

GUIDELINES FOR LEADING THE CULTURAL MAPPING EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION

The Exercise

Cultural Mapping works best when it is used like a game. It is not intended to be an encounter-group kind of exercise, nor is it the kind of thing where people should feel under pressure to “perform.” It should be fun. As the leader, this is something you can communicate by the way you introduce the exercise. Simply tell your group that the purpose of the exercise is to help them get to know each other, to illuminate cultural identities, and to facilitate cross-cultural communication. Let them know it will be fun.

Your job as leader is to keep this fun aspect intact and to make people feel comfortable while doing the exercise. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. Your role is to simply facilitate and encourage the discoveries that will be made during the exercise—not to refute or debate any observations that are made.

It is very important that you read the ground rules (below) to the groups before you run the exercise. Not only is this necessary for the exercise to work, but it will also make people feel more comfortable and willing to play.

What normally happens with the Cultural Mapping is that the participants get caught up in the exercise very quickly. The group can get pretty rowdy and will often keep talking after the one-minute discussion time is up and when the sub-groups are reporting to the whole group. When this happens, call out “**FOCUS!**” This will generally stop the talking and focus the attention of the group. If it doesn’t, tell the group that it’s important that they stop talking and listen to each other.

****For each question, give the group one minute to find one thing in common. Try to stick to the one-minute limit so the exercise doesn’t go on too long.

Often sub-groups will report more than one thing that they have in common. It’s okay if they do.

Every once in a while, a group will report that they couldn’t find one thing that was true for everyone. This is okay, too. Ask them to share some of the things they discussed.

Sometimes a participant will say that they don’t fit into any of the categories you have given them for a particular question. Let them know it’s okay, and that they are free to form another category if they’d like. For example, it sometimes happens that when you ask Question #9 (What is your gender?) the group will split up into three or more groups (men/women/others).

The questions that generally create the most heated discussions are Question #4 (What is your socio-economic background?) and Questions #6 and 7 (Religion). You may want to give the group a little more than one minute to find something in common if you can sense that there is a livelier-than-usual discussion taking place in the sub-groups during these questions.

The questions that can sometimes make people feel uncomfortable are Question #12 (Are you disabled?) and Question #13 (What is your sexual orientation?). When you ask these

questions, remind the group that they are free to step out of the game if they don't feel comfortable participating.

Make sure that when people step out of the game, they come and stand with you. This will make "stepping out" more comfortable for people. Announce this during the ground rules before you begin the exercise. When people do step out and stand with you, chat with them so they don't feel awkward.

The only time you may have to step in and stop the exercise is if someone breaks the ground rules, such as "outing" another person or disclosing information about someone else in the group. It is unlikely this will happen, but if it does, just stop the game and remind the group of the ground rules. If someone tries to refute the discoveries made by someone else in the group, remind that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions and that it is not appropriate to invalidate the observations and discoveries of others. If someone refuses to abide by the rules, or continues to invalidate the observations of others, then it is appropriate for you to ask them to leave the group.

The Discussion

One of the benefits of the Cultural Mapping exercise is that it allows discussion about cultural differences—a potentially explosive subject—to take place in a non-threatening way. It also demonstrates that discussions about difference don't have to be negative or stress-creating. In fact, through Cultural Mapping, these discussions can be positive. The spontaneous discoveries that take place during the exercise give people the chance to step out of the different cultural identity categories that are inherited by society at large. In fact, Cultural Mapping often helps to expand participants' notions about what constitutes cultural identity beyond the usual definitions and limitations associated with race.

Most people find themselves in a category with every other person in the group at some point during the exercise, and will find that they have something in common with that person. In this way, Cultural Mapping helps create connections and helps to highlight similarities. In addition, the process of arriving at something each group has in common involves going through all the things they don't have in common. So the exercise helps to illuminate difference as well.

The key to leading the discussion is to allow it to be free-form. Let the group share their discoveries. Don't try to impose ideas or insights. The discussions are usually very lively. It is unlikely that you will have any difficulty in getting a conversation going. Participants are eager to talk about the experience and all the discoveries they made.

It's important to remember that you are the facilitator—not a teacher or expert who has the answers on cultural identity, or information about the hidden meaning of the exercise. There are no answers or hidden meanings—except those that the participants discover for themselves. There is no agenda either. At the very least, people will have a good time with it and will get to know each other. At the most, they will acquire new insights about cultural identity.

It's important to note that the discussion should not be a debate on correct or incorrect notions of culture, race and identity. If someone in your group starts to argue with another member,

or tries to invalidate anyone's observations, stop them and remind them that this isn't the purpose of the exercise. Cultural Mapping is structured so that the participants will be making discoveries about their own experiences (and not the experiences of others) so the situation shouldn't arise.

GROUND RULES

- This game is to help you get to know each other
- The exercise will be physical; you'll be moving around the room
- There may be some questions you're not interested in answering and, if so, you can step out of the game at any time
- Some people may choose to disclose things during the exercise, so the confidentiality of the experience is important
- You should not disclose things for other people, only for yourself

DISCUSSION

Immediately following the exercise, lead a discussion with the group. They can remain standing, or they can sit down for the discussion—whatever they want to do.

It is important that the discussion be somewhat free-form. Ask the following general questions to get them talking. Your role as the leader is to simply call on people and guide the discussion. You should not debate, challenge, argue, or invalidate observations made by anyone in the group.

QUESTIONS

1. What did you learn?
2. What was surprising?
3. How does this impact your view of cultural identity?
4. How does this impact your view of multi-culturalism?
5. Did anyone find themselves being the only one in a category at any point during the exercise? What was that like?

CULTURAL MAPPING QUESTIONS

1. Make a map of the USA—where were you born?
(Have the group fit into “USA” and “Outside USA”)

Find one thing you share in common. Talk to those near you.

2. Make a map of where you live now.

What do you share in common?

3. Oldest child, youngest child, middle child, only child

What special things did you have to deal with?

***Remind the group that anyone can step out of the game at any time*
If someone steps out, they should stand by the facilitator.**

4. What is your socio-economic background?

5. What is your family situation? Do/did you live with both parents? Your Mother? Your Father? Grandparent? Relatives? Other?

Ask: What do you share in common?

6. What religion were you born into?
(Baptist, Catholic, Unitarian, Atheist, Buddhist, Islam, Spiritualist, etc.)

Ask: Find one thing that you have in common.

7. What religion are you now?

Remind the group that anyone can step out of the game at any time

8. Age line. Have everyone line up from the oldest to the youngest.

Ask: Talk to the people on both sides of you. What impact does age have on your life?

9. What is your gender?

10. Race. What is your race? Are you African American, Native American, Latino, Euro American?

11. What is your favorite form of writing? Poetry? Songs? Short stories?

12. Are you disabled?

13. What is your sexual orientation?