JIMMY AND ROSALYNN CARTER SCHOOL FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION
George Mason University

Identity Mapping

Tehama Lopez-Bunyasi, Amelia Johnston, Jane Walker

Overview:

By considering factors of their own identities, students will be prompted to reflect on identity's role in shaping peoples' relationships with themselves, with others, and with the world. This stand-alone activity is perfect for an advisory seminar, homeroom, or community building in any classroom. This activity aims for students to reflect on how they see themselves versus how others see them and how identities can impact a person's role or participation in society. This activity involves creativity, personal reflection, and intergroup discussion.

Either for homework or in class, students will "map" their identities using whatever materials are available. These maps will be displayed around the room. Then, students will spend 10 minutes or so walking around the room, seeking out commonalities between themselves and their classmates. This will be followed by a guided discussion.

Learning Outcomes:

- Are prepared to discuss issues and ideas with people of different views, learning to listen and ask questions with compassion, open minded-ness, and respectfulness.
- Acknowledge that perceptions are influenced by various socio-cultural aspects. Develop an understanding of difference, cultivating empathy, and building cross-cultural competencies.
- Appreciate the economic, social, cultural, religious, and international conditions that help to shape our world.

Information for Instructor:

Student handout included, "Identity Mapping Student Handout"

It is important to wait to use this activity once trust has been built in the classroom as it does ask students to be open and vulnerable. It is absolutely necessary to establish ground rules of showing respect for one another before any class discussion on this topic happens.

Students may challenge each other or ask each other challenging questions. For example, a student might say they identity with one thing, and another might say "no you do not," or "that is not a real identity." This can lead to meaningful discussions but can also be difficult to navigate.

Perhaps "experience" is more meaningful or appropriate in some classrooms than "identity." Teachers should feel free to adapt the exercise to what will be effective in their classroom.

Instructions:

Either in class or for homework, assign students to "map" their identity to share with their classmates. Some suggestions and ideas for mapping are included at the end of these instructions. Ultimately, it is up to the teacher to decide on the boundaries for the students' maps, which can be adapted to the time and resources available to the instructor.

Creative Commons Copyright: Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)
You are free to share and adapt this resource under the following terms. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits

With sticky notes, students will walk around the classroom looking at each other's maps. When they see a commonality on a classmate's map, they will put a sticky note on or next to the map, with the commonality written on the sticky note. The teacher can change or add to what the sticky notes indicate. For example, students might comment on another person's map when something on it surprises them.

Students will return to their maps and reflect on the sticky notes they received and the commonalities they share – or do not share – with their classmates. After students have walked around the room, allow them sufficient time to answer the reflection questions, about 5-7 minutes.

Teachers may decide to end the activity at the personal reflection questions, or to extend the activity by inviting students to share their responses to their reflective questions either in groups or with the class and/or to discuss the debrief questions below.

Discussion Questions:

- First thoughts or impressions of this activity? What did you see in your classmates' maps?
- Is it important to define ourselves? Can identities change?
- Are there any parts of your identity that you wish other people understood better?
- Will this activity inform how you interact or respond to people in the future? If so, how?
- (Optional) What role does identity play in a space of leadership and/or decision making?

Ideas for Identity Maps:

Identity maps can be as simple as a piece of paper with the student's name on it surrounded by words or images; or they can be more artistic/creative. Ultimately, the maps will use words and/or images to convey factors of the students' identities. Identity maps can be digital or physical, but physical is better for this activity if possible. Paper/poster board might be easiest, but students are welcome to get creative.

Depending on the discretion of the teacher, maps can be in any form that feels right for the students, using whatever materials feel right to them, as long as their classmates can clearly read or understand what is on their map. For example, a student might write their name in the middle of a piece of paper or poster board with words surrounding it, and the words might vary in size depending on importance or significance. Or maybe they like to draw, so they create something using drawings or paintings. Or maybe they like to write, so they write a poem, song, or short story. While creating their map, they might also think of a way to portray the salience of different characteristics that contribute to their identity.

Applications:

This could be a great activity to take a short pause during the school year to build community within the classroom. Having this discussion could then be a great springboard to discuss issues related to history, immigration; government and legislation; interest groups; understanding how different groups are impacted by legislation, lessons related to the US census, economics, psychology, narratives within literature, contemporary issues related to community conflicts, etc.

Creative Commons Copyright: Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)
You are free to share and adapt this resource under the following terms. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits

Identity Mapping Student Handout

Intro: Identity and Identity Salience

Identity can be understood as a unique set of characteristics that define an individual person, such as values, religion, race, family origins, personal history, interests and hobbies, appearance, physical or mental ability, etc. Sometimes, aspects of your identity are defined by you and only you; other times, aspects of your identity might be ascribed to you by other people or by the norms, expectations, or biases of your society, whether they feel true to you or not.

An important term for understanding and discussing identity in this activity is *salience. Salience* is the quality of being particularly prominent or important. *Identity Salience* refers to an identity being consistent through changing contexts and circumstances. For example, "being from a small town" might not seem like a defining characteristic when surrounded by other people from your hometown. When you go to a big city, however, and find that you are the only non-city person in sight, you might feel like "being from a small town" is suddenly a defining part of your identity. Meanwhile, you might find that other parts of your identity remain equally significant as they were before.

In this activity, you will "map" your identity and reflect on how aspects of personal identity affect our interactions, relationships, and how we engage with society.

Step 1: "Map" Your Identity

Map your identity according to the instructions from your teacher.

Step 2: Finding Commonalities

With sticky notes or small pieces of paper, walk around the classroom looking at your classmates' maps. When you see a similarity between your map and another person's (*ie. you were both born in the same state or country, or speak the same language*, *or both play an instrument*) put a sticky note on or next to the map, with the commonality written on the sticky note.

Step 3: Reflection Questions

After walking around the room and looking at your classmates' maps, return to your seat and answer the reflection questions below.

1) Were you eager to share certain parts of your identity more than others? Which ones? Why?

2) What do you use to signify parts of your identity? *Ie. clothes, jewelry, hair style, language, etc.*

teach.conflictresolution.gmu.edu
Creative Commons Copyright: Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)
You are free to share and adapt this resource under the following terms. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits

3) Did you notice your classmates identifying themselves in ways that you had never thought to identity them? Have other people ever ascribed an identity to you that you haven't given yourself? How do other people's perceptions of us differ from our own?

4) What is *identity salience*? Are there aspects of your identity that are more salient than others? What parts of your identity change based on certain circumstances?

5) Are there some people who can hide certain parts of their identity, and others who cannot? Why might someone want or choose to hide a part of their identity?

Step 4: Group Discussion and Debrief

Creative Commons Copyright: Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)
You are free to share and adapt this resource under the following terms. You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits