Who I Am Poems (Introductory-Level)

Preparing and Assigning:

This activity begins an active introspective process while continuing to provide opportunities for individuals to make connections with each other. Participants write short poems, starting each line with "I am," encouraging them to describe in their own words who they are and what’s salient to their identities.

Objectives:

In any attempt to increase awareness and encourage self-development, it is crucial to engage participants in activities that call for introspection and self-reflection. It is also important to provide opportunities for participants to make connections across, and even within, identity borders. The "Who I Am" activity can provide a non-threatening starting point for encouraging self-reflective thought and introspection. It is a safe way for participants to think about and share the influences that have shaped their identities. Also, it continues the connection-making process as participants find unexpected similarities and differences between themselves and others in the group.

This activity also can be an excellent closing activity, allowing folks to re-connect at a self-defined and human level at the end of an experience in which they are discussing difficult issues.

Instructions:

Ask participants to take ten to fifteen minutes to write a poem called "Who I Am." Instruct them that the only rule is that each line should begin with the words "I am..." Leave it open to their interpretation as much as possible, but suggest that they can, if they wish, include statements about where they’re from regionally, ethnically, religiously, and so on; memories from different points in their lives; interests and hobbies; mottos or credos; favorite phrases; family traditions and customs; and whatever else defines who they are. Be sure to let them know that they will be sharing their poems.

Facilitator Notes:

In order to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to share her or his story, you might consider breaking the group into diverse small groups of 8-10 if necessary. Give participants the option either to read their poems or to share parts of their poems from memory.

Points to remember:

1. Because some individuals will include very personal information, some may be hesitant to read their poems, even in small groups. It is sometimes effective in such situations for facilitators to share their poems first. Consider sharing your poem before asking students to write their own pieces. If you make yourself vulnerable, others will be more comfortable doing the same.
2. Be sure to allow time for everyone to be able to speak, whether reading their poems or sharing them from memory.
3. If you’re using this as a final activity, not much processing is necessary. Encourage applause and thank folks for sharing their poetry.
4. If you use this activity in the middle of a class or workshop, have some process questions ready. When everyone has shared, ask participants how it felt to share their poems.
5. Ask what, if any, connections people made with each other from this activity. What were some commonalities across poems? Did any of these surprise you?
6. You might also consider asking people to get up and talk to someone with whom she or he felt a connection through the poetry.

Sample - My Personal "I Am From" Poem:

I am basketball on a snowy driveway.
I am fishsticks, crinkle-cut frozen french fries and frozen mixed vegetables.
I am primarily white, upper-middle class neighborhoods and racially diverse schools.
I am Donkey Kong, Ms. Pac Man, Atari 2600 and sports video games.
I am football on Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day.
I am "unity in diversity" and "speaking from your own experience."
I am triple-Wahoos, earning three degrees from the University of Virginia.
I am diversity, multicultural education, identity, introspection, self-reflection, and social action.
I am Daffy Duck, Mr. Magoo, Hong Kong Phooey, Foghorn Leghorn, and other cartoons.
I am Tae Kwon Do, basketball, the batting cages, a soccer family, and the gym.
I am a wonderful family, close and loving and incredibly supportive.
I am films based on true stories and documentaries
I am the History Channel, CNN, ESPN, BRAVO, and Home Team Sports.
I am a passion for educating and facilitating, personal development and making connections.