The power (and caveats) of body mapping as a visual methodology with vulnerable youth

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore the NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) experiences of young people living in impoverished settings.

Design/methodology/approach – Methodologically, this study was informed by a qualitative analysis of visual and textual data related to a body mapping exercise with eleven young people who were participants in a four-day start-up workshop in a larger action research project.

Findings – The findings reveal that, although being NEET negatively affects young people's self-esteem, confidence, hope for the future and general well-being, body mapping can help them discover latent assets useful for reducing their insecurities.

Originality/value – Researchers using this method need to be well prepared to deal with possible emotional trauma, and to this end, we provide some guidelines for the effective implementation of body mapping.

Keywords Assets, Holistic well-being, NEET, Support needs, Youth unemployment

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Youth unemployment increases vulnerability to decreased psychological well-being. Being unemployed can manifest in the denigration of self-worth, loss of hope and meaning and a decline in cognitive performance due to high anxiety levels (Thalmayer *et al.*, 2021). In addition, unemployment increases the risk of social exclusion and perpetuates social disadvantage, which in turn increases susceptibility to negative mental, physical and emotional outcomes (Finch and Bradshaw, 2021). Youth in South Africa have been rendered vulnerable by the intersectionality of multiple stressors stemming from, and contributing to, increased poverty (Fearon *et al.*, 2017). Although education is a critical factor in improving the future of children living in deprivation (Corbett and Fikkert, 2012), the under-resourced state of schools in socio-economically challenged communities contributes to, rather than addresses, the problem (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2016). Most schools in townships are characterised by overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources for teaching, learning and extra-mural activities, a lack of basic services, such as clean

water and sanitation and insufficient access to social welfare services (Maringe and Moletsane, 2015). As Spaull (2015, p. 7) said nearly ten years ago, "Apart from the 25% of schools that are mostly functional, South African schools as they currently stand do not, and arguably cannot, impart to pupils the foundational knowledge and skills they should be acquiring at school." Unfortunately, there has not been much improvement since then. The lack of equity in the schooling system still places school-leavers at a disadvantage when they begin their adult lives.

Youth are highly vulnerable in the South African labour market, with an unemployment rate (i.e. those actively seeking work) of 63,9% for those aged 15–24 and 42,1% for those aged 25–34 years, which is worse than the official national rate of 34,5% (Statistics South Africa, 2022). This is of great concern as unemployment is seen as a source of instability and uncertainty, leading to negative psychological outcomes (Inanc, 2018). Although higher education participation is encouraged to improve societal equality as well as individual employment prospects, even graduates (approximately 12%) struggle to find employment (Van Lill and Bakker, 2022). The global data on well-being, education and employment as signifiers of opportunities for young adults reveal that many are being pushed into the margins of society, hampered in their quest to lead productive lives by entrapment in cycles of economic and social deprivation, leading to a loss of personal vision and hope for a better life (Radosavljevic et al., 2021). These young people tend to be at more risk of engaging in anti-social activities or adopting negative coping mechanisms (Vidic and Cherup, 2022). A recent study amongst the youth of a South African township (Wood, 2019) indicated many suffer from mental health issues, leading to a vicious cycle of negativity and loss of hope for a better life.

However, this is not to say that the graduates of township and rural schooling in South Africa have no potential. Although they have been rendered vulnerable by systemic inequalities, we proceed from the principle that young people have enormous potential when they have the opportunity to realise it. This opportunity also enables them to recognise the complex barriers that prevent them from accessing opportunities to maximise their capacity to participate in and contribute to the societies in which they live (Kearney et al., 2015). We approached this study through the lens of positive psychology, whose focus is on developing internal and environmental assets to enable people to flourish in adverse contexts (Phan and Ngu, 2017). By focussing on the positive, anxiety levels can be reduced and productivity and creativity increased (Phan and Ngu, 2017). We recruited youth who could be categorised as NEET to participate in an action learning and action research (PALAR) project to assist them to discover their assets so that they could draw on them to minimise their risk factors and increase their ability to navigate towards protective resources (Theron et al., 2022). Guided by AL theory (Cho and Egan, 2022), which incorporates cycles of action and reflection, we decided to use body mapping as one of the tools to help them increase their self-awareness and identify their support needs. This proved to be a powerful tool to help them get in touch with their successes, dreams and hopes, but it also required facilitators to be comfortable with and competent to contain the emotional trauma it aroused. We first explain our theoretical approach, before clarifying the concept of body mapping as a visual method. Thereafter, we explain the methodology used to identify the findings. The question that guided this article was: "What are the benefits and possible dangers of using body mapping with vulnerable populations such as NEET youth?"

Action learning as a positive theory of change

AL as a paradigm or theory of change acknowledges the worth of embodied knowledge, which is self-directed, empowering and sustainable (Zuber-Skerritt and Wood, 2019). By engaging with participants to find ways to develop creative learning and thinking "outside the box" that is appropriate for people facing social and economic adversities, youth who are

in danger of losing hope can develop confidence, capability and character and understand how they can initiate and sustain personal development. AL also builds resilience, as people develop their potential to respond to challenging environmental circumstances and to access and negotiate help from their social ecologies (Gama and Theron, 2023; Theron and Ungar, 2023). AL is a vital skill to enable people to adapt to the changing life demands of this century (Widad and Abdellah, 2022; Wood and Zuber-Skerritt, 2022). It can best be facilitated by working on a team project with those affected by the issue, such as in this case where unemployed young people investigated ways to improve their own situation. AL also helps to develop the five pillars of education for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). Through self- and group reflection, youth first have to develop high levels of self-awareness and think critically about who they are and who they want to be in relation to their social environments (learn to be); they can support each other to learn technical skills to enable them to sustain their lives (learn to do); group interaction helps them to develop interpersonal skills to enable them to "learn to live together" in this increasingly complex and diverse world; and continual reflection helps them to "learn to transform", to keep pace with the ever-changing demands of society. Finally, the AL process provides them with a framework to "learn to know" so that they become lifelong learners, able to apply these skills in any context. AL is thus multifaceted and constant, realised through the acquisition of skills and habits of mind that encourage a lifelong approach to learning, allowing individuals to respond to dynamic and fast-changing environments. This is in line with the growing literature on the need to shift from a didactic, reproductive, skills-based approach to education, towards one which develops critical and creative thinking, digital literacy, problem-solving and collaborative working, all skills required for the so-called fourth industrial revolution (Schwab and Sala-i-Martín, 2016) that will help youth to find or create their own employment opportunities. Participatory methods work well in developing the skills necessary for AL (Wood, 2019) and body mapping is the method we focus on in this paper.

Body mapping as a research method

Body mapping has been described as a research tool that combines visual arts, therapeutic practice and community development (Ebersöhn, 2020; Orchard, 2017; Elbrecht, 2022). The technique has now evolved to become a research method that is oral, visual and qualitative (Dinerstein *et al.*, 2020; Gastaldo *et al.*, 2018). Researchers in a variety of disciplines have used it to explore contextual factors that influence the well-being of individuals in regard to their social relationships and subjective beliefs about their lives and circumstances (Gastaldo *et al.*, 2018) and so we deemed it suited to helping youth to explore their lived experiences and identify their support needs. An asset-based and decolonising method (Smith, 2021) situated within an emancipatory paradigm (Lys *et al.*, 2018), body mapping can help to transform the mindsets of participants towards recognising their potential, rather than focussing on assumed deficits. Like other visual methods, body mapping can help participants overcome perceived power relations and/or language, cultural or age-related barriers to communication, to articulate visually the knowledge that they might have struggled to verbalise (Jokela-Pansini and Wintzer, 2021; Trombeta and Cox, 2022). Sharing their body maps with others also elicits constructive feedback, enhancing their subjectivity and ability to self-reflect. Body mapping positions the body as an epistemic site (McCorquodale and DeLuca, 2020), engaging the participants as co-producers of knowledge (Parker *et al.*, 2017), thereby building their self-worth and self-confidence (Lys, 2018). In this project, where we aimed to facilitate the holistic development and employability of NEET youth, we thought it an ideal method for the deep self-reflection necessary for AL. Participants drew a life-sized silhouette of their bodies on paper and then used various materials to indicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences in response to a specific prompt, as explained in the methodology section. This helped both

them and us to gain valuable insights into their circumstances and experiences. Through body maps, participants communicated personal issues, thoughts and feelings and generally told their life stories (Boydell *et al.*, 2018; Gastaldo *et al.*, 2012) that were brought to the surface through sharing the images with the group (Gastaldo *et al.*, 2018). This exercise caused some of the participants to become very emotional as they relived traumatic experiences. Yet, as they verbalised their trauma and painful experiences, body mapping proved to be therapeutic, bringing healing and closure to their painful past. Literature attests to the therapeutic nature of this method (Dew *et al.*, 2018; Gastaldo *et al.*, 2018), and although we did not initially envisage this purpose, it did, in fact, turn out to be a very therapeutic exercise as discussed in the findings.

Methodology
Guided by a transformative paradigm (Romm, 2015), we purposefully recruited eleven participants, four of whom were unemployed graduates placed as interns in the university and the rest members of two township youth clubs from the community partners in the project. The group comprised seven male and four female participants. The body mapping exercise was conducted on day two of a four-day start-up workshop of the larger PALAR project. The aim was twofold: (1) to help us as researchers to really understand the pressures and adversity facing the youth, so that we could find ways to facilitate support for their ongoing development; (2) to help the youth to better understand themselves and identify their embodied strengths and potential. Participants were asked to draw an outline of themselves on large sheets of paper and were given paints, drawing materials, glue, pipe cleaners, crepe paper, feathers and other decorative objects to use. They were instructed to "Draw yourself and using the materials at hand, depict how you see yourself now as a young person living in the township who is not studying or working. There are no right or wrong answers – be as creative as you like and express yourself. Give your map a caption and feel free to add notes or writing to explain what you want to say." Four hours were dedicated to this task to ensure the participants had enough time. After completion, they had a lunch break and then were invited to share and explain their body map to the rest of the group. We digitally photographed the body maps and encouraged the participants to take the original map home with them. We also audiotaped their narratives and ensured group discussion that we transcribed before thematically analysing them using the six steps of Braun and Clarke (2014). Since the participants were part of the data analysis sessions, in line with PALAR principles (Wood, 2022) (one of the outcomes of the project was to develop the research skills of the youth), they had the opportunity to add to or change the transcripts and present their interpretations of the data. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the institution involved (NWU 00402–22-A2), attesting to strict adherence to the concepts of justice, beneficence and respect for persons.

Discussion of findings
We now present the themes that emerged from the analysis of the visual and textual data. We indicate participants by the code P and support the findings with relevant verbatim quotations, visual evidence and relevant literature.

Theme 1: body mapping promoted self-awareness
Body mapping allows participants to reflect on both pleasant and painful past experiences and allows them to process their feelings towards acceptance (Elbrecht, 2022). The painful experiences identified by participants included repressed emotions arising from gender-based violence, bereavement, absent fathers, gangsterism, depression, poverty, drug abuse, near-death experiences and body shaming.

Talking about our past, some of us are coming out of rough roots and have experienced lots of pain
. . .. [P6]

My slogan is "pain and joy" . . . I went through depression, body shaming, gangsterism and I was a
party animal . . . I have written "pain", "excitement", "honesty", because this is who I am and what I
have experienced. [P3]

Not having a father was a bad experience, as I thought being around boys could be a good thing, only
to find out it was not, but it was a bad crowd, and did a lot of bad things [sic] and some were doing
drugs which was bad for me. [P4]

I have survived death twice . . . this took a lot of courage. I am a victim of gender-based violence
through my blood father . . .. [P10]

The integration of AL and body mapping provided participants with the opportunity to
become self-aware (Zuber-Skerritt and Wood, 2019). It helped open their eyes to who they are
and increased their self-knowledge, whilst also helping them identify and relate to their
emotions. For example, one participant said of the body mapping:

. . . is like you are going to be . . . aware of who you are and get to learn your personality, value your
emotions . . . This is helping people to become aware of themselves and their emotions. [P1]

Furthermore, engaging in the body mapping process and reflecting on life can have
therapeutic benefits, as noted by Ebersöhn (2020). Participants were able to delve deep into
their thoughts and identify their strengths and assets, as the following examples indicate:

. . . through soccer, I managed to stay away from the streets and substances, and also help my peers
stay off substances and crime through soccer. [P9]

So, I see myself as a humble person and a person that [sic] is willing to give light and positive vibes to
people and encourage them to not give up on their dreams. [P5]

As a result of reflecting on their lives, participants became appreciative of life and regarded it
as a gift, whilst also recognising their own value (see Plate 1).

I am grateful for the rebirth of life . . . Then my slogan is "the gift of life, the rebirth". [P3]

So my slogan is "the gift of life", [I have survived death twice] . . . My philosophy: you have a purpose
in life despite the circumstances . . .. [P10]

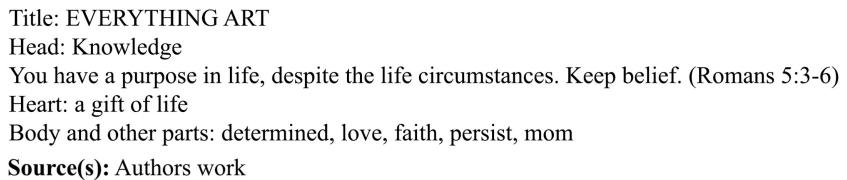. . . you're here for a reason, you have a purpose in life. [P2]

Moreover, the participants realised their potential to achieve great things with the right
resources. For example, they viewed education as an important tool with which they could
better their lives and communities (see Plate 2).

. . . education one day will get you to where you want to be, so I always . . . ensure I get to the desired
goal. [P2]

. . . education is basically the way of me giving myself what I really want, [I wasn't as fortunate when
growing up]. [P3]

Follow your dream, always remember that you matter in this life you are worth it, be humble.
This perspective aligns with resilience theory, which suggests that weaknesses, failures
and obstacles can be opportunities for self-growth and maintaining a positive outlook for the
future (Phan and Ngu, 2017). Instead of relying on negative coping skills and anti-social
activities, as noted by Vidic and Cherup (2022), body mapping helped participants discover
their inner strengths and become willing to learn to face negative emotions and to start
learning how to deal with adversity, as discussed in the next theme.

Title: EVERYTHING ART
Head: Knowledge
You have a purpose in life, despite the life circumstances. Keep belief. (Romans 5:3-6)
Heart: a gift of life
Body and other parts: determined, love, faith, persist, mom
Source(s): Authors work

Plate 1.
Body map of P3

Theme 2: body mapping helped the youth participants to come face-to-face with their emotions
The process of designing and constructing the body maps helped participants to access repressed feelings that they perceived were holding them back. After the body mapping exercise, they were glad that they had spoken out and released all the painful emotions which they had concealed within themselves. As a result of the freedom and relief they felt by sharing their emotional pain, participants decided that they would never again bottle up their emotions.

> I was about to say . . . you are going to be close to your emotions and . . . for me now I am no longer going to close my emotions inside of me [sic] and will always express how I feel and share with someone that is really close to me . . . so . . . it is okay to speak up and be free and share with someone you trust. [P1]

> It was emotional at first, but once we started doing it, I felt free just to talk about everything and just release it. Some of the things even my friends do not know about it [sic]. [P5]
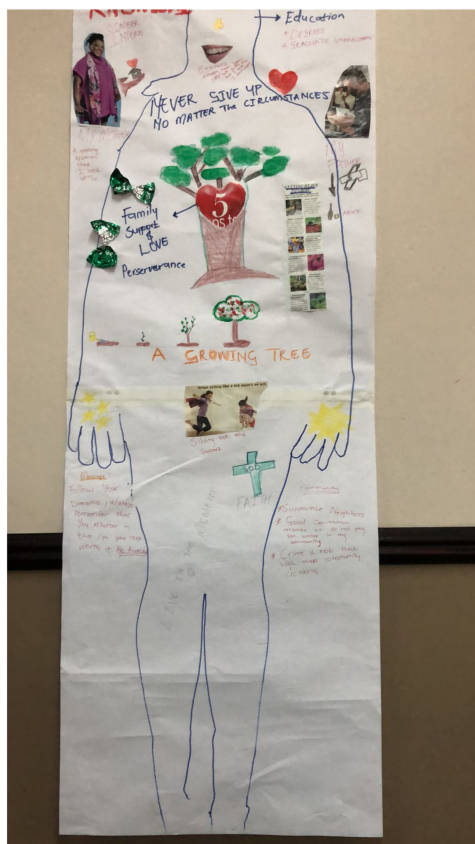
> It was fine, it wasn't that scary as much [sic], and that we have to express ourselves it was good. [P3]

> [I feel] Free and relieved. [P10]

Title: A GROWING TREE
Head: Knowledge, COMBER intern, Education, degrees, graduate unemployment
Emotions:
My father, alcohol abuse and debts
My mother, a strong woman that I look up to
Heart: family support and love, perseverance
Body and other parts: sibling love and support
Faith, GOD
Live in the moment
Community: supportive neighbours, good sanitation at least we do not pay for water in my
community, crime is not that high there are community actions.

Source(s): Authors work

Plate 2.
Body map of P4

Some of the participants became very emotional and we had to take them to a quieter place
and help them to talk about their feelings. Fortunately, two of the academic researchers had
the necessary qualifications and experience to do this. Therefore, by the end of the body
mapping exercise, all the participants were happy to share their images with the others,
except for one who did not wish to. However, we were told that she later did share with the

other three girls on the project with whom she was staying in the venue for the workshop. Thus, the body mapping exercise helped participants to disclose their painful experiences and circumstances which they normally would not express, and once they had done so, they realised that sharing them paved the way for a healing process, which they had not previously been able to access.

> We [normally] don't have time to deal with our problems. Sitting down and facing problems is another perspective in life and it gives you that sense of freedom somehow . . . I didn't think I would get the courage to present, to be honest without crying. [P10]

> It was emotional at first, but once we started doing it, I felt free just to talk about everything and just release it. Some of the things even my friends do not know. [P5].

> As youth, we tend to coop everything up and continue with the days because we believe that we don't have time to deal with our problems . . . I think the emotions are something you have to cross to ensure that you actually open up, because when you are in denial, you never going to [sic] get to the part where you accept and acknowledge your problems, and actually face them and tell yourself: "this is who I am and this is what makes me". [P10]

The above sentiments echo Gastaldo *et al.* (2018), who report that body mapping elicits a multitude of emotions and resurfaces intense and distressing memories. The same is reported by D'Souza *et al.* (2020), who assert that body mapping evokes emotions and memories by placing participants inside the situation (as compared to just thinking about it). It also makes them pay attention to their emotions and lived experiences. In the process of explaining their drawings and their narratives to each other and receiving feedback, they can learn alternative perspectives to their problems as highlighted by others. Although this exercise did open old emotional wounds, the sharing of personal painful emotions is normally helpful and beneficial psychologically for participants in the long run (Israelashvili *et al.*, 2020). Repression of trauma however can lead to long lasting negative mental, physical and behavioural symptoms (Griffin, 2020) that impair the life experiences and opportunities of the young person. The body mapping exercise thus helped the youths to understand the influence that their past experiences had had on their present feelings and lifestyle and enabled them to identify assets that could bolster their coping responses, as discussed in the next theme.

Theme 3: body mapping revealed the assets and potential of the youth

In as much as recalling the painful life experiences through body mapping triggered emotions, it also highlighted their resilience, both to themselves and to others. They explained how determination, personal philosophies, self-talk, role models and persistence had strengthened them.

> I consider myself as [sic] a very . . . persistent, determined . . . person . . . do not be ashamed of your past, because it is what makes you strong. [P3]

> My philosophy: you have a purpose in life despite the circumstances . . . focus on establishing yourself first, and your presence. [P10]

The opinions expressed above align with the findings of Theron (2016), who highlighted that young people do adjust to difficult circumstances, but also argued that the theories that focus on young people's resilience do not look at *how* young people do this. Body mapping proved to be helpful as a knowledge generation process, to enable young people to identify their strengths. Lys *et al.* (2018) contend that involving participants in the production of knowledge fosters self-assurance, enabling them to draw on their embodied knowledge and abilities (Zuber-Skerritt and Wood, 2019), thus fostering resilience. They not only learn about

themselves, but also become aware that others share similar incidents and feelings, thereby normalising experiences that they had kept "secret" due to shame or fear of rejection (D'Souza *et al.*, 2020).

Body mapping helped participants to see themselves in a positive light. For example, they described themselves as being "helpful" (P3; P10), "hard-working" (P10), "strong-minded" (P1; P8), "brave" (P1; P6), "business-oriented" (P2; P10) and "not influenced easily" (P8). They recognised that they were using their assets in becoming soccer coaches, mentors for younger children and farmers. When asked to highlight what the body map revealed about what they had to offer the community, they responded as follows:

> I can teach young ones about soccer and guide them not to indulge in crime and other things. [I can] also teach them to have a backbone; if they do not like something, they should tell others. [P4]

> I am not shy, and I am a brave person, so that all goes to my brain. My brain is very strong; I believe that any individual who is mentally strong nobody can do you anything [sic]. [P1]

> I am a . . . businesswoman. I do laundromat [sic] and have another new branch; we have more machines to use. Someone was asking me how you do it [sic] because when I started, I used my feet for blankets and my hands. I have learned from that, that if you do not do it yourself, no one else will do it for you. [P2]

> I don't think I get influenced easily . . . I am a strong person; mentally nothing can easy [sic] influence me as long as I made up [sic] my mind. [P8]

> I am an event organiser. I host events, concerts, and I am part of one of the best events management companies in the West Rand . . . Here by my head is the knowledge I have, which is agriculture and livestock. [P9]

The integration of AL and body mapping helped participants introspect and uncover their strengths and assets and become aware of how they could use them in a positive way to benefit self and others. Identifying assets reduces the likelihood of engaging in negative behaviour (Theron *et al.*, 2022). This process, therefore, strengthened protective factors and mitigated risk factors associated with unemployment and other challenges (Vidic and Cherup, 2022; Ebersöhn, 2020). Body mapping was the lens through which participants discovered that their adversities can be overcome through personal assets and strengths. Body mapping also helped them to think more hopefully about the future.

Theme 4: body mapping increased hope and motivation
Instead of feeling discouraged by their negative circumstances, participants seemed to find hope that things will turn out well for them and in their community, even if their current reality was not indicative of this. Their hope seemed to be connected to strong faith and support in the religious community.

> I am a Christian and my faith keeps me going . . . Every time after prayer, I tell myself that things will get better. Even though things take time to make sense or to happen, I believe that through faith, I believe that if it's meant for me, it will happen. Isaiah 60:22, "When the time is right, I the Lord will make it happen" is a verse that forms part of my philosophy. [P10]

> I love going to church to seek spiritual guidance. [P6]

> The siblings' love and faith that I have in God, that everything that you believe in it will eventually come to you and everything will just work out because of the energy that gives to the universe. [P5]

This finding is supported by Theron and van Rensburg (2020), who assert that relationships play a pivotal role in youths' resilience. Participants stated that they receive support and strength from their families, community and friends, with several of them expressing that their mothers were their source of strength and support. This finding echoes those of Theron

and van Rensburg (2020), who note that although parents may not prevent hardship, they may support, comfort and help young people to cope and adjust to adversity. Mothers in particular seemed to be their main source of support:

> My mother taught me a lot. She's my pillar of strength, financial supporter; she's one of the people I go to when I am facing challenges and difficulties of life. She taught me how to cook . . . She has always been my friend and my supporter, so whenever I come up with ma [sic] crazy idea, but I tell her this idea is going to work, she vouches for me, and she helps in any way she can. [P10]

> . . . there's no one for me to run to except my mother because she is always there for me. [P8]

Others found support in reading to educate themselves and from other community members (see Plate 3):

> My strength also comes from reading financial literacy books by Robert Kiyosaki, Donald Trump, and Napoleon Hill. I am a reader. I read a lot. [P10]

> With the support I got from my family, my friends and my community, I would say if it wasn't for the community, I wouldn't have started my business. [P2]

> The community, I would say; there are some supportive members which [sic] helped me to get to where I am . . .. [P5]

The above excerpts demonstrate the importance of social ecologies in the well-being of individuals. These results align with the tenets of positive psychology, which emphasises the role of social interactions as a foundation of strength for individuals (Phan and Ngu, 2017), resulting in favourable attributes for optimal functioning in the future (Theron and Ungar, 2023). The presence of supportive networks can enhance the resilience of young individuals (Gama and Theron, 2023; Theron and Ungar, 2023). This in turn could lead to the development of a sense of agency. Body mapping facilitated the identification of personal guiding principles and enabled individuals to reflect on their daily routines. As a result, participants were able to begin to see themselves as role models and self-starters, motivating them to spread their wings and soar like eagles. This mindset helped them remain focussed and encouraged, as evidenced by statements such as (see Plate 4):

> My message is that [sic] follow your dreams; always remember that you matter in this life, and you are worth it, and be humble. [P5]

> I would describe myself as a go-getter . . . I use the symbol of light, I make sure I lead by example, so in whatever I do, I make sure I put light into it . . . Being a woman does not limit you from achieving your dreams. Study hard; put your books first . . . I use mirrors as a reflection of my life every day and it motivates me . . . fly like an eagle . . . fly your wings, the world won't put bread on your table. [P2]

After the workshop, we encouraged participants to take their body maps with them. They later told us that they hung them in their bedrooms where they can easily see them as soon as they wake up every morning. From what participants said, their body maps are a constant reminder to them of their inner strengths which keeps their hope alive. Generally, participants learnt from the body mapping exercise and from the group discussions they had that they could achieve anything as long as they resolve to do it, exercise patience and are confident. This is evident in the following statement:

> I have learned that once you put your mind into [sic] something through perseverance, self-confidence, and being free-spirited, anything is possible . . . [P6]

> My message is that growth is a series of mistakes. It's going to be hard sometimes, but life is a risk; you have nothing to lose except knowing that you have tried at least . . . [P8]

Title: PAIN, JOY. DON'T BE AFRAID OF CHANGE.

Head: music helped me to be the person I am now. Being a lovely, caring, motivational person has shown me that life doesn't take sides all of us have a negative side. Change, Farming is part of the change.

Heart: I once used drugs thinking they will cure or decrease my pain. Body shaming was part of my problem where I was called by names and mocked. Being part of a gang member. Using drugs and alcohol while I was stressing.

The place I used to go for meditation: nature.

Body and other parts: keep your head up for the game. Don't hate the change. The pain and regression that was happening where having feel like partying. The community and the people around me helped me to change my past life. The police are the resources for fighting crime. Care, Love, Patience. Pain, excitement, honesty, faith, teamwork, listen.

Source(s): Authors work

Plate 3.
Body map of P1

This echoes Lys *et al.* (2018), who argue that taking part in group discussions increases self-confidence. This was evident as some participants did not want to share their stories at first, but later after listening to others, they were motivated to share. Furthermore, as researchers, we made it easier and more comfortable for participants to talk and relate with us by having three of our own team members (to whom participants could relate culturally) share their personal stories of adversities and how they thrived through such experiences. This was necessary to ease power relations so that participants would not be intimidated by researchers' academic positions and qualifications (Parker *et al.*, 2017). This example helped draw participants into the body mapping exercise and they became eager to share their stories too. Jokela-Pansini and Wintzer (2021) support this by asserting that body mapping engages participants holistically in a way that overcomes power relations by focussing on the production of new knowledge in a group. Therefore, body mapping as a part of an AL process
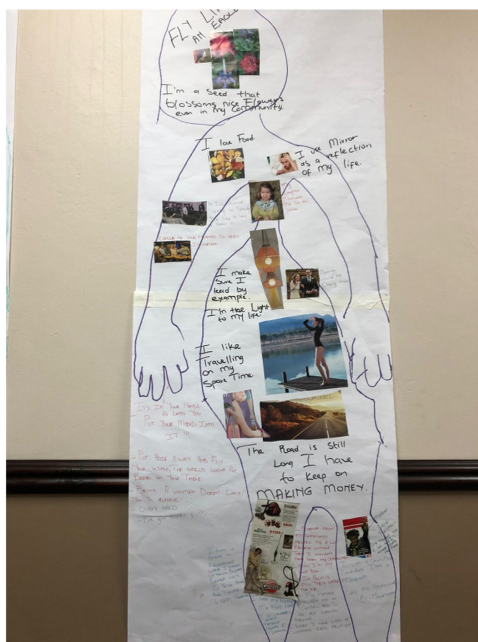
Title: FLY LIKE AN EAGLE
Head: I am a seed that blossoms nice flowers even in my community.
Heart: I love food; I use mirror as a reflection of my life. As I have studied safety and security.
Body and other parts: circle of your friends is very important. I make sure I lead by example. I'm the light to my life. Marriage would be a choice.
I like travelling on my spare time. The road is still long I have to keep on making money.
It's in your hands as long you put your mind into it! Put pride a way and fly your wings put bread on your table. Being a woman doesn't limit you to achieve
Study hard, put your books first

Source(s): Authors work

Plate 4.
Body map of P2

ensured the involvement of every participant which served as a powerful tool in building supportive relationships that formed the basis for personal change (Wood and Zuber-Skerritt, 2022).

Although body mapping is a valuable tool for gaining insight into participants' lives and experiences, researchers must be mindful of potential pitfalls. As researchers, we offer our reflections on the use of body mapping to aid others in avoiding similar mistakes when employing this visual method to gather data.

Caveats when using body mapping
The first issue we encountered was a *logistical* one that caused us some embarrassment. After giving the instruction to draw an outline of their body, we started to help them to do this. Only when we were standing astride them as they lay on paper did we realise that this could be invasive and inappropriate, so we quickly stopped and asked them to either just draw a

likeness of their bodies or ask a peer of the same gender to do it for them. In addition, body mapping involves tracing a life-sized body using large pieces of paper, and some of the young ladies were rather larger than the paper we provided, so it is advisable to ask participants to join the large sheets for themselves. This avoids any embarrassment on their part if their body does not fit in the paper provided.

We also realised the importance of carefully considering *the timing* of the body mapping exercise within the four-day workshop. Body mapping cannot be a standalone, once-off exercise with a group. It arouses strong emotions within participants and is a highly personal exercise; therefore, it is not a method that can be used without prior relationship-building between facilitators and participants and amongst participants themselves. We had decided to do it on the second day and in hindsight, it may have been better to do it on the third day when participants were more relaxed. Fortunately for us, we had dedicated the first day to building connections within the group and had done another exercise to help participants to think about their assets, so that they ended the day feeling good about themselves and had started to form bonds with us and with each other.

Body mapping is a highly emotive strategy; therefore, creating a safe environment is necessary as negative emotions are aroused in the process. Facilitators need to be able to cope with participants' *emotions* and provide immediate support to contain them. A research team needs skilled facilitators from multiple disciplines who can deal with emotions and be constantly aware of how the exercise is helping or threatening participants. Having a registered social worker and a psychologist in our team assisted in containing feelings and providing immediate counselling where needed. For example, we could see when participants were struggling emotionally and could quietly take them aside and help them to deal with their emotions. Counselling helped, as everyone managed to finish the body mapping discussion, although one participant did not wish to share with the group, and this was respected. Therefore, when using body mapping, expect painful experiences to be unearthed and be ready to immediately provide counselling opportunities. In addition, respect participants' right to not share or only share as much as they are comfortable with.

Conclusion

We conclude that body mapping can help researchers gain deep insights into phenomena under investigation, but if combined as part of an AL process, the four themes emerging from this study indicate that body mapping promoted self-awareness, helped the youth participants to come face-to-face with their previously repressed emotions, revealed the assets and potential of the youth and increased hope and motivation. However, researchers need to be well prepared to deal with potential negative reactions from participants; otherwise, the benefits will be lost. In fact, if not used correctly, emotional damage could ensue, which of course would violate the ethical principle of beneficence.

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