

## Chapter 10

# Activating Art Education Learning by Mapping Community Cultures

**Manisha Sharma**  
University of Arizona, USA

### ABSTRACT

*In this chapter, the author describes a class assignment that invites university students to explore the concept of placemaking as outcome, and of mapping as methodology in contemporary art education. The objective of this is to challenge students' preconceptions of how and where community-based art education is described and practiced. The project also encourages connections to trends and processes in contemporary art. The author presents student interpretations of the assignment through two projects, inviting readers to follow an examination of ideas for local practice through global thinking. In summary, this chapter suggests a model or strategy for educators and community-based art professionals to initiate socially engaged civic praxis, and activate discussion about global thinking, by mapping local visibility.*

### A CALL FOR DIALOGUE

Contemporary literature in art education, especially that which is focused on visual culture, claims that visibility—the making of social meaning through visual cues—is no longer a reflection of social action, but rather it *is* contemporary social action affecting people across cultures and professional arenas (Daiello, Hathaway, Rhodes, & Walker, 2006; Freedman, Heijnen, Kallio-Tavin, Kárpáti, & Papp, 2013). With visual based communication becoming more prevalent globally, professionals in the fine arts, media studies, visual communication, and education recognize the importance of being conversant and forward thinking about publics and encounters with conceptual and physical community spaces. This drive towards a more socially-engaged and dialogic art practice is a global phenomenon, as evidenced by conference style arts events such as *Para-Site* (n.d) in Hong-Kong, exhibitions like *Say What* in Turkey (*Say What?*, 2015), *A Proximity of consciousness: Art and social action* (2015) at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and transnational artistic networks like *Connecting Cities* (n.d), to name but a few. To foster such work

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in and through critical art education requires teaching practices to extend beyond imparting skills of studio & object-focused production and critique, and towards skills fostering dialogic and participatory communities outside of traditional classroom settings. This includes helping students figure out how to gain a better understanding of local and regional neighborhoods, national and global politics, and physical as well as virtual spaces. Bringing such work into the art education curriculum critically means that whether they are based in the classroom, museum, or alternative sites in the community, art educators must delve into their existing ideas about what community and culture are, before even thinking about constructing lesson plans and curriculum or specific pedagogical strategies. Succinctly put, they must think about what art education is, and does to cultural communities, in a global way.

In the following pages I offer a strategy for initiating such thinking by describing an exercise where undergraduate and graduate students together researched, designed and created resource maps, making visible a navigable landscape for and of identified communities in a southwestern city in the United States. These students, in this process, investigated:

1. The nature of a community
2. An identified culture of that community,
3. Related cultural communities in the city, and
4. A list of the resources available to that community.

In doing so, students devised ways of learning more about space and place holistically, explored the concept of mapping as place-making both in theory and practice, and debated the role and impact of art education and the nature of civic engagement and socially engaged art.

First, however, I will provide context by reviewing current discourse in community-focused art education. I will further contextualize by describing some key ideas in socially engaged art and civic engagement that affected the students' perspective, specifically placemaking and mapping. Then I will describe how students mapped various parts of the city, to engage in placemaking in order to identify potential and desirable sites of arts-based civic engagement. Finally I conclude by reflecting on how this process itself might be understood as socially engaged art education; how the maps as artifacts illustrate global thinking, even as they focus on local spaces.

## **THINKING GLOBALLY ABOUT LOCAL CULTURE**

### **Conversations in Community-focused Art Education**

Scholars have reported histories of community focused art education in various ways. The antecedents of community based art education (CBAE) in the United States lie in programs begun in social movements such as the Settlement House Movement and the Civil Rights Movement. Borwick (2012) links social justice agendas to community art as he describes participatory practices with lead artists that he dubs socially cooperative art. For Borwick the artist is pivotal. Naidus (2009) traces histories of artistic practice as central to community building, citing ancient roots of cave art that recorded social rituals, and deliberate politically driven movements like the WPA. Naidus writes of how art has been a force of resistance to silencing politics, such as in the Cold war era and the Red Scare, explaining how such arts activism morphs into transformative pedagogy as in, for instance, Feminist pedagogy and Liberatory

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