

Kinship Mapping

Introduction

We are our relations. We are born into certain family, social, ancestral, historical, biotic, and cultural relations. No person is self-contained but rather is embedded relationally from the first breath. This is our matrix of life. Even before we develop language or a separate sense of self, our relations constitute who we are. Mapping your relations can reveal many facets of your kinship.

Land Kinship

A good place to start mapping is the land where you were born or a special place you most remember. With a piece of paper and colored pencils, you can just use lines and stick figures for your map, developed and enhanced later. Research may be required to answer these questions.

Draw a map of this land: key landforms and major water bodies. You can choose the scale. Does this place have a bioregional name?

Place a marker for your home, areas part of your normal range of movement as well as major human habitations.

Mark the origin of your drinking water and the main foodstuffs that you eat from that region. What are the soils does this region?

Add how people live in association with the land - the main activities and industries.

Add symbols for the birds that greet you each day, native trees and plants you were most familiar with, the animals and insects common to the region.

Add symbols to note where the sun rises and sets, the stars and constellations that draw your attention at night, typical weather cycles and seasonal changes. You can include things like growing and resting seasons, rainfall, amount of sunlight and storm seasons.

Debriefing Kinship Mapping

Creating a Narrative

Write a narrative that expresses your embeddedness in this bioregion in a certain historical moment. Describe all the natural relations that were your immediate kin, living and nonliving, as the matrix of your life. Tell any stories that convey how you feel/felt connected to this place. Can you redraw the map to illustrate your connections, your relationality?

Creating an Self Introduction

Write a short introduction to yourself as your kin.

Reflection Questions

Introduce yourself by your kinship...how does this disrupt modernity and normalized identities?

Does this way of describing yourself foster a shift in perception?

How can you stay mindful of “all your relations” each day?

How can we recognize and accept the kin relations each person carries?

What other kinship relations could you map?

How might this change your way of being in the world?

Resources

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013). Milkweed Press.

Restoring the Kinship Worldview by Wahinkpe Topa (Four Arrows) and Darcia Narvaez (2022). North Atlantic Books.

Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World by Tyson Yunkaporta. Text Publishing Company.

Transformative Sustainability Education: Reimagining our Future by Elizabeth Lange (2023). Routledge.

“The Signature of the Whole: Radical interconnectedness and its implications for global and environmental education” by David Selby in Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning edited by E. O’Sullivan, A. Morrell, & MA O’Connor (2002). New York: Palgrave.

“Riverspeaking: the spiraling of transformative and restorative learning toward kinship ethics” by Elizabeth Lange in Envisioning Futures for Environmental and Sustainability Education edited by P. Corcoran, J. Weakland & A. Wals (2017). Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers.

Examples of Kinship Mapping

