

## TEACHING NOTES

### **You-topias – constructing identities**

What we put on and inside our bodies, the things we wear and eat, say a lot about ourselves, our culture and identity. ‘Placing’ ourselves in space and time is also important in saying who we are. These are the building blocks of You-topias.

These notes are for guidance. You may take these building blocks and interpret them in your own way – we are looking for diversity. I have however provided a step by step guide for those who may find them useful. They begin by exploring what your students wear and eat. We then move on to the ‘places’ where your students feel ‘at home’, in some cases these may be fantasy places - where are they, when are they? We conclude by the creation of ‘postcards’ from them to us, from their places, their times.

Depending on your group and how they may best respond, spread the stages described below over an appropriate number sessions according to the time you have, the concentration span of your group etc. *NB. Notes for more advanced students are bullet pointed and in italics.*

### **1. WHAT WE PUT ON:**

#### **Step One:**

- A) What clothes or items of adornment do they like to wear themselves – encourage them to describe them, and the elements that make them up –pattern, colour, texture - as precisely as possible.
  - *With more advanced students, discussion might include influences of fashion, popular culture, various strands of youth sub-cultures etc.*
- B) What clothes or items of adornment do their parents like to wear – again encourage them to describe them, and the elements that make them up, as precisely as possible.
  - *Again discussion might include what might influence their parents tastes,*
- C) What ‘special’ clothes or items of adornment are worn by themselves or their families for important events – again encourage them to describe them, and the elements as precisely as possible.
  - *What influences are at work. Do they have a sense of ‘traditional dress’ or dress that signifies their culture – what are the signifiers, the material, the cut, colours, patterns.*
- D) Ask them to write a first draft of a poem, ‘story’ or piece of creative writing about differences that might show up when the above situations – themselves, parents, the everyday and special - collide. Humour, frustration or a sense of estrangement can be expressed here. This is an exercise to encourage them to recognise what might be ‘traditional’ or a particular cultural signifier, and what might be regarded as mainstream British/International styles, age or gender signifiers. Discuss this and their responses to the situations expressed.
- E) In the light of the discussion, get them to write a final version.

**Step Two:**

- F) Ask them to bring in 3 items of 'signifying' clothing or adornment, or at least pictures of these, that express their identity as explored in step one. Ask them to 'record' these, through drawing, photocopying/scanning, photographing.
- *Details of 'signifying elements' are important here e.g. something that expresses a) their particular individuality, which might also signal age and gender, b) their culture, with references to the 'traditional', religious or even stereotypical (if done within a critical framework)*
  - *For more advanced students, see reference to creating a photo-tableau below or create/enact a multicultural fashion show or event where clothes are an important focus.*

**2. WHAT WE PUT IN:**

**Step One:** exploring the concept of expressing identity through food:

- A) Pupils individually choose their favourite food and describe it – encourage them to define the different elements that make it up.
- *Is this influenced by their age, culture, gender?*
- B) Describe their parent's favourite food – again encourage them to define the different elements that make it up.
- How does it differ from their own taste, what might the reasons be?*
- C) Explore whether they have a sense of 'traditional' or 'special occasion' foodstuffs (or have they been to their family's homeland and sampled food there?). Again encourage them to define the elements that make it up
- D) How do they eat, what 'ceremonies' or 'special preparations' go with these special occasions, what utensils do they use, what other items might be involved.
- E) You may wish to ask pupils to write a poem, a 'story', or a piece of descriptive writing about such an event.
- *How do they view the 'traditional' foods of their culture. Are they interested or involved themselves or do they simply respond to family/cultural expectations.*
  - *Are they interested in foods normally associated with other cultures. Do they enjoy them? What do they think those foods, and etiquette surrounding them, says about the cultural identity of others?*

**Step two,** Gathering visual references:

From the information gathered in Phase One, find or purchase a range of foodstuffs and utensils and arrange in the centre of the class. If your group is up to it, you might ask them to arrange these items for a special multicultural dinner party.

- F) Ask pupils to draw/paint the items which relate closest to them, their family or culture (use of colour is important, so choose the most suitable drawing/painting media to your group's skills and abilities)
- G) If you have cameras (Polaroid or digital preferably but any will do) take photographs of these items and children working. If there are special ways of eating you might get the children to demonstrate this and photograph.

**H)** Do they have any pictures of themselves, family's or friends eating at 'special occasions'. If they don't have such pictures can they find equivalent of appropriate foods in magazines, cookery books etc. Menus would also be useful. Get them to bring these in and copy them.

***For more advanced students:***

- *Each individual record – draw, paint, photograph using colour – a meal that expresses a) their individual taste, whatever that is b) that expresses their 'traditional' culture – this can be generic or specific, e.g. regional c) that expresses something specifically about their age and/or gender.*
- *One might for example create a multicultural dinner party for the group, wearing the clothes, using the appropriate utensils and other signifying items. This could be an installation, a 'role play' (with people wearing appropriate dress) for a photographic tableau, or a photo(shop)montage.*
- *Alternately one could design objects and utensils for 'World Restaurant'.*

***Issues to consider in the creation of a photo-tableaux***

- A) *Creating the Context:*** *the setting for the dinner party, where is it, what is the mood, is it harmonious, uncomfortable, confrontational?*  
***Activities:*** *Brainstorming, visual research, photographing or finding images of suitable locations.*
- B) *Devising a situation:*** *explore the group dynamic and how this fits with the context, mood etc.*  
***Activities:*** *Discussion, role-play.*
- C) *Individuals respond to 'the situation'***, *choose what 'roles they may feel appropriate comfortable in or stimulated by, but in relation to 1 & 2.*  
***Activities:*** *Role-play and photography with Polaroid or digital cameras.*
- D) *Choose 'props' and select details*** *that may add an additional layer of meaning. These can be references to known or imagined events and incidents that help contextualise, 'fix' or extend the meaning of the situation they are acting out within a wider social context: e.g. references to real or imagined historical events or recent news items, a metaphor for a 'meeting of nations'.*  
***Activities:*** *Research, collection and recording of visual references and/or objects.*
- E) *Experiment with composition.*** *Play with all the elements, emphasising hierarchy of importance in the signifiers, what is in the foreground, middle distance, and background. Consider scale, depth of field, readability, etc.*  
***Activities:*** *Photography (digital or Polaroid), editing and composing.*
- F) *Finalise tableaux;*** *vary camera angles, in particular experiment with lighting to match the location and the mood of the 'situation'. Do initially with digital or Polaroid then when satisfied shoot final version in high resolution (film or digital).*

### 3. PLACE AND TIME

**Step One:** Ask students to bring one or more of the following items into class that recall a significant incident or situation:

- A) a photograph featuring their home, their neighbourhood or usual haunts.
- B) a holiday snap
- C) a postcard
- D) a souvenir

**Step two:** Students individually present their items to the group, indicating the following:

- why the moment was important.
- who was there
- how the object/image reminds them of the moment and that time (what kind of details, objects, the weather, how the 'mood' was indicated etc.).
- What is missing, or how the object/image could be improved to more accurately represent the moment and that time.
- what is it about the moment that makes it enduring and what is there about it that they might carry into their future.

**Step three:** From ALL the above references the students create their own postcard expressing themselves now, from their place and time.

This can be done using drawing or collage (for example photocopying/scanning things they have brought in) they should try to incorporate:

- references to what they wear
- what they eat/how they like to eat
- who they like to have around them
- where they feel 'at home' – a sense of place
- an indication of what makes this time special

### **The 'Futuretown And Beyond' Web Site**

The final images will be posted on the *Futuretown And Beyond* web site at the TownCentRIC. The web designer will need them at a particular resolution and information will be given at a later date about this and other technical matters.

In the meantime, if the images are being created digitally or scanned, make them at a resolution at which you can get a good quality printout (e.g. 10" x 8" x 300ppi), and they can be sampled down later. All images should be in landscape format.

They will also be made available to the public as 'virtual postcards' that may be accessed and sent from the web site with an added message or greeting.

Where the final image is a group effort, an 'image map' will be made to identify each student's input. Either on a printout or a photocopy of the image, each student's area of input needs to be drawn around and attributed with a name. This is to indicate to the web designer where 'hot spots' should be for accessing each student's background information.

This background information should be made up of not more than one page of text and images per student – of what their interests are etc. It can be identified by their first, though not their full name, for their personal protection. No addresses or phone numbers should be given. This material will need to fit onto a floppy disk, so any images should be small and low resolution. Further information will be given later. Unless a specific format is requested by the web designer, save all images as medium resolution JPEGs.

All classroom work needs to be completed by mid June and the final material delivered to the web designer. The work will be launched at TOWNCENTRIC during the week of the 2 July, 2001.

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