



Creating transformative practitioners with Placemaking

Rosanne van Wieringen

Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies / Interdisciplinary social science

Cause & Aim

Universities are expected to educate a new generation of academic professionals who can respond to societal challenges. Bridging the gap between university and society is a way to prepare students becoming transformative practitioners. They must be equipped with transformative competencies by experiencing transformative practices build into curricula. The goal of this study is to understand what transformative learning entails according to students. Therefore, this education research focusses on the perspective of students on what they experience as important competencies to become transformative practitioners. The existing course Placemaking, used as a case study, provides education in which students experience a transformative practice.

Education Research Approach

Literature review

- **Transformative learning** is about the process of actively changing a worldview (i.a.; Iwaniec et al., 2019; Lange, 2004; Loorbach et al., 2017; Rådberg et al., 2020)
- **Challenge-based learning** engages students in a real challenge, open-ended, with multiple solutions (i.a. Bernard, Edstrom & Kolmos, 2016; Gallagher & Savage, 2020)
- **Place-based learning** gives focus to a challenge by making it (more) visible, feasible and tangible (i.a. Forester, 2022; Singleton, 2014)

Case study: course Placemaking* (9/12 erts)

*Nominated for the NOP (2023)

Placemaking pedagogy is based on transformative learning & CBL, with a strong emphasis on place-based transformation.



Figure illustrates the Placemaking methodology and phases for transformation

Empirical research

Semi-structured interviews with former Placemaking students (N =15)

Experience journey (mutual) deeper understanding:

- how students experienced the course and this type of learning.
- what transformative competencies students perceived,
- what students experienced as difficult and challenging in becoming transformative practitioners.

Findings

Bridging theory and practice

- **Real-life challenge**
- **Beyond theorizing the problem**
"Finally, a course where I can really apply my knowledge to a real-life challenge so I can really mean something."
(Respondent, 13)

Acquired transformative competencies

- **Collaborating & co-creating**
- **Creative thinking & problem/conflict solving**
- **Perseverance & acting**

"It is very much about how important it is to achieve something bottom-up, i.e. you only achieve what people want if you ask them for input and let them decide and give them a say in what you want to achieve."

(Respondent 10)



Figure shows top 8 of transformative competencies

Needs to become transformative practitioners

- **Actual intervention and implementation**
- **Aligning perspectives**
- **Communicating to a broader public**

"More support in communication because it can also be seen as important. On how to get it across. What is really the most important thing to convey to all people involved in our challenge?"

(Respondent 7)

Contributions

Main findings show that the challenge-place-based learning course Placemaking, creates:

- **Opportunities:** students acquired and improved competencies becoming transformative practitioners.
- **Challenges:** students did not feel fully proficient transformative practitioners in acting upon and solving challenges because of a single experience. Therefore, this kind of challenge-place-based learning should be more often reflected in the academic curriculum.

Articulating and reflecting on what students learned and acquired was of mutual added value; it made students' experience more meaningful and conscious in becoming future transformative practitioners.