

Chapter 5

Self-Mapping: The Power of Self-Produced “Self” Images as a Stimulus to Action and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

Self-mapping is a self-reflection paradigm in which the self-mapper, through self-produced images, documents their thoughts about intellectual journeys, professional/personal aims, courses of action, mapping milestones (“memes”), as well as the navigational points to achieve the goals. Self-mapping methodology places the “self-as-researcher” inside a creative process, in which the “self” identifies institutional requirements (e.g., toward candidature, promotion, publications, etc.) and symbolically visualises the progress toward identifiable end-goals. This chapter explores the importance of images and visual media in placing the self within contemporary instructional cultures of an individual’s reality. It argues that the images are specific, purposeful, and personal rather than auxiliary to other forms of visual meaning-making. The process empowers self-mappers to participate in a visual culture of “a future self” that is of their own creation.

INTRODUCTION

In August 2015, the chapter’s author gave an interactive keynote presentation titled, “Self-Mapping: Brokering the Borders of the Research Universe,” for Central Queensland University’s School of Education and the Arts Research Symposium. The author was interested in exploring connections between the power of self-produced images and professional self-realisation. Involvement as the keynote speaker in the symposium facilitated the trialing of an approach termed “self-mapping,” a creative institution-based problem-solving and self-actualisation methodology. Symposium attendee participants in this trial included: research of higher degree (RHD) students, academic staff, and professional staff. Ethic clearance was secured as a low-risk study (for projects involving negligible or low risk, as defined by the National Statement). In contributing to the ongoing questions around imagery, creativity, and self-

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realisation, this theorised discussion investigated the central question: What is the power of self-produced self-images as a stimulus to action and empowerment among post-graduate students, their supervisors, and/or academic and professional staff working in a tertiary context?

To this end, self-mapping moves beyond traditional idea-generation methodologies and places the self as the point of origin. In addition, it places the self-as-researcher inside an evaluative practice of self-creative visualisation and imaginative self-orientation. It takes into account institutional milestones (memes) within the postgraduate research/supervision experience and/or the working environment of the tertiary context. The following discussion includes participant commentary and exemplars. Participants volunteered to take part in an investigative research study in which respondents (participant A, B, C, and D) created a self-map (whether hand-drawn or digital) and a personal commentary/reflection regarding their self-mapping experience.

Through an interpretation of Robertson's (2010, 2011) concept of memes—combined with theories of the self as cultural and discursive construct—self-mapping is examined as a practice of connecting self-constructed images with “hope-for” futurity in the form of a primary end-goal. Examples of participant self-maps will be provided and analysed to determine their utility in facilitating participant opportunities to:

- Visualise and self-examine personal and professional outcomes toward primary end-goal(s) with a view to understanding and symbolically expressing associated personal and institutional requirements.
- Utilise self-mapping in tandem with forms of visual expression to raise questions about how personal mapping and orientation intersect to document forward goal-oriented progression and the implications for understanding personal and professional identity.

Self-mapping can be conceptualised as a methodological framework distinct from idea-generative practices such as mind-mapping, SCAMPER (developed by Bob Eberie), brainstorming, brain-writing, and reverse thinking. The unique feature of self-mapping is that this methodology places the self—the “for self”—as the main component in both creating visual ideologies of the self and determining relationships between points. Traditional generative methods associate single words and ideas in numerous linkages to other ideas and concepts. However, self-mapping links the self directly with main ideas in an outward, multi-directional set of intersecting trajectories toward identifiable end-goals radiating from the self as the central point of origin.

RESEARCH ON SELF MAPPING: DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES, CONCEPTS, AND DEFINITIONS

The concept and practice of self-mapping span many disciplines. In mathematics, self-mapping defines “a mapping of a domain $F: U \rightarrow U$ to itself” (Krantz, 1999, p. 78). Mindful practices, such as the Alexander Technique, defines self-mapping as the “self is what the self is, you yourself with your intrinsic nature and all your genetic makeup. It is your self map, not yourself, that governs how you feel and what you do” (Conable, 2009, p. 6). Geographers undertake community mapping as “[a community's] active struggle over place ... [a] question of ‘geography’ in the original sense of ‘earth writing’ (*geo-graphia*) or self-mapping” (Crampton & Stewart, 2002, p. 525). Anthropologists undertake projects of self-mapping as:

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