

**Community Mapping: Embracing Diversity
Spring 2002 Group Inquiry
Urban Specialist Certificate Program**

**Mary Jane Kirkham
Jennifer Lubke
Anne Thomas-Abbott**

**Fulton High School
April 25, 2002**

Community Mapping: Embracing Diversity Spring 2002 Group Inquiry

I. Community Mapping Rational

A. Relevance

The School Improvement Plan (SIP) for Fulton High School lists five staff beliefs, three of which are supported by an inquiry in to the effect of community mapping. “We believe that a safe, comfortable environment and positive relationships encourage learning and improve self-esteem. We believe that each student is a valuable individual who can learn, achieve, and succeed. We believe that within our diverse community, everyone shares the responsibility for success of our students.” Our group initiated a community mapping project in August 2001 with the endorsement, encouragement, and support, of the administration of our school. The project was well received by the administration because of it is aligned with the goals of Project Grad and the freshman mentoring program, PATH.

B. Introduction

For the 2001-02 school year, a focus of Fulton’s SIP is that “student [and staff] behavior will indicate self-respect, compassion, and an appreciation for the diversity within the school and community. Community mapping addresses the needs of our students and staff by raising awareness of the Fulton community, its values, assets, and issues.

Our cohort became interested in this topic after participating in an introduction to community mapping facilitated by Mary O’Sullivan in July 2001. We wanted to recreate our experience for our colleagues, so we approached the administration with the idea of a community mapping in-service activity during the opening days of the school year (2001-02).

The question our inquiry will address is “What impact does community mapping have on educator attitudes, classroom practice, and the orientation of novice teachers?” Research indicates that community or resource mapping will provide our staff with insight into the community they serve, it will help both veteran and novice teachers understand the make up of the student population. In addition it will improve the way we interact with community members and capitalize on those relationships. Community mapping will help teachers find ideas for project-based, contextual teaching and learning.

II. Research Questions and Support

A. Research Questions

The questions our inquiry will address are as follows: 1) What impact does community mapping have on educator attitudes about students and the community the school serves? 2) How will community mapping help educators make lessons more

relevant to the student audience? 3) Will community mapping affect the orientation of novice teachers?"

B. Research Support

"Community Mapping: Toward Cultural Awareness," Mary O'Sullivan

This article is an overview of the rationale and process of CTE (Contextual Teacher Education). CTE is the concept of teacher education that helps pre-service teachers relate their subject matter content to real world situations. One powerful tool of CTE is the process of community mapping. The article outlines community mapping in detail (Tredway, 2000) and discusses its benefits and drawbacks.

Research shows that students' cultural and social contexts are an important link to their achievement. "Too often, however, culture is viewed as a problem and diversity in terms of a deficit model." (Friend & Seidl, 1999) Community mapping is a way to change the deficit model approach. Most participants of the community mapping project done at Washington University felt that it was successful in heightening awareness of both community assets and issues. This knowledge can be used to actually implement CTE in the schools and as a result improve them. One concern of researchers is that community mapping cannot be a one-time event or its purpose will never be actualized.

"Environmental Education: Sense of Place and Social Justice," Elaine V. Howes

Howes employs community mapping with pre-service student teachers in an attempt to acclimate them to the environment in which they will teach. Howes reports that community mapping is a way to help pre-service teaching students, "particularly those from outside [the context of] the city, learn to appreciate the city as a sensible response to human needs, both social and physical." She also indicates that the mapping exercise is a way for students to "gain some experience in the complexities and contradictions of city life." Community mapping encouraged Howe's participants not just to look at the problems of city life but also the positive aspects as well. Howe also sees community mapping as a tool for educators who want to work for social justice because it can help illuminate some of the root causes of problems that affect children in urban schools. Howe cites a student who, after participating in community mapping, became aware of the "inequitable conditions that cause urban children in poverty to become ill at disproportionately large rates."

"Studying Neighborhoods in Learning to Teach," Janine T. Remillard

Remillard advocates community mapping exercises as ones which will encourage beginning teachers to look outside of their own classrooms for strategies to addressing societal issues like poverty, justice, and racism. Without community mapping, teacher knowledge of student community and conditions is "decontextualized and frequently served to further, rather than challenge, stereotypes" about the students and community. Community mapping was used in Remillard's

study with pre-service teachers who studied the communities they would serve. One of the goals of this approach was to encourage and support the novice teachers in their “classroom-based encounters” with students. Another goal was to increase the pre-service teachers’ awareness of the resources and history available both to them and their students. Remillard stresses, however, that a teacher needs training in “both theory and method to locate, identify, and document these resources.”

Cagle, L, Kershaw, C., Hersh, S., O’Sullivan, M. & Staten, M. (Submitted for publication, 2002). Voices and Reflections: An Urban Education Handbook. Milwaukee: Urban Network to Improve Teacher Education.

“Community Mapping: A Rationale,” L. Tredway

Community mapping is a set of principles and a strategy for helping pre-service and in-service teachers to understand their students and connect school to “real” life. To truly make an impact on student learning, a community mapping program must have reciprocity, depth, and authentic experience for both teachers and learners. When done well over a sustained period of time, community mapping will help teachers to deeply understand the community of the students. Community mapping must be “deliberate, intentional, thoughtful and well-planned.” Tredway cites a 1999 study by Steinberg and Stephen. He advises, “. . .one way to begin this process of reciprocal and deepening knowledge is taking time to map the community in which you teach and to understand the community ‘on the ground.’ Mapping is not a one-time event nor is it a prescription; it is meant to be a starting point that generates other collaborations and perhaps more attention to one theme that emerges . . .”

Community mapping has three purposes: to establish reciprocity between teachers and the community in which they teach, to make connections for future conversations and student work, and to document both assets and liabilities in the community. Coming to know students creates reciprocity in the classroom. Reciprocity begins when teachers can connect classroom learning to students’ prior knowledge and experiences. It continues as teachers learn to integrate community resources into the curriculum. Initially, community mapping empowers teachers and puts teachers “in a stronger position to be the guide.” For community mapping to have any depth, however, it must transform the teacher’s instructional practice and curriculum. Ultimately, the goal of community mapping is for teachers and students to challenge their assumptions, consider multiple viewpoints, practice decision-making, and take social action.

Tredway, L. (2002). *Community Mapping*. Unpublished manuscript prepared for Contextual Teaching and Learning Project, Ohio State University and U.S. Department of Education.

III. Methods and Procedures (Part A)

The participants of this inquiry are 68 members of the faculty of Fulton High School. The participants are 38% male and 62% female. The subject areas represented include English, Fine Arts, Foreign Language, Library, Math, Physical Education and Wellness, ROTC, Science, Social Studies, Special Education, and Vocational, teaching all grade levels from 9-12.

On Friday, August 10, 2001, our cohort coordinated 6 teams of Fulton staff members in a community mapping activity. Prior to the event, we choose 6 discreet

areas of the Fulton zone, pinpointing areas with high concentration of incoming freshman class members. Each area encompassed approximately 10 square city blocks. Team members boarded vans donated by the Emerald Avenue Foundation, a local non-profit youth service agency. Teams were provided packets including materials, instructions, maps, a list of freshman households to visit within the designated area, and job descriptions for each faculty member to perform.

Within a three hour time period, the teams were expected to walk within the area they were assigned; observe and inventory the area's assets and issues; make contact with freshman households; and collect artifacts from the area (i.e. brochures, rubbings, pictures, business cards, etc.). We expected to have a time for each group to process, prepare, and present their findings upon returning to school the same day. Scheduling considerations surrounding the beginning of the school year, however, prevented this immediate feedback. The faculty members who participated did complete a survey about their experience. However, there was no group synthesis of the day's activity. Consequently, the faculty had to wait several months before regrouping for closure.

Data was collected as follows:

- ◆ survey to measure the initial responses of the faculty to a community mapping exercise. This survey will be followed at the end of the academic year with a reflective survey to measure the impact of the activity on teaching strategies, classroom management, and teacher attitude. Data will reflect the number of years respondents have taught. (See Appendix .)
- ◆ interviews with selected participants. Interviews will provide anecdotal evidence. (See Appendix .)
- ◆ Digital images will be used to enhance PowerPoint presentation.

IV. Methods and Procedures

Our methods included two surveys of the community mapping participants, one immediately following the activity and the other at the end of the school year. We also interviewed three individuals using our research questions. The first survey was composed of four open-ended questions. There were 68 participants; 46 responded. Responses to the questions were tabulated in categories based on patterns of responses. For example, a question about expectations elicited responses that ranged from negative to neutral to positive. The second survey was composed of six yes-or-no questions. Out of the 68 surveyed, 28 responded. These responses were tabulated and additional written comments were noted and evaluated for patterns.

V. Results/Implications/Recommendations

A. What impact does community mapping have on educator attitudes about the students and the community the school serves?

Overall, respondents on both surveys indicated attitude changes. Seventeen percent of the respondents to the first survey reported having specific expectations regarding what they would learn about the community. Thirty-three percent reported having no specific expectations about the community or were unsure of what to expect in the community. Twenty percent of participants expected an irrelevant activity with limited benefit. Following the activity, 76 percent reported positive, friendly, cooperative reactions from community members, parents, and students.

On the second survey, 46 percent of respondents said their perception of the student body at Fulton was changed by the mapping experience. When asked, “You learned something about the community you would never have imagined (yes/no),” 57 percent reported yes. Misconceptions about or hidden assets within the community were uncovered by the activity. A teacher of thirty-three years experience teaching in the community noted, “I saw some socioeconomic problems that impact our students.” A teacher of twenty-six years experience was impressed by, “Industry in the area, strong religious spirit, and economic diversity.” Other teachers were impressed by the number of homeowners in the community, the transience of some community members, and by the urban renewal efforts within the community. An eight-year veteran reported being, “unaware of the resources that are available” in the area.

Research supports our findings that community mapping had a positive effect on teacher attitude about both students and their community. Friend & Seidl (1999) document that community mapping changes educator attitude away from a “deficit model,” as well as heightening “awareness of both community assets and issues.” Tredway (2000) defines mapping as “consciously and conscientiously walking and talking in the community. . . . As a result, the views of both teachers and students may and should change.”

B. How will community mapping make lessons more relevant to the student audience?

The data revealed little impact on teachers’ classroom practices, management, and one-on-one contact with students. Eleven percent of respondents on the second survey reported changing curriculum or teaching strategies due to their community mapping experience. Fourteen percent reported a change in their classroom management, and 21 percent indicated that community mapping affected their interactions with students. One first-year teacher commented that the community mapping experience informed her approach to fundraising and parent contacts. Another teacher with 17 years experience wrote, “Being aware of the student community determines how I relate to them.”

The research provides some explanation for why the community mapping activity did not have a greater impact on classroom practice. Researchers stress that mapping cannot be a one-time event (O’Sullivan 2002). Community mapping programs must

have reciprocity, depth, and authentic experience for both teachers and learners (Tredway 2002). Tredway advises that teachers start by mapping the communities in which they teach, but that experience must be eventually expanded to include the students themselves. We did not provide a follow-up activity for our community mapping participants in which they could process what they learned and generate ideas for incorporating community mapping into their classrooms. For community mapping to have a significant impact on classroom practice, it must be supported by administrative leadership and the entire school community.

C. Will community mapping affect the orientation of novice teachers?

Five novice teachers participated in the community mapping activity. Novice teachers were identified as interns or teachers with less than two years experience. The data reveals that community mapping had a positive impact on the orientation of the novice teachers to the community. An intern coming to the urban setting from a rural area wrote on the second survey, "It was interesting to see a sense of 'community' in the 'big city.'" A first-year teacher stated, "I was able to see what community members valued and see some of the diversity in the area."

Data also indicate that novice teachers experienced a positive orientation to the school community through the community mapping experience. A first-year teacher wrote, "The mapping experience began my first week at Fulton. It helped me to learn names and begin getting to know faculty in a small group setting."

Tredway (2000) indicates that community mapping is particularly important to pre-service teachers because they bring certain doubts and fears about how students will respond to them and how they will interact with students. Coming to know students help them to develop the ability to plan for students' reactions and interactions within the classroom setting. Howes (2002) supports Tredway with results that indicate community mapping to be a powerful tool in acclimating students from outside of a city come to appreciate the city "as a sensible response to human needs."

D. Implications and Recommendations

An idea for a future inquiry into community mapping would be to examine ways to create a community mapping program with depth and breadth. How does a school create a systematic mapping program? We envision an approach that, with consistent support from the administration, would become the focus of the entire faculty and would inform all aspects of the life of the school from curriculum to teacher practice and would involve student participants.

If we were to conduct our inquiry again, we would prepare teachers at the outset to identify one classroom application from the community mapping experience or one way to involve students in a similar mapping activity. To do this it is essential that there be a closure activity the day of the event in order to process and support teacher innovation.

The community offers multiple natural teaching and learning opportunities. Throughout our community are issues and topics ripe for interdisciplinary, collaborative study. An old home in need of restoration with rumored historical significance would be an excellent research topic for social studies, language arts, and vocational classes (cabinet making and drafting).

Appendix

Results of the Initial Survey

1. What were your expectations before beginning this activity?

Excited about a worthwhile activity: 4
 Unsure/no expectations: 15
 Irrelevant activity with limited benefit, boring: 9
 Expected to meet students, people: 2
 Expected to learn, curious about community, student backgrounds: 5
 Faculty would not participate, resist: 3
 Weather would be a factor: 1
 Expected to ride rather than walk: 1
 Expected to see old, run-down homes: 1
 Activity would build faculty cohesiveness: 1
 Participants would be met with hostility or surprise: 2

2. What were some reactions from community members, parents, and students to having you walk in their neighborhood?

Positive, friendly, cooperative reaction, attitude: 31
 Uncertain at first, welcoming upon learning mission: 4
 Saw teachers as dedicated: 1
 Excited, stunned, surprised: 3
 Confused, wary, watchful: 6

3. What is one thing you learned about the area you were assigned that you did not know before the activity?

Don't judge area before getting to know it: 1
 Historical Value of Area: 2
 Services
 Fire station in area: 5
 Youth/community center in area: 4
 Number of churches: 8
 Hospital used to have a chicken pen: 1
 Housing
 Shot gun houses: 3
 Renovations, improvements: 4
 Diverse housing situations: 4
 Rental units: 2
 Vacant homes, homes for sale: 1
 Beautiful homes, yard: 3
 Mobile homes: 1
 Area deteriorating more than expected: 1
 Businesses

Number, type of businesses: 4
 Industry: 1
 Residents
 Caring and apathetic: 1
 Elderly: 1
 Some sleep during day: 1
 Staff relationship to area: 1

4. How did your experience compare with your expectations?

Positive: 16
 Better than expected: 15
 Comparable to expectations: 8
 Wanted to meet more people: 2
 Community people afraid rather than hostile: 1
 Beneficial to classroom: 1

Results of the Second Survey

1. You changed or modified a classroom practice, content, or strategy due to your experience with community mapping activity.

Yes- 3
 No – 25

Comments and years of experience of the person making comments:

I grew up in this community, therefore, I was familiar with the area and its population. I do believe it was a worthwhile endeavor. (30 years)

2. Your perception of the student body at Fulton and in your classroom changed or was enhanced by your trip into the community.

Yes- 13
 No- 15

Comments and years of experience of person making comment:

It was enhanced because I knew very little about the community. (Intern)

I was able to see what community members valued and see some of the diversity in the area. (1 year)

I understand more fully where my students are coming from, when

they leave my four walls of my classroom. (6 years)

Was already aware. (12 years)

Really saw the dismal conditions some of our students live in and also the strengths of that community. (15 years)

I learned a bit more about their background. (24 years)

Got to see where more about their background (25 years)

I saw a part of the community I did not know about. (33 years)

Reminded and refreshed my base of knowledge of the community. (36years)

3. Community mapping affected your classroom procedures, or management.

Yes-4

No- 24

Comments and years of experience of the person commenting.

I try to realize some of the situations that students come from. (Intern)

How I approach fundraising and parent contacting. (1 year)

Being aware of the student community determines how I relate to them (17 years)

4. Community mapping affected the way in which you interacted with students one-on-one.

Yes-6

No- 22

Comments and the years of experience of the person commenting:

I try to realize some of the situations that students come from. (Intern)

Have maintained closer relationships with the students we visited. (15 years)

5. Working with your colleagues to present your zone of our community improved your sense of morale and camaraderie.

Yes- 21

No-7

Comments and the years of experience of those commenting:

It was the first opportunity to meet many of the teachers. (Intern)

The mapping experience began my first week at Fulton. It helped me to learn names and begin getting to know faculty in a small group setting. (1 year)

One-on-one with other departments is good! (4 years)

I got to know some teachers better that I never get to talk to on a regular school day. (6 years)

Good opportunity to interact with the teachers better that I typically do not get to spend time with. Had fun with my group! (12 years)

Worked with a great team – everyone participated. (15 years)

Got to know some of them who I didn't know too much. (18 years)

We were able to rely on each other's support. (24 years)

Saw them on a more personal basis – outside the school building (25 years)

I got to know some of the staff better. (33 years)

I was with a great team! Got to know the new interns. Because of the driver (Mr. Haskell) realized, and refreshed memory of how much time coaches spend with the boys.

6. You learned something about our community that you had never known or would never have imagined.

Yes- 16

No-12

Comments and the number of years experience of the person commenting:

It was interesting to see a sense of “community” in the “big city”. (Intern)

I began learning about the transiency of people in the community and urban renewal efforts. (1 year)

The wide difference, block to block.

Very diverse- somewhat nice homes can be next to or across the street from old abandoned ones. (6 years)

I was unaware of the resources that are available. (8 years)

The history of the community (Mechanicsville) that so many were homeowners. (15 years)

Something about businesses. (17 years)

Many of our students have very poor living conditions. (24 years)

Industry in area strong religious spirit, economic diversity. (26 years)

I saw some socioeconomic problems that impact our students (33 years)

Enjoyed visit to Knoxville College area and seeing the new development in that area. (36 years)

Interview Questions:

- 1) What did you expect to get out of this activity?
- 2) What did you learn about the community that you did not know before?
- 3) Was the experience positive or negative for you? Why?

Interviews:

Coach Jody Wright: Due to coaching I was already pretty aware of the community and what it involves. However, I thought this was a good idea! Most of our faculty benefited!

Linnie McMillan: The community mapping activity was terrific! I appreciate your hard work to make the morning a success. I think even some of the “old grumps” had their eyes opened!

Larry McCall: I was afraid before we started this activity because I know the reputation of this community. I was delighted to find out what we discovered today.