**Mapping Our City: A co-created curriculum for Youth Led Participatory Mapping in Urban Refugee Contexts**

**Maya Elliott**

Department of International & Transcultural Studies, Teachers College, Columbia University

---

**Introduction**

Mapping Our City is a curriculum for youth-led participatory mapping projects in urban refugee contexts. It aims to help communities identify and respond to social justice issues in their own lives and to bring into existence open-source maps that can become resources for the community at large.

**Curriculum Objectives**

1. Equip youth with the critical thinking, research and mapping tools needed to investigate spatial justice issues in their lives
2. Build community knowledge resources that capture knowledge and assets that may not be represented in formal maps
3. Providing youth an opportunity to participate meaningfully in community and humanitarian activities in urban settings.

“Maps, like theories, have power in virtue of introducing modes of manipulation and control that are not possible without them. They become evidence of reality in themselves and can only be challenged through the production of other maps and theories” (David Turnbull)

---

**Conceptual Frameworks**

**Youth as Co-Creators**

A curriculum is designed for and with youth in urban refugee settings. It will be adapted and piloted with Syrian and Kurdish refugee youth in Gaziantep, Turkey. However, this framework is designed to be implemented in youth centers, informal education settings, or extracurricular programs for refugee youth in urban centers anywhere. This curriculum is premised on the idea that participatory mapping can be incorporated to a wide variety of perspectives and experiences into community understandings of space. Thus, classes should ensure that they are inclusive and representative of a wide variety of youth experiences. The curriculum framework provided here is a scaffold for building out the curriculum in collaboration with youth. Students then apply these new skills to their own mapping projects in each unit, allowing them to use and relate the new skills to investigate issues relevant to them.

**Spatial Justice Theory**

“Wie all experience in one way or another the negative effects of unjust geographies. This makes us all participants in a spatial drama and the right to the city a progressively shared identity, determination, and effectiveness in changing the world for the better. This text is presented from the perspective of the spatial justice theory of justice” – Edward Sujo (2015, p.108)

**Meaningful Participation**

This curriculum is informed by the Lundy model for meaningful youth participation which identifies the four factors that need to be present for meaningful youth participation. These factors are: Spaces, Voice, Audience, and Influence (Kemeny, Blyth & Ford, 2017, p.197). Subsequently, four strategies for incorporating the four elements into the curriculum in a number of ways. The structure of the curriculum allows youth to take ownership of class activities and shape class content according to the interests that interest them (space, voice). This technical, linguistic and academic skills are designed to recognize existing knowledge (in all forms), connect students to real-world issues and events, and develop both competencies and ideas (voice, audience). Mapping teams are an organic way for students to develop their own networks and connect, and also learn about each other’s experiences and perspectives in a safe space (space, voice), while the creation of participatory mapping projects allows for youth to create knowledge resources that are accessible and helpful to their communities (audience, influence). Finally, the participatory mapping process also enables youth to engage with local services and actors, which allows them to build networks and act as facilitators, connectors and role models in their wider communities (space, voice, audience, influence).

---

**Language**

The text is written in English. However, a great effort has been made to ensure that many of the resources, learning materials and software platforms used exist in other languages as well. When the curriculum is piloted, a version of the primary content will be conducted, and translation of key materials will be carried out ahead of time.

---

**Limitations & Adaptations**

The curriculum is heavily reliant on technology. In addition to ARCGIS or QGIS resources, student devices like phones, tablets and digital devices are required.

This curriculum as heavily dependent on language. In addition to ARCGIS or QGIS resources, student devices like phones, tablets and digital devices are required.

---

**Conclusion**

Co-creating curriculum with youth from urban refugee contexts is one of the most serious limitations in this curriculum is lack of awareness or familiarity with the specific context this curriculum will be used in. The activities and content of this curriculum are designed to be highly adaptable. Furthermore, the range of skills taught, from digital mapping to academic skills and research design, are intended to be transferrable skills. Not every activity will work for every set of groups or students, so rather than seeing the curriculum as a formal progression of lessons, it should be viewed as a toolkit of resources mapping which can be selected and adapted to meet the needs of the context and the interests of the student. Significant cultural adaptation will have to occur whenever the curriculum is used. The initial pilot, materials and lessons will be adapted to fit the Turkish context of the curriculum, and other languages as well. There is no expectation that the curriculum will be translated into other languages.

In conclusion, this curriculum is designed to provide students with the skills and confidence to carry out their own investigations of space. It is designed to help students both explore critical spatial mapping as well as fundamental components of critical spatial literacy. The curriculum is designed to support the development of youth who are looking for ways to make sense of their communities and to create their own mapping projects by the end of the curriculum. Each unit builds on the previous by adding new skills and introducing students to new perspectives on space.

Students also then explore these new skills to their own mapping projects in each unit, allowing them to use and relate the new skills to investigate issues relevant to them. This also allows students to progressively build each component of their final mapping project over the course of the curriculum, rather than piling them all at the end. This will also provide a more direct applications of skills, more time for peer and community feedback, and the chance for projects to evolve and foster over the full span of the course.

The curriculum consists of six units that progressively build on each other. Each lesson is one hour long, although certain lessons that involve field trips or data collection are expected to last longer. Each unit will last three weeks, and it will take four and half months (roughly one semester) to complete the full curriculum.

---

**Literature Review**

**Curriculum Map**

**Unit 1: Introduction to Mapping**

**Question:** What makes something a map? What community assets (skills, knowledge, resources and needs) exist in this neighborhood that don’t appear on maps?

**Skills:** Map reading skills

**Project:** Photomapping Our Neighborhood Project

**Unit 2: Using Maps**

**Question:** How are digital maps different from paper maps? How has technology changed how we use maps?

**Skills:** Survey and qualitative data collection skills

**Project:** Community survey: What do people use maps for?

**Unit 3: Data & Place**

**Question:** How does the organization of data on a map affect what relationships can be inferred about different data sets and place?

**Skills:** Analyzing data sets and visualizations across space

**Project:** Designing maps with Data Layers

**Unit 4: Creating Maps**

**Question:** What information can be included in a map? How can you show the relationship between places?

**Skills:** Plotting features

**Project:** Mapping Physical Spaces with ARCGIS

**Unit 5: Perspectives on Space**

**Question:** How is your experience in the city different/same from other people’s experiences? Does your map reflect a range of perspectives and needs?

**Skills:** Collecting data

**Project:** Experiencing the City Data Project

**Unit 6: Sharing Maps**

**Question:** What does your map show and how can you make people use it?

**Skills:** Finalizing Inquiry Maps

**Project:** Presenting to the community

---

**Curriculum Overview**

The aim of this curriculum is to provide students with the skills and confidence to carry out their own investigations of space. It is designed to help students both explore critical spatial mapping as well as fundamental components of critical spatial literacy. The curriculum is designed to support the development of youth who are looking for ways to make sense of their communities and to create their own mapping projects by the end of the curriculum. Each unit builds on the previous by adding new skills and introducing students to new perspectives on space.

Students also then explore these new skills to their own mapping projects in each unit, allowing them to use and relate the new skills to investigate issues relevant to them. This also allows students to progressively build each component of their final mapping project over the course of the curriculum, rather than piling them all at the end. This will also provide a more direct applications of skills, more time for peer and community feedback, and the chance for projects to evolve and foster over the full span of the course.

The curriculum consists of six units that progressively build on each other. Each lesson is one hour long, although certain lessons that involve field trips or data collection are expected to last longer. Each unit will last three weeks, and it will take four and half months (roughly one semester) to complete the full curriculum.

---

**Essential Questions**

What is a map? Who is it for, and how can it be used?

How do you understand the space around you?

What information is important for other people to know about this space?