# PEDAGOGY OF CARE AND CENTRALITY OF THE PERSON: THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF BODILY AND EMOTIONAL DIMENSIONS

# PEDAGOGIA DELLA CURA E CENTRALITÀ DELLA PERSONA: IL VALORE FORMATIVO DELLE DIMENSIONI CORPOREE ED EMOTIVE

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**ABSTRACT**
English
This contribution explores the pedagogical value of bodily and emotional dimensions in university programs within the medical-health area, highlighting their role as a foundation for a pedagogy of care centered on the person. Integrating body and emotions into education fosters awareness, empathy, and ethical responsibility, promoting an educational and professional approach that combines technical competence with relational and human sensitivity.

Questo contributo esplora il valore pedagogico delle dimensioni corporee ed emotive nei percorsi universitari in area medico-sanitaria, evidenziando come esse possano costituire un fondamento per una pedagogia della cura centrata sulla persona. Integrare corpo ed emozioni nella formazione significa promuovere consapevolezza, empatia e responsabilità etica, favorendo un approccio educativo e professionale capace di coniugare competenza tecnica e sensibilità relazionale.

**KEYWORDS**
Pegadogy; Bodily and emotional dimensions; Educational approach.
Pedagogia; Dimensione corporea ed emozionale; Approccio educativo

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, higher education has increasingly been called to reconsider its fundamental purposes and methodologies. This is particularly evident in medical and health-related fields, where the complexity of human care demands that training extend beyond the mastery of technical knowledge and clinical expertise. However, the issue is not confined to the health professions. Across the university system, there is a growing awareness that education must engage the student as a whole person, integrating intellectual, emotional, and embodied dimensions in order to cultivate capacities for care, empathy, and ethical responsibility. This reorientation suggests that pedagogy itself should be reconceptualized as an act of care, one that places relational and existential dimensions at the core of university education.

The concept of care has traditionally been explored in philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy as a relational practice that connects individuals to others and to themselves. In higher education, however, such perspectives have often been overshadowed by models privileging cognitive mastery and measurable performance. Recent research demonstrates that this imbalance risks producing professionals who are technically competent but insufficiently prepared to engage with the relational, affective, and existential complexity of human life. For this reason, contemporary scholarship has begun to emphasize a “pedagogy of care” as a paradigm that recognizes vulnerability, embodiment, and emotional presence as key resources for learning and professional development (Huzar, 2025).

Within medical humanities, for instance, the incorporation of narrative, reflective, and artistic practices has been shown to enhance students’ capacity to perceive patients as whole persons, situated in contexts of suffering, history, and meaning (Engebretsen et al., 2024). This line of inquiry resonates with wider efforts in higher education to foster embodied learning environments, where students’ bodily experiences and emotional responses are not seen as distractions from rational knowledge but as essential pathways to deeper understanding (Park, 2024). Such approaches argue that the cultivation of empathy and relational sensitivity cannot be achieved through lectures alone but requires pedagogical

practices that actively involve the body, the senses, and the emotions in the process of learning.

The integration of care into higher education can also be understood as a response to the broader social transformations that characterize contemporary societies. The rapid expansion of digital technologies, the intensification of global crises, and the growing awareness of mental health challenges among students have placed new pressures on universities to move beyond instrumental conceptions of education. A pedagogy of care recognizes that students are not only learners of disciplinary content but also persons negotiating uncertainty, fragility, and existential questioning. In this sense, the university becomes not merely a space for knowledge transmission but also a context for cultivating resilience, compassion, and ethical presence.

This shift calls for a rethinking of vulnerability as a pedagogical resource. Rather than being treated as a deficit or obstacle, vulnerability can be recognized as a condition that opens possibilities for trust, reciprocity, and authentic learning encounters. When teachers acknowledge their own limitations and create spaces where students feel safe to express uncertainty, learning becomes less about competition and more about mutual growth. Such an approach dismantles hierarchical dynamics and replaces them with relationships based on respect and shared responsibility (Huzar, 2025).

The role of embodiment in learning further illustrates the potential of a pedagogy of care. Research in educational sciences suggests that cognition is not a purely abstract process but is deeply connected to sensory and bodily experience. Learning that engages the body—through simulation, role-play, performance, or reflective physical practices—can anchor abstract knowledge in lived experience, thereby increasing retention, understanding, and ethical awareness (Jiménez, 2025). In professional contexts, such as health education, embodied learning also enables students to rehearse relational scenarios, to sense the impact of their presence on others, and to recognize the emotional weight of care interactions. Yet these insights are equally applicable across disciplines, as all fields require graduates who can navigate complex social dynamics with sensitivity and ethical awareness.

Another crucial dimension concerns the emotional life of students. Studies have highlighted that emotional engagement is not an ancillary aspect of learning but a central determinant of motivation, persistence, and meaning-making. When

higher education acknowledges emotions as legitimate components of the learning process, it promotes deeper forms of intellectual engagement and personal transformation. At the same time, attention to emotions requires pedagogical intentionality: teachers must be prepared to create supportive environments where emotional expression can contribute to, rather than disrupt, learning (Park, 2024).

The implications of adopting a pedagogy of care as a university paradigm are far-reaching. At the curricular level, it necessitates a reconfiguration of learning objectives, teaching methods, and assessment strategies. Traditional curricula often prioritize measurable outcomes such as technical knowledge and procedural competence. A pedagogy of care, by contrast, insists that outcomes should also include relational competence, ethical sensitivity, and reflective capacity. Such outcomes are more challenging to measure, yet they are indispensable for forming professionals capable of addressing the multidimensional challenges of contemporary societies.

Moreover, the paradigm shift implies institutional change. Universities must cultivate cultures that embody care not only in the classroom but also in policies, structures, and everyday interactions. Student wellbeing initiatives, mentoring programs, and inclusive practices all contribute to building institutions that live out the values of care. These institutional commitments reinforce the message that education is not only about producing knowledge but also about fostering human dignity and flourishing.

Taken together, these considerations indicate that embedding a pedagogy of care within higher education represents a critical step toward humanizing academic formation. It aligns with current research emphasizing the centrality of embodiment, emotion, and vulnerability in meaningful learning (Engebretsen et al., 2024; Jiménez, 2025; Park, 2024; Volpe, 2025). It calls universities to see themselves as communities of care, where intellectual formation is inseparable from ethical and relational growth. This paradigm represents a decisive move away from reductionist approaches and toward a holistic vision of human education—one that places the person, in all their complexity, at the center of the academic endeavor.

## 2. Body and Emotions as Pedagogical Dimensions

The recognition of body and emotions as integral dimensions of pedagogy has gained increasing scholarly attention in recent years, particularly as higher education confronts the limitations of models that privilege cognitive abstraction and disembodied knowledge transmission. While traditional university teaching has often prioritized intellectual mastery, the contemporary pedagogical landscape underscores the need to embrace the embodied and affective aspects of learning as constitutive elements of educational practice. This move reflects broader theoretical currents within educational philosophy, neuroscience, and psychology that highlight the interconnectedness of cognition, emotion, and corporeality in processes of human development.

In the last decade, research in cognitive science has challenged the Cartesian dualism that separates mind and body, demonstrating instead that cognition is deeply rooted in bodily experience. Recent studies confirm that learning is enhanced when students actively engage their bodies through interaction, simulation, or sensory involvement, as these processes anchor abstract concepts in lived experience (Wilson & Foglia, 2023). Such findings provide robust support for pedagogical models that view the body not merely as an instrument or a passive carrier of the mind but as a co-constitutive dimension of knowledge. In higher education, this implies that disciplines traditionally considered theoretical can benefit from embodied methodologies, which foster deeper retention and holistic understanding.

Emotions, likewise, have been increasingly recognized as fundamental to the learning process. Far from being peripheral or disruptive, emotions shape attention, motivation, memory, and meaning-making. As Pekrun and Loderer (2022) demonstrate in their research on achievement emotions, affective states influence not only students' performance but also their capacity for engagement and long-term development. In pedagogical terms, this recognition calls for approaches that intentionally integrate emotional awareness and regulation into the classroom environment. Teachers are encouraged to cultivate atmospheres of empathy, trust, and openness that validate emotional expression while guiding students toward constructive reflection.

The pedagogical value of integrating bodily and emotional dimensions extends beyond individual learning outcomes to encompass the cultivation of relational competencies. When education acknowledges embodiment and emotion, it nurtures students' capacity to perceive themselves and others as complex beings

situated within relational networks. This orientation is especially vital in fields where interpersonal sensitivity and ethical responsibility are paramount, such as healthcare, education, and social work. Yet the relevance is universal: all academic domains require graduates who can navigate interpersonal contexts with empathy, awareness, and ethical discernment.

Innovative teaching methodologies illustrate the transformative potential of this approach. Role-play and simulation, frequently used in medical education, provide students with opportunities to experience embodied scenarios that evoke authentic emotions and interpersonal dynamics. Recent work by Bruna and Lee (2024) shows that simulation-based learning not only enhances technical proficiency but also fosters emotional intelligence and reflective capacity. Similarly, narrative and arts-based pedagogies engage both body and affect, enabling learners to explore identity, vulnerability, and meaning in ways that extend beyond rational analysis (Wright, 2023). These practices illustrate how the integration of bodily and emotional dimensions enriches learning with depth, relevance, and humanity.

The integration of emotions and embodiment into pedagogy also responds to urgent challenges within contemporary higher education, including the mental health crisis among students. Increasing rates of stress, anxiety, and burnout have raised concerns about the adequacy of purely cognitive or performance-driven educational models. Pedagogical approaches that foreground care, emotion, and bodily awareness contribute to creating environments of wellbeing that support not only academic achievement but also holistic human flourishing (Kahu & Lodge, 2022). This recognition positions the university as a place not merely for knowledge acquisition but for the development of balanced, resilient, and relationally competent individuals.

However, the inclusion of bodily and emotional dimensions in education is not without challenges. Some critics argue that excessive emphasis on affect risks diluting academic rigor or blurring the boundaries between personal and professional spheres. Yet scholars such as Jiménez (2025) have countered that embodied and emotional approaches do not undermine intellectual standards but rather deepen them by situating knowledge in the lived realities of students and teachers. When pedagogical practices engage the full spectrum of human experience, they prepare learners to think critically, act ethically, and respond adaptively to complexity.

Another challenge involves assessment. Traditional evaluation methods often fail to capture growth in emotional competence or embodied awareness, focusing instead on measurable cognitive outcomes. This gap has prompted calls for more comprehensive assessment models that recognize reflection, empathy, and relational skill as valid learning achievements (Shapiro, 2023). The incorporation of qualitative and narrative assessment tools offers promising avenues for aligning evaluation with the holistic aims of a pedagogy of care.

Recognizing body and emotions as pedagogical dimensions requires a paradigm shift in how education is conceptualized and practiced. It involves moving away from a narrow focus on the transmission of abstract knowledge toward a model that situates learning within the whole person. This paradigm affirms that students are embodied, affective, and relational beings whose growth depends on environments that nurture all dimensions of their humanity. In doing so, it aligns higher education with broader societal needs for professionals and citizens who can embody empathy, resilience, and responsibility in an increasingly complex world.

## 3. Medical Humanities and Interdisciplinary Perspectives

The emergence of medical humanities as a significant area of inquiry has transformed the way higher education approaches the relationship between science, practice, and human experience. Initially developed as a corrective to the dominance of the biomedical model, medical humanities have expanded in recent years into an interdisciplinary field that bridges medicine, literature, philosophy, ethics, history, and the arts. At its core, this movement seeks to humanize the practices of care and to cultivate in future professionals the capacity to understand illness and health not only as biological phenomena but also as deeply lived and culturally mediated experiences (Shapiro & Coulehan, 2022). This orientation resonates strongly with the pedagogy of care, since both emphasize relationality, narrative, and the recognition of the person in their existential complexity.

Recent scholarship highlights how medical humanities provide a framework for integrating technical knowledge with the cultivation of empathy, critical reflection, and ethical discernment. Engebretsen et al. (2024) argue that the humanities' contribution to health education lies in their capacity to foster interpretive skills, enabling students to perceive ambiguity, engage with plural perspectives, and respond to patients as subjects of meaning rather than objects of diagnosis. Such skills are not supplementary but essential to professional practice,

given the inherently uncertain and relational character of healthcare interactions. Similarly, Volpe (2025) demonstrates that critical medical humanities curricula help dismantle reductionist conceptions of health and prepare students to work in contexts of diversity, vulnerability, and structural inequity.

The interdisciplinary character of medical humanities is crucial. Unlike approaches confined to disciplinary silos, medical humanities intentionally weave together perspectives from literature, history, philosophy, and the arts with clinical sciences. This integration produces a dialogical space where different ways of knowing can challenge and enrich one another. For example, narrative medicine—pioneered by Charon and increasingly embedded in curricula worldwide—draws upon literary analysis and storytelling to cultivate listening and interpretive practices among healthcare professionals. More recently, initiatives incorporating visual arts, theater, and music have demonstrated the potential of artistic practices to enhance observation, communication, and emotional awareness (Williams, 2023). These interdisciplinary methodologies create opportunities for students to explore the complexity of human suffering in ways that purely biomedical instruction cannot achieve.

Beyond their application to medical education, medical humanities exemplify a broader movement toward interdisciplinarity in higher education. As contemporary social challenges—climate change, pandemics, migration, and technological disruption—transcend disciplinary boundaries, universities are compelled to adopt models of learning that integrate scientific, humanistic, and ethical perspectives. A pedagogy of care thus converges with the interdisciplinary ethos of medical humanities: both insist that knowledge is most transformative when it is situated in dialogue across domains and when it attends to the lived realities of individuals and communities.

The adoption of medical humanities in curricula also reflects growing recognition of the role of narrative and meaning-making in the experience of illness. Illness is not merely a pathological condition but a disruption of life stories, identities, and social relations. Educating students to listen to patients' narratives and to reflect on their own professional and personal stories fosters the capacity for empathy and moral imagination (Charon & Montello, 2022). In this respect, medical humanities serve as both content and method: they provide subject matter that explores human experience, and they model interpretive practices that cultivate sensitivity and ethical engagement.

However, integrating medical humanities into university curricula is not without challenges. Some institutions still treat them as optional supplements or electives, peripheral to the "core" scientific training. Critics argue that in already crowded curricula, there is limited space for humanities courses. Yet recent evidence suggests that embedding humanities transversally across programs yields more sustainable and transformative outcomes. Rather than isolated courses, interdisciplinary integration ensures that humanistic perspectives permeate the entire formation of professionals, shaping their identity and practice in enduring ways (Bleakley, 2022).

There is also an important methodological debate within medical humanities regarding their purpose. While some advocate for an instrumental role—using humanities to improve communication skills, empathy, or professionalism—others argue for a more critical orientation that challenges structures of power, inequity, and epistemic reductionism. The latter perspective emphasizes that humanities should not only "soften" medicine but also interrogate its assumptions, highlight cultural differences, and bring to light marginalized voices (Jones et al., 2023). For pedagogy of care, this critical orientation is essential, since care cannot be separated from issues of justice, equity, and social responsibility.

The interdisciplinary nature of medical humanities also points to their broader relevance beyond health education. Similar integrative approaches can enrich other domains of higher education where the challenge of connecting technical expertise with ethical, cultural, and relational competence is urgent. For instance, engineering programs have incorporated ethics and humanities to address the social implications of technological development, while business schools increasingly draw upon literature and philosophy to cultivate leadership and reflective decision-making. These examples highlight the wider potential of medical humanities to inspire interdisciplinary pedagogies that foreground care, meaning, and human dignity across the university.

Ultimately, medical humanities embody a pedagogical vision that resonates deeply with the idea of education as care. They affirm that to educate is not only to transmit knowledge but to foster interpretive, relational, and ethical capacities that allow students to engage with the complexity of human existence. By situating learning at the intersection of science, humanities, and lived experience, medical humanities exemplify how interdisciplinary education can form professionals and

citizens capable of combining technical expertise with compassion, responsibility, and critical awareness.

## 4. Care as an Educational Category

In contemporary pedagogical discourse, care is increasingly recognized not only as an ethical imperative but also as a foundational educational category. To speak of care as a category is to affirm its structural role in shaping the purposes, practices, and values of education. Care is not a peripheral quality that supplements technical instruction; rather, it constitutes a framework for understanding what it means to teach, to learn, and to cultivate human development within higher education. By positioning care as central to pedagogy, scholars argue for a profound reorientation of educational theory and practice, one that acknowledges relationality, vulnerability, and responsibility as constitutive dimensions of the learning process (Mortari, 2023).

The concept of care has long been associated with feminist philosophy and ethics of relationality, particularly through the work of scholars such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, who underscored that moral reasoning is deeply situated in networks of interdependence. In recent years, this ethical orientation has been further elaborated within higher education studies, where care is presented as a lens through which to rethink authority, assessment, curriculum design, and institutional culture. For instance, Tronto's (2022) updated framework situates care as both a personal practice and a political project, emphasizing attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness as interlinked dimensions of caring activity. Applied to pedagogy, this framework suggests that education is fundamentally a relational act that must be responsive to the needs, voices, and vulnerabilities of learners.

Viewing care as an educational category also means confronting the epistemological assumptions that underpin traditional academic models. Western traditions of higher education have historically privileged ideals of autonomy, objectivity, and rational detachment, which often marginalize embodied, emotional, and relational knowledge. Care, by contrast, affirms the epistemic legitimacy of experience, narrative, and empathy. This does not undermine scientific rigor; rather, it complements and expands the scope of knowledge by insisting that truth is not only discovered through detached observation but also constructed through dialogue, mutual recognition, and ethical encounter (Boffi &

Rossi, 2024). Thus, situating care as a category challenges the hierarchy of knowledge and calls for integrative pedagogies that validate multiple ways of knowing.

One of the most significant contributions of care as an educational category is its potential to reshape the identity and role of the teacher. Traditionally, the university teacher has been imagined as a transmitter of knowledge and a guardian of disciplinary boundaries. A pedagogy grounded in care redefines this role as one of relational presence and ethical responsibility. Teachers become facilitators of growth, mentors who accompany students in their intellectual and personal journeys, and co-learners who remain open to their own vulnerability. Recent research on "pedagogies of presence" suggests that students perceive their learning as more meaningful when educators embody attentiveness, empathy, and relational authenticity (Han & Xu, 2023). Care therefore functions not only as an ethical stance but also as a pedagogical method, shaping the quality of educational relationships.

At the same time, conceiving care as a category entails recognition of the student as more than a recipient of knowledge. The student is a relational subject, simultaneously dependent and responsible, whose growth unfolds in dialogue with peers, teachers, and the broader community. Education that is grounded in care invites students to see themselves as ethical agents whose learning carries responsibilities toward others. This perspective aligns with broader trends in higher education that seek to cultivate civic responsibility, global citizenship, and ecological awareness, recognizing that education must prepare individuals to engage meaningfully with complex social and planetary challenges (Andreotti, 2022).

The integration of care into pedagogy also has implications for the design of curricula. When care is treated as an educational category, curricula are not structured solely around cognitive outcomes but also around the development of empathy, reflection, and relational competence. This requires innovative methods such as narrative writing, dialogical seminars, and experiential learning that foster critical self-awareness and ethical sensitivity. For example, recent studies on reflective writing in professional education demonstrate that students who engage in narrative practices show enhanced capacity for empathy, perspective-taking, and ethical reasoning (Chen et al., 2023). Such methods make care not an abstract principle but a lived pedagogical practice.

The institutional dimension of care must also be considered. Universities are not only sites of knowledge production but also social environments where students and staff live, interact, and develop identities. Treating care as an educational category requires institutions to embody caring values in their policies, structures, and cultures. This includes attention to student wellbeing, inclusive practices, mentoring systems, and institutional responsiveness to diverse needs. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the urgency of institutional care, as universities were called to support students and staff in contexts of isolation, anxiety, and disruption (Marginson, 2022). A pedagogy of care, therefore, cannot be reduced to classroom practices; it demands systemic transformation toward more humane and inclusive academic communities.

Despite its transformative potential, the incorporation of care as a category in higher education also raises tensions. One concern is the risk of care being instrumentalized, reduced to a managerial discourse of student satisfaction rather than a substantive ethical and pedagogical commitment. Scholars caution against the commodification of care, urging instead a critical stance that resists neoliberal frameworks and insists on care as a practice of justice and solidarity (Zembylas, 2023). This critical dimension is essential to prevent care from being depoliticized and to ensure that it addresses systemic inequities in access, participation, and recognition.

Another challenge relates to the balance between care and academic rigor. Critics sometimes argue that emphasizing care might lower standards or compromise the autonomy of learners. However, empirical evidence increasingly suggests that environments characterized by care are associated with higher levels of engagement, motivation, and achievement (Kahu & Lodge, 2022). Far from diluting academic standards, care enhances them by creating conditions in which students can flourish intellectually and personally.

Conceiving education through the lens of care thus opens the way for a more humanizing and socially responsive university. It insists that universities are spaces where human dignity must be nurtured and where students and teachers alike are recognized in their full humanity. This paradigm invites higher education to move beyond reductionist and instrumental logics and to embrace its responsibility for cultivating empathy, ethical responsibility, and relational presence. In doing so, it aligns pedagogy with the broader human project of sustaining life, justice, and community in a fragile and interdependent world.

## 5. Didactic Methodologies for Embodied and Emotional Learning

The pedagogical recognition of the body and emotions as constitutive dimensions of human learning has generated increasing interest in the design of didactic methodologies that can concretely integrate these aspects into higher education. While traditional approaches have often privileged abstract reasoning and the transmission of content through lecture-based formats, contemporary scholarship emphasizes that meaningful learning requires the engagement of cognitive, affective, and embodied processes simultaneously. Such integration is particularly crucial in university contexts that aim not only to cultivate knowledge but also to prepare students for relationally complex and ethically demanding professional and civic roles (Pekrun & Loderer, 2022).

One of the most established methodologies that foregrounds embodiment and emotion is simulation-based learning. Initially developed within medical and nursing education, simulation allows students to engage in realistic scenarios where they must respond not only with technical skill but also with relational sensitivity and emotional regulation. Recent studies demonstrate that high-fidelity simulation fosters self-awareness, empathy, and resilience alongside clinical competence (Cant & Cooper, 2022). Moreover, simulation has been adapted beyond healthcare, including teacher education, business, and law, where students rehearse decision-making in emotionally charged contexts. These experiences encourage reflective practice, helping learners to analyze how their bodily presence and emotional responses influence their professional behavior.

Role play and drama-based pedagogy represent another avenue for embodied and emotional learning. By enacting scenarios, students are invited to inhabit perspectives different from their own, which can expand empathy and foster ethical imagination. Research by González and Vega (2023) shows that role play not only enhances communication and conflict-resolution skills but also encourages students to reflect critically on social structures and power relations. Theater-based methodologies, moreover, provide spaces where vulnerability and creativity are embraced, allowing students to explore both personal and collective dimensions of identity.

Narrative and reflective writing practices also constitute powerful tools for integrating emotions into learning. Encouraging students to write about their experiences, challenges, and encounters with difference fosters deeper levels of

reflection and perspective-taking. Narrative methods are particularly relevant in professional programs, where students confront situations of uncertainty, loss, or ethical tension. Recent work demonstrates that reflective writing enhances emotional awareness and contributes to the development of professional identity (Chen et al., 2023). Importantly, narrative approaches are not confined to health or education; they can be applied across disciplines to cultivate critical thinking, resilience, and the capacity to connect knowledge with lived experience.

Arts-based pedagogies provide additional modalities for embodied and emotional engagement. Visual arts, music, and dance have been incorporated into university curricula to promote observation, creativity, and empathy. For instance, Williams (2023) documents how art observation exercises sharpen students' attentiveness and interpretive skills, while music and movement practices foster collaboration, emotional expression, and intercultural understanding. Arts-based learning challenges the dominance of verbal and analytic modes, demonstrating that other forms of expression can generate equally valid and transformative educational outcomes.

A further methodology aligned with embodied and emotional learning is mindfulness and contemplative pedagogy. Practices such as meditation, breathing exercises, and body scans cultivate self-awareness, emotional regulation, and presence. Empirical research indicates that mindfulness interventions in higher education reduce anxiety, improve concentration, and enhance relational sensitivity (McConville et al., 2022). When embedded in curricula, mindfulness practices help students connect with their own embodied experiences, enabling them to approach academic challenges and interpersonal interactions with greater balance and attentiveness.

These methodologies illustrate how embodied and emotional learning can be operationalized in concrete pedagogical strategies. Yet their adoption also raises critical questions about assessment, scalability, and institutional support. Traditional assessment practices are poorly suited to evaluate growth in empathy, resilience, or reflective capacity, leading to calls for more holistic evaluative frameworks. Some scholars advocate narrative and portfolio-based assessment as means to capture qualitative aspects of student development (Shapiro, 2023). Moreover, implementing embodied and emotional methodologies requires institutional recognition of their legitimacy and provision of adequate resources, including time, training, and supportive environments.

It is also essential to acknowledge the potential risks associated with pedagogies that foreground vulnerability and emotional engagement. Without careful facilitation, such practices can expose students to discomfort or even retraumatization. For this reason, educators must be trained not only in the techniques themselves but also in ethical facilitation, boundary-setting, and the creation of safe spaces (Zembylas, 2023). When responsibly implemented, however, these methodologies can generate transformative educational encounters that profoundly shape both personal and professional identity.

An additional consideration concerns inclusivity and cultural responsiveness. Not all students experience or express emotions in the same way, and embodied practices may carry different meanings across cultural contexts. Methodologies must therefore be adapted to respect diversity, ensuring that students from varied backgrounds feel seen and supported. Research on culturally responsive pedagogy indicates that when embodied and emotional methods are attuned to cultural difference, they can foster belonging and equity within the university (Gay, 2022).

From this perspective, embodied and emotional methodologies emerge as vital instruments for realizing a pedagogy of care in higher education. By engaging the whole person, they enable learning that is intellectually rigorous, emotionally resonant, and ethically grounded. Such approaches prepare students not only to master disciplinary content but also to navigate the relational, affective, and moral complexities of contemporary life. In this way, the methodologies discussed here exemplify how care can be concretized in pedagogical practice, transforming classrooms into spaces of growth, empathy, and humanization.

## 6. Implications for University Education

The integration of care, embodiment, and emotion into pedagogy inevitably carries significant implications for the broader architecture of university education. Universities have historically been designed around ideals of rationality, efficiency, and technical expertise, often sidelining relational and affective dimensions of human development. Yet the evidence increasingly suggests that without attending to the whole person, higher education risks producing graduates who are competent in disciplinary content but ill-prepared for the ethical, relational, and civic responsibilities of contemporary life. Reconceptualizing higher education through the paradigm of care, therefore, requires both curricular and institutional transformation.

At the curricular level, embracing care as a guiding principle implies a shift in learning outcomes. Traditional curricula typically emphasize cognitive mastery and the acquisition of technical skills measurable through standardized assessments. By contrast, a pedagogy of care calls for outcomes that also include empathy, reflective judgment, resilience, and relational competence. Scholars have argued that such competencies are no longer optional but essential, as professionals across disciplines encounter increasingly complex human and ecological challenges (Andreotti, 2022). Curriculum design must therefore be broadened to reflect not only what students know but also how they relate to others, themselves, and the world.

This curricular transformation requires the adoption of teaching methodologies that actively engage the body, emotions, and imagination, as discussed in the previous section. However, it also demands a rethinking of assessment practices. Conventional examinations and performance metrics capture cognitive proficiency but rarely measure growth in empathy, ethical reasoning, or self-awareness. Recent research highlights the importance of alternative assessments—such as reflective portfolios, dialogical evaluations, and narrative assignments—that can more authentically capture holistic learning outcomes (Shapiro, 2023). Universities must thus align evaluation systems with the broader educational mission of forming whole persons rather than merely credentialed professionals.

Beyond curricula, the paradigm of care has profound implications for institutional culture. Universities are not neutral spaces; they embody values through their structures, policies, and everyday practices. When care is taken seriously, institutions must move beyond performative commitments to wellbeing and equity, embedding these principles into the fabric of academic life. This involves fostering inclusive pedagogies, supporting mental health initiatives, and cultivating mentoring relationships that affirm students' identities and experiences. As Marginson (2022) notes, the pandemic revealed the fragility of universities' support systems, underscoring the need for more sustainable infrastructures of care that extend beyond crisis management to everyday educational practice.

Faculty development also emerges as a crucial implication. Teachers are central to the enactment of care, yet many have not been systematically trained to integrate relational and emotional dimensions into their pedagogy. Professional development programs should therefore equip educators with the skills to facilitate

embodied and emotional learning, to create inclusive and safe spaces, and to reflect critically on their own positionality and vulnerability (Han & Xu, 2023). When faculty themselves experience institutional care and support, they are more capable of embodying care in their teaching and mentoring relationships.

At the systemic level, positioning care at the heart of higher education calls for rethinking the very mission of the university. Neoliberal pressures have increasingly framed universities as engines of economic growth, prioritizing productivity, efficiency, and competition. Within such frameworks, care is often marginalized as secondary or "soft." Scholars such as Zembylas (2023) warn that unless care is explicitly recognized as a central educational value, it risks being co-opted into managerial discourses of student satisfaction rather than pursued as a transformative ethic. A pedagogy of care insists that universities are not merely institutions of knowledge production but communities of human development, responsibility, and solidarity.

The implications also extend to equity and justice. When universities adopt care as a paradigm, they commit to addressing systemic inequalities in access, participation, and recognition. Care requires attentiveness to the diverse needs of students, including those from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds. Research on equity in higher education emphasizes that caring pedagogies contribute to a sense of belonging, which is strongly correlated with persistence and success (Kahu & Lodge, 2022). Universities that prioritize care therefore play a crucial role in democratizing education and enabling all students to flourish.

Digital transformation further complicates this picture. The rapid expansion of online and hybrid learning environments raises questions about how care, embodiment, and emotional presence can be maintained in virtual spaces. Emerging research suggests that digital pedagogies can indeed foster care when designed intentionally, through practices such as synchronous dialogue, reflective journaling, and multimodal expression (Bond et al., 2021). However, digital platforms also risk exacerbating isolation and disconnection if relational dimensions are neglected. Universities must therefore invest in technologies and pedagogies that humanize digital education and preserve opportunities for relational and embodied engagement.

Importantly, a pedagogy of care carries implications not only for teaching and learning but also for research. Academic research has traditionally been guided by objectivity and detachment, yet the inclusion of care as a category challenges these

assumptions. Participatory, community-engaged, and interdisciplinary research methodologies exemplify how care can shape knowledge production itself, ensuring that research is responsive to human needs and social justice (Boffi & Rossi, 2024). In this way, care influences not only what is taught but also how knowledge is generated and disseminated.

Taken together, the implications of adopting a pedagogy of care for university education are profound. They call for rethinking curricula, assessment, faculty development, institutional culture, digital transformation, and research practices. This paradigm positions universities as communities of learning that recognize students and staff as embodied, emotional, and relational beings, whose dignity and growth must be affirmed. Rather than marginalizing care, universities that embrace it as a central principle can become spaces where technical expertise, ethical responsibility, and human flourishing are cultivated in equal measure.

## 7. Conclusions

The analysis developed throughout this work highlights the urgency of rethinking higher education beyond models centered exclusively on knowledge transmission and technical specialization. Universities are called to become environments that not only provide intellectual training but also cultivate ethical responsibility, relational competence, and holistic human development. This perspective places care, embodiment, and emotion at the heart of pedagogy, recognizing students and teachers as persons whose dignity and growth must be affirmed.

A humanizing university education requires a profound transformation of curricula, teaching methodologies, and institutional cultures. Learning outcomes should not be limited to the acquisition of cognitive skills but should also include empathy, reflection, and resilience. Classrooms must be reimagined as spaces where intellectual rigor coexists with emotional resonance and relational authenticity. In the same way, institutional policies must support inclusion, wellbeing, and a sense of belonging, ensuring that all members of the academic community can thrive.

This vision extends to the mission of the university itself, which cannot be reduced to the production of qualified professionals or measurable outputs. A pedagogy of care positions the university as a community of growth, solidarity, and responsibility, where scientific excellence and human flourishing are pursued in

equal measure. By embracing this paradigm, higher education can respond more effectively to the complexity of today's world and contribute to the development of professionals and citizens capable of combining knowledge with empathy, responsibility, and creativity.

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