

Mapping Identity for Curriculum Work

Kristin G. Congdon, Marilyn Stewart,
and John Howell White

At the outset, it appears to be a simple proposition—teachers bring values, beliefs, and trusted practices to their work as curriculum developers. Most educators are familiar with what has been called “the hidden curriculum.” This is the notion that any plan for teaching and learning carries with it assumptions about what is important and that these assumptions guide more than the identified content. Educators’ assumptions also guide the ways in which school days are structured, spaces for learning are designed, textbooks are selected, children are addressed, and other educational decisions are made.

As teachers, we do well to remember that the decisions we make on a daily basis are value-laden. Beliefs about children, the enterprise of schooling, the subjects we teach, and the instructional practices we employ are only some of the beliefs that undergird our selection of content, the means we choose for its delivery, and the practices we sanction within the school community. It is also important, however, to recognize the sources of these beliefs.

Teachers, as do all people, exemplify and actualize the beliefs and values that emerge from their active participation with the world. Our individual identities are constructed through our interaction within overlapping and intersecting communities to which we belong. In addition to living in a local community—our city, town, or neighborhood, for example—we are members of what we loosely refer to as “shared-interest” communities. If one is a member

of a softball team, for example, one belongs to a larger recreational community of people who play or watch softball. Part of our identity consists of membership in this recreational community. The assumptions, beliefs, and values we hold as a result of our membership in a variety of such communities converge within the culture and work of the school. When we, as teachers, engage in curriculum planning and implementation, we bring, in varying degrees, these deeper level assumptions, values, and beliefs to our work.

Community influences persist and typically go unrecognized in curriculum decision-making. We rarely think of how our geographic community membership, for example, affects the choices we make in designing curriculum and teaching. How do assumptions stemming from one’s life within an urban community differ from those related to living in rural or suburban settings? Assumptions, values, and beliefs associated with our age, family structure, politics, and economic communities similarly guide our choices, although we rarely consider these influences.

When we begin to think carefully about the ways we define ourselves in relation to our community relationships, we go beyond simply accepting the obvious proposition that curricular decisions are value-laden. This became evident in two professional development institutes held during two consecutive summers at Kutztown University entitled, “Inquiry, Community, and Curriculum.” We presented an activity in which the participants—art specialists, elementary classroom teachers, secondary subject area teachers, and a few administrators—“mapped” their identities. We asked the participants to recognize how private experiences move them to public action and how their constructed identities influence their curricular decisions. Believing that the creation of art is like the creation of curriculum, in that the community influences converge in both practices, we also suggested that participants consider the underlying power of community influences in their art-making as well as their educational processes.

The Mapping Identity Project

The Mapping Identity Project consists of using a Project Guide, divided into two parts, to complete a large “map”—a ring of two concentric circles divided into separate boxes for each shared-interest community (see Figure 8.1). In Part One, participants follow a series of prompts in the Project Guide that encourage reflection upon individual community memberships. The participants consider identification with and relationship to religious, gender, geographic, family, age, economic, political, recreational, aesthetic, racial/ethnic, occupational, and health communities. The kind of self-reflection required to complete this initial phase of the mapping exercise helps participants come to an awareness of self as much more complex than day-to-day experience typically provides. We have found that participants take this initial

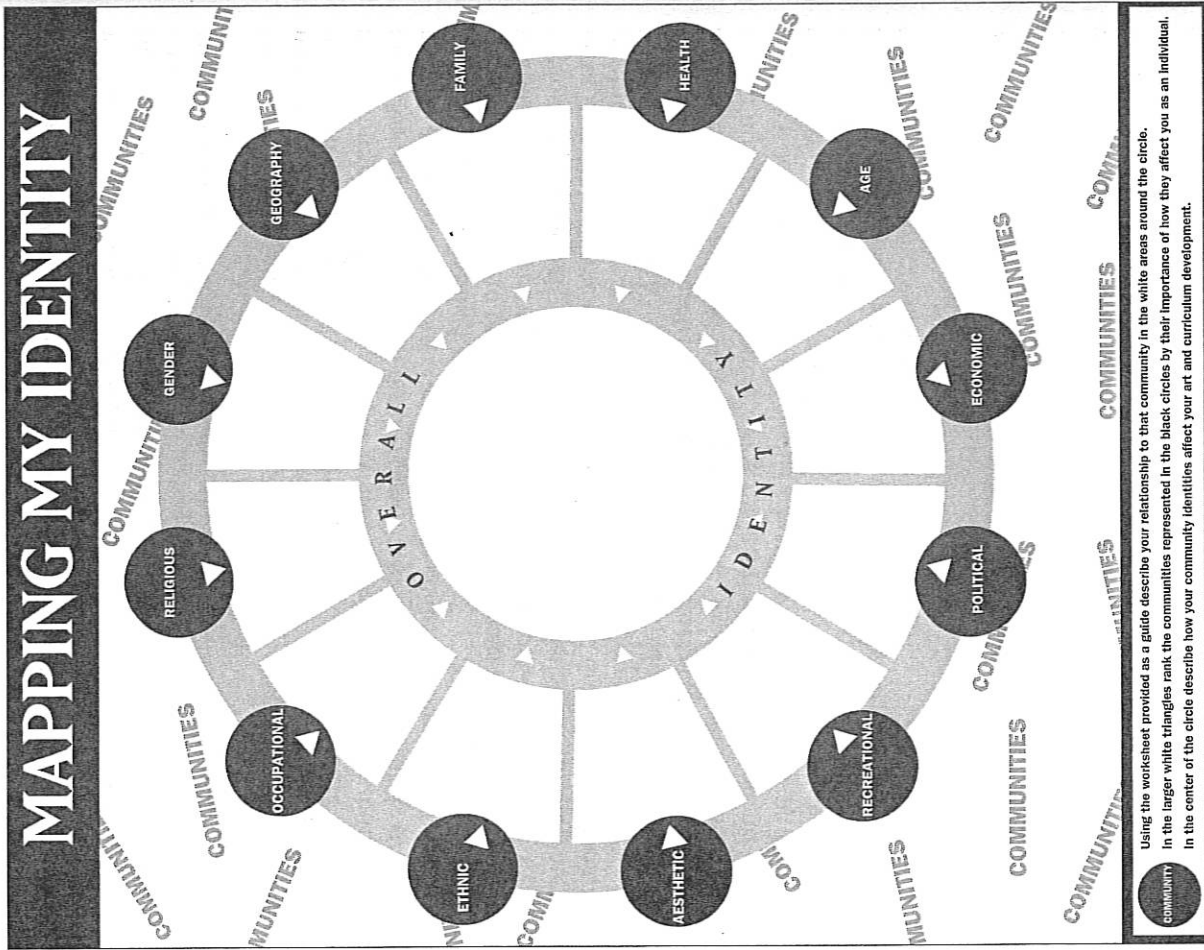


Figure 8.1 Identity Map.

charge very seriously. Most report that they have not previously reflected upon these questions and that the experience of doing so is poignant and, in some cases, life-changing. Part Two prompts participants to review their shared interest community memberships and rank those memberships' importance in relation to their impact upon them as individuals. For instance, a teacher might rank her or his gender identification as the most important factor in construction of identity, followed by political, ethnic, occupational, and other community relationships. Finally, participants consider how their community identities impact the decisions they make in their curriculum work (and art-making, when appropriate).

The Mapping Identity Project can serve as both an instructional tool and an artwork. The map may be enlarged, printed on poster-board, and worked on with paint, markers, collage, etc. It also may be used to prompt reflection in journals or sketchbooks or responses in essay form.

MAPPING MY IDENTITY PROJECT GUIDE

Part One

Use the following prompts to guide your responses in the outer ring of your identity map:

Religious Identity/Community

- I consider my religious identity to be what?
- I share it, or do not share it, with others because why?
- I consider myself as an isolated or an active religious community member because?
- I would prefer to explain my religious identity in a different way (for instance, I am a privately spiritual person; I consider religion a lifestyle, etc.).

Gender and Sexual Identity/Community

- Most of, some of, very few of my choices in life are influenced by my gender/gender identity and/or sexual identity.
- Most of, some of, very few of my teaching decisions are influenced by my gender/gender identity and/or sexual identity.
- My gender/gender identity and/or sexual identity affects my relationship with my male/female students.
- My gender/gender identity and/or sexual identity has had an impact on my choice of career because?
- I most often choose to spend leisure time with friends of the same? opposite? sex because?

Geographical Identity/Community

- When people ask me where I am from, it is easy or hard to answer because?
- I consider my home to be?
- I am a rural or urban person because?
- I need or do not need to have a sense of roots in a particular place or geographical community because?
- I express my geographic roots to others by my (politics, community work, gardening, accent, clothes, etc.).

Family Identity/Community

- Family is of great significance, somewhat significant, not at all significant to me because?
- I choose to or do not choose to spend leisure time with members of my family because?
- My definition of family is?

Age Identity/Community

- I consider myself young, middle-aged, old because?
- Aging is hard or easy because?
- I like to or do not like to spend time with others my own age because?
- Generational things I identify with that are age specific are (certain music, dining, politics, experiences such as going to school in the 60s, etc.).
- If I were the opposite sex, I'd think of aging differently because?

Economic Identity/Community

- Economically, I consider myself to have low income, moderate income, or I income?
- I consider myself to be poor, middle class, or wealthy?
- I do or do not think one's economic situation is an appropriate topic for discussion in this context or many others.
- I am comfortable or uncomfortable with my economic status because?

Political Identity/Community

- Politically speaking, I consider myself to be (conservative, liberal, Republican, apolitical, Democrat, etc.) because?
- My political identity comes mostly from my (family, growing up in the 80s, personal experience, religious identity, etc.).
- I think our political values inform most of what we do, or I would prefer not to make politics too much of an issue in education, or "let's tip-toe around political issues, please," because?

Recreational Identity/Community

- In my spare time, I (work out at a gym, spend time with a gardening group, engage in politics, read, relate to the world of cyberspace, etc.).
- I belong to a recreational community in the following ways (read the same magazines, have a similar language, wear the same kinds of shoes, bowl at coolest alleys, etc.).
- I don't take time for recreation because?

Aesthetic Identity/Community

- You can or cannot tell who I am by the way I dress.
- My outward appearance is representative of the above other communities which I belong.
- I spend a lot of a little energy, money, and/or time on shoes, tee-shirts, jewelry etc. because?

Other Identity/Community

The categories listed above are provided to encompass some reoccurring issues and themes that have affected many different people. Remember that this is not an exhaustive or even an essential list, but rather a good place to begin. It is important that as an individual or as a group member you examine other significant relationships. For example, the guide was changed to include family identity at the suggestion of some individuals working with it. Before proceeding, consider whether the above categories adequately represent the major interest communities to which you feel attached. If not, consider what you mean by the area identified then add it to your list. Develop a few questions directed toward this specific dimension of your life.

Part Two

Overall Identity

We find that it is not only valuable to identify community memberships, but also to prioritize them. Prioritization can confirm valuable relationships, reveal undervalued relationships, and provide a more realistic view of relationships previously thought to be important.

- If I were to rank the importance of all the communities I belong to in the way they affect me as an individual, the ranking would look like this: (for example, 1. Political, 2. Racial/Ethnic, 3. Occupational, etc.)

Consider the following questions to reflect upon the ways that your community identities affect your curriculum planning:

- How would I rank the effect of my community identities on the kinds of art works that I show my students? Take a moment to consider examples from each area.
- How would I rank the effect of my community identities on the kinds of learning activities that I promote in my lesson plans? Take a moment to consider examples from each of your identity communities.
- How would I rank the effect of my community identities on my relations with other teachers and the field of teaching in general? Take a moment to consider examples from each of your identity communities.

Using the Mapping Identity Project

Completion of the map provides a deeper understanding of one's engagement in professional work. We have found the exercise to be useful with teachers at varying levels in their careers and in a variety of contexts. Because

Racial/Ethnic Identity/Community

- My ancestors are mainly (Spanish, Italian, African-American, Amish, etc.).
- I consider myself to be (White, Black, mainstream, mixed, I don't like being asked this question, etc.).
- I consider my ethnic identity a heritage that is informed by my biological heritage or my cultural experience because?
- This part of my identity is important or relatively unimportant because?

Occupational Identity/Community

- I consider myself to be first and foremost an artist, a teacher, a student, an art educator, or something else.
- I like this part of my identity, I am ambivalent about this part of my identity, or I want to change this part of my identity, because?
- The rest of the world respects my occupational identity or does not respect it because?
- Members of my occupational community respect or do not respect their identity because?

Health and Body Identity/Community

- My physical attributes greatly affect or do not affect the way I see myself and the way others see me because?
- My physical and mental health play an important role in the ways that I view the world because?
- Members of my health and body identity communities recognize and communicate their shared experiences with one another in what ways?

identities shift with continued participation in the world, the exercise can be repeated at various points throughout one's teaching life. We also encourage those who use the mapping exercise to add communities to the process. As with any map, the terrain may change, and new maps must be made.

The Mapping Identity Project can be valuable for individuals working alone to develop curriculum, and it is also useful when teachers plan together. The mapping process helps members of the group to be more aware of individual and collective perspectives. This awareness helps to establish a more open and embracing atmosphere during the curriculum planning and, presumably, the implementation process.

We have found that teachers readily value and explore ways in which mapping their own identities as teachers can be translated into instructional practices to be used with their students. An identity map is a tool for guiding and reflecting upon learning by both teachers and students.

Past institute participants have shared with us ways that they have adapted the exercise for use in their classrooms. In some cases, teachers used the identity mapping exercise to help students carefully consider their shared-interest community memberships as groundwork for approaching the study of art. The self-reflection process provided students with a better understanding of their identities at work while viewing and making artworks. Teachers have found that the process can be used to develop ideas related to the creation of art works. For example it can be used as a tool to generate an initial idea, to provoke thought in the midst of working on a project, to consider how another person might interpret the work, and to critique and reflect upon the final stages of the work.

Some of the teachers also used a variation of the mapping exercise to consider art made by others. After investigating the work of particular artists, for example, students attempted to complete the identity map by taking on the voice of the artist studied. Such an approach highlights the important notion that art-makers are real people, with influences stemming from real-world experiences.

Identity Maps and the Interpretation of Artworks

Artworks emerge from communities of interest and are interpreted by viewers, including students, who in turn have their own shared-interest communities. Needless to say, as time goes by, the interactions among all of these voices becomes a vibrant and interesting mix.

To use the identity map in the process of interpreting artworks, a teacher can have students review a collection of artworks and select one artwork to investigate. Recognizing that this initial selection will inevitably reflect a stu-

dent's community identity, the teacher can then ask students to consider how they made their choices in light of the identity map categories. In a large class discussion, the teacher and students discuss each category in relation to how they made their selection. The students can then prioritize the importance of the categories in relation to their choices and discuss their prioritization in small groups.

With their attention directed toward their chosen artwork, students can then use their identity maps as a guide to consider the communities of interest that have affected the development of their selected artwork. For example they might ask, "What is the religious identity of the work?" They offer reasons for attributing the specific identity to the work. Pushing toward art history, a teacher might ask students to consider the religious identity of the culture within which the art work was produced. The complexity of interpretation becomes clear as the student sees that there might be difference among the religious identity of the work, the religious identity of the artist and the students' own religious identity. In addition, they might consider the religious identity of the culture within which the artwork was produced and the students' own religious identity. In addition, they might consider the religious identities of past critics and historians who have shaped our understanding of the work(s).

Using the identity map as a tool for interpretation can provide student and teachers with a means of understanding that, in addition to artworks, texts, conversations, classroom practices, and other cultural phenomena are all developed out of communities of practice. Teachers may not only guide the interpretation of artworks but also guide the interpretation of groups of works, exhibition spaces and museums, objects and events from popular culture, and interpretations of art writing and art books. Ask yourself, "Does my favorite textbook have a cultural or community identity?"

Conclusion

For many practiced teachers, working with students comes easily and seems to be a natural outgrowth of their lives. Good teaching includes reflective practices that provide teachers with a means to gain fresh insights into the work. Identity mapping is one way to accomplish this. It provides a means to intentionally reconsider the social and cultural dimensions of our lives that we bring into classrooms.

Authors' Note

Our thanks to Professor Elaine Cunfer, Communication Design Department, Kutztown University for her design of the Worksheet.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

1. What do the authors mean by community? What kinds of frameworks support the authors' use of community? Explain. What is the relationship between community influences and curricular choices?
2. Why is it relevant for teachers in the classroom to know this about themselves? How can a discovery of identity help us in the classroom?
3. Complete Part I and II of the "Mapping Identity Project." Did your understanding of your identity change from the description that you wrote before reading this chapter? In what ways? What did you discover? What did others in your class discover? Once we discover this about ourselves, how can we relate this to the differences among our students?
4. What are the community identities of your students? Who are your students with regard to race, gender, ethnicity, etc.? How do your community identities affect your choices for your students' learning? Do you consider the community identities of your students when making choices?
5. How can an identity map be used in the elementary classroom? What might we learn about ourselves and our students by completing identity maps? What problems or limitations might arise from attempting to map our identities in an elementary classroom?

RESOURCES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Alicia de Alba. *Curriculum in the postmodern condition*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Michael W. Apple. *Power, meaning, and identity: Essays in critical educational studies*. New York: Peter Lang, 1999.
- Louis A. Castenell, Jr. and William F. Pinar (Eds.). *Understanding curriculum as racial text: Representations of identity and difference in education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Henry A. Giroux. *Living dangerously: Multiculturalism and the politics of difference*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.
- Cameron McCarthy & Warren Crichlow (Eds.). *Race, identity, and representation in education*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- William F. Pinar (Ed.). *Queer theory in education*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1998.
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- William F. Pinar. *Understanding curriculum: An introduction to the study of historical and contemporary curriculum discourses*. New York: Peter Lang, 1995.
- William A. Reid. *Curriculum as institution and practice: Essays in the delib-*

CHAPTER 9

QUESTIONS AND EXPLORATIONS

1. Where do our identities come from? Do they remain the same over time and in different contexts? Explain.
2. What is included in a person's cultural history? How does this conjoin with learning in the classroom?
3. What do students gain by having their cultural and historical identities included as a part of classroom learning?
4. What kind of opportunities for self-expression should we provide children when making art? How is the idea of self-expression related to that of identity?
5. Describe ways in which you have explored and expressed your identity. Have you ever used art as a means of understanding your identity?

Children Performing the Art of Identity

Charles R. Garoian

a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z
 alphabet cards stretch clear across the front of the classroom pinned above the front wall, to the left hangs a polyester American flag on a black wooden pole mounted at a 45° angle

a green chalkboard, framed with aluminum, covered with numerical symbols, formulas, figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, $67+32=99$, $\sqrt{2}=1.414$, $a^2+b^2=c^2$, $3\times 13=39$, 50% of 10=5 like the transmutations of an alchemist, they aspire to mystic truths

worn black felt erasers line the ledge covered with white dust adjoined with fragments of broken and used chalk—testimonies to ruminations, calculations, and articulations lost

large colorful posters tacked along the bottom of the chalkboard and along the entire front wall of the room, each instructing a proper breakfast diet prior to school: orange juice, milk, two pieces of toast, two eggs, two strips of bacon, and hash brown potatoes