the care approach that we try to apply at all times favoured the creation of an environment of trust in which we could open up to others and share our most intimate stories and feelings. It's these stories and the emotional bonds that have been created by everyone who has offered us mutual learning on a much more human level. I believe that we all take away from the process values such as honesty, resilience, active listening, or the desire to excel, without forgetting how enriching it has been to learn to see the world through the eyes of a blind person and offer them the possibility of discovering the world of video. (MDC Student – UP Group)

These values and learnings generated during the process enhance the overcoming of historical prejudices and oppressions in participation and knowledge production. This overcoming requires the implementation of decoding:

On the first day of the workshop they had assumed that we were the ones who were going to make all the decisions and do all the work and that they were going to be merely actors in a film. Through the different stages of the process they realised that the power was theirs, and began to show an increasingly active attitude. Our role as facilitators was crucial to achieve that empowerment and appropriation of the video and the process associated with it. From the first day we occupied a position of technical support and of advisers so that the UP participants felt comfortable and the masters of the project. (MDC Student – UP Group).

This decoding of the accompaniment enables a critical awareness about the reality and its complexities. By recognising the different subjectivities of the participants and their knowledge, the search for shared reasoning is enhanced:

During the Action Learning process the most representative changes which we were able to contribute to as a result of our participation and collective construction with organisations were: the connection and knowledge between stakeholders, which strengthens relationships and generates networks of collaboration; the construction of alternative perceptions and narratives of the neighbourhood based on the dialogue, awareness, and involvement of the community in the change based on their opinion; and emphasising the value of the various initiatives in the neighbourhood that had been made invisible and improving their dissemination. (Student MDC – Mapping Group)

This capability to learn with other people through the co-production of knowledge enhances the capability to transform, to seek change through collective action.

### ***Capability to transform***

The capability to transform is enhanced throughout the AL process, but it is through the recoding and co-production of collective products and proposals that it materialises. The facilitation of the process through participatory methodologies such as PhotoVoice, Participatory Video, Participatory Social Diagnosis, and Citizen Initiatives Mapping—CIVICS—enhance the recoding based on shared reasoning:

In this way the class has become a self-confident agent of change, not only with the desire to continue to learn more, but also with the spirit to communicate it to whoever is necessary. (MDC Student – Secondary School Group)

The immersion in a local reality, the facilitation of participatory methodologies, and the critical reflection on the practice allows students to become aware as beings and as development professionals. In this process, critical awareness emerges, recognising oneself as being in a glocal context and to intentionally transform it:

It's the desire to help and contribute to the change for a better society, from my own environment, to be a better human being and struggle for my dreams that fill me with energy and a positive attitude every day, to act in the best way and to not give up even when things do not go as expected, to make mistakes, or to see the injustices around me. The will to transform and commitment to wanting a more equitable society, where there is greater equality and social justice for all. (MDC Student – Mapping Group)

This commitment to transformation is enhanced by participation in a small group and the promotion of participatory methodologies alongside historically oppressed groups. It is the opportunity to give a voice to these people and contexts.

That's why I believe that the group has contributed in a very positive way in Taleia, since we have been able to produce content adapted to its needs and useful both in its present and its future. (MDC Student – Taleia Group)

Public feedback and subsequent actions (evaluation, reflective work, teacher's notebook, etc.) are an opportunity for the students to reflect on the impact of the AL process in themselves, the people, and entities involved and in the neighbourhood:

This increased mobilisation of the wills, capacities, and resources of the community has represented inclusion, implication, integration, and identity that can enhance the social transformation pursued and which we have contributed to in some way through our participatory process [...] and the possibility of generating collaboration networks, solidarity networks of common interests as resources that enable collective action to enable community strengthening processes, and also, the personal capability to mobilise those contacts arising from

relationships towards the achievement of collective goals. (MDC Student – Mapping Group)

This process of transitivity between being, doing, learning, and transforming is the conscientisation conceptualised and argued for by Paulo Freire (1970). Conscientisation is the critical awareness of being in an oppressive reality and the ability to overcome epistemic oppression through the liberation of oneself and other people, based on the diversity of knowledge and collective action.

## **Conclusions**

The Action Learning promoted by the MDC-UPV in Na Rovella, even with its limitations, is a case study of education for liberation—a process that enhances the expansion of capabilities for epistemic liberation among participating students. It is the opportunity to put students' knowledge into action and give a voice to the neighbourhood, a practice that is reflective and critical to local and global reality and seeks to promote social transformation processes, based on the facilitation of participatory methodologies that promote critical and reflective participation, communicative openness, and collective action.

The capabilities for epistemic liberation are enhanced throughout the entire training on the Masters degree, but they are implemented through immersion in the neighbourhood alongside vulnerable communities and social groups that take part in participatory processes facilitated by students. These capabilities are interrelated and trigger one another. The capability to be enhances the capability to do. The capabilities to be and do in the field of higher education promote and expand the capability to learn and the capability to transform.

Participatory processes that intend to be transformative should enhance the four capabilities for epistemic liberation presented and analysed here. We believe that the rehumanisation of the being and the recovery of knowledge from experience promote a critical and reflexive participation in the processes of knowledge co-production. This participation enhances the appropriation of materials and products co-produced by the university and society and is reinforced by the capability to learn from other people,

knowledge, and experiences. This capability to learn from the reflective and critical process enhances the capability to transform through collective action.

This educational experience is a humanistic and liberating undertaking promoted by teachers and researchers committed to the social transformation of the University, its relations with students and local reality. It is not a simple process to promote within the framework of a university, and it is also technically challenging, since there are many institutional barriers and obstacles that hinder the implementation of this type of experience. These barriers and obstacles are related to the curriculum, the teaching load, the lack of recognition and incentives, traditional evaluation (exams), the culture of knowledge transfer, among many other existing difficulties.

Despite the institutional difficulties, the motivation and the appropriation of the process and of the products and materials generated by the students and of the people and groups that participate reinforce the commitment of the teaching staff to make this experience of liberating education possible. It is a political undertaking, based on academic activism, to move towards a public university committed to epistemic justice and social transformation—a liberating university that enhances the capabilities for epistemic liberation of students and historically oppressed communities marginalised from knowledge production processes.

In future publications we will further explore the capabilities for epistemic liberation enhanced in the people and groups of the neighbourhood who participated in the Na Rovella Action Learning process.

In conclusion, we consider that this research provides a road map for enhancing the expansion of capabilities for epistemic liberation in the field of higher education and the co-production of transformative knowledge. This case study aims to contribute to the promotion of epistemic justice, expanding the opportunities for the epistemic contribution of the next generations. Being aware that there are still many epistemic challenges and injustices to address and make visible in the field of higher education, we propose the capabilities for epistemic liberation to expand other participatory processes of co-production of knowledge between the university and society.

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