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Cultural Mapping as a Social Practice

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Abstract

Inspired by Gerald Wood and Elizabeth Lemley's (2015) article entitled *Mapping the Cultural Boundaries in Schools and Communities: Redefining Spaces Through Organizing*, this response inquires further into cultural mapping as a social practice. From our perspective, cultural mapping has potential to contribute to place making, as well as the values to sustain more equitable social futures. Thus, alongside the maps created, we longed to learn more about how the participants were engaged in mapping, how perceptions of mapping changed over time and context, how participation was mediated by relationships, and how transformation in the participants, child, youth, and adults was manifested. Making visible the richness of this experience, however, likely requires research funding, support, and time.

This article is a response to:
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Introduction

IN "MAPPING THE Cultural Boundaries in School and Communities," authors Wood and Lemley (2015) described their experiences as facilitators in Student Involvement Day (SID), a weekend program for young people between the ages of seven and 18 years old that brings together teacher education students and community members around a goal of youth empowerment. Drawing on the work of Freire and Dewey, they described their critical pedagogy linking students' experiences with current events in Arizona, in this case the passage of Senate Bill 1070, widely viewed as anti-immigrant legislation, and House Bill 2281, which banned ethnic studies. The article highlighted cultural mapping as one of many activities used in SID and included images of the cultural maps created by three of the students based on physical locations where students felt their cultural identity was included or excluded.

The "tools" young people employed to "increase inclusion of their cultural identities in multiple spaces" were also described (p. 8).

We acknowledge the significance of the pedagogical work that these authors described. Their general commitment to pursuing pedagogical engagement with young people that creates the

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potential to promote democratic values, including justice and fairness, as well as their specific efforts to enhance students' social and political understandings of "place" through cultural mapping, is laudable. Their interest in sharing with educators and scholars the potential of cultural mapping to contribute to these goals is an interest that we share as well. It is our opinion that research on cultural mapping with young people is important, and it is in support of this goal that our commentary is written.

The topic of cultural mapping is generative, and there are a number of interesting threads we considered pursuing in this response. First, we discussed writing a historical description that links the practice of cultural mapping with the literature on it and the purposes for which it is more commonly used by cultural and community geographers (see, as overview, Lee & Gilmore, 2012). Another option could have been teasing out the concepts of space, place, and the relationships between them in order to examine how Lefebvre's (1992) ideas are helpful to this work. Third, we thought about highlighting the relationship between identity and cultural identity, inquiring into how they are different, overlapping, or the same and the processes or practices through which they develop over time. Instead, our intent is to go beyond what was presented in the article to ask a question and propose a response that we think may contribute to the conversation about fostering youth empowerment through critical pedagogies: What is gained by elaborating the notion of cultural mapping as a social practice of place making for more equitable social futures?

We are interested in this particular elaboration because what we wanted to see more of in our reading of Wood and Lemley (2015) was a sense of the process of engaging in cultural mapping. We longed to see the dialogue, the interactions, the relationship building that occurred in order to create the final maps and the additional conversations with peers, teacher candidates, and teachers in schools that occurred as a result of the process. The dynamic pathway of engagement, the relationships that support engagement and change as a result, and the traces left behind of participation are just some of the generative qualities that surface when people "do" cultural mapping. The concepts that we offer to elaborate cultural mapping—social practices, place making, and social futures—have in common the central role of social mediation in lived experience (Vadeboncoeur & Rahal, 2013). In addition, they share a recognition of varied participation in practices, foregrounding ongoing change in the ways that individuals and communities engage in practices (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). The argument that cultural mapping has the potential to enable space to become place and the joint construction of more equitable social futures requires making visible the work of building relationships and practices and the values that sustain them.

Participating In/Through Social Practices

If we attend to cultural mapping as a social practice, rather than a single activity, we move it from a single experience, however meaningful, to an ongoing experience. Social practices are sustained repertoires of action mutually constitutive of and constituted by the speech through which people engage (see, for discussion, Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Social practices are repeated

experiences that give shape, in general, to our day-to-day lives, and that, in this case, give shape to experiences in programs like Student Involvement Day.

When cultural mapping moves from a single activity to a social practice, a number of possibilities surface. First, participating in cultural mapping becomes an expectation. It comes to define, in part, what it means to be a participant in a particular program, and it highlights the experiences and expertise of the participants alongside how they identify themselves and the values that they hold. Second, cultural mapping moves from a once-occurrent activity to a practice that is revisited. Perhaps revisiting occurs so a person can see what has changed in a physical location, reflect on changes in how space is represented, or, perhaps most important, note changes in the meaning of maps, mapping, and what is represented for the participants. Third, when cultural mapping is a social practice, it is shared. Mapping becomes the subject of dialogue, and the map itself becomes an artifact around which additional dialogues occur. So along with using cultural mapping "to start the conversation" (p. 2), we wanted to see how it was used to encourage "dialogue around shared experiences across school sites" (p. 8), and we wanted to learn more about the people with whom young people were conversing. We agree with Wood and Lemley (2015) that these conversations were important to the students in order to recognize that "other students were having similar experiences" (p. 9). We think, as well, that allowing parents, teachers, and the public into these sorts of conversations was encouraged—the authors noted that "when parents and school staff came to SID, we invited them to participate in activities and discussions" (p. 8)—but we don't know from the article what this looked like, who responded to the invitation, how the interaction unfolded, or the effects that it had on the young people and the adults.

It is possible that the boundaries drawn and the shadings for inclusion and exclusion depicted on the maps may or may not change over time, and the meaning of the map to the map makers may or may not change over time. Participating in cultural mapping as a social practice that occurs over time, however, enables young people, facilitators, and the people with whom these maps are shared to acknowledge the possibility of change, the kinds of change desired, as well as the direction of change. With the introduction of mapping and maps across contexts—if, for example, they were shared with peers and teachers in school contexts—the process of mapping and the map offer a new form of mediation for the relation between the map maker and observer. And if mapping is engaged in repeatedly, the resulting series of maps becomes not just a representation of places and what they mean but also a representation of time and change over time: potentially individual change and social change.

Place Making

Elaborating cultural mapping as a practice of place making highlights the significance of developing an attachment to place based on the meanings of the places that are made and remade by the participants (see Cajete, 2000; Kruger & Jakes, 2003). A sense of place may develop over time for an individual or a group of

people—and it may also be hindered—through participation in social practices that begin to define the rhythm of time spent in a place, as well as the characteristics of a place such as the actions that people engage in. Think of the descriptions that Trina, Keith, and Tonya, in Wood and Lemley (2015), made of their experiences in their homes and/or at school: the overlaps and the differences between these two contexts and their experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

Place making requires explicit attention to the natural landscape, the human contributions to the landscape, as well as the relationships between what is available, how it is used, and by whom. Place making highlights the importance of teaching through authentic, or em-placed, experiences, for example, the connection made for the young people and teacher candidates during SID to the legislative changes in Arizona and the meaning of these changes for access to ethnic studies in schools. We must also recognize diverse attachments and meanings that may differ across individuals, groups, and social relations, in this case across youth, parents, and teachers. Place making is built upon sustained engagement over time that supports an enriched sense of place through place-based knowledge brought to life in social practices. Over time, these practices may change attachment to and the meaning of a place like school for young people who are "bored in school" and "actively disengaged" (Wood & Lemley, 2015, p. 2).

While critical and place-based pedagogy can be woven together (e.g., Gruenewald, 2003a), there is the potential for place-based approaches to focus too directly on connection to physical place and to lose connection with the relationships between places, for example, links beyond local places to places that are farther away, or global. Indeed, place-based pedagogy itself is not beyond critique. In a recent discussion of the "local trap," Gulson (2014) highlighted the potential dangers of conflating place with "authentic experiences and identities" to the point of assertions or claims regarding "who is the true local, the true inhabitant" (pp. 418–419). One of the challenges of place making, then, is recognizing that "if educators and students are to understand culture in the places where they live, they must explore the interdependent economic, political, ideological, and ecological relationships between places near and far" (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 630). Rather than becoming ever more insular, place making, as locating and grounding, must also become an opportunity for exploring anew. Using cultural maps, as Wood and Lemley (2015) did, to "identify issues in schools and communities" (p. 4), is enriched through connections to similar struggles, for example, at the Praxis Youth Conference, and in global communities as well.

For the young people and facilitators in SID, participating in cultural mapping as an opportunity for place making may enable new possibilities. First, inquiry into the concepts of place and place making becomes an experiential opportunity, along with inquiry into concepts like attachment and meaning. Second, the idea of place making itself opens inquiry in at least two ways. It makes explicit the notion that places can be made: that they aren't intrinsically meaningful. Indeed, each participant must draw from culture and their experience to impose meaning on places. Also, the idea of place making makes explicit the notion that physical spaces are constituted, in part, by collections of places with different attachments and meanings for participants. Inquiring into the places that are more meaningful, relevant, and/or significant for participants is central to this work. Not simply to surface experiences of inclusion and/or exclusion, but to go beyond this to trouble inclusion/ exclusion as static labels and to reconstitute social practices in places as a force for the construction of both equity-oriented and sustainable social futures.

Sustainable Social Futures

When cultural mapping is a social practice, it contributes to the construction of valued social futures by collectively organizing attention to the kinds of issues that surface: for example, inclusion, exclusion, disengagement, attachment, mobility, risk, and safety. Identifying places where one feels included, or the converse, excluded, provides an obvious topic for dialogue around what and who is seen as valuable, by whom, and why differences in values may exist in the first place. Yet in order for participation in practices to build the values that will sustain the practice, both participation and the practice must be perceived as durably consequential (O'Connor & Allen, 2010).

Following Lemke (2000) and Nespor (1994, 2004), O'Connor and Allen (2010) argued that "to understand the significance of the learning taking place . . . we have to look at the spatial and temporal trajectories along which participants are moving before and after their encounters in the local learning context" (p. 168). This means asking how the young people, teacher candidates, and facilitators came together at SID, along with asking how conditions or, perhaps, places were reassembled to allow for future gatherings that build upon previous learning. How does the knowledge constructed in making maps, the negotiation of identities represented in the maps, and the expression of values related to these representations gain significance in a reassembled context? Wood and Lemley (2015) noted that they worked "to ensure the conversations would not just stay at SID" by encouraging "youth to think of ways they wanted to follow up on the discussions, role plays, and cultural mapping" (p. 9), yet we know little of this other than that several young people were interviewed by the media and attended the Praxis Youth Conference.

Consequentiality foregrounds two levels of organization. First, it foregrounds the necessity of particular kinds of skills, expertise, interests, experiences, and identities to be taken up by broader social groups or organizations in a manner that enables them to exist at a scale beyond a local interaction, for example, having peers and teachers visit the maps on display at a school, engaging in a dialogue that gives recognition to what they represent, and articulating steps to move beyond the representation. The vulnerability of the map makers must be considered in undertaking the move between contexts: What is the experience of sharing a map that was generated outside of school with students and teachers inside school? Consequentiality may be in evidence if maps that were created in SID began to spill over or travel intercontextually, in a sense taking the practices and the children and youth with them. Second, consequentiality foregrounds the necessity of growing "different levels of participation"; thus, it is not only about

gathering young people in cultural mapping "but also about learning to mentor younger children and youth, apply for grants to support programs, or take their messages to the school board or mayor . . . and sustain the local, regional, and national work that makes these enterprises part of a movement" (O'Connor & Allen, 2010, p. 171). This means intentionally acting to develop new social practices—ones that offer different possibilities for engagement, participation, and recognition—and the values that sustain them.

Engagement in cultural mapping has the potential to contribute to the emergence and maintenance of the values that will sustain the relationships, identities, and practices that emerge as a result. Cultural maps, as artifacts, showcase what is valued *intra*contextually and, if they move across contexts and become recognized and, ultimately, valued in another context, we begin to see the potential of mapping to contribute tiny bridges across contexts, *inter*contextually. While cultural maps are themselves artifacts in the most obvious physical sense, Vossoughi's (2014) research as a facilitator in an academic outreach program highlighted examples of social analytic artifacts. These artifacts were functions of speech, discursive tools that "deepen and propel the collective analysis of social problems" (p. 353). The classroom context was a university course that combined university reading and writing with political education and artistic activity.

As one example, heteroglossic attunement was highlighted through a dialogue between students and instructors regarding the high proportion of women working in *maquilas*, sanctioned manufacturing operations that exist in a free trade zone on the Mexican side of the border between Mexico and the United States. In class discussions, Vossoughi (2014) traced heteroglossic attunement: the unfolding discernment of multiple perspectives in speech, especially historical and ideological, by students given attention to the particular shades of meaning that emerged through tone and word choice in dialogue. Students recognized dominant voices and discourses and—through dialogue—identified, analyzed, and subverted them. The social speech shared in dialogue enabled and provided evidence of epistemic openness, perceptions of social problems, and the development of solidarity as the discussion moved from an explanation of the high proportion of women due to the perceived ease of controlling them relative to men, to their perceived weakness relative to men, and ultimately, to a nuanced discussion of the intersections of dominant perceptions of women's labor and the wages paid to them. This research highlighted the importance of engaged social analysis, for example, being able to distinguish between what a factory owner might think and what each student thought, and in addition, through audio recordings, transcription, and analysis, the importance of making visible how these dialogues were mediated by the instructors and the kinds of analytic artifacts that were cocreated as a result.

Whether learning in a university classroom, as in Vossoughi's (2014) research, or engaging in cultural mapping with young people, as in Wood and Lemley (2015), making visible social practices, and making visible what engaging and participating in them leaves behind, enables educators and researchers to make claims regarding contributions to equity-oriented social futures

and the extent to which they may be sustained through evidence of the generation of values that support them. Our point here is not to compare Vossoughi's university students with the youth with whom Wood and Lemley (2015) worked; we know young people are capable of tuning in to the different perspectives in curriculum, stories, and policy documents and that this attunement is an aspect of critical pedagogies more generally. What is significant for us is what becomes visible with the kind of research Vossoughi used: Also an educator, by using ethnographic methods and analyzing discourse, she made visible the pedagogical accomplishments that provide evidence of learning and change over time.

When Dewey (1938) highlighted the relationships between present and subsequent experiences, and the importance of selecting "the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (p. 28), he was asking educators to act intentionally with a view toward creating with students sustainable social futures (Vadeboncoeur & Murray, 2014). A central concern for all educators is the quality of experiences, as well as the role of social relationships in enabling young people to participate and contribute to local places (see Vadeboncoeur & Rahal, 2013). It is engagement over time in social practices that is required to envision, to sustain, and to make visible the possibilities of more equitable social futures.

Conclusion

The move to elaborate cultural mapping as a social practice, as a repeated repertoire of social action that is mediated by speech and that serves an organizing function in experience, in general, and learning, in particular, is significant. It means that we move beyond identifying places as inclusive or exclusive and work to build inclusion—through relationships and practices—where it doesn't currently exist. It means ongoing engagement with students, teachers, and communities and staying long enough to make a change possible, see it, and continue to support it. And even once we begin to see relationships and bridges built, and even after places begin to change, there is much work to do, as young people and adults often bear the scars of previous discrimination, oppression, and exclusion. Our work to engage people and enable participation through social practices, place making, and creating social futures must also change how young people have been taught to see themselves and each other as well. What the move to elaborating cultural mapping as a social practice enables is the recognition that it is not just space or place that matters; time is of equal importance (see, for discussion of time and space, Vadeboncoeur, 2005).

Now, it may be that what we are elaborating here aligns with or even overlaps with the work of Wood and Lemley (2015) and we were unable to see it as clearly as we wished in our reading of their article. While we recognize the value of research on cultural mapping with youth and wish to see more of it, we also acknowledge the funding and resources required for research designed to provide the depth of reporting we hope to see in the literature generated about cultural mapping. If more funding, time and resources were allocated, then we would argue for seeing more data, learning more about lived experiences, hearing more about dialogues, as well as tracing

dialogues to better see what is taking place. Why was Trina's map in the shape of a musical note? Who did she show her map to and what did they think? What shaped Keith's representation of the beauty behind the pieces of life fitting together? How did he feel about his map later in the school year? What kinds of school experiences became possible for Tonya as a result of her connection to school through books, as well as the teachers who mediated this connection by sharing a diverse range of lived experiences with her through books? How did her relation to school change over time and why? In general, how was the experience of school and schooling changed by cultural mapping? Making visible evidence of this sort would support the claims to transformation and empowerment made by Wood and Lemley (2015) and be an invaluable resource for helping others see the potential role of cultural mapping in bringing more equitable social futures to life.

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