

NOTES ON THE USE OF MAPPING IN THE COUNSELLING PROCESS

By

Dr. R. Vance Peavy

19 February 2002

Page 2 Creating Structure for the Practical Activity of Mapping

Page 6 SocioDynamic Visualizations and Mapping

Page 9 Map

CREATING STRUCTURE FOR THE PRACTICAL ACTIVITY OF MAPPING RVPEAVY Feb-02

Def: "Life space" refers to all of the influences or forces impinging on an individual at any moment in time, including inner and outer forces. . The concept of life space is a social concept similar to Kurt Lewin's concept of "social space" combined with the quasi-psychological concept, "landscape of mind".

Def: "Visualization" refers to the mental pictures, images, perceptions that an individual has of his or her "inner world", i.e., thoughts feelings, imaginings, and memories It refers also to the perceptions the individual has of the surrounding existential, social, material situation in which he or she is embedded.

Def: "Mapping" refers to materializing or making explicit by drawing/symbolizing/writing the visualizations that the help seeker has about his or her whole life space or some aspect of it. Mapping is regarded as a form of participative learning in which both help seeker and helper investigate and learn about the help seeker's life space through participating in the activity of mapping. Mapping is a way of showing "what is going on", "who is doing what", and "how the help seeker is experiencing his or her life". Mapping is a way of making the self-in-context "visible".

Mapping is done in conjunction with dialogue. It is a cooperative activity carried out by helper and help seeker. The helper **guides** the mapping process by providing a "light" structure. The help seeker produces the substantial content of the map from his or her memory and awareness of life experience.

Principal benefits that can derive from mapping include:

- Clarifying and simplifying complexities in the life space
- Identifying patterns and interconnections of life space features
- Produce understanding of the existential situation/context
- Define possibilities, as well as help seeker capacities and needs
- Clarify the influence of others on the individual and problem
- Help to organize and focus ideas, events, experiences, and feelings

It is the task of the helper to provide structural guidance for the mapping activity **without imposing content**. "Structure" is provided in three ways:

1. By **contributing to a social/communication space defined by:**

- a. A supportive atmosphere
- b. Reliability and interpersonal trust
- c. Reasonable freedom from interference
- d. A sense of cooperative engagement and personal interest
- e. Easy and facilitated access to relevant information and any institutional "rules" that apply to counselling

- f. Presence of careful, patient listening
- g. Opportunities for “learning by doing”

2. By making **statements that guide and shape the process of mapping.** Examples of process guiding statements include:

- Use this large paper and make a big circle that we can call your life space (or personal world, or situation, etc.)
- In this space we will try to make a picture of your problem, family, work environment, future, relationship, etc.
- My job is to ask you some questions and your job is to try to show your answers by drawing them in your life space.
- Make a mark or stick figure representing yourself in the space
- You can draw, write, make marks or use any method or symbols that you want to make a picture of what we are talking about.
- Mapping is something we can work together on, and will help both of us understand your situation better

3. **By asking questions that direct the help seeker’s attention to “relevance” structures in the life space or problem being mapped:**

- If there are other people who are involved in your concern, who are they?
- How do you feel influenced by others? How?
- How did you get involved in this concern to begin with?
- If you did not have this problem, how would your life be different?

- If you could change one important part of this problem, what would you change?
- What do you need to have or learn to do in order to resolve this difficulty?
- If you could stand outside of your problem and look at it as though someone else had it, what would you say to that person that might be helpful to them?
- What do you find yourself “talking to yourself” or saying to yourself when you are worried or thinking about your problem?
- What different routes have you thought about that might get you over or beyond this difficulty? What is getting in your way of moving forward?
- In your opinion, what is the key to finding or making a solution for your difficulty?
- When you think about, or talk to others about your difficulty, what kind of emotions or feelings do you experience(have)?

More suggestions on how to provide structure for mapping

When mapping it very important to do the best you can to adjust the mapping process to the ability, experience and readiness of the help seeker. The actual life experience(past, present, anticipated) remains the constant focus: This means:

- Encourage the use of whatever kind of drawing, writing, symbolizing that the help seeker is able and willing to use
- Ask the help seeker if he or she is willing and ready to try making a map—explaining what mapping is and why it is helpful to most people—don’t pressure or manipulate

- Emphasize working together, cooperation, and the fact that mapping can benefit both help seeker and helper
- Stay close to the life experience of the help seeker—don't interpret, theorize or impose your own ideas on the content of the help-seeker's expressed experience
- Don't be afraid to make specific structuring suggestions about how to proceed with the mapping process
- Remember that a help seeker knows much more about his or her life than you do; and that he or she will have to live with the choices, plans, conclusions that are constructed and accepted during the counselling process. **Stay close to the help seeker's life experience**. Mapping is a method for helping an individual to articulate his or her life experience. Mapping is a **descriptive** process, not a theorizing process.
- Keep mapping and dialogue in tune with each other. Dialogue enables mapping and mapping enables dialogue. Dialogue, mapping and respectful silence/reflection form a powerful trilogy for making sense of life experience.
- When you have an impulse to offer an idea or suggestion to the help seeker, make it clear that it is your idea or perception and may or may not make any sense to the help seeker. Mapping is meant to be a method for providing the help seeker with a greater sense of personal control over his or her own life. It is not meant to be a springboard for the helper's favourites ideas or "expert" opinions. The counsellor's expertness lies in the capacity to assist others to articulate, clarify, and organize their life experiences into coherent patterns.
- Remember that mapping, just like dialogue, is a meaning-making activity—it is a method for making sense out of the help seeker's existential situation and his or her ideas and actions in that situation.

Some of the common **pitfalls** of mapping include:

- Lack of counsellor confidence and skill in mapping
- Counsellor is either too imposing or, conversely, too inactive
- Help seeker is not ready to map or feels incapable of drawing
- Counsellor inflexibility in communication and role definition
- Counsellor desire to solve the other's problem
- Counsellor does not pay adequate attention to relationship factors
- Help seeker has expectations that cannot be met by counselling
- Counsellor does not know how to keep mapping and dialogue going on at the same time
- Over emphasis on efficiency, goal achievement, time-use, and "data-pushing", institutional rules, objectivity, and officialness.
- Counsellor or help seeker fail to realize that a map is always a temporary construction and changes as circumstances change.

SOCIODYNAMIC VISUALIZATIONS and MAPPING

... an introduction by Dr. R. Vance Peavy.

To visualize is to form a *visual mental image* of something. Visualizations can be constructed from memories, observations, immediate thought and feeling processes, or formed as anticipations and imagined futures.

Mapping is the activity of *materializing visual images* - that is, turning mental images into drawings, maps, graphs, designs, symbols, art forms, collages, and other materialized artefacts of the human mind. Mapping is a natural function performed in all cultures by nearly all children.

In SocioDynamic Counselling the processes of visualizing and mapping are regarded as essential cultural tools for communicating. Mapping is such a fundamental activity that we might refer to the human being as *homo cartographicus*. In SocioDynamic Counselling, mapping is used to further the learning and communication of both counsellors (in training) and help-seekers (who are trying to construct better pathways in life).

Speaking-listening, writing-reading, and visualizing are the three principal means of making meaning, communicating, and constructing cultural sense.

To watch mapping occur is an opportunity to observe the magic of a human mind mediating its objects of consciousness.

Maps do not just represent *reality*; they are tools for *constructing* reality.

. . . Creating a Life Space Map.

While practically anything can be mapped, we have chosen an example dealing with the subject "mapping your future."

The working premise is this: "My future as a media designer by a seventeen-year-old secondary school student," reconstructed on computer from the student's original hand-drawn map.

The mapping activity should be approached as a cooperative process. The counsellor contributes the structure of the map by asking meaning-generating questions. A "meaning-generating" question is one that invites the participant to supply information about the life space that is personally meaningful. The individual being guided fills in the content of his or her own life space through answering the questions. The process should be flexible, and the person should be encouraged to draw, use symbols, images, metaphors, icons, or write words or short sentences.

Using colored pens also allows the person to indicate his or her experience by choosing colors. The basic strategy is to develop a visualization map of what the person considers to be important and personally meaningful, and to place different factors into association with each other. The guide can support the mapping process by supplying good questions, humour, a creative, open attitude, and by assisting when the person wants assistance.

The counsellor or teacher guides the individual or group with the following instructions: "Draw a large circle and place yourself in the enclosed space somewhere. This is your personal world."

- a. Some people imagine that they will have several futures, others imagine only one. What do you imagine (dream about) as the future you would like to have? Somewhere in your life space (or personal world), draw or write a little bit about your future or futures. If you have more than one future in mind, which seems most appealing to you?
- b. Who are the important people in your life who might help you make progress toward the future you are imagining? Place them somewhere in the circle.
- c. What are some important stepping stones toward your future? Place them in the circle.
- d. What do you think might prevent you from moving toward your future? Indicate this in your personal world.
- e. How will your life be if you get to the future you want? Can you indicate this in your life space?
- f. Are there things which you must do or learn to do if you are to move in the direction of your future? Indicate this in your life space.

The resulting map can be viewed on Page 7 of this section.

In conclusion, then, it is worth emphasizing that all mapping activities proceed together with dialogue. Each supports the other.

Mapping brings the three modes of *meaning communication* - namely, Speaking, Writing and Visualization - into *meaning construction* for both the help-seeker and the helper.

Through life space mapping the helper is able to enter into the life space of the other and understand the meaningful life experiences and factors of the other's personal world.

Mapping can assist both guide and help-seeker to visualize a complex situation and to see how different elements of the life space are patterned. It brings clarity and a temporary structure to the problem or decision situation.

It is an excellent example of learning and problem-solving through guided participation.

