Addressing Hostile Attitudes in and through

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Article

Addressing Hostile Attitudes in and through Education—Transformative Ideas from Finnish Youth

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Abstract: Amid global disturbances, the calls for educational institutions to promote peace and counter hostility intensify. However, policymakers and other adults typically draft the various programs developed for schools to pursue this mission. While young people have valuable insights into the realities and issues around them, their ideas are rarely solicited in this respect. This study contributes towards filling this gap by bringing insights from Finnish youth on how to address hostile attitudes and foster the development of more peaceful futures in and through education. The data were gathered through an online survey sent to students in upper-secondary education (16- to 20-year-olds) in Finland. The survey included an open-ended question on how schools could address hostile attitudes. In total, 2744 students answered this question, and their responses composed the data of this study. Through qualitative analysis, we found that their suggestions concerned both the academic and social dimensions of school education in addressing hostile attitudes. The students highlighted that to change people's attitudes and beliefs, they need to know *more*, and most importantly, they need to know *differently*. They proposed self-reflection and dialogue as pedagogical tools for the critical examination of one's taken-for-granted assumptions. The students' ideas align well with the tenets of transformative learning, which could be valuable in developing educational approaches for more peaceful societies.

Keywords: hostile attitudes; education; upper-secondary education; transformative learning

1. Introduction

Finnish people's values, identities, and worldviews have diversified [1], and in the recent years, the confrontations between them have strengthened [2]. Discussions related to the growing diversity are heated, and conspiracy theories, hate speech, and anonymous discussions on social media [3] further weaken the opportunities for constructive dialogue. Normalization of hostile rhetoric is discernible not only in political discussions and the media [4] but also in schools among children and youth [5].

Hostile attitudes expressed by children and youth must be taken seriously in education because they threaten democracy: they are often based on othering and us-against-them rhetoric, and if intensified, they may lead to dehumanization and even violent radicalization [6]. Amid global crises that further fuel othering, education is a necessary tool, which plays a central role in helping to safeguard democracy and build peaceful societies. In Giroux's [7] words, "schools are one of the few spheres left where youth can learn the knowledge and skills necessary to become engaged, critical citizens". Although young people embody the future of the society and are at the forefront of cultural and social change [8], their views are typically not solicited or represented in (the drafting of) educational policies and practices for addressing societal challenges (except for UNESCO MGIEP, 2017). This study contributes towards filling this gap by bringing new insights from Finnish youth on how to address hostile attitudes and foster the development of more peaceful futures in

and through education. The data were gathered in the Finnish educational context, but the findings are relevant also beyond the national context as regards the development of educational approaches in educational institutions internationally.

1.1. Hostile Attitudes

By "hostile attitude", we refer to Allport's [9] definition of prejudice as a hostile attitude or feeling toward a person solely because they belong to a group to which one has assigned objectionable qualities (p. 7). All individuals are members of several social groups. Groups are typically defined by a commonality, such as gender, kin, faith, ethnicity, nationality, language, or ideology. According to research, people tend to favor and ascribe more positive characteristics to the groups they identify with (ingroups) and derogate those groups to which they do not belong (outgroups) [10]. The "ingroup bias" that emerges early in childhood [10] may thus partly be seen as one of the root causes for prejudice and intergroup conflicts: negative attributes assigned to outgroups create negative expectations of them and thus increase prejudice and perceived threats and fear regarding the outgroups [11]. Allport's intergroup contact hypothesis [9] and social identity theories [12,13] suggest that contact between members of different social groups lessens prejudiced attitudes and fosters positive views of other groups. However, mere knowledge about outgroups and understanding of concepts such as prejudice, discrimination, and diversity enable more positive intergroup attitudes [14].

1.2. Finnish Education and the Problem of Normative Finnishness

Finland is a liberal, democratic welfare state with a national, inclusive, and free-for-all public education system that aims to provide equal opportunities for life for all children and young people regardless of their background [15]. The Finnish national core curriculum for basic education mandates school education to promote equality and social justice [16]. Despite this noble aim, educational institutions in Finland, as elsewhere, are bound by the "ideological, social, and economic forces" [17] (p. 27) that manifest in the contexts in which they operate (see also [18,19]). In other words, the worldviews promoted through education typically reflect the societal status quo [20] and the interpretations of normative Finnishness (i.e., white, secular Lutheran, middle-class, able-bodied, Finnish-speaking individuals) and thus reproduce the societal hegemony (with its problems) unless consciously disrupted [21]. Uncritical adoption of the normative worldview in Finland is highly problematic because of the strong hegemony of normative Finnishness in which plurality still has little room: racism is a substantial societal issue [22], and othering and other types of exclusion of diversities in Finland keep fueling hostile attitudes and behaviors in the society [22,23] and also in education [24–26].

Examples of the ways normative Finnishness is still maintained and renewed through formal education are multiple. These include, for example, the way education continues to be dominated by European- and Western-centered perspectives that have ignored or silenced the experiences and voices of minorities ([19,27]; for a critical review, [28]). Eurocentric and Western narratives have been central in Finnish history textbooks [29] and geography textbooks [30] and reproduced national "others" that have typically included ethnic minorities, such as the Tatars, the Sami groups, and the Roma [31]; people from developing countries [30]; and communists and immigrants [32]. The stereotypical ways to depict people in teaching and learning materials are one of the key ways in which education (un)intentionally reproduces imaginaries about "us" and "them" [33,34].

Curiously, these realities are in stark contradiction with the core values of the Finnish society and the national curricula—equality, equity, democracy, and social justice [16,35]. Previous studies demonstrate that from one decade to the other, Finnish people hold self-transcendent, other-focused values as the most important [36–38]. Hence, it appears that the circle of care of Finnish people is still exclusive of societal minorities and those who differ from the mainstream. The traditional, taken-for-granted assumptions and

interpretations of normative Finnishness seem deeply embedded in societal attitudes and structures maintaining national othering.

However, recent studies on younger generations indicate a promising shift. They show that the Finnish youth are open-minded, inclusive, and welcoming of diversities [39]. Their values reflect universalism, benevolence [40,41], and respect of human rights [42,43]. Most importantly, their prejudices are not based on traditional social categories, such as ethnicity or religion, but on lifestyles that the youth consider alienating and dangerous [40,41].

1.3. Educational Programs to Foster Peace

Several educational programs have been developed internationally to foster social harmony and reduce hostility, including peace education (e.g., [44]), democracy education (e.g., [45]), citizenship education (e.g., [46]), multicultural education (e.g., [47]), and human rights education (e.g., [48]). These programs typically focus on promoting non-violent dispositions, increasing awareness and understanding of others, and caring for the welfare of others in a peaceful manner [49]. Though urgently needed, the effects of these programs may be limited by how they are sometimes understood and implemented in schools. For example, if the core ideas of peace education are promoted through an occasional student project or a theme week, the transformational impact of the program may remain weak. Moreover, recent Finnish studies demonstrate that regardless of good intentions, the programs may be implemented in ways that do not challenge racism and prejudices but exoticize diversities and sustain social categorization [50–52].

Further, as the saying goes, values are caught, not taught. Teachers, like all people, have their value preferences [53] and attitudes and worldviews [54,55] that become manifest in their intuitive responses regarding student diversities [56] and the ways hostile attitudes, othering, and racism are tackled (or not) in education.

In the face of these challenges, the UNESCO 2021 report on the futures of education, co-drafted by over a million educational experts, sets ambitious global guidelines for shaping peaceful and socially just futures in and through education. The report argues that education needs to be transformed in ways that allow "thinking differently about learning and the relationships between students, teachers, knowledge, and the world" [57] (p. 3). To pursue this challenge, transformative learning is a prominent educational approach that involves deep structural changes in how we understand and interpret the world and ourselves [58]. Mezirow defines transformative learning as a "rational metacognitive process of reassessing reasons supporting our problematic meaning perspectives or frames of reference, including those representing such contextual and cultural factors as ideology, religion, politics, class, race, gender, and others" [58] (p. 103). The process produces confusion, which, in turn, acts as a catalyst for developing novel views and creating conscious change in beliefs and actions ([58]; see also [21]). Because of its dynamic and critical reflection of taken-for-granted assumptions, the transformational learning approach offers a noteworthy framework for fostering attitudinal change through education.

To offer novel insights on how education could better contribute to creating more peaceful societies in the Finnish context, we turned the gaze onto Finnish young people and their ideas about ways schools could prevent the development of hostile attitudes.

2. Method

In this study, we investigated Finnish youth's views on the role of schools in addressing hostile attitudes. Specifically, we aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) According to students, what are the central elements in addressing hostile attitudes in and through education? (2) How could the students' suggestions inform the crafting of more peaceful futures in and through education in Finland?

2.1. Participants

We collected the data for this study through an online survey sent to students (16- to 20-year-olds) in upper-secondary schools and vocational institutions in eight municipal-

ities in Finland during the autumn of 2019. After the nine years of basic education, the students continue education in general, academically oriented, upper-secondary education or vocational education and training (VET) or a combination of these two. Nationally, around 54 per cent of Finnish youth continued their education in upper-secondary schools and 40 per cent in vocational institutions in 2019. Further, 3 per cent continued in other preparatory education, and 2.4 per cent did not continue in formal education, as in 2019, upper-secondary education was not yet compulsory [59]) The municipalities were of different sizes and from various geographical locations across Finland. Of all respondents of the study, 52% were female, 42% were male, and 5% identified either as "other" or did not want to specify their gender. The ethnicity of the respondents was not recorded, as this is not a normative procedure in Finland. It needs to be noted that the data are not representative of all Finnish students in secondary-level education: the survey aspired to include students from both streams of upper-secondary education; nevertheless, there were far more respondents from the general upper-secondary institutions (5/6 of respondents) than the vocational institutions (1/6 of respondents). Hence, the proportions are not directly corresponding with the actual around 54 per cent of Finnish youth attending upper-secondary schools and 40 per cent in vocational institutions (situation in 2019) [59].

2.2. Procedure and Instrument

Ethical approvals for the study were granted by the Universities of Helsinki and Oxford and the municipalities in which the educational institutions were located.

School headmasters or teachers distributed the link to the survey to the students, but it was highlighted that participation was completely voluntary. As all respondents were at least 15 years old, the participants were regarded as competent youth, so no consent from their guardians was required. The survey began with a confirmation of voluntariness and full anonymity, explanation of the purpose of the study, and reminder of the right to withdraw from responding at any moment.

The online survey consisted of quantitative measures and multiple-choice questions about the students' values, identities, attitudes, and views on education. The last question in the survey was open-ended and formulated as follows: "How could the school best prevent the development of hostile attitudes?" There were no specific instructions for answering this question, but the students could elaborate on it as little or as much as they desired. Altogether, 2744 respondents answered this question (out of the total 3617 respondents who participated in the survey), which we considered a high response rate for a question of this nature. The length of the 2744 answers varied from a few words to more extensive reflections, with the total yielding 35 pages of text, which compose the data of the present study.

2.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the students' answers qualitatively, we followed the guidelines of data-driven thematic content analysis [60] using Excel and Atlas.ti. We started the analysis by a careful reading of all answers to the last survey question. In the first phase of the analysis, the two researchers analyzed the answers sentence by sentence. We noticed that most answers concerned the academic and social dimension of school education in addressing hostile attitudes. We thus created two main themes according to these dimensions and grouped the answers under them. In the second phase of the analysis, we created sub-categories for the two main themes according to the similarities of content in the answers. Finally, we named the main themes and sub-categories. The two researchers first analyzed the data individually and then cross-checked to secure validation and consensus of the categorizations. The themes are presented in Figure 1.
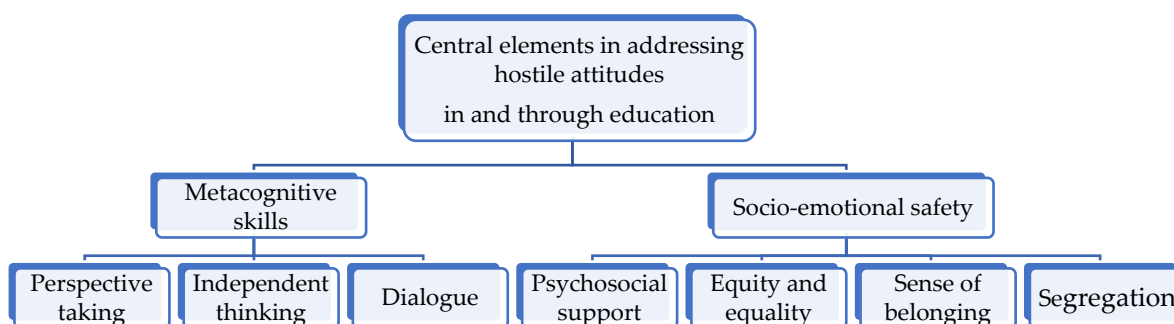
Figure 1. Central elements in addressing hostile attitudes in and through education.

In the following, we provide an answer to the first research question: "According to students, what are the central elements in addressing hostile attitudes in and through education?". For this purpose, we give a detailed presentation of the findings, structured by the above-named thematic categorization. The two main themes, *metacognitive skills* and *socio-emotional safety*, and their descriptive sub-categories are discussed and illustrated with verbatim quotes from the students' answers (translated from Finnish into English by the researchers).

3. Results

3.1. Metacognitive Skills

The first main theme, "metacognitive skills", was based on answers that addressed the role of knowledge, self-reflection, and awareness in attitude development as well as the cognitive skills that the students considered necessary in addressing hostile attitudes. Metacognition here refers to the process of becoming aware of one's own thinking [61]. Within this main theme, the young people's answers were grouped into three sub-categories according to their content and entitled as (I) *perspective-taking*, (II) *independent thinking*, and (III) *dialogue.* The sub-categories are presented in Figure 2.
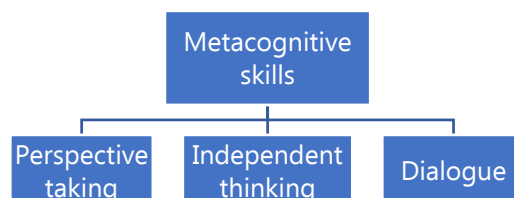
Figure 2. Main theme, metacognitive skills, and sub-categories.

The answers concerning *perspective-taking* emphasized the role of schools as places to gain objective and diverse knowledge about different cultures, religions, ideologies, values, political systems, and viewpoints that the young people regarded as necessary for the development of awareness, tolerance, and understanding, especially concerning those who seem different. Many answers underlined the value of skills needed to gain, evaluate, and apply knowledge in a responsible and ethically sustainable way. As the quotes below exemplify, according to the students, the school should be a place where reliable information and viewpoints from different perspectives are provided:

> *It is [central] to offer instruction and knowledge to everyone about different topics, so that people could form their views and opinions based on facts and not on prejudices.*

> *[It is important] to discuss how little individuals can impact premises of their lives. And how vulnerable to influences the human mind is. And somehow bring forth the fact that things are never black and white.*

The emphasis on perspective-taking shows that the youths see knowledge construction as a school-wide process and not bound by the classroom walls. They recognize that

perspective-taking requires exposure to diversity of viewpoints. The ability to challenge and change one's own viewpoints is regarded as key for developing open-mindedness [62,63] and epitomizes the goal of transformative learning [58]. However, as the following quote brings out, some students recognize that the knowledge provided at school is typically based on the viewpoints of majorities and thus biased:

> *The history we learn at school is very white and European. The worldviews of students would certainly become broader, if history was taught from the African perspective, for example, before the arrival of the imperialists, or from the Asian perspective, for example.*

The findings demonstrate that at least individual students can recognize and be critical of the ways in which school education renews the hegemonic norms and traditions and attitudes that are based on these perspectives (see also [27,28]).

The second sub-category, *independent thinking,* refers to skills related to self-reflection and media literacy that, according to the youths, should be taught at school to enhance independent, critical thinking. The youths seem to recognize that there are "bubbles" in the social media [64] and understand the ways in which social media and algorithms limit their access to unpartisan knowledge. As the quotes below show, many respondents emphasize the role of (social) media in the construction of worldviews:

> *[It is important] to accentuate that many things grow massively out of proportions in social media because people overreact and seek for drama.*

> *[We need to] figure out the pitfalls of algorithms. So, if I watch one right-wing-endorsing video on YouTube, it will propose more content like that.*

Self-reflection was viewed as a central skill to recognize manipulation and prejudiced information and to identify biases in one's own thinking:

> *[It is important] to teach criticality towards one's own culture and customs, to broaden one's thinking skills.*

> *[Schools should] encourage people to be critical, in a healthy way, towards others' and especially towards one's own ideas.*

The students' suggestions are in line with previous research that demonstrates the ways people may be manipulated into hate and dehumanization through various rhetorical and methodological means used in propaganda and thus highlight the importance of the ability to critically evaluate the messages to which one is subjected [65].

The third sub-category, *dialogue,* grouped answers that highlighted the importance of constructive and non-judgmental discussion on challenging topics in addressing prejudices and hostile attitudes. Skills to negotiate, debate, and resolve conflicts were emphasized as central objectives for school education:

> *In my view, it would be central to bring everyone together to discuss different perspectives in a neutral and objective way, after which everyone could calmly choose the most fitting perspective and ideology for themselves, without pressure from the others.*

> *Discussion means exchanging thoughts and ideas, learning and teaching about different perspectives. It is not about knocking down the opponent and his views.*

Overall, the findings related to the first main theme, *metacognitive skills*, suggest that the students recognize the connection between knowledge and perspective and find this nexus central in addressing hostile attitudes in and through education. To challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions, the students called for dialogues in which dissenting opinions are voiced because they see dissent as an opportunity to learn. This is in line with research showing that diversity of viewpoints and constructive disagreement enhance collective intelligence and smarter decision making [66]. However, teachers may hesitate to engage students in discussions on sensitive topics [67–70]. It is therefore important to note here that the role of the teacher in these types of discussions is not to be the expert on content knowledge or to act as a moral judge but to provide and ensure a safe space for shared reflection and dialogue (see also [71]).

3.2. Socio-Emotional Safety

Next to the more academic and cognitive aspects, the second main theme emphasized the social dimension of school education in addressing hostile attitudes. Entitled *socio-emotional safety*, this theme grouped students' reflections on schools as central contexts for socio-emotional development and personal growth. Socio-emotional safety in the students' answers referred to school culture, which prohibits bullying, harassment, and prosecution over diverse views and identities. The notion of *safe space* has its history in the LGBT movement in the 1970s [72]. Today, in educational contexts, it has come to denote a harassment-free zone wherein various identities, worldviews, and diversities are valued or at least tolerated and where controversial topics can be examined and discussed with respect to the emotional safety of the participants [73] and without a fear of repercussions [74,75]. The answers in this group highlighted the role of daily interactions at school that shape the students' (social) identities and attitudes (see also [76]). The answers were grouped into four sub-categories according to their content, namely (IV) *equity and equality*, (V) *psychosocial support*, (VI) *sense of belonging*, and (VII) *segregation*. The sub-categories are presented in Figure 3.
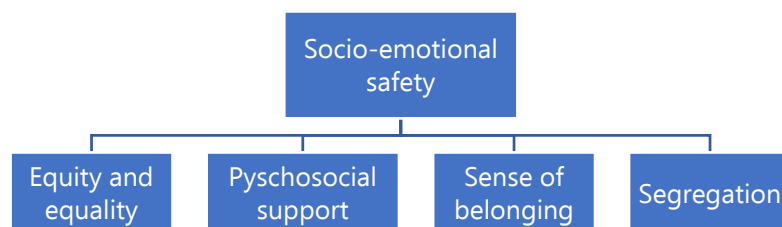
Figure 3. Main theme, socio-emotional safety, and sub-categories.

The first sub-category, *equity and equality*, included the students' moral and ethical perspectives on the importance of equality, equity, and the respect of diversities in addressing hostile attitudes. The category highlights the Finnish national values of equality and social justice. The students' answers emphasized the importance of equal and just treatment of all students at school regardless of their background, identities, or personal views. Teachers' role in modelling tolerance, neutrality, and fairness was considered central, as the following quotes illustrate:

> *The only method to eliminate hate speech and racism with little resources is the educators' own example of tolerance toward other people, cultures, values, and attitudes.*

> *It is critically important for teachers not to teach according to their own political convictions. Or at least they have to give a disclaimer before making a political statement to the students.*

Teachers are in a position of power, and the respondents suggest they should use this position to model equal treatment of all people. While the students do not expect their teachers to be experts in subject knowledge regarding all possible viewpoints, they clearly want their teachers to be fair and respectful towards all students and all perspectives. Respect is an essential aspect in the creation of a safe space [62,68]. Previous studies have also recognized the important role of teachers in enhancing students' feelings of safety at school [77,78].

The respondents saw a strong connection between hostile attitudes and a weakened level of subjective wellbeing, which is in line with previous studies (e.g., [79,80]). The sub-category (V) *psychosocial support* highlights the importance of all students to be "seen" at school and to be recognized as eligible members of the school community. The respondents called for increased care and attention from the adults in the school community and, in the name of equity, highlighted the urgency of addressing the psychosocial needs of those who suffer from mental health problems, depression, burn-out, or loneliness before the problems escalate. Psycho-social support provided at school from the teachers, or the student welfare professionals was deemed central in addressing hostile attitudes:

Youths' mental health problems should be recognized better and prevented earlier. It would be helpful to have an easier access to the school psychologist. Also, if the class sizes were smaller, teachers would have an opportunity to get to know their students and notice their mental health problems, and the development of hostile attitudes, in time.

Schools should be more vocal about the importance of wellbeing. [They could] organize moments of relaxation and give less homework, and emphasize that students should also have time to sleep. This conveys a feeling to the students that they are genuinely cared for, and that academic performance is not prioritized [over wellbeing].

The sub-category *sense of belonging* grouped answers underlining the importance of social encounters, sense of belonging, inclusion, and care in the school community in addressing hostile attitudes. According to the students, a sense of belonging helps counter bullying and prevent hostile attitudes, reduce loneliness, and enhance openness to the other. Previous research validates the students' idea—there is a connection between lack of belonging, weak levels of resilience, and radicalization, for example [81,82]. To enhance the feeling of community, many students called for mixing of student groups and teamwork and organization of whole-school events [83] in which everyone would feel included:

[Schools should] increase the sense of belonging by urging different people to talk to each other and by encouraging shyer people to speak up, too.

A considerate and open-minded atmosphere [at school] can be created by talking about different human destinies and lived experiences.

Hostile attitudes are often due to the feeling of not being accepted and of not belonging to any group.

The findings underlined the importance of a shared social (collective) identity in school that could be built around the ethos, values, and the expressive characteristics of the school and its community [84,85]. A shared social identity enables constructing positive and shared social norms and attitudes and viewing the whole school as a safe space rather than restricting this space to single teachers and classrooms [62]. It is important to realize that learning and attitude development are not bound by classroom walls and curricular contents but take place in everyday encounters in the school community [9].

A few respondents (n = 32), however, saw the absence of "different pupils" as the best way to prevent hostile attitudes within the school community. These answers were grouped under the theme *segregation*. According to these respondents, social harmony could be reached if the "problematic" students were placed in separate schools. Often, these responses included racist or otherwise discriminatory allusions:

[Schools should] kick out the bullying, violent, and troublemaking immigrant students. They disturb the schooling of others.

While the number of students whose responses were categorized into this theme was small (~1%), it is important to take their existence into consideration when planning school-wide activities, as hostile attitudes are typically stemming from feelings of threat and fear [11].

Overall, the second main theme, *socio-emotional safety*, brought forth the social and emotional side of schooling, which, in research and practice, is seen as increasingly central for student wellbeing. Students who feel good at school are more motivated, learn better [86], and feel less school burnout [87].

In the following, we will discuss the findings and elaborate on the second research question about how the students' ideas could inform the crafting of more peaceful futures in and through education in Finland.

4. Discussion

Amid global disturbances, the calls for educational institutions to promote peace and counter hostility intensify. However, the various programs developed for schools to

pursue this mission are typically drafted by policymakers and other adults. Although young people are regarded as agents of societal change and have valuable insights into the realities and issues around them, their ideas are rarely solicited in this respect. To fill this gap, this study investigated their suggestions to address hostility in and through education. The data were gathered through an online survey sent to students in upper-secondary educational institutions in Finland. The survey included an open-ended question on how schools could prevent the development of hostile attitudes, the answers of which composed the data of this study. Our qualitative analysis of the students' answers (n = 2744) found two distinctive themes in the students' suggestions: on the one hand, the students underlined the importance of the academic side of schooling, and on the other hand, they highlighted the social dimension of school education in addressing hostile attitudes. The first main theme, metacognitive skills, emphasized the need to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions people have regarding diversities. The students seemed to realize that to change people's attitudes and beliefs, they need to know *more,* and most importantly, they need to know *differently,* which is in line with previous studies on ways to transform beliefs and attitudes [58,88,89]. The students suggested that metacognitive skills—skills related to thinking about thinking—can be developed at school through practicing independent thinking, perspective taking, and dialogue, which allow for drawing inspiration and perspectives from multiple sources of meaning, self-reflection, and critical assessment on various assumptions and frames of reference. However, this requires a safe space where the emotional safety of all participants is secured [68,77], which brings us to the second main theme that emerged from the analysis.

Undeniably, knowledge acquisition and socio-emotional safety are strongly intertwined and mutually reinforcing, especially in educational settings: research shows that the better and safer one feels at school, the better the learning results, and vice versa [90,91]. In our study, the students recognized that attitudes are not shaped through knowledge acquisition only but also through emotions and interpretations stemming from lived experiences and encounters with diversity (i.e., learning *with* and *from* others). The second main theme, socio-emotional safety, emphasized the importance of emotional safety at school, which, according to students, is created in and through positive relationships, intergroup contact, and an ethos of respect, equality, and care. The students underlined the role of teachers in modeling these values and behaviors.

Upon reflection on how the students' suggestions could inform the development of novel educational approaches for Finnish education, which was our second research question, the tenets of transformative learning proved valuable.

Transformative Learning in the Creation of More Peaceful Societies

Transformative learning is a prominent educational approach that involves deep structural changes in how we understand and interpret the world and ourselves [58,92]. In other words, transformative learning denotes a process by which students learn how to think critically for themselves rather than take assumptions supporting a point of view for granted [58] (p. 103).

Dialogue and critical reflection, highlighted by the students in our study, are fundamental elements of transformative learning. Through dialogue, students bring in their personal knowledge of their lived experiences that help ground and contextualize their viewpoints. Critical reflection will take these into consideration with a focus on issues of power, privilege, and social structures [93], which are essential elements in the pursuit of equality and social justice, the core objectives of Finnish education [16].

Pedagogically, transformative learning means moving from increasing students' knowledge (knowing *more)* towards making them critically reflect on the taken-for-granted frames of reference that preserve social hegemony and problems in it (knowing *differently)*. This helps develop more inclusive, open, and reflective beliefs and attitudes that guide their actions and behavior [58] (p. 92). The transformative process of reassessing hostile attitudes through critical reflection and shared knowledge is presented in Figure 4.
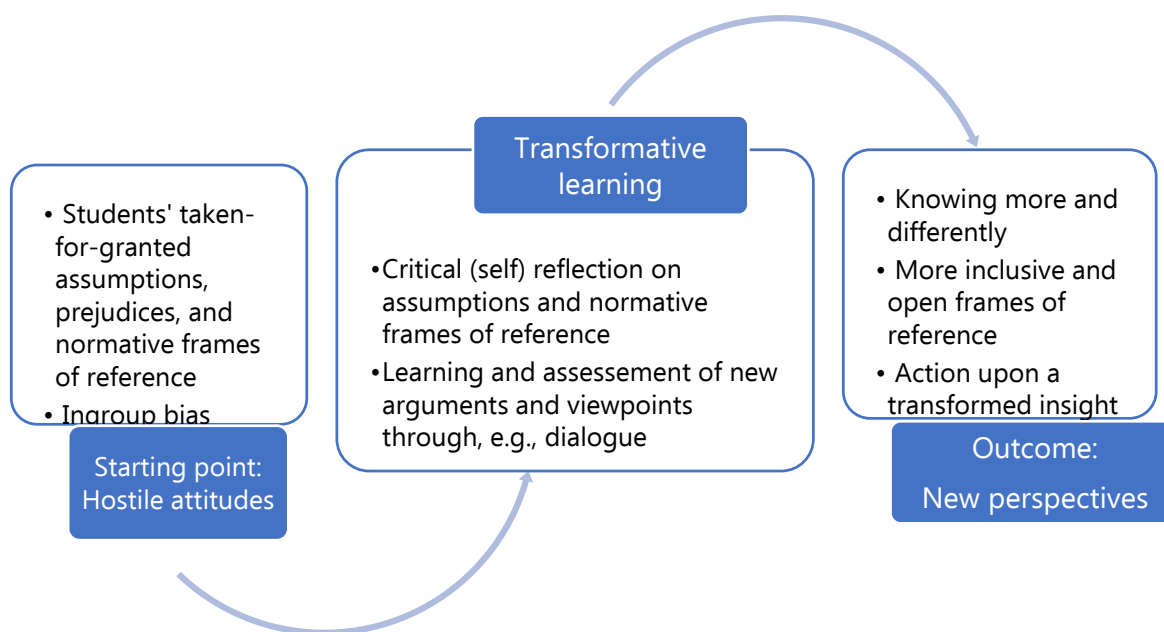
Figure 4. The process of addressing hostile attitudes in and through education.

Transformative learning relies on the idea that the process and learning goals are more significant than information delivery. This idea alleviates some of the challenges related to the traditional educational approaches used to counter hostility and foster peace, namely, superficial implementations that enhance exoticizing and othering. In the transformative learning process, the teacher's role is first and foremost to create an appropriate learning environment, a safe space for the students' critical thinking, and (shared) reflection on their frames of reference and the prevailing belief systems and practices [93].

Although initially developed for adult education [92], transformative learning is well-aligned with the suggestions of Finnish students to address hostile attitudes. Pedagogically, the tenets of transformative learning support the mission of all levels of (Finnish) education to pursue the development of a socially just and democratic society [15] while enabling critical observation and transformation of the traditional frames of reference related to "normative Finnishness".

5. Conclusive Remarks

The values of equality, equity, democracy, and peace promotion underpin the ethos of Finnish education and are central values for Finnish people, especially the youth [40–42]. Yet, racism and discrimination are real concerns in the Finnish society [22]. Current global crises and insecurities intensify these problems internationally. The calls for education to support peace and counter hostility [57,94] are justified but challenging for schools to undertake. The challenge arises from the fact that, traditionally, education is assigned to socialize children and youth to the prevailing social and cultural values and norms [17,20]. However, more recently, education has been mandated to foster their capacities for critical observation and identification of societal problems and address these in a transformative yet democratic manner (e.g., [16,21,57]).

Finnish students' suggestions to address hostile attitudes in and through education offer valuable insights for tackling this challenge and for shaping more peaceful and socially just futures. The findings encourage Finnish education to take a bolder step towards transformative learning [44], which supports students to reform society instead of passively adopting the prevailing norms [20,95]. More research on transformative learning among children and youth and the pedagogical approaches to facilitate this type of learning is needed. Although this study was carried out in Finland, we believe that the findings are

relevant beyond the national context regarding the development of educational approaches in educational institutions internationally.

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