

Article

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A VISUAL MAP OF LEARNER TRANSFORMATION

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Steve Henry

The disruptive and changing nature of the world has been described as “Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear and Incomprehensible (BANI)” by Casico (2020). With such change, there is increased complexity to navigate by those wishing to make sense of and respond to such complexity in professional learning programmes. Transformative learning has been described by Mezirow (2009, p. 22) as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to change.” Transformational learning is in alignment with sensemaking amid complexity.

The development of this map has been driven by a desire to provide ways for experienced professional learners to make sense of and articulate their shifts in practice. This article provides an update on this development, building on work published previously with colleagues (Henry et al., 2019). This article also seeks feedback from readers.

Visual mapping is a powerful research tool as it allows for the creation of rich and reflective data about educational and vocational experiences (Groves, 2022). Such visual maps may be helpful since transformational learning is often difficult to put into words, which is no surprise given the fact that transformational learning is cognitive, embodied, and emotional (Grocott, 2022). I began exploring the mapping of such change five years ago and published with others our preliminary templates and thinking (Henry et al., 2019). Since then, I have been working on doctorate research on transformational learning, which concludes that an impetus for sensemaking is the ‘why’ of transformational learning for experienced adult learners. Learners should create their own map because learner agency is the force and compass for learner transformation (Green, 2022). There is potential for such maps to be used to provide a meta-visual summary of a learning process.

This resource is designed for learners who have just completed their programme, and allows them to generate a transformation map. The tool has four steps, as follows:

1. Name the top five change moments (‘aha’ moments, insights, or realisations) from your learning programme and articulate them as succinctly as possible. When did they occur in the programme? Early, middle or late?
2. To work out the relative importance of these moments, imagine you have 20 tokens to spend across them. If all five were of equal importance, they would receive four tokens each. But you can spend 16 on one and one each on the rest, if you want. How would you allocate the tokens? This gives you the relative importance of each change, which is then represented in the image in Figure 2.
3. Create a table like the one in Figure 1, which is a fictional example of a learner who returned the token allocation against the phase in the programme as per the figure.
4. Draw the named changes according to the example shown in Figures 2 and 3 for a visual map of the transformational narratives occurring in the programme.

| Narrative of 'aha' moment or transformation | Number of tokens | Phase in programme |
|---|------------------|--------------------|
| I am no longer an imposter as I belong in my role and am valued | 7 | Late |
| I have been changing careers to avoid my unhappiness | 5 | Late |
| My leadership practice is unsustainable | 4 | Early |
| I put everyone else first | 4 | Mid |
| A breakthrough resource | 2 | Early |
| | 20 TOTAL | |

Figure 1. Table of narratives of 'aha' or transformation moments and their relative importance according to the phase in programme.

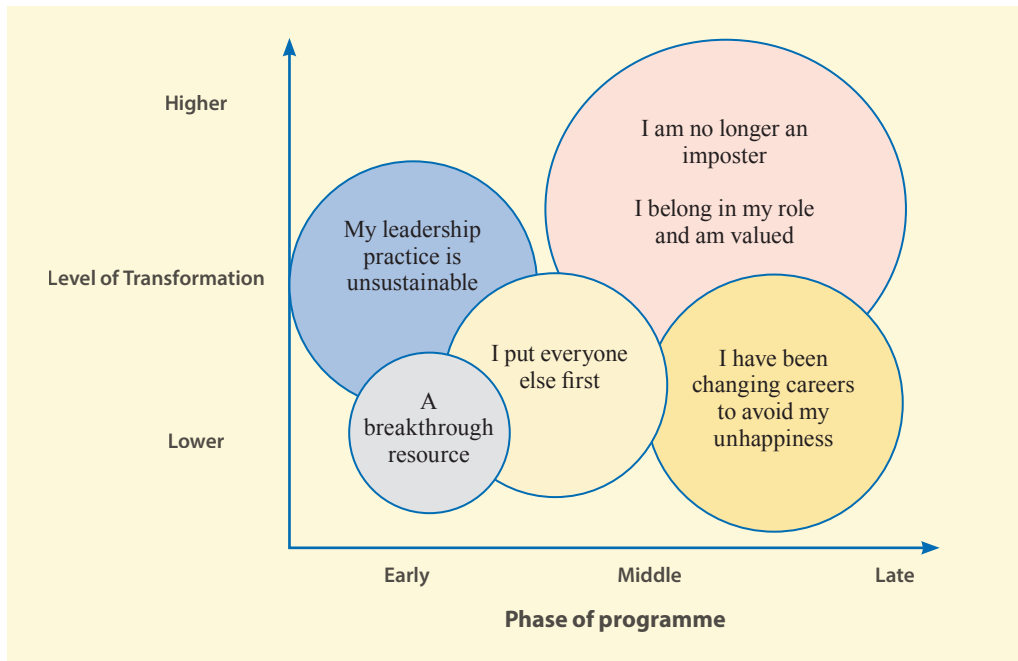


Figure 2. Transformational learning map in a programme for a fictitious learner.

The map provides a visual summary of the narrative change throughout a learning programme. Figure 3 is another map example, which reflects my own learning journey over the past five years in a doctoral programme.

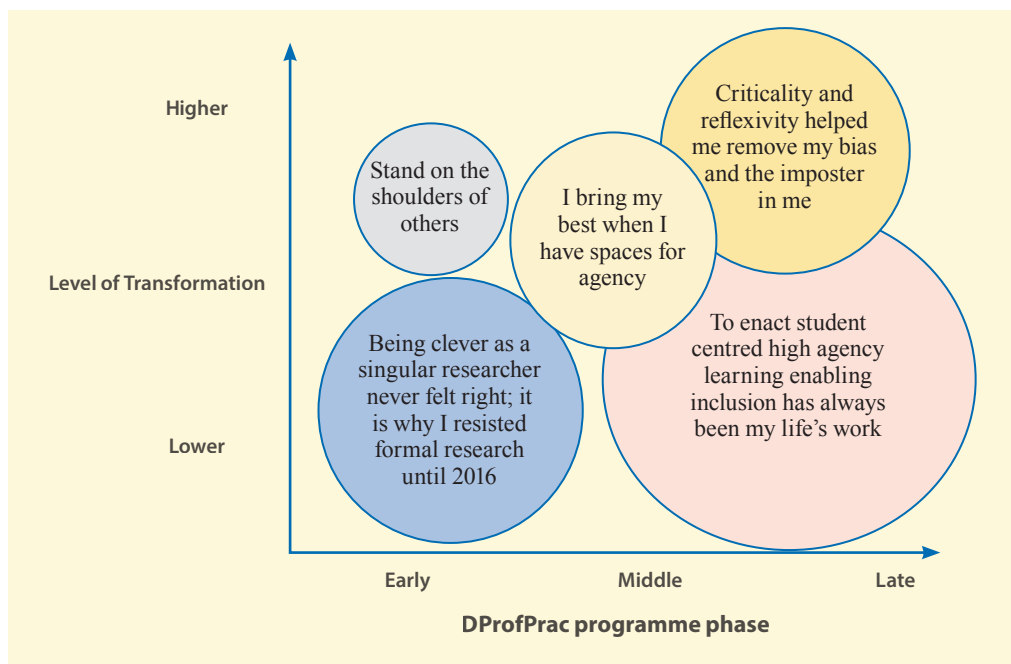


Figure 3. Transformational learning narratives for Steve's doctoral programme.

My experience of constructing this map as a learner enabled me to see the learning from the programme with increased clarity. It will be used in the upcoming assessment of the programme as a distilled summary of the learning. As a result, I see the value of such visual maps for learners.

A research project is planned to map a range of learners across programmes and consider its use. There is potential for the map to be used beyond learning programmes. Perhaps other learning can be mapped, such as the learning from being in a professional role or from spending five years in prison or sailing around the world. The process of creating the map has the potential for learners to activate increased clarity for themselves and for communicating their learning. Ideas to improve this model would be gratefully received to steve.henry@op.ac.nz, please.

Steve Henry is based at Otago Polytechnic's CapableNZ, where he facilitates learners in independent learning pathways. His passion is for learner agency to enable a customised approach that is learner centred. His current doctoral research explores transformational learning in vocational education.

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