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Transition Planning: Community Mapping as a Tool for Teachers and Students

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Introduction

Community mapping is a tool grounded in a school-to-careers research base that can aid educators' efforts in matching students' transition needs with community assets. It is also a tool that can build teachers' knowledge and awareness of community assets to create more effective transition plans. Additionally, it is an instructional activity that helps students explore organizations as well as career opportunities in their community. Community mapping can be a geographical mapping of a target community (concrete mapping) or an abstract mapping of assets or services within a target community (abstract mapping). Either way, it is a contextualized teaching and learning (CTL) approach that can acquaint teachers with the target community's culture, resources, transition assets, and needs.

Community Mapping is Grounded in Research and Theory

Contextualized teaching and learning is an instructional framework that is an outgrowth of school-to-careers theory and research (Sears & Hersh, 1998).

> Contextualized teaching is teaching that enables learning in which pupils employ their academic understandings and abilities in a variety of in-school and out-of-school contexts to solve simulated or real world problems, both alone and in various group structures.… Learning through and in these kinds of activities is commonly characterized as problem-based, self-regulated, occurring in a variety of contexts, involving teams or learning groups, and responsible to a host of diverse needs and interests (p. 4).

Six attributes of CTL frame effective teaching and learning as:

- using a problem-based approach;
- occurring in multiple contexts;
- fostering self-regulation;
- supporting an understanding students' diverse life contexts;
- employing authentic methods of assessment; and
- utilizing interdependent working groups.

CTL uses a problem-based approach to teaching and learning. When students engage in authentic problem-solving they define and research problems, usually collaboratively. Community mapping, most effective when done in groups of three or four students, engages them collaboratively.

CTL occurs in multiple contexts. How a person learns a particular set of knowledge and skills and the situation in which a person learns are fundamental to lasting learning (Borko & Putnam, 1998). Community mapping encourages both teachers and students to leave the school walls and incorporate the community into their instructional experiences.

CTL helps foster self-regulation in students. Effective teaching and transition planning must focus on determining and meeting the needs and developing the capacities of each learner. CTL helps students monitor and direct their own learning. Community mapping can develop students' abilities to analyze their own thinking habits and apply a repertoire of strategies for learning, evaluating, and directing their own efforts toward increased learning. These are essential transition skills.

CTL supports an understanding of students' diverse life contexts. Learners have distinctive perspectives evolving from their personal history, environment, interests, beliefs, goals, and ways of thinking (Sears & Hersh, 1998). Community mapping supports teachers' understanding of learners' diverse life contexts.

CTL employs authentic methods of assessment. Instruction that is contextually oriented treats assessment as an ongoing activity, continually informing both teacher and student. Multiple sources of evidence, including community mapping, are collected over time and in several contexts.

CTL utilizes interdependent learning. Learning is a social process that is enhanced when learners have opportunities to interact with others on instructional activities (Vygotsky, 1978). CTL designs experiences so that students learn from each other. Through community mapping individuals have an opportunity to gain perspective and think reflectively, which may foster social and moral development and self-esteem.

Community Mapping: A Teacher's Transition Tool

Community mapping is an effective professional development activity for all types of teachers who use a CTL approach. Mapping can acquaint teachers with the target community's culture, resources, transition assets, and needs. Community mapping is best done in small groups of three or four students whenever possible to ensure a variety of perspectives and insights.

When educators engage in community mapping, they explore such things as resources, housing, businesses, social-service providers, recreational facilities, religious institutions, neighborhood history, and public opinion about local issues. For transition planners, the objective of the exploration is to develop baseline knowledge about the community's current issues and assets that will become an intrinsic part of their transition planning. This experience also allows teachers to explore career opportunities that may be relevant to their students' goals and interests.

Concrete Mapping

As a geographical activity, concrete mapping may resemble a "scavenger hunt." The mapping facilitator has "staked out" several small, appropriate areas to walk through that might yield rich results. Participants then visit one of those "staked-out" areas of the target community and talk to people on the streets and in community businesses and resource centers about their experiences and history in the community. They also collect appropriate artifacts and take pictures. If the group is large enough it should be divided into groups of three or four, and each group then visits a different area of the target community. There are roles and responsibilities for each group member (Table 1) and objectives to accomplish, but every group member is responsible for observing, talking, and questioning people and deciding where to visit and what is important.

This can be daunting to some educators— wandering around with clipboards and digital cameras in hand, talking to strangers. It can also be daunting to strangers if they are not approached appropriately. An opening sentence, such as "We're educators from [name of school] and are trying to find out more about the community," helps puts both the educators and the people they approach at ease.

The concrete mapping of a community typically takes up to three hours. When mapping is completed, educators reconvene to share any findings about transition assets and issues among the group or discuss discernable patterns before continuing in-depth research of the community's potential role in transition planning.

Table 1. **Sample Roles and Responsibilities for Community Mapping**

Roles	Responsibilities	Materials
Scout	Hands out materials, tells everyone what to do, keeps group on task, guides group using highlighted map	Initially has all materials to hand out, has map and clipboard to guide group
Mapper	Keeps track of all places visited, draws draft map later used in presentation	Paper for making new map, clipboard
Tabulator	Uses surveys to tabulate housing, businesses, etc.	Survey, clipboard
Note-taker 1 Note-taker 2	Takes observational notes of people and places, keeps track of photos	Clipboard, note paper, photo record sheet
Photographer	Takes 8-10 significant photos, tells note-taker number of photo, location, and importance	Digital camera
Collector	Collects artifacts that exemplify community (flyers, brochures, business cards, etc.), tells note-taker what is collected, where, and importance	Bag for collection
Rubber	Looks for historical or significant markers—cornerstones, information on statuary or building—to make a rubbing from, aids tabulator in counting	Chart paper and crayons

Note: For further explanation of the community mapping process, see the Recommended Resources section on page 5.

The power in a concrete mapping experience is that educators personally interact with community members, which inevitably enhances both educators' knowledge of the community and community members' knowledge of the school. This can also be an initial step in developing relationships that involve community organizations in working more directly with school programs.

Abstract Mapping

In abstract mapping, the process of geographic or concrete mapping is modified, because instead of physically walking through the community, teachers find out about assets abstractly through Internet research, telephone calls, and some interpersonal visits. Teachers can work in teams to map assets and services by dividing the community into targeted areas or by types of resources. If a facilitator is preparing educators for mapping activities, support for the team's efforts can be accomplished by providing such things as categories of assets to survey, sample focus questions to collect pertinent data, identification of roles and responsibilities for team members, and a timetable to complete the mapping.

The goal in abstract mapping is to learn as much as possible about a variety of community assets and services. Everyone gathers data to create "transition resource books" by combining team members'

collected artifacts such as brochures or flyers with their analysis about a community's assets and services. Each member receives a copy of the transition resource book, which includes all research and can be updated each year by participants. Through the process of abstract mapping, teachers initiate relationships between school and community to support students' needs through conversations with potential transition resource agencies. Educators explore how the target community's assets and services can be accessed by their students.

As educators research and analyze community resources, they develop an understanding of and appreciation for the richness of diverse cultures within the community. They may also discover barriers such as a lack of transportation or a limited range of community-based organizations, which may have implications for transition planning. The most important outcome of abstract mapping is the improved instruction that results from an increased knowledge of students' needs and available resources as well as the ability to combine them in appropriate ways.

Community Mapping: A Student's Transition Tool

Once teachers are familiar with the mapping process, their students can also engage in mapping of transition resources. Just as educators can walk a

target area to look for potential transition partners, students, too, can explore community resources that will support their individual transition goals. For example, mapping can be planned around learners' career interests. In one situation, several students were interested in professional football careers. A mapping activity took place at a professional football stadium where learners interviewed, collected information about, and photographed people performing a variety of jobs: accounting, retail sales/marketing, public relations, and athletic training.

The teacher's role is to facilitate the mapping experience—setting up necessary interviews; obtaining permission to visit a site; and preparing students to ask questions, use digital cameras, and collect relevant data. The students also assume roles within their group so that everyone has responsibilities that contribute to learning more about what a community has to offer them as they begin to monitor their own needs. The culminating activity is an information-sharing presentation for all students. This presentation is a form of authentic assessment where students demonstrate what they have learned.

Examples of Community Mapping

Two community mapping examples demonstrate how this activity can be incorporated into a variety of school programs.

Example 1. A teacher is presenting a unit on neighborhoods in a ninth grade social studies/history class. She wants her students to learn about the Shaw District neighborhood in Washington, DC. A historical perspective will enable her students to explore the current causes and effects of the area's gentrification/revitalization. After students have researched the Shaw District's history they are ready to learn about the community firsthand. The teacher uses community mapping to engage her students in activities. For instance she assigns students to prepare to talk with people in community social-service organizations by researching the organizations' missions and services. She has students practice with digital cameras so that they can take pictures of buildings and housing to compare with pictures from their historical research. The students also develop interview questions that they practice by role-playing so they are comfortable interviewing community members who have lived

through the changes over the last 20 years. Students then analyze this data to determine cause and effect in the changing community, predict the future of the community, and explore roles they might play as young adults in the community.

Example 2. Teachers assigned to community-based classes for students ages 18-21 incorporate community-mapping instruction into their life-skills curriculum. After introducing the concept of accessing the community and learning about its resources, teachers present the community-mapping process to students. A student may volunteer or be selected by the teacher or class to have his or her neighborhood mapped. This student becomes the lead student. Prior to the designated day for visiting the community, the teachers and students discuss roles and responsibilities. The lead student is generally the mapper and shares scouting responsibilities with the teacher. On the appointed day, students meet at the school and travel together to the student's home or meet at a designed place in the community. Together the class maps the key places (i.e., bus stop, shopping areas, recreation areas, professional offices), locates public transportation stops and collects schedules, conducts job development activities (i.e., cold-calling, getting applications), and gathers other artifacts. Eating lunch in a restaurant is included in the community experience, and the lead student is responsible for selecting the restaurant. During lunch the students discuss the mapping experience and findings and turn all artifacts over to the lead student. The lead student is responsible for putting the materials together for a class presentation.

Conclusion

Community mapping creates a useful, exciting product for teachers, students, and community members. The creative aspects of community mapping can energize teachers; they can begin to think differently about assessment, transition planning, and teaching. They become more engaged in their students' communities and begin to share a common knowledge-base with students. Community mapping, too, can motivate students and stimulate increased interest in learning. It can also help them expand their view of the community and its members. Students gain a connection with businesses and services with which they might not typically connect. Finally, community

mapping engages community members in school programs and allows them to view students and teachers more personally. It can also afford opportunities for employers to get to know and consider potential employees.

Often it is difficult to know what a community has to offer students and also what the community is willing to offer. Conversely, it is often difficult for community organizations and businesses to be aware of what young people need and what they bring to the table. Through the use of community mapping, transition planning becomes focused on matching students with community needs in such a way that relationships are forged, fostered, and updated, while keeping transition planning a meaningful, two-way process with successful outcomes.

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Sears, S., & Hersh, S. (1998). Contextual teaching and learning: An overview of the project. In *1998 Contextual teaching and learning design conference proceedings: Preparing teachers to enhance student success in and beyond school.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, College of Education, Center on Education for Training and Employment.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Recommended Resources

Community YouthMapping
Academy for Educational Development/Center for Youth Development and Policy Research
http://cyd.aed.org/cym/cym.html

Community Resource Mapping:
A Strategy for Promoting Successful Transition for Youth with Disabilities
National Center on Secondary Education and Transition
http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=939

Mapping the Assets of Your Community:
A Key Component for Building Local Capacity
Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State
http://srdc.msstate.edu/publications/227/227.htm

Mapping the Whos, Whats, and Whys of Community Development and Community Building:
A 10-Minute Self-Assessment Tool
The Forum for Youth Investment
http://www.forumfyi.org/Files/mappingwhosp2-pfv.pdf (16 KB, 1 pg)

Holding Schools Accountable Toolkit
Annie E. Casey Foundation
http://www.aecf.org/publications/accountable.pdf (714 KB, 78 pp)

http://www.ncset.org

NCSET Web—A National Resource Coordination Tool

Here's what you'll find—

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Information on more than 25 diverse topics in secondary education and transition including an overview, answers to commonly asked questions, research abstracts, emerging practices, and more!

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