

# Ways of Creating Differences Together

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## *Why it is worth to think about alternative ways of schools*

After one of my recent workshops during a project day in a School in Jena, where we worked interactively with the map of tomorrow ([map.vonmorgen.org](http://map.vonmorgen.org)), the teacher came to me, grateful about the experience the children just had, and said „Thank you for this amazing project. We should have much more like this, but unfortunately we have so much school.“ First, I wanted to reply nicely but then I stopped suddenly and needed to think. School is the best space for such an experience, without the school, the pupils would not be here and me neither. And I asked: “Why don’t you just continue this project, or let your children do similar global learning activities?” She started to think and explained that she cannot do it, because of the testing. And those tests are centralized from the government, so she can’t decide about the content. (Once I travelled in a train with a politician from Bavaria who was responsible for educational plans and she complained that the central plans cannot be as innovative as she wanted them to be, because many teachers won’t understand it)

I often have discussions like this but normally with students and from my own childhood I remember, that I had huge difficulties to follow the teacher’s intension, why I had to learn things. It was hard for me and most of the times I blamed my teachers for this. But this conversation just showed me, that also teachers are part of a system, they do not understand. At Ideen<sup>3</sup> e.V. we try to bring transformative learning to school, motivated by our own frustrating teenage-years, which we had at highschool. The feeling of not knowing why you are there and the helplessness, that you cannot change the system. We try to create spaces of true learning and a sense for self-impact.

And now I am asked to write a schedule about 10 lessons, each three hours? In “Constructivist Learning” Kersten Reich cited Dewey that “learners are not an inactive recipient of experiences, but active players within it.” So without knowing those “recipients” I should not start to design any course. Instead, I will try to design a free space, which can be filled by active players most effectively, to find emotional responses within themselves and opportunities for experimenting in the real world.

## **Formal and Transformative Education**

Apart from action learning or informal learning outside of school, which’s importance is more and more understood, we have two areas of learning at school:

- The traditional, **formal learning** - we could even call it industrialized learning - is most common in Germany and a kind of Holy Grail, not to be touched or modified. The image of children, that you can feed them with facts and they keep it for their life, is quite common under adults. It is a learning, where the learner is not only not asked, what to learn, but mostly he/she does not even understand the reason of the lessons, because content is fractured like a pie, easy to schedule in a day but without any full learning experience. In most schools students cannot say, what they want to learn and are unable to take learning decisions. In my eyes this is the main reason, why they need to be motivated/forced by tests.
- The "new" **transformative or self-directed learning**, which is not very spread, is the vision of our Ideenwerkstatt von morgen (Ideasworkshop of tomorrow). Until now just during project-days pupils can decide and guide their own learning journey, sometimes we get invited then. But ESD is the key-topic to bring (back) this holistic learning to schools generally. There are already few examples. The term “transformative learning” just fits perfect, because it is not only learning about the social ecological transformation, but is a way to transform schools,

transform the way of learning and builds on the assumption, that learning is an transformation inside of the learner. The other way round: learning without an inner holistic transformation is not sustainable. And this inner transformation often creates the reason to transform the world, as Paulo Freire revealed it already. Transformative learning is not about objective facts but about really changing the own surrounding, the school and the own city.

Although formal learning has mostly over 90% of the school-time, the transformative learning can bring huge impact already if it is only for few hours a week. But in this time, learners have the chance to develop questions for regular lessons, reflect on their feelings and collectively shape the formal part of education. And this is the hope I want to share: I don't blame schools, curriculum or the society of the way of learning they created because no matter if the schools or government supports this process, the students will bring this transformation anyway. Not in a revolution but just by creating resonance. And from my experience so far, if students create this change within their school against the orders of the headmaster, they even learn more about transformation and develop more power of change, than students on schools, where the management board supports the transformation.

## Manipulation or Self-directed learning

But if transformative education is about changing the world, how is it possible, without manipulating the learners?

For transformative learning, teachers can ignore all content and focus on the learning-surrounding and the different perspectives, they can bring to the learning situation. Students are used to get answers in schools, which they need to spit out in the tests and by this they know, what is right and wrong. But all facts, which can be right or wrong, have no valuer, since the internet knows it better anyway. Therefore teachers should not stress own topics and facts but rather bring in new people and change the environment to bring in all perspectives that are needed. Because true dialog between different perspectives are those greyscales, the internet and artificial intelligence cannot provide.

## The Art of Workshop Creation

The task of a teacher is to create an environment, which enables adventures. Therefore we created the "Art of Workshop Creation" with 5 phases as a guiding principal for open education:

1. **Orientation:** Is about to know with whom, for how long you are together, how they feel and what they might be interested in. It should never focus on knowledge difference, so that "weak" participants can feel welcomed too!
2. **Experience and feel:** We do not start by discussing but by discovering what seems interesting/new and by listening. We want to truly understand other perspectives and needs. And this should be a complete peer-learning-process where the teacher only connects the points and explains some backgrounds so that everybody understands the problem, but never guides the topic or gives answers/solutions. Raising questions is the basis to be able to learn things.  
80% of the knowledge students learn from their peers, only roughly 10% from the teacher. So we should definitely increase the peer learning time at school.
3. **Analysis:** For a solid ability to judge we need reliable sources of knowledge and often an historical overview. So taking out facts would be too simple, but putting them in the right frame, makes them even more powerful. But all facts provided here, needs to connect to an emotion in the second phase. Science is the important tool, not to prove that our emotions, visions, needs and questions are wrong, but to give a frame to them, reflect and to see other

connections. This part can bring new concepts and historical explanations and can be done even with pure presentation for 20 min.

This presentation can also be done by students or an external person with a certain or even wrong/onesided opinion. In this case, the Analysis must be reflected after the action phase, or, if the hypotheses is controversial, the group can go back directly to step 3 and explore their understandings openly. But this part is definitely the shortest in the whole workshop.

4. **Action:** The most important part, where the whole workshop is focussing on, is the question: "Why do I need to know this and what do I want to do with it"". Already for the workshop design phase, we can use the thoughts about action, to know what points are relevant to learn and what is just "nice theory" but does not help the student in his transformative journey. The Action-Part also consists of two parts. The first "action"-part is about discovery, fieldtrips and stories about change makers. The second part is about own ideas and project-development tools to put dreams into first steps.
5. **Closing evaluation.** This is the same mood as the first step. We reflect on where we have come, compared to our initial goals and how each of us felt during the trip of change. Everyone should share one key insight which was new to him/her. It can be also a space, where people say that certain content did not fit for them or that they regard a certain opinion as crucial, but here is no room for discussions. Just for feelings and open questions.

## Getting ESD on the ground

In step 4 about action it becomes clear, that learning can not only take place in classrooms and on paper but needs to involve the whole community. Transformative Education and a whole institutional approach should not mean that students get facts about sustainability, watch how the school reduces their carbon footprint and how the school-leader transforms the schools according to the plan of some ministries. But instead the students should be deeply involved from the first questions, where to go, and get the possibility to change their school, if they need and fight for.

But the life of pupils does not only take place in schools. Reveal and improve the supply-chain of the school-kitchen is just the first prototype for change-design. Soon the students will involve the whole community of parents, friends and sustainable pioneers of the whole city.

To foster this integral change we created the map of tomorrow, where students start to map all places, they think are valuable for the future, where they discover new partners and where they create new local networks of trust and change. Whole institutional approach in our sense does not mean to see a school as an isolated island, but to build a network of change around it. Education is the driving factor of our society and must stand for this role!

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