

## GEOSCAPES:

### WHO AM I? WHO ARE WE? WHERE DO WE LIVE?

These three questions underpin the identity and diversity work that is the backbone of community cohesion work in schools and elsewhere. They are essential questions to explore, whether we are working within a school or community or reaching out to make a link with others. It is our starting point.

The following notes from workshops at the Cape UK Community Cohesion CPD day provide a possible framework for some of this exploratory work and illustrate how the use of creative processes – in this case drama and visual art – provide a mechanism for exploration that is both safe and challenging. Creativity allows for emotional response to find expression without over-exposing anyone and provides a tool for communication which transcends other potential communication barriers (e.g. linguistic competence) In other words, it allows everyone to find their own level, to contribute and feel included.

Who am I? ....leads to Who are we? And includes Where do we live?

#### DRAMA: STEP 1

Name and a lie: Stand in a circle. Going round the circle, everyone says their name and something about themselves that isn't true, e.g. I am the president of the United States/I love strawberry ice-cream/I want to climb Everest...the aim of this being to put everyone at ease, start to put names to faces and to see that everyone can do drama, because you have just made up something, which is what drama is.

#### ART: STEP 1

Make a name badge, using the same principle as the drama, i.e. write your name and then illustrate it how you would like to be seen or thought of – this can be factual or complete fantasy – it will be a talking point when you meet others.

#### DRAMA: STEP 2

Human geography: Naming a central spot in the room as somewhere, everyone goes to where they were born in relation to this place (it can be streets, towns, countries, etc depending on what's most applicable). Then everyone moves to where their mother was born, then their father....continue as long as it takes to show that everyone moves at some time...then back to place of own birth, think of something positive to say about it, why people should visit, go round and share these and then do the same with a negative stereotype about the place...

N.B. It is important to know and be sensitive to the possibility that some people will not know this information (e.g. if they are adopted) or that it may have painful connotations (e.g. if they are a refugee). It is important to suggest and support the activity with these things in mind and also to be aware if most of the group are in a huddle and one or 2 participants are clearly isolated, if they are the only ones who come from somewhere different to the majority. These are not reasons to avoid the activity, and they are important to include as opportunities to raise awareness of how where we come from forms a crucial part of our identity and how hard it is for people where this is not something they are comfortable with.

### DRAMA: STEP 3

Then, having noted what happens here, shift the focus from geographical communities and loyalties (or not!), to interests and what creates a 'community of interest':

e.g. 'if you like...animals/music/food/travel'...etc. You can move from group to group as you wish and then when it settles, ask 2 groups to meet and try to explain to each other why their group is good and why others should join them. The group listening has to then explain to the larger group what is so good about the other group. They do not have to feel it or believe it but they have to present an accurate and respectful account. This is important in developing empathy; understanding what it is like to stand in someone else's shoes.

### ART: STEPS 2 AND 3

The above drama can also be done in visual art form, where participants (students) can find out where people were born and then make a human geography map of where everyone is from.

Then they can make an interest map/diagram with Venn diagrams for those who want to be included in more than one interest group or community. This would involve a lot of discussion and would open up many possibilities...a class map/school map etc.

The idea here is for the children to find out what they have in common and what they don't. Suggestions would need to be put forward first in a teacher-led class session, then collated and discussed. The idea is to get eventually to the sticky issues where people often don't agree or understand each other and to see if there is enough common ground to find solutions.....

Start with making a visual representation of your own life, likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses etc. Include what and who are important to you. Then, working in pairs, make another 'picture' of your joint life, where are the commonalities, how would you represent that? Then work in larger groups to do the same thing until you have a whole class 'map'. Features of each class map can then be pooled to make a school map. If you then proceed to link with another school, this can be a way of introducing yourselves as your school community to another.....

When doing this kind of activity, please notice both *what* happens and *how* it happens. Sometimes just the process of doing something creative alongside others, with no pressure, creates an atmosphere of companionable talk...the picture or whatever it is starts to take shape and the conversation flows. There's no need for eye contact as everyone looks at what they are doing but can listen and join in when they want to. Many interesting things emerge in this kind of context. Then the course of the conversation affects the process and inevitably the product and so it continues in a cyclic way. This work uses the brain in a way that allows connections between thoughts and feelings to surface and find expression – the 'profound learning' defined by the National College of School Leadership and talked about by Pat in her paper and her introduction to the course. It also illustrates perfectly the concept that "identity is a matter of becoming as well as being." (Stuart Hall).

We hope you find these notes useful and wish you luck on your journey of exploration this year.

With thanks to Janine Waters of Manchester University.